

# The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail



## The Anza Trail - A Historic Link to Arizona's Past

Stretching from Mexico to the San Francisco Bay, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail uniquely ties the cultures and peoples of northern Mexico and California with Arizona's history.

It was over two centuries ago that scores of families from Sonora and Sinaloa first crossed through Gila Bend as they traversed the Gila River and headed west. Their actions forever changed the history of California, Arizona, and the west.

Before the expedition, the desert formed an impenetrable barrier between Mexico and Alta California. But Spain's hope to hold on to an overextended empire and the promise of a new life in a distant land compelled Juan Bautista de Anza to lead his group of settlers on a year-long nearly impossible trek.

In 1990, Congress commemorated the sacrifices and hardships of these travelers by declaring the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail one of our National Trails. Administered by the National Park Service in cooperation with volunteers from Nogales to San Francisco, the trail offers present-day tourists opportunities to explore in the footsteps of the original settlers.



Image courtesy Bill Singleton, Pima County Graphics

Anza relied on the water from the Gila River to sustain the nearly 300 people and hundreds of animals that accompanied the expedition on its way to San Francisco. Although American Indians had traversed the desert for centuries, until 1775, the Spanish had never attempted to send a large group of women and children across the Arizona frontier to create a settlement on the Pacific Coast.

## Central Arizona at the Crossroads of History

The Gila River has always been the key to survival for the people of central Arizona.

In historic times, it sustained generations of Tohono O'odham and other indigenous people who relied on the river for their water and food. Today, the water from the Gila River makes Pinal and Maricopa Counties major food producers for the American market throughout the winter season.

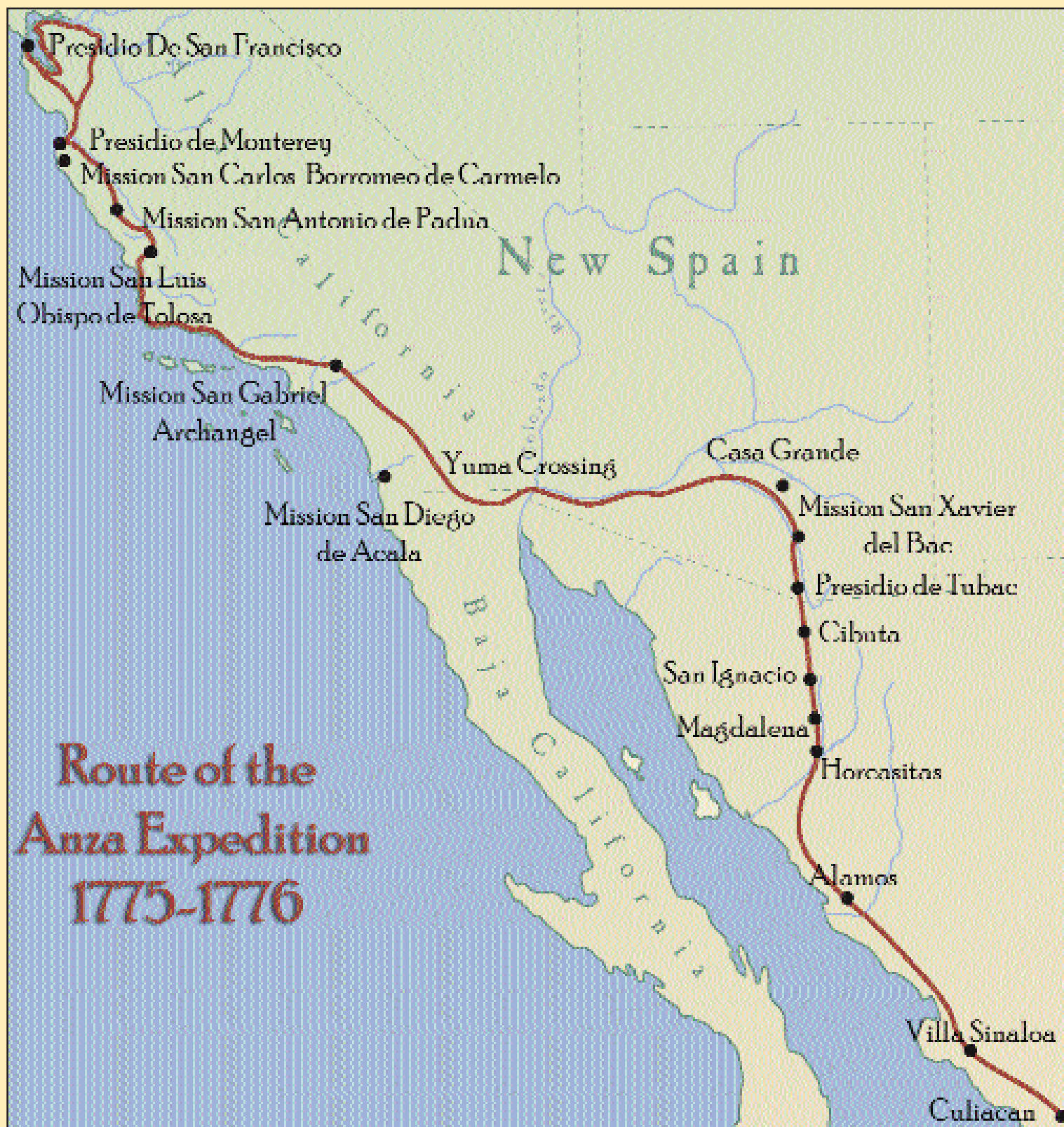
For the Anza expedition and other westward settlers, the Gila River was the crucial link that made desert crossings possible. Rivers were the first highways that guided early travelers across untried routes. Not only did they sustain early settlers and their livestock, but they afforded a level and safe means of travel.

The Anza colonists may have been the first modern group of settlers to pass through the area but they

would not be the last. The families on the Anza expedition demonstrated that the Gila River could serve as a link between the Spanish frontier at Tucson and the Colorado River hundreds of the miles to the west.

In 1781, the Spanish would use the same route again to send the next large group of families to begin the settlement of Los Angeles. A few generations later, the Mormon Battalion would follow much the same route through Pinal and Maricopa Counties as they made their way west to San Diego. The Butterfield stage shared the same route a decade later with regularly scheduled coaches crossing the desert.

Today, the thousands of travelers who travel the interstate west through central Arizona are the legacy of those first bold footsteps made over two centuries ago.



From Tucson to San Gabriel, the Arizona and California deserts were a tremendous impediment to western settlers. The Anza expedition proved that families could use the Gila River as a tool in crossing to California.

If you would like more information on the trail, please contact trail headquarters at:

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