

Anza Trail Themes

The Juan Bautista de Anza Historic Trail allows a reflection on the early history of the West simply by having visitors travel its route. As you read the Trail Guide chapters and visit sites on the trail, keep in mind several themes that help to put the trail and Anza's expeditions in perspective:

- An overland trail was needed to better establish the settlement and colonization of *Alta California*. Not many people and very few large animals could be transported in the small ships of the 18th century. The Anza Trail was thus the completion of a long held Spanish plan to populate the northern frontier via an overland route connecting Sonora to *Alta California* and was an integral part of Spanish colonial policy in the New World. The tensions between Spain and the other European powers of the time were pivotal in the *Viceroy's* decision to attempt the expedition to, and settlement of, San Francisco in order to protect the possessions in *Alta California*.
- The Anza Trail story shows that Anza displayed remarkable leadership in bringing so many people safely over a little-known route in a potentially hostile environment. The successful arrival of nearly 300 colonists, soldiers, and their families at the Monterey Presidio was largely due to Anza's planning, direction, and guidance. His perseverance and charisma provided the dynamic leadership that was necessary for the success of the expedition and for opening a land route across the Arizona and California deserts.



The order of the train. Anza leads a diverse group across the desert in a pack train.

Graphic: Bill Singleton

- The Anza Trail represents another layer in a universal story of migrants crossing great distances and enduring tremendous hardships in the hope for a better way of life. This historical event reflects the migration of people and their interaction with existing cultures on the West Coast during the later portion of the 18th century.
- The people of the Anza expedition are a reflection of the Spanish frontiers of the late 18th century. The expedition's settlers came from diverse and varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These people and their stories live on today through their descendants and the historic legacy they left behind. In many ways, they mirror the diverse communities that line the Anza Trail today.

- Families played an important role to the overall mission and were in marked contrast to prior Spanish *Alta California* settlements. Unlike previous military endeavors, women and children were necessary participants. The Anza Trail story tells how women and children, not just soldiers and priests, were key in the settlement of California and the success of the 1775-76 Anza expedition. The mandate of the expedition was to bring Spanish civilization to *Alta California*, and to populate it. Recruiting families for the expedition ensured the future success of the Spanish settlements by increasing the overall Spanish presence there. Moving one's family across such distances, and even giving birth on the trail, was no easy task. As brave as any soldier, the women of the expedition were unsung heroes whose contributions were no less valuable.



The expedition was composed of families of mixed descent, that are mirrored in the populations of the people who live along the trail even today.

Graphic: Bill Singleton

- The Anza Trail links the stories of over a dozen different American Indian groups that were contacted by the expedition in the course of the trip. The records created by the expedition diaries paint an informative, if biased, picture of the different people who were contacted along the trail. Through these diaries, some of the stories of these cultures at the time of contact can be told, as well as how their lives and those of the people who came to California on the Anza expedition forever changed both cultures. These complicated and dynamic relationships continue to evolve and affect the lives of descendants of the expedition and the tribes.
- In 1776, Anza brought over 1,000 horses, mules and cattle to California. In 1781, Rivera y Moncada brought 1,000 more. Along with the arrival of the Anza expedition came the introduction of new land uses, plants and animals to the California landscape, setting in motion long-term ecological changes that have forever altered the region's landscape and biological systems.