

## = Carancahua Bay =

Carancahua Bay is a northern extension of Matagorda Bay located in Jackson and Matagorda counties in Texas , United States . It is oriented from the southeast to the northwest but meanders as it reaches the north to the confluence with Carancahua Creek . Generally slender , it is only about 1 mile ( 1 @. @ 6 km ) in width north of its circular mouth .

The bay serves as a nursery for shrimp and as an ecosystem for diverse species of birds and fish . Shrimp farms have been established inland to circumvent restrictions on the bay . The area close to shore is prone to flooding , and can sometimes accumulate large populations of mosquitos . As a consequence , no major settlements have been founded on the bay . However , the small communities of Port Alto and Carancahua have been established on the western and eastern shores , respectively .

## = = History = =

The name Carancahua derives from the term that formerly referred to the Karankawa Indians , who resided on its shores . Texas ' Spanish Royal Governor , Martín de Alarcón was the first documented European to tour the bay while on a voyage with a Tejas guide and several others in the early 18th century . During the expedition , two Karankawa Indians were spotted near the bay going about their daily lives , but were frightened by the sight of Alarcón , and quickly swam across despite the guide 's reassurance to them that Alarcón meant no harm . The next day , the Indians came ashore from a sixteen @-@ passenger canoe ( which could hold 4 men , 4 women and 8 children ) , and notified the Tejas guide that they wished for Alarcón and his men to leave . As a peace offering , Alarcón presented the Indians with tobacco and clothing on behalf of the Spanish crown , which they accepted . In exchange , the Indians offered Alarcón dried fish , and warned him of the nearby French fort of St. Louis , believing he wanted to establish a colony on the bay . Alarcón declared the bay for Spain , but did not establish a permanent settlement .

Only a handful of settlements have been established on the bay . The town of Carancahua first formed as a small collection of cabins that were used in the 1880s as a stop for mail between Texana and Matagorda . However , the bay 's propensity for flooding and malaria prevented growth . In fact , the bay was notorious for its swarms of mosquitos that would fly from the Colorado River delta , and documented by a late 19th @-@ century rancher :

A fairly strong easterly wind had been blowing for three days ; on the evening of the third day , the mosquitos arrived , flying high , about fifty feet , and looking like a cloud of mist over Carancahua Bay . At the ranch , they set everything on fire that had blood in it , and all work was suspended by unanimous consent ... little or nothing was done for nearly five days ; by this time the main body had passed , though plenty remained to make everything uncomfortable for about two weeks . This migration was from east to west and the line was about three miles wide .

Approximately 50 people lived at Carancahua in 1915 , but the population dwindled to 25 in the next decade . The town remains a community , but the current population is unknown . Across the bay , a settlement of about ten permanent residents , initially known as Persimmon Point , was renamed Port Alto in 1939 . The town grew , attracting retirees and vacationers who contributed to a peak summer population of 205 in 1961 . Hurricane Carla destroyed the town in September 1961 , but it was rebuilt five years later . In 1970 , a beachfront was constructed along the shoreline as the listed population reached 170 people . The 2000 census reported that 45 people lived in the town . Schicke Point , located near the mouth of Carancahua Bay at Carancahua Pass , is a small fishing village with approximately 70 residents , including legendary anglers Tyler Kurtz & James Malek and big trout specialist Russell Shelton . Cape Carancahua is an affluent gated residential community , located on the bay 's northern shore .

## = = Features = =

The bay has two extensions near its mouth with Matagorda Bay at Carancahua Pass , including

Redfish Lake to the southwest and Salt Lake , just above the former . On the bay 's eastern shore , the mouth is headed by Schicke Point , which curves north to the Schicke Point Community , where several private piers are located . About one mile ( 1 @. @ 6 km ) inland from the community 's shoreline are the Piper Lakes . North from the Schicke Point community , the El Campo Club community is found , with several residences on a straight line along the coast with docks stretched into the water . Further north , the bay takes a sharp turn to the west past a swampy area then heads north and becomes more slender as it passes from Calhoun into Jackson County . The shoreline continues north and passes several oil wells to the town of Carancahua , where a few piers are scattered along the shore . Just north of the town , a small inlet is formed , at the base of which , the Fivemile Draw is found , surrounded by swamps . To the north , several docks line the shore and continue until the bay winds to the west to a large swamp . Past the swamp , the width of the bay shrinks and continues southward along the shore of the Cape Carancahua community , surrounded by water on three sides . Past the cape , the bay turns to the north and is crossed by Texas State Highway 35 . It then heads west and north again , while gradually becoming narrower until it reaches the marsh at the mouth of Carancahua Creek . The East and West Carancahua Creeks , which merge before their confluence , feed the bay . West Carancahua Creek runs 28 miles ( 45 km ) south from its source near White Hall to meet with East Carancahua Creek , which runs southwest for 32 miles ( 51 km ) from its source in southern Wharton County . Both streams are intermittent in their upper reaches . The western shore mimics the shape of the east . As it moves south of the Carancahua Creek mouth , Weedhaven is formed , south of which , the shore counters Cape Carancahua and heads northeast past several oil wells to a sharp point . The shoreline continues directly south until it reaches a large swamp . Past the swamp is the town of Port Alto , where several docks and piers are located .

= = Ecosystem = =

Carancahua Bay is protected by the State of Texas and locally by the 300 @- @ member Carancahua Bay Protection Association . It is a nursery bay for shrimp , and is a habitat for shellfish including oysters . Finfish such as the redfish and black drum are commonly caught from the bay by recreational fishermen . Birds common to the bay include the wood ibis , roseate spoonbill , snowy egret , great @- @ tailed grackle , Louisiana heron , willet , black @- @ necked stilt , caracara and the black vulture .

During a 2004 assessment of Texas waterways , the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality found higher than normal levels of bacteria at the mouth of Carancahua Creek and alkaline pH levels , symptomatic of algal bloom . The issues discovered by the Commission were common in the water bodies examined for the study , and they noted that such issues would be addressed .

= = Industry = =

The bay is off limits to shrimping due to its legal status as a nursery , however shrimp farms have been established and approved along its shores . The harvest of shellfish , particularly oysters , is heavily regulated , but allowed at certain times and places . Whereas the main Matagorda Bay is an approved area for shellfish production , Carancahua Bay is divided between restricted and conditionally approved areas . The Texas Department of State Health Services described the areas conditionally approved as being from the mouth of the bay to a " beige house " on the eastern shore and cutoff across to a " grey barn " on the western shore , save for a small sliver of water that includes most of the shoreline of Port Alto , which is restricted . All areas north of the diagonal line are restricted as well .

Several oil and natural gas wells are scattered throughout the shoreline and a few are included in the waters of Carancahua Bay . The most notable include the wells of the Appling Field segment , a mile offshore from Port Alto , which is believed to contain 33 billion cubic feet ( 0 @. @ 93 billion cubic meters ) of natural gas . The field was first discovered in the 1950s , but later abandoned . Brigham Exploration is working with Royale Energy to develop ten reserves in the area , spotted

during a seismic survey .