

San Mateo County - San Francisquito Creek to San Mateo



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Driving Directions for Auto Route

While driving to *San Mateo* County north on the El Camino Real, turn right on Alma Street after University Ave., and follow Palo Alto Ave. to visit the Palo Alto redwood tree on the banks of the San Francisquito Creek. Returning to *El Camino Real* northbound, take Arroyo Court west in the City of San Mateo to see California Historical Landmark No. 47 and park commemorating campsite #96. To visit the Crystal Springs area, turn west on Crystal Springs Rd. and north or south on Skyline Blvd. Return to El Camino Real north and turn left in Burlingame on Ralston Ave. traveling one block to Heritage Park at Occidental Avenue. This is close to expedition campsite #94. Continue north on El Camino Real, and in Daly City, turn left (west) onto John Daly Blvd. to CA 1 north, and head to San Francisco County.

Hiking/Biking Ideas

The exploratory group surveyed the area around the *San Andreas* and Crystal Springs reservoirs. This area provided many of the timbers used to build the San Francisco *Presidio* and Mission. Hiking and biking trails are available via Cañada and Skyline Roads. These trails, as well as those of the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Coyote Point County Recreational Area, offer opportunities to experience some of the bay's environment as the Anza expedition members may have seen it.



El Palo Alto

Photo: Greg Smestad

Diary of Pedro Font, March 30, “I measured its height with a graphometer which they loaned me at the mission of San Carlos del Carmelo, and I found it to be, according to the calculation which I made, some fifty *varas* high, a little more or less....I set up the graphometer thirty-six *varas* from the foot of the tree and a vara and a half above the ground, and, pointing at its top through the sights of the alidade, it showed [an angle of] 52 1/2 degrees. Then, with the graduated semi-circle, forming the triangle of those degrees, and adding to it the height of the base of the graphometer, which was a vara and a half, it gave as a result the altitude stated...”

A vara was 0.836 meters or 33 inches.

About Your Visit to San Mateo County

Continuing north from Santa Clara County up the San Francisco Peninsula, the exploratory expedition crossed into San Mateo county at San Francisquito creek, and camped at a dry watercourse about two miles beyond San Mateo Creek (*Arroyo de San Mateo*). They camped at the Arroyo on their way back from San Francisco, having killed, with bullets, a “monstrous” bear in the nearby hills. Moraga returned to San Mateo in June with the settlers on their way to San Francisco to found the Presidio and Mission.

Sites of Interest

A. El Palo Alto

Located on the San Francisquito creek (El Camino Real at Alma St.), this redwood tree's height was measured by Father Font using a graphometer. His method would be familiar to any student of geometry, trigonometry or surveying. The surrounding city takes its name from the famous tree.

B. San Mateo Creek and Expedition Camp #96

Anza and a small group of soldiers camped here on the banks of the *Arroyo de San Mateo* on March 29, 1776 after exploring the peninsula and selecting the sites for the Mission and Presidio of San Francisco. It was also used from June 24–27, 1776 when Moraga brought priests, soldiers and their families north to found the Mission and Presidio of San Francisco (California Historic Landmark No. 47).

C. Heritage Park and Expedition Camp #94

On its way up the peninsula, the exploratory expedition camped in Burlingame on March 26, 1776 at a dry watercourse about two miles beyond the *Arroyo de San Mateo*. They camped at San Mateo creek to the south on their way back. One block west of El Camino at Ralston Ave. is Heritage Park (coordinates: 37° 34' 26" N, 121° 21' 1.3" W). This is California Historic Landmark No. 48.

D. Crystal Springs Reservoir Trails

Gaspar de Portolá and his men camped nearby (in 1769), as did Captain Fernando de Rivera y Moncada (in 1774). It was Rivera's chaplain and diarist, Father Palou, that named the *Cañada* (canyon) *Andrés*, which today applies to a reservoir and the San Andreas Fault. On their way back from San Francisco in late March 29, 1776, Anza's men shot a huge bear nearby. Located in the scenic Crystal Springs Watershed, Sawyer Camp Trail (Skyline Blvd. & Crystal Springs Rd.) is one of the most popular trails in the county.

E. San Francisco Bay Trail

The trail offers a walking and bicycling route for the Anza Trail from San José to the San Francisco Airport. Parks connected by the trail in San Mateo County include: Coyote Point Recreation Area, San Mateo Bayfront Park, Burlingame Bayside Park, and Belmont Marina Park.

F. Coyote Point Recreation Area and Museum

This park (located at 1961 Coyote Point Dr.) provides a wide variety of opportunities including picnicking, swimming, bicycling, and jogging. At the Coyote Point Museum, visitors can observe, and listen to, live animals such as river otters and foxes that members of Anza's expedition may have seen.

Learning On The Trail in San Mateo County

Questions on the Trail

Along the San Francisco Bay Trail in San Mateo, visit the Coyote Point County Recreational Area & Museum.

Question: What are some of the animals that roamed the area? Which have disappeared since Anza’s visit?

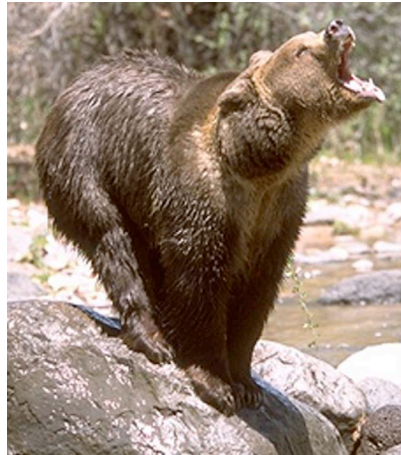


Photo: California Academy of Sciences

On the CD: The Bear of San Mateo

Bear growl and Flintlock Rifle Gunfire

They killed a bear near Crystal Springs on their way back to San Mateo Creek, and later presented the hide to the Viceroy. Father Font, describes on March 29, 1776, “...Here the commander decided to go to explore a nearby valley called San Andrés, which is in the range of the spruce trees, also called redwood...to see if it had good timber for the settlement at the port... We traveled through the valley some four leagues to the southeast and southeast by south, and crossed the arroyo of San Matheo where it enters the pass through the hills.

About a league before this there came out on our road a very large bear, which the men succeeded in killing. There are many of these beasts in that country, and they often attack and do damage to the Indians when they go to hunt, of which I saw many horrible examples. When he saw us so near the bear was going along very carelessly on the slope of a hill where flight was not very easy. When I saw him so close and that he was looking at us in suspense I feared some disaster. But Corporal Robles fired a shot at him with aim so true that he hit him in the neck. The bear now hurled himself down the slope, crossed the arroyo, and hid in the brush, but he was so badly wounded that after going a short distance he fell dead.

Thereupon the soldiers skinned him and took what flesh they wished. In this affair we spent more than an hour here. The commander took the hide to give as a present to the Viceroy. The bear was so old that his eye teeth were badly decayed and he lacked one tooth, but he was very fat, although his flesh smelled much like a skunk or like musk. I measured this animal and he was nine spans long and four high. He was horrible, fierce, large and fat, and very tough. Several bullets which they fired at him when he fled they found between his hide and his flesh, and the ball which entered his throat they found in his neck between the hide and the muscle with a little piece of bone stuck to it.”

1 league is about 2.56 miles; 1 span is about 9 inches.

Additional Resources

El Palo Alto Park,
City of Palo Alto –
250 Hamilton Ave, Palo Alto, CA 94301;
tel.: 650-329-2100,
web:city.palo-alto.ca.us

California Historical Landmarks, CA Dept. of Parks & Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation – P.O. Box 942896 Sacramento, CA 94296;
tel.: 916-653-6624,
web: ohp.parks.ca.gov

Heritage Park, Burlingame Parks & Recreation Dept. – 850 Burlingame Ave, Burlingame, CA 94010;
tel.: 650-558-7300,
web: burlingame.org/Index.aspx?page=424

Crystal Springs and Sawyer Camp Trail County of San Mateo – 455 County Center, 4th Floor, Redwood City, CA 94063-1646;
tel.: 650-363-4021,
web: co.sanmateo.ca.us

San Francisco Bay Trail;
tel.: 510-464-7919,
web:
<http://baytrail.abag.ca.gov>

Coyote Point Museum – 1961 Coyote Point Dr., San Mateo, CA 94401;
tel.: 650-342-7755,
web: coyoteptmuseum.org

Maps – the USGS store in Menlo Park, CA;
web: usgs.gov/ or
<http://store.usgs.gov>