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OLD SPANISH TRAIL WAS NO SUPERHIGHWAY

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. AUGUSTINE --- Eventually, Interstate 10 will speed motorists cross-country from the east coast of Florida to the west coast of California. Needless to say, it will be a far cry from the earliest of transcontinental highways which began here at St. Augustine.

The beginning of that road was the Old Spanish Trails which really was a pathway beat out through the jungle-like underbrush and through the swamps by persevering priests in the first Spanish colonial period (1565-1763) as they went about establishing missions in the interior. Aside from the clergy, the Spanish did little about roads because the early Conquistadores believed the state was an island and they searched for a water route to connect the villages.

Near downtown St. Augustine is an unusual type marker which is designated the "Zero Mile Stone" of the Old Spanish Trail, the first throughway in the new world which crept cross-country until it reached San Diego. The unique landmark is a sphere made from native coquina rock quarried here. It’s sizable, six foot in diameter, and was erected in 1928 by the local Exchange Club.

Traveling on the Trail was risky business because Indians frequently attacked the strangers. And when the English in Georgia coveted Florida, raiders oftentimes slipped across the border to harass the trail-blazers. As time passed the trail became used more and more. Gen. Andrew Jackson, later to become Florida's first governor, marched along the trail when he entered Florida during the First Seminole War. In 1824, a Federal highway was authorized between St. Augustine and Pensacola and generally followed the Trail.