through official letters couriered back and forth; their deep mutual antipathy may be seen in a letter La Salle wrote when Beaujeu wished to return to France rather than assist in landing the colonists:

[Y]our longboat does not give me time to reply to your letter with so much consideration as you have devoted to writing it, though the way in which you vent your spleen in the letter suggests that you wrote it rather more hastily than its length would require.

It is no fault of mine, Monsieur, if you have not already provided for the safety of His Majesty's ship; but I know on what grounds you ask me for pilots to take it into this river which I never intended that it should enter, and more than I wished to stop it at this shore. You may take it where you think fit.

On January 17, 1685, La Salle determined it was time to land his men, explore the coast, find the river, and locate a place to establish the colony. He was probably near Cedar Bayou and the western end of today's Matagorda Island in Texas. After several days of surveying the surrounding countryside, the expedition's chronicler Henri Joutel noted, "The country did not seem very favorable to me. It was flat and sandy but did nevertheless produce grass. There were several salt pools. We hardly saw any wild fowl except some cranes and Canadian geese which were not expecting us."

Early in February, La Salle ordered Joutel to disembark with 120 to 130 men and march up the coast to find a large river that he was convinced would be the west branch of the Mississippi. Joutel complained that the men had little or no military experience: "Truthfully, although we had 120 to 130 men with us, 30 good men would have been better and would have done more and perforce eaten less, to which end they were without rival . . . these were all men who had been taken by force or deceit. In a way, it was almost like Noah's Ark where they were all sorts of animals. We likewise had men of different nationalities. The soldiers had been recruited by the lower ranking officers of the navy, who received a half pistole [five francs] for each man, by whatever means possible."

The party eventually encountered what they thought was a large river, which was actually Pass Cavallo, today's name for the entrance into Matagorda Bay. The three vessels arrived shortly afterward, and La Salle came ashore to inspect the terrain. He found a location on the western side of Pass Cavallo suitable for establishing a temporary camp, called the Grand Camp, and ordered La Belle and l'Aimable to come through the pass. On February 16, the ship's pilots made a sounding and determined that the two vessels could enter. They marked the entrance with buoys to guide the two ships away from hazardous sandy shoals.

La Belle came through the pass without difficulty about two in the afternoon and anchored inside Matagorda Bay. La Salle ordered that cargo be unloaded from l'Aimable, the expedition's main supply ship, which was five times larger than La Belle, so that she could also enter the pass. Eight iron cannons were removed from the ship and taken ashore to the temporary camp. On February 19 l'Aimable's Captain Aigron was satisfied that adequate cargo had been unloaded, although much remained on board. According to Joutel, "On the 20th, La Salle ordered the captain to approach the bar, adding that when the sea was high, he should signal