



Living in a globalised world

The Chamizal dispute

Narrator:

Today the Rio Grande is no longer grande, meaning 'large'. No longer 'Bravo', it's Mexican name, meaning 'wild'.

In some places it is a dry riverbed but it wasn't always like this.

For hundreds of years the Rio Grande resisted human attempts to tame it. It fought back.

Regularly when the snows melted in Colorado spring floods wiped out the centre of the twin cities of Juárez, El Paso.

The man who knows all about this is Park Ranger, Gerry Flood.

Gerry Flood, Chief Ranger, Chamizal Park, El Paso:

After the river became the boundary, it started to shift course to the south. And it did it in several episodes. Flood episodes that move the river and us, leaving land that was Mexico in the United States north of the river.

Narrator:

These posts mark the original boundary of the two countries.

When the river changed course in El Paso, part of Mexico disappeared into the United States of America. It remained disputed territory until 1963, when a new border was agreed, and Chamizal Park established.

Gerry Flood:

By the time the treaty was signed, the Chamizal Convention in 1963 there were over 5000 people living on the disputed land and all those folks had to be moved. They literally, the US government bought their homes and they were relocated and they were given money enough to buy new homes and moved but it was very traumatic and very significant for them so the changes in the river over the years had had great human consequence.

Narrator:

Presidents Johnson and Diaz Ordaz signed the Chamizal Convention, which channelled the Rio Grande, and gave back land lost when the river changed course.

Gerry Flood:

We actually gave about 600 acres back to Mexico and this section of land was still in Mexico but to make it easy, and that's when we actually channelised the Rio Grande right through here, and moved the boundary a little bit farther north.

Narrator:

That unpredictable element water had changed the border. It is the only time in it's history that the United States of America has given away any of it's territory.