

History and Significance

The Historic Setting

The Anza expedition of 1775-76 took place because of a unique combination of political, economic, religious, and military circumstances. In 1773, when Anza was planning his trip, Spain claimed an immense territory including the western United States, Florida, and the Philippine Islands. What is Mexico today had been occupied by the Spanish for over 200 years, and they had established colonies in New Mexico nearly 175 years earlier. In what is Arizona today, Spanish influence extended as far north as the Gila and Colorado Rivers. Baja California was being settled.

As the mines of the Americas continued to send wealth to Spain, the riches of the Philippines took on great significance. Crews of the Manila galleons had long suffered from pirate attacks and scurvy, so ports along the western coast of the California from Cabo San Lucas to Monterey attained high priority. By the 1760s, Russian ships were reported as far south as Oregon, searching for seal and otter pelts. English and French freebooters threatened the slow-sailing Spanish trading vessels; and the crowns of both countries were supporting voyages of discovery, threatening Spain's hold on its empire.

In the meantime, other political factors changed the course of events in Spanish America. In 1767, Charles III of Spain, reacting to the growing power, wealth, and influence of the Society of Jesus throughout his empire, expelled the Jesuits from all his realms. He turned over missions under Jesuit control to other religious orders or to the secular Church. From their bases in *Baja* (Lower) California, the Franciscans were anxious to expand the mission frontier into *Alta* (Upper) California.

In 1768, José de Gálvez had been appointed to the post of Minister of the Indies with both the task and the desire to return the empire to the old days of wealth and glory. Both Gálvez and the Franciscans cast their eyes northward and began to lay plans for exploration and settlement from Baja California to the north.

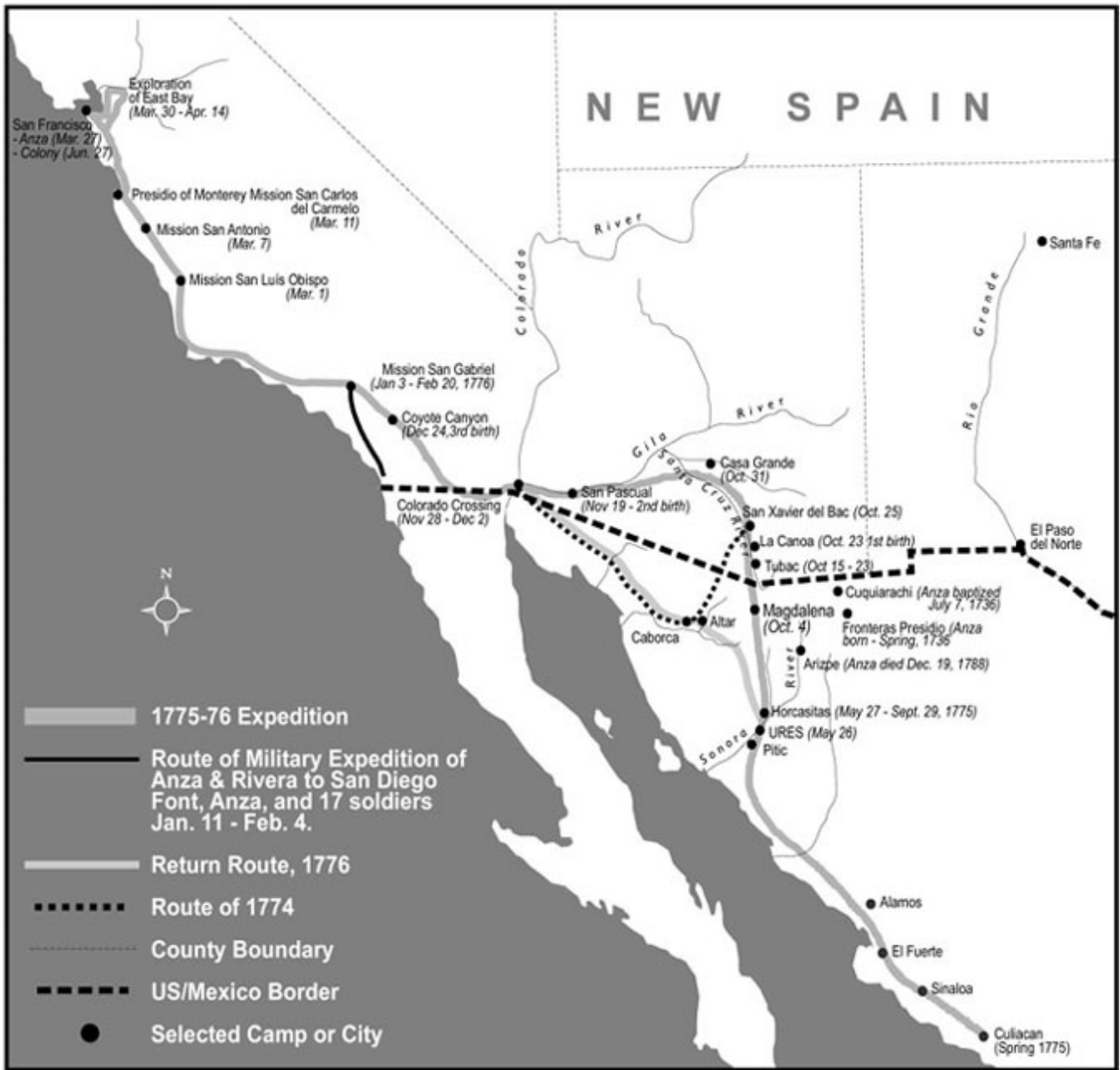
The resulting Portolá expeditions of 1769 and 1771 produced the establishment of five missions and two presidios in Alta California: San Diego de Alcalá in 1769; San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo in 1770, San Antonio de Padua in 1771, San Gabriel Arcángel in 1771, San Luis Obispo de Tolosa in 1772, and the presidios at San Diego and Monterey. During the 1769 expedition, a scouting party stumbled upon San Francisco Bay, which had eluded sea-borne explorers for more than a century.

Only a small force of 61 soldiers and 11 Franciscan Friars manned these five missions and two presidios. These settlements were utterly dependent upon outside supplies for survival during their early years and were small, weak, and constantly threatened with starvation.

Anza Expedition 1775-76

Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail

U. S. Department of the Interior National Park Service



MAP NOT TO SCALE

Based on a map provided by Donald T. Garate

The Need for an Overland Route

Due to prevailing winds and currents along the California coast, provision of the struggling settlements by sea was hazardous. Supply ships attempting to beat their way northward from Baja California to Monterey often took five times as long to reach their destination as those sailing south. Often they were blown out to sea to disappear forever, or were driven to destruction along the rocky coastline. Overland travel from Baja California was also long and arduous, and the harsh land had little food to spare for export.

The feeble settlements and outposts necessary for the protection of the empire's integrity and for the Franciscans as they pursued the salvation of souls could only be strengthened and supplied if a dependable and safe overland route could be opened between Sonora and Alta California. Such a route could lure more settlers to California, and would allow food to reach the new settlements from the farms of northern Mexico.

The project of opening a land route had a history going back to Fray Kino at the end of the 17th century. The Spanish military and early missionaries braved the unknown in small steps, establishing routes later followed by adventurers like Fray Francisco Garcés who traveled to the Pimas on the Gila River, and once crossed the Colorado River to approach the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains. In the 1730s Juan Bautista de Anza, Senior, urged opening a land route from Sonora to the Pacific.

The final impetus to exploration came in 1769 when Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, the son, commander of the small Presidio of Tubac, learned through the local Pimas that a tribe to the west of the Yumas reported white men on the west coast. This timely report of the Portolá expeditions suggested that a convenient overland route was feasible. He was convinced that he could find a way across the deserts and mountains dividing Sonora and Alta California.

The Exploratory Expedition

When Antonio María Bucareli y Ursúa became Viceroy, he sustained efforts to secure Alta California for Spain. In 1773, he granted Anza's petition to lead an overland expedition to California, influenced by the support of Costansó, the engineer with the Portolá expedition, and of Father Serra, in Mexico City at the time.



... in virtue of the exploration of the port of San Francisco made by Captain Don Pedro Fages in company with Father Fray Juan Crespí in the year 1772, in the month of March, and of the report which was given of it, accompanied by a map in which they delineated a great river which they said they had found and called the Río de San Francisco an order came from Madrid to the effect that that port should be occupied and settled immediately.

from Font's Complete Diary in *Anza's California Expeditions*, Vol. IV, p.225



On January 8, 1774, Anza left Tubac with a small band of twenty soldiers, a dozen servants, and a herd of 200 cattle and pack animals. Father Garcés accompanied the expedition to lend spiritual guidance and desert experience, and to seek out friendly Indian villages he had visited on previous travels. An additional guide was Sebastián Tarabal, a Baja California Indian and a runaway from Mission San Gabriel, who appeared at Tubac

just before the expedition started.

The expedition went by way of Caborca in the Altar Valley to replace horses which had been stolen in an Apache raid at Tubac. This route put Anza on the classic short road to the Colorado, later known as "El Camino del Diablo," passable by small units which could rely on sparse water holes and rock tanks for water. This route was commonly used by patrols from Altar. It was not a suitable route for a large colonizing expedition because of the lack of forage and water. For this reason, on his return, Anza explored the Gila drainage to ascertain feasibility of that route for a larger contingent of settlers.

The party reached the Yuma Indian villages at the junction of the Colorado and Gila Rivers without difficulty. Here Anza courted the favor of the Yuma chief, Salvador Palma, to help ensure future safe passage at this crucial point in the journey.

After several false starts and skirmishes with thirst and starvation, the expedition succeeded in finding a mountain pass leading toward coastal California. On March 22, 1774, Anza arrived at Mission San Gabriel. Since San Gabriel was already linked by known trails to the growing chain of missions between San Diego and Monterey, the overland route to California was now open for supply, emigration, and military use.

Now Spanish authorities could lay the last cornerstone for the grand scheme of protection and settlement of Alta California — the establishment of an outpost on the recently discovered port of San Francisco. This harbor could be defended against all enemies and could provide a perfect northern anchor for Spanish defenses.



As a consequence of the first journey which the Lieutenant-colonel Don Juan Bautista de Anza made by way of the Colorado River to Monterey in the year 1774...it was decided in Mexico to make this second expedition and journey, the better to explore the country, and especially to conduct thirty families of married soldiers to the port of Monterey, in order by means of them to settle and hold the famous port of San Francisco.

from Font's Complete Diary in *Anza's California Expeditions*, Vol. IV, p.1



The Colonizing Expedition, 1775-76

Anza was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel for his accomplishments. He quickly gained from Bucareli appropriate recruiting authority to command an expedition of settlers to San Francisco to establish a presidio and two missions. He selected as his second in command José Joaquín Moraga, second lieutenant of the company at the Royal Presidio of Fronteras. A veteran with eighteen years of service, his father had met death in the Indian frontier wars just as Anza's father had. Eventually, Lieutenant Moraga would lead the colonists to the actual founding of the Presidio of San Francisco in the name of Spain.

Anza began his recruitment in Culiacán and Sinaloa which, after 200 years of settlement, had a population which might be willing to risk a forbidding journey for opportunities in a new settlement. The settlers gathered at Horcasitas, Sonora, located about 175 miles

south of today's international border. In Horcasitas, three recruits died of unknown causes. On September 29, 1775, 177 persons left for Tubac. Between Culiacán and Tubac, four births occurred.

After delays at Tubac due to Apache raids which depleted the stock, the expedition set out on October 23, 1775. As accounted for in the expedition diaries, there were 240 persons: Anza, three officers, eighteen veteran soldiers from the Presidios of Sonora and Tubac, twenty soldier recruits, 29 women — wives of the soldiers — four volunteer families, 128 children, twenty muleteers, three *vaqueros*, three servants, three Indian interpreters, 695 horses and mules, and 355 cattle. Recent translations of letters written by Anza during his journey from Culiacán to Horcasitas have revealed that more *vaqueros* may have escorted the expedition than accounted for in the diaries. A more realistic number for all persons on the expedition may be over 300 (Garate, 1995).

Spiritual leadership and scientific reckoning were provided by Fray Pedro Font. Both Anza and Font kept detailed diaries of the entire journey. Garcés set out with the expedition, as did Father Thomas Eixarch of Tumacácori. Garcés kept an expedition diary as far as the Colorado River where he and Eixarch remained.

The first night out, a woman died in childbirth. She was buried at Mission San Xavier del Bac. The baby survived to reach California. Amazingly enough, given the hardships yet to be endured, the expedition would record no more deaths. After Father Font conducted three marriages, the expedition left San Xavier del Bac on October 26. The colonists now left the last outpost of Spanish civilization in the Pimería Alta, and would not see another until they reached Mission San Gabriel in Alta California.

From San Xavier del Bac the expedition moved northward up the Santa Cruz River valley, past present-day Tucson. A rest near the Gila River enabled Anza and Father Font to visit the ancient Casa Grande ruins. The party then followed the Gila west to the Colorado River. Delays were numerous, due to sicknesses of both humans and animals, and a stop for one more birth.

The party finally reached the Colorado River, on November 28. With the assistance of the friendly Yuma Indians, led by Chief Palma, the crossing was completed without serious mishap.

On December 4, 1775, leaving Fathers Eixarch and Garcés behind to minister to the Yuma natives, the expedition followed the Colorado west. They were headed for known water at San Sebastián Marsh. Anza divided the expedition into four groups, three of colonists and one of livestock, each traveling a day apart to better secure water and forage. They encountered an unusually cold and snowy winter. By December 17, the entire party had reached the haven of San Sebastián.

Despite the cold weather, the colonists set forth again on December 18. Dry camps alternated with wet. At one dry camp, the thirst-plagued cattle, meant to provide future meat for California, stampeded. Nearly fifty were lost.



In the morning we found eight beeves and one of the vaqueros' mules frozen to death, for since they came so thirsty, and gorged themselves with water, the bitter cold of the night killed them. At noon the sergeant [Grijalva] arrived with

*the second division of the people of the expedition and the second pack train.
They came half dead with cold from the cruel weather....*

From Font's Complete Diary in *Anza's California Expeditions*, Vol. IV, p. 133



They entered Coyote Canyon. On Christmas eve night a baby was born, on Christmas they rested, and on December 26 the colonists reached the pass. Fifty miles from Mission San Gabriel, they finally entered fertile land. They reached the Santa Ana River on December 31, and Mission San Gabriel Arcángel on January 4, 1776. The expedition more than doubled the European population of Alta California.

Cultivated fields, cattle, sheep, and hogs thrived at Mission San Gabriel, which had been relocated since Anza's first trip and was still composed of crude buildings. The colonists' spirits revived with food, water, and rest. Their stay at San Gabriel became much longer than expected when Anza agreed to help Fernando Rivera y Moncada, *Comandante* of California, suppress hostilities between Spanish and Kumeyaay peoples in San Diego.

He also hoped to find there additional supplies for the journey to Monterey, since the colonists were straining the resources of San Gabriel. He encountered delays in subduing the Kumeyaay forces and in gathering supplies at San Diego. Further delays occurred at San Gabriel when several soldiers deserted. Finally, on February 21, 1776, the expedition set forth toward Monterey, leaving Lieutenant Moraga behind to chase the deserters. The colonists followed known trails to Mission San Luís Obispo and Mission San Antonio. Here they were rejoined by Moraga who had captured the deserters and returned them to Mission San Gabriel.

On March 10, they reached Monterey after a journey of 130 days and nearly 2000 miles from Horcasitas. The Monterey Presidio, then six years old, consisted of a chapel, a barracks, some small houses, and a stockade. Father Serra had moved the mission to the Carmel Valley, a short distance away, where the land was more suitable for farming.

The colonists waited in Monterey, while Anza set out on March 23 to explore the port of San Francisco and to pick a site for settlement. With him were Father Font, Lieutenant Moraga, eight soldiers, muleteers, and local guides, twenty persons in all. They selected a site for the presidio on the headlands above the bay and for a mission near an arroyo they named Arroyo de los Dolores, after the day of its discovery, "Friday of Sorrows" [Good Friday].



The port of San Francisco...is a marvel of nature, and might well be called the harbor of harbors... Indeed, although in my travels I saw very good sites and beautiful country, I saw none which pleased me so much as this. And I think that if it could be well settled like Europe there would not be anything more beautiful in all the world....

from Font's Complete Diary in *Anza's California Expeditions*, Vol. IV, pp. 333 and 341



Following orders to explore the extent of the "river" of San Francisco, the party moved

southward around the end of the bay, traversing the low foothills on the east side of the bay to the Carquinez Strait, traveling east toward the Sierra Nevada, and then south to return to Monterey on April 8.

The colonists were destined to wait for several more months before seeing the port of San Francisco. Rivera y Moncada had made his own exploration of the bay area in 1774 and had decided that it was not suitable for settlement. Despite Anza's enthusiastic report of his reconnoitering expedition, sent to Rivera at San Diego, the colonists were not given permission to leave Monterey.

Tired of waiting, Anza set off on the return trip to Mexico on April 14. The major part of his task was completed. With him went Father Font, the ten soldiers from Tubac, some servants, and one couple who had decided not to stay in Alta California. The party reached Horcasitas on June 1, after an absence of eight months.

After considerable delays, *Comandante* Rivera finally relented, and the colonists left Monterey for their new home on June 17, 1776, under the command of Lieutenant Moraga. On June 27 they reached the site of Mission San Francisco de Asís (Mission Dolores) and began the gradual task of building the mission, the presidio, and their new homes.

Significance of the Anza Expeditions

Anza's vision for an overland route to Alta California was an integral part of Spanish foreign and colonial policy in the New World, whose goal was to contain England, France, and Russia and extend Spain's hold upon her territories.

Anza displayed remarkable leadership to bring at least 240 people safely over a little-known route in a hostile environment. Anza made contact with the many native peoples along the way and noted locations of water, forage, and fuel which made possible a route of settlement between Sonora and Alta California. Although the route was largely abandoned by the Spanish after an uprising of the Yuma Indians in 1781, it had allowed the passage of enough cattle, settlers, and soldiers to ensure the survival of the existing settlements and to begin the *pueblos* of San José and Los Angeles. The Gila River section of the trail would be the basis for the Mormon Battalion route, the Butterfield Overland Mail route, and the "southern route" many Americans followed to settle in California.

The soldiers and families that Anza escorted brought their language, customs, traditions, and general expressions of Hispanic culture as it existed in the New World. These early settlers of California, were a mixed group of European, Native American, and African heritage. They had a significant impact on the cultures of the indigenous peoples they encountered and on the development of California.

The diaries of the two expeditions provide a record of the American Indian cultures and of the landscapes encountered by Anza. Read carefully, they reveal some details of the culture and daily lives of these peoples. The diaries have been translated into English and annotated by Herbert Bolton as a five-volume work, *Anza's California Expeditions*, Berkeley, 1930.

The quality of the achievement was so inspiring that equestrians and others in contemporary times have been moved to reenact it, notably in 1975-76 with the Bicentennial reenactment organized by the two state and nineteen county Bicentennial committees.



Santa Barbara, California, 1976.



The backcountry of Santa Clara County, 1976.



Tumacacori to Tubac, 1992.