



International Boundary Study

No. 159 – December 1, 1976

Guatemala – Mexico Boundary

(Country Codes: GT-MX)

**The Geographer
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GUATEMALA - MEXICO BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Guatemala-Mexico boundary is approximately 962 kilometers (598 miles) long. It follows three parallels, three geodesic lines, including one meridian, and the courses of the Rio Suchiate, Rio Salinas, and Rio Usumacinta. The boundary is demarcated by rivers or pillars throughout its entire length.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mexico, formerly the Viceroyalty of New Spain, declared itself independent from Spain on September 16, 1810. The Captaincy General of Guatemala, which consisted of the provinces of Guatemala, Chiapas, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, declared its independence from Spain on September 15, 1821. Shortly thereafter, Chiapas declared its aggregation to Mexico,¹ but Guatemala refused to accept the incorporation of Chiapas into Mexico until 1882. Guatemala, along with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, was annexed briefly by Mexico, from 1822-23, and between 1824 and 1838 the five states were members of the Federation of Central America.

On December 7, 1877, a convention was signed by Guatemala and Mexico providing for a commission to survey their common boundary in two sectors: (1) from the vicinity of Ocos on the Pacific coast to Cerro de Izbul, and (2) from the Cerro de Izbul to the Yucatan Peninsula.² The survey was never completed, but a treaty delimiting the Guatemala-Mexico boundary was signed on September 27, 1882.

In Article 1 of the 1882 treaty, Guatemala renounced forever its rights to the state of Chiapas and its district of Soconusco and consequently considered the said territory to be an integral part of Mexico. Article 3 of the treaty contains the present delimitation of the Guatemala-Mexico boundary as clarified in the Rio Salinas sector by a convention signed on April 1, 1895.³ A protocol signed on September 14, 1883, provided for the organization of boundary commissions authorized by Article 4 of the 1882 treaty. By May 1899, the demarcation of the boundary with pillars or monuments was completed.⁴

¹ Alexander Marchant. *Boundaries of the Latin American Republics, an Annotated List of Documents, 1493-1943*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944, State Department Publication, Inter-American Series 24, pp. 62 and 320.

² Gordon Ireland. *Boundaries, Possessions, and Conflicts in Central and North America and the Caribbean*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1941, p. 107.

³ Convention between Mexico and Guatemala, for the Settlement of certain Boundary Questions. Mexico, April 1, 1895. *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 87 (1894-1895), pp. 528-30.

⁴ Alberto Amador. *Memoria de la Cuestion de Limites entre Mexico y Guatemala*, Mexico. Imprenta de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1931.

III. ALIGNMENT

Article 3 of the treaty of September 27, 1882, delimits the Guatemala-Mexico boundary as follows:⁵

The boundaries between the two nations shall forever be the following:

1. The line along the middle of the River Suchiate,⁶ from a point situated in the sea three leagues from its mouth, up river, along its deepest channel, as far as the point. [Vertice de Muxbal]⁷ where the same river intersects the vertical plane that passes the highest part of the volcano of Tacana, and about 25 meters distant from the most southern pillar of the Custom-house Station of Talquian, in such manner that this Custom-house Station shall be within the territory of Guatemala.
2. The line determined by the vertical plane previously defined, from its meeting with the River Suchiate till it intersects the vertical plane which passes over the summits of Buenavista and Ixbul [Vertice de Niquihuil].
3. The line determined by the vertical plane that passes by the summit of Buenavista, and which has already been astronomically fixed by the Mexican Scientific Commission, and the summit of the Ixbul Hill, from its intersection with the former one up to a point 4 kilom. beyond the same hill [Vertice de Santiago].⁸
4. The parallel of latitude, which passes through this last point, and from thence in an easterly direction until meeting with the deepest channel of the River Usamacinta or the River Chixoy, in case the aforesaid parallel should not meet the first-named of these rivers.⁹

⁵ Treaty between Mexico and Guatemala, for fixing the Boundaries between the respective States. Mexico, September 27, 1882. *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 73 (1881–1882), pp. 273–6.

⁶ An International Boundary and Water Commission (CILA) was established between Guatemala and Mexico through an exchange of notes dated December 21, 1961. Because of periodic flooding and the changing of channels, CILA has channelized the course of the Rio Suchiate.

⁷ Unofficial coordinates, subject to future geodetic datum adjustments, were determined through triangulation observations by the Inter-American Geodetic Survey (IAGS) and the Instituto Geografico Nacional (IGN) of Guatemala for the following vertexes: (1) the location of the Vertice de Muxbal was calculated at 15° 04' 16.142" N. and 92° 03' 37.93" W., and (2) the location of the Vertice de Niquihuil was calculated at 15° 15' 35.153" N. and 92° 12' 37.609" W.

⁸ The longitude of the Vertice de Santiago was calculated to be 91° 43' 54.723" W. from official Boundary Commission data which give the distance from the Vertice de Chixoy (on the Rio Salinas). Official Boundary Commission data also afford the following: (1) a latitude of 16° 04' 32.21" N. for the parallel between the Vertice de Santiago and the Vertice de Chixoy; (2) a latitude of 17° 15' 12.05" N. for the parallel between the Rio Usamacinta and the Vertice del Ceibo; and (3) a longitude of 90° 59' 22.2" W. for the meridian between the Vertice de Ceibo and the Vertice de Campeche.

⁹ The convention of 1895 clarified the treaty of 1882 to the effect that the boundary extended eastward along the parallel of the Vertice de Santiago to the Rio Chixoy (Rio Salinas). It then continued

5. The line along middle of the deepest channel of the Usamacinta, continuing along this latter, in the other case, from the meeting of the one or the other river with the aforesaid parallel, until the deepest channel of the Usamacinta meets the parallel situated 25 kilom. to the south of Tenosique, in Tabasco, measured from the center of the square of the said town.

6. The parallel of latitude just referred to, from where it intersects the deepest channel of the Usamacinta, till the meeting with the meridian [Vertice del Ceibo], which passes at a third part of the distance between the centers of the squares of Tenosique and Sacluc, the said third part being reckoned from Tenosique.

7. This meridian from its intersection with the aforesaid parallel to latitude $17^{\circ}49'$ [Vertice de Campeche].

8. The parallel of $17^{\circ}49'$ from its intersection with the aforesaid meridian indefinitely towards the east [the tripoint with Belize is located at the Vertice de Aguas Turbias].¹⁰

downstream along the median line of the deepest channel of this river to the Rio Usumacinta.

¹⁰ Subject to future geodetic datum adjustments, the longitude of the Vertice de Aguas Turbias or tripoint with Belize was determined through triangulation observations by IAGS and IGN to be $89^{\circ}09'06''.749$ W.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Office of the Geographer, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of the Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8742, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520 (Telephone: 632-2021 or 632-2022).