

California Explorers Series

Juan Bautista de Anza



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Juan Bautista de Anza (1736-1788)

Unlike many of the other California explorers who traveled by sea, Juan Bautista de Anza is recognized as finding the first overland route from Mexico to Monterey. Anza was skilled at making his way through uncharted territory. He also had military experience fighting hostile Indian tribes like the Apaches. These were exactly the qualities the King of Spain was looking for in a leader for a new overland expedition.



The king was worried about Spain holding on to Alta (upper) California. Sea routes were dangerous and long. The ships had to sail against the wind and current all the way north. The land route through Baja (lower) California that Father Serra and Governor Portola had used was now unsafe. The missions did not have enough supplies to share with travelers and the local tribes were getting more unfriendly.

If the missions and presidios got too weak, Spain might not be able to keep control of Alta California much longer. Other countries like England and Russia would be quick to snatch it away. So another land route was needed, and Juan Bautista de Anza had an exciting plan to find it. It was quickly approved.



On January 8th, 1774, he led thirty-four men and 260 mules, horses, and cattle from Tubac, a settlement south of modern day Tucson, Arizona. Anza was clever. He did not have a map, so he took the next-best thing: a California Indian who had escaped Mission San Gabriel and successfully made his way through the mountains and deserts to Mexico. His name was Sebastian Tarabal, and Anza thought he would make a great guide. Little did he know how much he would need Tarabal!

By February 7th, the expedition had traveled 375 miles. The first big challenge ahead of them would be the mighty Colorado River. It needed to be crossed, but the waters were deep, wide, and cold. Many of the men could not swim. Once again, Juan had a smart plan. Can you guess what he did?



Anza made friends with the local Yuma Indian tribe and their leader, Chief Palma. He brought them gifts like ribbons and trinkets. The chief offered to carry the explorers across the river on tule reed rafts. It worked perfectly, and everyone made it across. They were all safe...but not for long!

There were two choices in front of Juan--go northwest or go south. Anza picked south which would take them through the middle of what we call the Imperial Valley. Oops! Soon Anza and his men found themselves lost and wandering the desert for weeks. Finally, Sebastian Tarabal, the guide, recognized a landmark and got them out of the sand dunes before they died of starvation or lack of water. Soon they were on their way to Mission San Gabriel.



Once they arrived at the mission near present-day Los Angeles, it was an easy trek up the Central Valley to Monterey. Anza had found the overland route the King of Spain wanted. He was eager to get home and tell everyone how Monterey was a perfect spot for a settlement.

The Viceroy, or king's representative, was so happy with the news that Anza got promoted and was given another expedition to Monterey—this time escorting thirty-five families to settle the area. It took until October 1775 to finish preparing for the trip.



Most people did not want to leave Mexico and start fresh in a new land. The government offered incentives or rewards to poor people who were willing to relocate. It must have been quite a sight to see 245 people, 340 horses, 165 pack mules, and 302 cattle set out from Tubac. Just like modern day travelers, Anza did a little sightseeing along the way. They stopped for a day to view the mysterious prehistoric ruins of Casa Grande.

It was slow going for the large group, but this time Juan made sure no one got lost! Once the expedition had to stop for several days when some of the settlers got too sick to continue. The bad news was one woman died. But the good news was four babies were born.

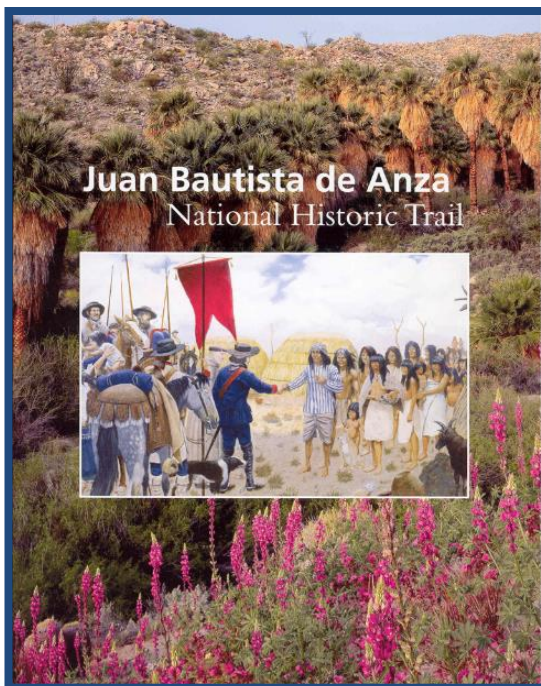


Still, the holdup meant the trip would take longer, and supplies would only last so long. Anza worried that they would run out. He also worried about crossing the Colorado River with all those people. Once again, the Yuma Indians were there to help. The tribe's strongest swimmers swam alongside the travelers on horseback in order to rescue anyone who fell in the water. Luckily, everyone made it across alive.

Anza was relieved, but he still had many problems to face in the desert crossing ahead of them:

- Food and water would be scarce in the arid land
- Weather could--and would--change suddenly, with deadly results
- A few servants and soldiers would run away
- Some trails would be blocked or impossible to travel
- Animals would get sick or hurt

But they finally made it through the desert and mountain passes like Coyote Canyon which is in what is now called Anza-Borrego. Does that name sound familiar?



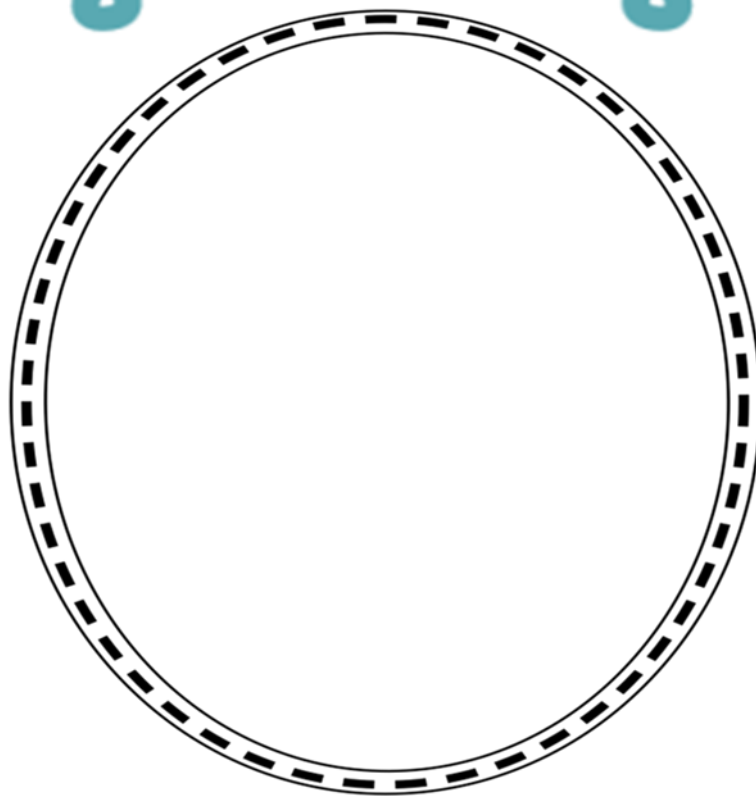
Arriving safely in Monterey on March 10th, 1776, Anza made sure all the families got temporarily settled before he headed up to the San Francisco Bay area to scout out possible locations for a new mission and presidio. He chose the sites for Mission Delores and the San Francisco Presidio before returning to Mexico. The families in Monterey left soon after to settle permanently in the area that we call the city of San Francisco.



After his successful expedition, Juan Bautista de Anza was made governor of the province of modern-day New Mexico. He remained there as governor until 1787 when he moved to Sonora. He was then appointed Commander of the Presidio of Tucson but died before he could start the job.

Today the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park are named in honor of the brave, clever, and strategic overland explorer.

Name _____



Explorer

Birth-Death

Country

Name _____

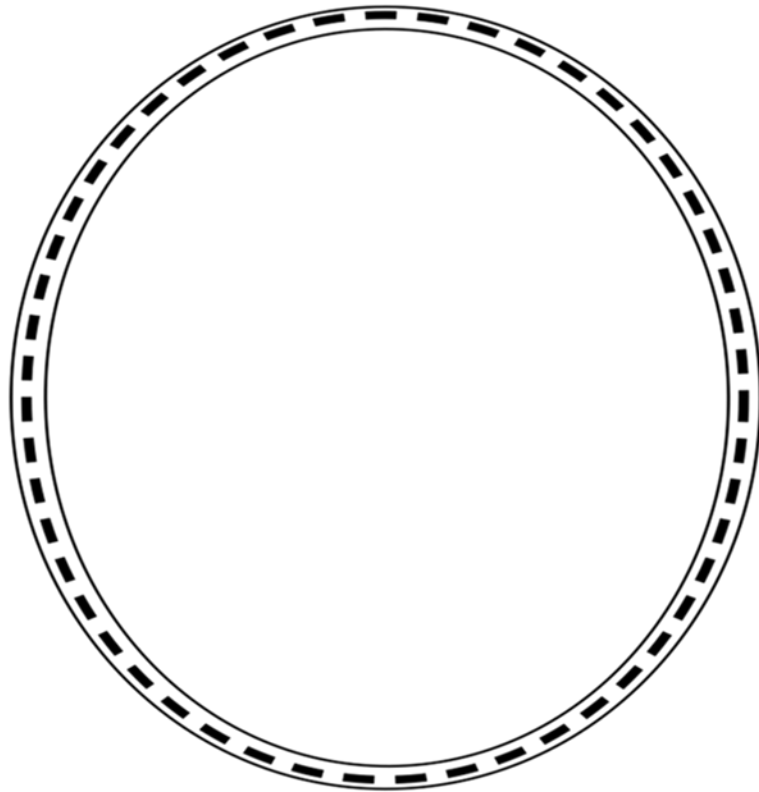
Explorer Name :

Goals _____

Accomplishments: _____

Interesting Facts:

One word that describes this explorer:



Explorer

Birth-Death

Country

Explorer Name :

Goals _____

Accomplishments: _____

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