Rancho Los Félix: An Anza Expedition Legacy

The diseñó (hand-drawn map) for El Pueblo la Reina de Los Angeles (Town of the Queen of Angels) is thought to be dated around the early 1800’s. "Los Felices" refers to the area of Rancho Los Félix; and "Los Berdugos" is correctly spelled as Los Verdugos. Credit: Donald C. Tillman, Four Square Leagues: Los Angeles, Two Hundred Years Later, Los Angeles City Board of Public Works, (undated).

by Ruth Taylor Kilday

Jose Vicente Félix may be remembered best as the husband of Anza expedition member María Ygnacia Manuela Pinuelas who died in childbirth on November 24, 1775 and was buried at Mission San Xavier del Bac in Arizona today. The child, José Antonio, survived the trip but died nine months later at Mission San Gabriel. Despite the personal loss of two family members within nine months, Vicente, the father of eight other children, returned as a soldier to southern California and later became a successful Californio. Rancho Los Félix, a 6,647-acre grazing concession including the Los Angeles River, was confirmed between 1796 and 1800. Over 4,000 acres of the original Rancho Los Félix are now known as Griffith Park in the City of Los Angeles. The story of Félix is part of the continuing saga of southern California water. Here is a small part of the story...

While several of the 1776 Anza party left the Presidio of San Francisco to found the first pueblo in San José in 1777, José Vicente Félix remained stationed at the presidio until 1781 when his military experience and his ability to read and write earned him a major assignment in settling El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles (The Town of the Queen of the Angels). He returned to land and a Mediterranean climate more suited to his Sonoran roots and to places he had camped and ridden near the Los Angeles River. Félix, three other soldiers, and the first of three settling parties arrived at Mission San Gabriel in June 1781 three months ahead of the pueblo's official founding along the Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles de Porciúncula (Our Lady of the Angels of the Little Portion or the Los Angeles River).

The pobladores (settlers), recruited from various places around the Gulf of California, were quarantined at the mission. On September 4, 1781, Corporal Félix led the party of pobladores the final eight miles to the banks of the Río Porciúncula. In a valley nestled between two mountains, the pobladores established the town of El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula.

In This Issue...

Agencies Start Trail Marking Challenge Cost Share Program
Pima County Promotes the Trail Anza Plaza Project Takes Shape
Rio Rico Properties to Donate Trail Easement Second Annual Anza World Conference in Arizpe
Students Connect with History
(Rancho Los Félix, cont.) ranges admired on a previous expedition by Father Crespi, and at a site designated by Governor Felipe de Neve, the original Los Angeles was established (now CA Historical Landmark #156). Even in this small, remote, and dusty pueblo in 1781, the forces of destiny creating the new nation were on the move, just as they were 3,000 miles away in the thirteen colonies.

The original pueblo was four square leagues, a league being 5,000 varas or approximately 2.6 miles - what a person could walk comfortably in one hour - as shown on the pictured diseno. Included within the boundary was Yang-na, the community of Chumash living in tule huts.

In 1787, Corporal Félix was appointed by Governor Pedro Fages to serve as Comisionado (governor's representative, but really the chief authority) of the new pueblo. He kept order and helped new settlers. As pueblo life assumed regularity, the balance of power shifted from military to civilian officials. Meanwhile, Félix remarried, applied for and received (circa 1796-1800) a grazing concession on land contiguous and upstream of the pueblo, a rancho of about one and one-half square leagues (6,647 acres). Life outside the pueblo was considered dangerous, and the granting of land to a military soldier was considered a smart strategy.

Rancho Los Félix, besides being the family name, was referred to in newspaper articles as “happy farm.” The rancho was reported as among the loveliest and most profitable in Alta California and “surpassed the others in both scenery and agricultural potential.” The rancho (today just east of Universal Studios, the Hollywood sign, Forest Lawn cemetery, among other features) included the eastern tip of the Santa Monica Mountain range where the spring-fed Los Angeles River turned 180-degrees to the south. Oak groves, ferns, and wild flowers were abundant. There were inexhaustible supplies of wood, water, and wildlife. Because of the rancho’s location northwest of the young village and the proximity of the road to Santa Barbara, it was a center of activity and played an important part in the emerging life of the new town.

Félix died in 1822 just before Mexico established independence from Spain and took over governance of California. His second wife became the land owner under Spanish law. She remarried a neighbor and became Dona Maria Ygnacia Félix-Verdugo (Berdugo on the diseno) while still occupying Rancho Félix.

As an astute business woman, she registered the Rancho Los Félix cattle brand. Meanwhile, the missions were secularized and, in 1835, Los Angeles was decreed the capital of Alta California, although the capital did not physically move from Monterey until 1845. During the politically unstable Mexican regime (perhaps because Félix was of Spanish descent and possibly because they were Spanish loyalists), the family took strong action to ensure and defend their legal rights. In 1839, Dona Félix-Verdugo secured the Rancho’s water rights. In 1841 and again in 1845 her petitions for title to the land were successfully reconfirmed. After California was admitted to the Union, Rancho Los Félix water rights were confirmed by the U. S. Patent Office.

In 1853, just before she died, Dona Félix-Verdugo deeded over portions of the rancho to her daughters. They, in turn, sold their land entitlements for $1 an acre to the family attorney, Antonio Coronel. The remaining acres went to Félix-Verdugo’s son, Antonio Félix. With continuing droughts affecting the entire cattle economy and mounting expenses to defend land and water entitlements, Félix was forced to take action. On his deathbed in 1863, the remaining acres of Rancho Félix were transferred to the lawyer Antonio Colonel, presumably in payment for legal fees.

The land was resold several times for many different reasons. In 1868 the water rights were leased by the down-stream City of Los Angeles. Nearly twenty years later, in 1885 the new owner, Griffith J. Griffith, sold the water rights to the City for $50,000 with the knowledge that they were much more valuable. As a visionary, Griffith, understanding the value of the land as a natural resource for the growing community, offered to sell it for $750 an acre. All the value of the land was based on its accessible water. The City wasn’t interested in his offer. Griffith eventually donated over 3,015 acres to Los Angeles for its first park. Until the property was annexed into the City in the early 1900’s, the Los Angeles River supplied all the city’s water needs.

Viva Rancho Los Félix!

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A Centennial Update

Griffith Park celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1996. As part of the year-long festivities, a plaque was dedicated to honor the Anza party expedition and campsite near Travel Town. Among Griffith Park’s many attractions is the 1853 Félix Adobe (City Landmark #401). Located in the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains and surrounded by nearly 14 million regional residents with three major freeways defining its northeastern boundary, residents and visitors have loved it to death! Nearly 10 million people used the park in its centennial year. And in November of that year, two separate bond issues passed (Proposition A and Proposition K), with $45 million designated for Griffith Park improvements. Additional Proposition A funds will be used to enhance the route of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail along the Los Angeles River with greenways, pocket parks, and youth educational and work programs.

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Noticias de Anza
Agencies Start Trail Marking

The National Park Service is actively working with federal and state agencies to mark and interpret the Anza Trail. The following activities are going on:

- The Presidio of San Francisco is developing plans to use the official marker on the historic route from Mountain Lake to the bluffs above the Golden Gate where Anza determined the location of the Presidio. Six interpretive displays will be installed along the trail. Other points of interest, including the remains of the original Spanish presidio, will be interpreted and shown on a park map. For the past six years, presidio staff have offered a tour along the route called “Walking in the Footsteps of Anza.”
- John Muir National Historic Site is preparing a site bulletin to interpret the Anza expedition at the Martinez Adobe.
- Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area will mark the trail as soon as its Comprehensive Design Plan for Simi Hills is approved and the trail alignment determined.
- Staff at Camp Roberts in Monterey County, California have proposed to mark an approximate eight-mile portion of the Anza route. Although some of the trail is within an impact zone which cannot be entered, much of the route travels through an oak-savannah landscape nearly the same as the expedition would have encountered. Individuals or groups can make arrangements to tour the trail and to use the facilities or camp when training maneuvers are not being conducted. Call Albert Davis at the Historical Museum at Camp Roberts at (805)238-3732 or Brian Duke at (805) 238-8418.
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is coordinating between its four districts involved with the Anza Trail: Maricopa, Yuma, El Centro, and Fort Ord Public Lands. Cheryl Blanchard, BLM archeologist, received a $9,000 BLM grant to mark and interpret twenty miles of the Anza Trail between Highway 85 and Mobile in Maricopa County, Arizona. This nearly pristine area receives many visitors especially celebrating the Mormon Battalion or following the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, with which the Anza Trail is contiguous. Marking the Anza Trail will bring the Spanish history of the trail to the public.
- The NPS and California State Department of Parks and Recreation signed a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) to certify the 23 parks through which the Anza Trail is routed. Henry W. Coe State Park and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park have already marked their trail segments with the official marker.

Congratulations

Heritage Trails Fund Amigos de Anza was recognized for the Commemorative Relay at the California Trails Conference in March 1997. Jeannie Gillen accepted the award from California State Parks and Recreation Director, Don Murphy. He also presented George and Vivian Obem with the Lifetime Achievement Award. George and Vie are the Santa Barbara County Chairs of Amigos de Anza.
Recap on the Relay...

by Nancy DuPont

The 1996 Commemorative Relay of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (NHT) came to a successful conclusion on December 8, 1996 in Antioch, California, at Bridgehead Park, Contra Costa County, Anza's campsite #101. On November 30, at the Presidio of San Francisco, 97 horseback riders, most in period costume, had delivered a message from the Mayor of Hermosillo, Mexico, to the mayor of San Francisco. Superintendent Brian O'Neill presented a Special Commendation to Heritage Trails Fund, Amigos de Anza, for its vision and perseverance in conducting the 1996 Anza Trail Commemorative Relay.

The message and other proclamations were carried in a mochila (saddlebag) transferred from rider to rider along the 1263-mile route during the 53-day event. In another symbolic gesture, water from the San Miguel River in Hermosillo was carried by relay participants and poured into San Francisco Bay to signify the blending of cultures.

Although Anza's path through Mexico is not part of the NHT as established by Congress, we began the reenactment of his journey on October 12 in Hermosillo to emphasize the cross-cultural aspects of Anza's legacy. Heritage Trails Fund sponsored the ride, with National Park Service help, to celebrate the 220th anniversary of Anza's journey and draw public attention to the Anza Trail. The relay was an official event of the California State Sesquicentennial. It was conducted by equestrians and bicyclists, runners and walkers, even a kayaker, who took on sections of the trail that pass through their communities. I followed the entire relay, riding over half of it on horseback.

We accumulated many new friends and 427 new members of Amigos de Anza. We reached some 5000 school children in Mexico, Arizona and California with a living history message about Anza. Over 2500 Relay participants assisted us in 61 events in the two countries, two states and 19 counties. We received proclamations from every city, county or park official at each of these events. Fourteen church leaders blessed us and four Indian tribes smudged us with accompanying prayers. Over 200 organizations were identified as supporters of the trail, and they logged 30,000 hours of volunteer service. We visited 83 parks and special places where 17,000 spectators joined us throughout the length of the trail. We were covered by 47 newspapers, seven television stations, two radio stations, and two videotape documentation's. The value of in-kind donations was $66,528.

Phil Valdez presides at the ceremony in Hermosillo, Mexico, where a group of about 100 relay riders were sent off with speeches, music, and cheers from Mexican citizens and dignitaries.
Students Connect with History

On November 13, 1996, 21 students from Carpinteria Middle School participated in the Commemorative Relay by carrying the flasks of water brigade-fashion through the streets of Carpinteria. To be chosen, the students were asked to explain why they would like to participate in the relay. Here are a few responses.

"Throughout my life, I have always wanted to be a part of history. I believe helping carry the water of the Sonora River to the San Francisco Bay would help fulfill my goal. This historical journey is an educational reminder of our roots and history in California."
— Chris Gocong

"I would very much like to be in this reenactment of history because I think that to be a good citizen it is important to know about how your community got to be the way it is."
— Rebekah Ernst

"It would be fun to participate because then it could be one of those stories that you tell your grandchildren and something that you would feel really proud about."
— Oriana Grubisic

"I feel that the Spanish were very courageous and this relay gives them the recognition that they deserve and I would like to acknowledge them."
— Johanna Reed

Some of the twenty-one (21) Carpinteria Middle School eighth graders who are ready to relay the water flasks.
Anza Plaza Project Takes Shape

The plan of the stage area for the Anza Plaza prepared by Design Collaborations of Tucson.

It started with an idea from two Tubac citizens and has grown into a reality involving many organizations, citizens, and business owners in Tubac. Ovelia Owen and Leila Pearsall felt that the area adjacent to Tubac Presidio State Historic Park [Anza’s home and the staging area for the 1775-76 expedition] and St. Ann’s Church would be an appropriate site for a plaza to commemorate Juan Bautista de Anza, his life and travels. Since the site lies on the Anza Trail, the Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona formed a steering committee made up of representatives from 16 local organizations. Starting with bake sales, aluminum can collection, and private donations, the committee raised over $4,000 including a grant with the Arizona Commission on the Arts matched by $1,000 from the County Board of Supervisors, and $900 from the White Elephant, a nonprofit charity organization. With this start-up money, the committee hired a design consultant. During six months time, which included three public workshops and nine steering committee meetings, the consultant developed a master plan for this major interpretive site on the national trail. Included in the Coalition contract with the design consultant was the important provision that the master plan must include estimated dollar amounts to construct the project and sources of funding for construction, allowing a smooth transition to phase II. Phase II of the project is now underway with development of the engineering drawings. Initially, $5,000 is being raised to cover the cost of the engineering consultant. We have a commitment for $1,000 from a local developer, Morning Star Ranch, and the County Board of Supervisors has submitted a $2,500 amount in this year’s budget. An additional $900 is committed from a local western organization, so we are not far short of Phase II funding. The steering committee is now looking for grants to cover the estimated $350,000 for construction.

Rio Rico Properties to Donate Trail Easement to Coalition

By Richard Williams

Rio Rico Properties recently agreed to donate approximately 14 miles of trail easement along the Santa Cruz River to the Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona. A ten-foot wide easement is proposed. The hiking and equestrian trail will border the river from Ruby Road in the south nearly to Santa Gertrudis Lane in the north, just one-half mile short of linking up with the 4.6 mile section of trail from Tumacácori to Tubac. With over 68 species of birds frequenting the river corridor during the spring and fall migratory seasons, we expect the trail will be a bird-watchers delight.

Easement donation is contingent on the Coalition providing liability coverage which the county has agreed to pay for the coalition. A Geographic Positioning System (GPS) survey will locate the trail and enable a claim investigator to pinpoint the exact relation to the trail where the incident happened.

The Santa Cruz County management committee of the Coalition has the goal of reestablishing the historic route of the Anza Trail within the county by the year 2000.

Pima County Promotes the Anza Trail

A diverse group of dedicated individuals in Pima County is doing wonders for the Anza Trail. Key players are the County Analyst for Trails and Open Space, Steve Anderson; the county Archeology and Historic Preservation Officer, Linda Mayo; the county Anza Trail Coalition Chair, Nancy Kelly; a local activist, Jim DiGiacomo; and the Green Valley News editor, Kathy Engle.

In May, 1997, Pima County voters passed a $36.3 million bond issue for open space, historic preservation, and trails. Of that, $750,000 are specified for the Anza Trail, covering 60...
Along the Trail

Mary Aguirre reports that Wade Cox, retired graphic designer for Arizona State Parks, is preparing the wayside exhibit for the Anza Trail in Picacho Peak State Park in Pinal County. She is also working with Jerry Crenshaw, retired Picacho Peak Assistant Manager.

Reba Grandrud will work on a membership plan for the Maricopa County Chapter of the Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona.

Over 350 people attended an international conference on the Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition held on November 6 and 7, 1996 in Calexico, California and Mexicali, Baja California. It was coordinated by the Imperial County chapter of Amigos de Anza and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de Baja California with sponsorship by the California Council for the Humanities, Valley Independent Bank, and the Imperial Valley College Desert Museum. Topics included logistics over uncharted courses, the effect on native populations, the effect on Mexican history, and the expedition in relation to the work of Portola and Serra.

Valerie Cantu Claverie, Amigos de Anza Imperial County Chair, is working with Linda Freitas, an artist, on an exhibit for the Pioneer Museum of the Imperial Valley Historical Society. It will feature the cultural influences of the Anza expedition members on California.

Gina Smurthwaite and Paul de Nubilo, Amigos de Anza co-chairs for Ventura County, are tying down the recreational retracement route for the Anza Trail. They are working with Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Conejo Open Space and Conservation Agency, the cities of Camarillo, Oxnard, San Buenaventura, and Thousand Oaks, and private landowners. In August, they made a presentation on the proposed trail route to the newly reconstituted Ventura County Park and Recreation Department and to the County Board of Supervisors on September 3.

Vie Obern reports from Santa Barbara County that the County Board of Supervisors accepted a grant of an easement along the Anza Trail route from Texaco for a 1.5 mile trail from El Capitan State Beach along El Capitan Ranch. The supervisors also approved application proposals for AB 1431 funds for trail studies which relate to the Anza Trail: a study of the routes, ownership, and topography of 1.75 miles from the proposed Dos Pueblos Golf course (ARCO) to Gato Canyon and 3.0 miles from Refugio State Beach to Arroyo Hondo and for study of a trail easement granted by Chevron when they put in a pipeline from Jalama County Beach Park to essentially Point Conception.

Ruth Kessler, former San Benito County Supervisor, heads a committee

Second Annual Anza World Conference in Arizpe

The second annual Anza World Conference held in Arizpe, Sonora, from May 15-18, 1997, was attended by students of Anza from Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico in the U.S., Sinaloa and Sonora in Mexico, and Spain. Providing the highlight of this year’s conference, six members of the Ansa family from Hernani (Gipuzkoa, Spain), birthplace of Juan Bautista de Anza, senior, attended. They included Ramón Ansa, who organized the group from Spain, and his wife, Josefa Eseiza; José Luis Ansa and his wife, Loli Mendizabal; and cousins Victoriano Ansa and María Lizeaga Ansa.

(A note about spelling: Our hero, Juan Bautista de Anza, the second, is the only person in his family who spelled the name with a “z”. His father, Juan Bautista de Anza, senior, spelled it “Anssa.” His grandfather, Antonio de Anza, spelled it “Ansa” about two thirds of the time and “Ansssa” the other third. We have standardized the spelling to “Anza” in this country in this century. However, the family, of which there are many still residing in Spain, spell the name “Ansa.”

Papers were presented on the Arizpe Cathedral, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, and Anza in New Mexico.

Field trips were taken to Nuestra Señora de Aranzazu de Tetuachi and San José de Basochuca, former homes of Juan Bautista de Anza as he was growing up. On Sunday, everyone had the opportunity to attend Mass in the Arizpe Cathedral where Anza is buried. Prehistoric Indian writings in the Cajón de Jiesari were visited on the way back to Tucson. Two vans went via Fronteras to visit the old presidio site where Anza was born.
(Along the Trail, cont.) to investigate marking San Juan Grade Road as the Anza Trail.

- The East Bay Regional Park District has completed a monument at Anza expedition campsite 101 at the Antioch pier, constructed through the Challenge Cost Share Program. The agency will work with Heritage Trails Fund on a dedication ceremony.

Web Page Prepared by Volunteers

Jeannie Gillen, Riverside County Amigos de Anza Chair, figured a way to make all of her volunteer hours on the Commemorative relay and other Anza activities pay off for her and for the trail. For college credit, she became the client of a multi-media class at Mt. San Jacinto College. Jeannie literally provided a wagon load of information, and the class used it to create a web page, under Jeannie’s guidance, which you can access at http://www.msjcnewmedia.com/anza/.

Anuncios

New Telephone and Fax Numbers

- The new telephone number of the Anza Trail Administrator, Meredith Kaplan, is 415-427-1438. This is a direct, voice-mail line. The new fax number is 415-744-3043. For e-mail, it’s meredith_kaplan@nps.gov.
- The new telephone number for The Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona is 520-325-0909, and the address is P.O. Box 42612, Tucson, AZ 85733-2612.

Exploring the Possibilities

The Amigos de Anza are exploring possible ways to participate in the California Sesquicentennial Celebration — anything from conducting an event in each county to planning an international reenactment. If you have time to help organize and produce an event in your area, call Nancy Dupont at (510) 937-7661.

Passport Stamp

Passport stamps for the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail are available from the National Park Service, Pacific Great Basin Support Office, 600 Harrison Street, Suite 600, San Francisco, California, 94107, attention Meredith Kaplan. Write or telephone us at 415-427-1438, or drop by. Let us know when and where you visited the trail, and we will provide you a stamped adhesive label. You can also get a passport stamp at Tumacacori National Historic Park.

Music

Authentic music of the Anza expedition period, Lost Treasures of New Spain, is now available on CD from Erador Records, P.O. Box 1116, Cambria, California. (See Noticias de Anza No.9, "The Dance of Anza's Time.")

NOTICIAS DE ANZA

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