

Moving Toward Accountability: Challenging Settler Narratives through Interpretive Shifts and Tribal Engagement at Anza National Historic Trail

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes the work I undertook from 2023–2025 as a Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow at Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (Anza NHT). It identifies long-standing gaps in Indigenous representation and participation on the trail and reviews the perpetuation of settler-colonial narratives that minimize the violence of settler invasion and marginalize the contributions of Native peoples in interpretive materials. These critiques are set alongside the significant interpretive and relational shifts initiated by Anza NHT staff following the adoption of revised themes and interpretive approaches in the 2023 Foundation Document. The report details the creation of internal onboarding materials designed to reorient the staff’s understanding of the impact of Indigenous dispossession, settler occupation, and the legal and structural violence that shaped the United States federal government and the National Park Service. The report also outlines the development of external Tribal outreach materials that build on this understanding of settler violence and articulate the trail’s commitments to accountability that exceeded the minimum federal requirement within an inherently asymmetrical system. The work concludes by summarizing updates to interpretive materials and highlighting new projects and partnerships along the trail, including the development of the Anza 250 commemorative logo, a revised Anza NHT brochure, and enhanced support for Tribes and Native-led organizations made possible through the Mellon partnership’s funding.

INTRODUCTION

We come from the land.... My ancestors were colonized three times ... first by the missions, the Spanish. They came here with this idea of taking the land. They didn’t come here in hopes of saving these savage people but to enslave the people that were here on this land.... Mexico came in and stole the lands from [the Spanish Churches], took that land and now it is called Mexico.... By the time [American settlers] got to California on the westward expansion, it was not about creating treaty with Indians anymore. It was about mass extermination.¹

Corrina Gould (Confederated Tribes of Lisjan)

The land currently called California and Arizona has long been filled with people and stories, with complex histories and relationships between communities, with systems of care and ceremony, and cycles of living and death. Both geographic areas and the Indigenous communities in those areas were subjected to what Corrina Gould describes above as the three waves of settler invasion and occupation: Spanish, Mexican, and the current US occupation.

Long-extant Indigenous lifeways and practices were violently disrupted by the invasion and sustained presence of the Spanish in the 18th century and the erection of a mission system, which incarcerated Native peoples and used their enslaved labor to enshrine Spanish rule

and cosmology.² Colonial regime changes came quickly, but little changed for Indigenous Peoples when Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821. Under the colonial occupation of Mexico, the Native population remained exploited, and labored within the *rancho* system in the period of secularization.³

This brief but destructive period coincided with passage of the United States’ Preemption Act in 1841, a law that guaranteed squatters first rights to purchase land at low rates based on first “settlement and improvement” of public lands owned by the federal government.⁴ The act worked in tandem with Andrew Jackson’s genocidal Indian removal policy of the 1830s and further opened the American West to White settlement. In 1848, Mexico

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ceded the land that is now called California and northern Arizona to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which heralded an intensified wave of settler-colonial occupation. This period ushered in yet more settler violence during the Gold Rush, which saw the US federally fund the killing of Indigenous Peoples.⁵ The historian Patrick Wolfe argues that “access to territory” is settler colonialism’s “irreducible element” and suggests that land grabs, like the one described above, are accomplished by destroying Indigenous life and lifeways and erecting a settler society in its wake. In short, he writes, “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.”⁶

TRANSFORMING RELATIONS AND INTERPRETATION AT ANZA NHT

We live daily in the wake of this destruction in the US, and its enduring presence engulfs quotidian life and historical memory alike. As a settler academic and activist working at the intersection of Indigenous studies, settler-colonial studies, and critical information studies, I am acutely aware of how these histories coalesced and shaped the legal establishment of public lands and the National Park Service (NPS) and its impact on Native peoples in California and Arizona. When I applied to the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (Anza NHT), I did so in hopes that I would be able to bring a critical approach and language to the position and help reckon with settler violence

Upon my arrival in fall 2023, I found myself at the start of a significant overhaul led by Anza NHT staff of their materials and approaches on the trail.

while simultaneously highlighting Indigenous lifeways and resistance. The initial call described the position as one that would allow the Fellow to develop “research, interpretation, outreach, and educational and digital programming initiatives focused on the complexities of Indigeneity, identity and heritage of Spanish colonization, and the Anza Expedition.”⁷ Upon my arrival in fall 2023, I found myself at the start of a significant overhaul led by Anza NHT staff of their materials and approaches on the trail. Earlier that year, for example, Anza NHT staff released a Foundation Document with revised interpretive themes that more accurately represented Native contributions and would be used to help invigorate Tribal engagement along the trail.

As a result, I spent my two years with the trail developing training materials and Tribal outreach materials, and

helping to build relationships with Tribes and Native-led organizations along the trail with the enthusiastic support of Anza NHT staff. The summary that follows provides an overview of the projects I worked on and supported. It includes a critical identification of gaps in Indigenous representation, an overview of the aforementioned materials, and a summary of the projects and samples of new interpretative content at the Anza NHT.

SETTLER MEMORY AND GAPS IN INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION AT ANZA NHT

For much of its history, Anza NHT presented an incomplete, paternalistic vision of settler-colonial violence and invasion. Despite the expeditions’ dependence on Indigenous knowledge and diplomacy, Anza NHT promotional and branding materials, including its brochure and main logo, often perpetuated narratives of colonial heroism and Indigenous tokenism. These narratives coincided with a lack of Tribal engagement evidenced in the trail’s 1996 Comprehensive Management Plan.

Designated by Congress in 1990, the Anza NHT follows long-extant Indigenous travel and trade routes and marks the 1774–1776 Spanish exploratory and colonizing expedition led by Lieutenant Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza. Anza’s trek began in present-day Sinaloa and Sonora, Mexico, progressed through southern Arizona, and ended in San Francisco, California. The expedition included Father Pedro Font and 240 colonists from Mexico with the imperative to settle Native lands in response to competing encroachment by other imperial powers.

Then and now, the trail spans over 1,200 miles and runs through the homelands of over 70 Tribal communities.⁸ Native leaders of the Tribes along the trail were acutely aware of the shifting social and political landscape and made alliances to both prevent and reduce the threat of Spanish violence. The expedition’s success and the colonists’ survival would not have been possible without the deep geographic and climatological knowledge of Native guides like Sebastian Tarabal, a Cochimí guide and translator, who led the caravan along the edge of what is now the Mojave Desert.⁹

The language and characterizations of Native contributions used above, which situates Anza NHT in a much longer history of Native knowledge and travel, represents one shift in narration and interpretation by Anza NHT staff to reflect newer documentation.¹⁰ To contrast this, consider the trail’s 2020 brochure, which begins with the heading “Pursuing a Dream” and states, “Juan Bautista de Anza’s father had a dream. As a soldier on the colonial

frontier of New Spain, he wished to find an overland route to the coastal province of Alta California. He died in an Apache ambush when Anza was three years old.”¹¹ In this too-familiar narrative of the singular male hero, Anza’s mission is expressed through Spanish colonial patrilineal desire and posited as a dream that is ended by Indigenous attackers.

Despite the necessity of Native guides and strategic alliances with Native communities, such contributions had been under-represented in Anza NHT materials and re-enactment performances, which favored celebratory colonial narratives. In the 2020 brochure, Indigenous relations to lands and Native guides are presented peripherally and only mentioned *subsequent* to Anza. The use of enslaved Native labor to erect Spanish missions is mischaracterized as merely the “[provision] of the labor required to build them.”¹² The brochure mentions the devastation of Native peoples but also notes that, “Many Spanish believed they were serving the Native communities’ best interests.”¹³ This paternalistic approach masks the scale of racial violence and terror that characterizes settler invasion. Following in much the same logic, the trail’s previous investment in colonial re-enactment recapitulated and minimized the inherent anti-Indigenous violence of a Spanish-led military expedition.

Similarly, I read Anza NHT’s main logo, designed by former staff with the assistance of a design team circa 1995, as an example of multicultural tokenism. The 1990s heralded a wave of “melting pot” approaches to teaching and understanding multiculturalism and diversity in the United States, but this push often resulted in tokenizing inclusions of non-White peoples that reproduced racial, racist stereotypes.¹⁴ Rather than reprint and reproduce the potential for harm of the antiquated logo here, I describe it. The Anza NHT logo features several silhouettes and centers a male Spanish colonial figure, presumably Anza himself, on a horse with his arm raised. To the right of this is an “Indigenous” male figure, on foot, and holding a spear, further visually coded as “Indian” via feathers in long hair and loincloth. Behind and to the left of the Spanish figure is a woman holding an infant, seated on a horse, who is followed by a Spanish priest, denoted by a large cross, seated on a mule. Much like the brochure opens with mention of an Indigenous attack, the “Indian” figure is the only figure depicted holding a weapon. I find this curious given the fact that Anza led a Spanish military occupation, and armed soldiers were part of the caravan and the historical record.

As I searched the digitized materials available for Anza NHT, I found no evidence of Tribal consultation during the design draft process. In the final logo, what we are provided is a visual stereotype of an “Indian” with no distinct identity or cultural specificity. The visual register of this figure as “Indian” is one which relies on the circuitry of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul, Quandamooka) calls “settler common sense” that both traffics in a settler-colonial fantasy of Indigenous life and reifies the primacy of the settler.¹⁵

In addition to the representational issues, I also found that Native peoples were under-represented or largely absent from the trail’s administrative records. In reviewing the trail’s founding documents, I found little evidence of sustained engagement with Tribes. For instance, it remains unclear how involved Tribes were with the initial scoping and development of the trail. Despite there being well over 70 Tribes along the trail, Anza NHT’s comprehensive management plan lists only nine Tribes as having been consulted: Amah-Mutsun Ohlone Tribal Band, Cahuilla Band of Indians, Costanoan/Ohlone-Esselen Nation, Gabrielino/Tongva Tribal Council, Gila River Indian Community, Muwekma-Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay, Quechan Indian Tribe, Salinan-Chumash Nation, and Tohono O’odham Nation.¹⁶ According to the comprehensive management plan, only two of the nine Tribes sent letters in response to NPS outreach. Esselen Nation’s letter advocated for a “proposed mitigation” and suggested “that misrepresentation of the Indian viewpoint can be avoided by encouraging descendants to record their own history, identify significant resources and participate in the interpretation regarding their history and ethnography.”¹⁷ The Bureau of Indian Affairs sent a letter on behalf of the Cahuilla Indian Reservation, who voiced opposition to the use of reservation lands for a recreational trail, citing the disruption of Tribal lands, previous experience with trespassing, and noted that these experiences made them “protective of their limited resources.”¹⁸ In accounting for the lack of Tribal engagement, I will note that federal government offices often send out only the minimum requisite notice and place the onus for contact and response on already under-resourced Tribal officials.¹⁹

In a more contemporary context, I found that Tribal consultation is further complicated by the peculiar position of national historic trails within the National Park System. Unlike a single, physical park site, national historic trails span significant swathes of geographic area and often involve a mosaic of sites and spaces managed by a variety

of administrators. As a national historic trail, the NPS does not own or manage land at Anza. As a result, many of the trail's decisions are made in partnership with outside landowners and managers, which can include entities such as California State Parks and Arizona State Parks, Bureau of Land Management, and other NPS units. Thus, the NPS staff at Anza NHT are limited in their ability to compel consistent tribal consultation with both federally and non-federally recognized tribes.

REORIENTING APPROACHES, BUILDING NEW RELATIONS

In 2020, the Martinez Adobe at John Muir National Historic Site, home to Anza NHT's sole permanent exhibit, was closed due to structural issues. This presented an opportunity for Anza NHT staff to critically re-approach interpretive strategies and develop Anza NHT's foundation document, initiated in late 2021 and finalized in March 2023. As part of this process, Anza NHT staff invited Indigenous leaders and scholars to collaborate in a workshop to update the trail's interpretive themes.

The 2023 foundation document highlights both Indigenous lifeways and the enduring impact of colonization on Tribes, as well as articulating an imperative to pursue projects that “embrace Native voices in collaboration [and] develop an interpretive program that allows for both stories to be told equitably.”²⁰ The foundation document also reflects a significant shift in language that explicitly names the Anza expedition as a colonial endeavor tied to “Spain’s geopolitical and global empire building strategy,” which “established Spanish power . . . at the expense of Indigenous peoples and their cultures.”²¹ Such language has also formed the basis of NPS making several major revisions to partnerships along the trail, including withdrawing support for colonial re-enactment and from partner organizations that support colonial re-enactment.

When I began my fellowship, Superintendent Naomi Torres and Interpretive Program Manager Christopher Bentley indicated the need for the development of training and outreach materials. Together, we envisioned a two-part project. First, I would write an onboarding document for staff and interns that would provide background information about Anza NHT's multiple colonial histories; provide an overview of the trail's previous limited Tribal engagement, with an emphasis on accountability; and indicate the trail's ethical and legal commitments to Tribes. Second, I would develop outreach materials for Tribal engagement that would communicate Anza NHT's core values and guiding rationales, demonstrate the shifts in the trail's work as evidence of commitment (i.e., “show

don't tell”), and clearly articulate the trail's commitment to Tribes beyond the minimum requisite federal laws. Both documents would express the values and vision of the 2023 foundation document. The documents went through several rounds of drafting, an external review, and an additional internal NPS review.

The internal, onboarding document is shared with all staff members, regardless of their position or the duration of their employment with Anza NHT. The goal is to express a critical and shared ethic and responsibility amongst all staff equally, regardless of their level of experience and knowledge. The onboarding document educates current and incoming staff on how Anza Trail's staff understand the social, legal, and historical context of their positions as agents of the state and how this shapes their interactions with Native peoples. This includes a discussion of how colonization and settler-colonialism carried out the intentional erosion of Indigenous lifeways and upended the complex social, cultural, and political systems Indigenous communities developed with each other and their inhabited lands. The document notes that the establishment of NPS and the creation of “public lands” was made possible by imposing a settler governmental and legal structure, and traces formative legal context from early land ordinances, to the “Marshall Trilogy,” to the impact of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).²²

While Tribal consultation is undertaken primarily by NPS superintendents, the intent is to provide *all* staff, regardless of their position on the trail, with an outline of the required federal duties and protocols as a result of the erection of a settler-state federal government and juridical structure. It is imperative for staff to understand that the 1916 establishment of NPS in the Organic Act is the direct result of federal oversight of lands within the public domain, and US ownership is the direct result of centuries of systematic dispossession and anti-Indigenous

The [onboarding] document notes that the establishment of NPS and the creation of “public lands” was made possible by imposing a settler governmental and legal structure, and traces formative legal context.

racial violence.²³ The onboarding document asks staff to understand that these socio-legal histories and their impacts should result in actionable change and shifts in

the way partnerships are pursued with Tribes. The work fundamentally argues that the impact of settler-colonial violence cannot be overstated because it enables NPS staff's presence and positions on the trail. These histories also inform how Indigenous communities may understand NPS staff as agents of the federal government.

In crafting the onboarding document, I use clear and assertive language to critically acknowledge the inherent limitations of working within settler-state institutions. First, I acknowledge that the language used by the federal government “does not necessarily reflect Indigenous beliefs, values, or ways of relating to land. Indigenous communities are more than ‘stakeholders,’ and land and sacred sites are more than natural and cultural resources or resources to be managed by the state.”²⁴ Further, drawing on the work of Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, I want staff to understand the importance of Indigenous refusal.²⁵ I write, “The right to refusal is particularly important as the Anza NHT works to establish a recreational trail along the historic corridor which *always* runs through Native lands and *sometimes* runs through reservations. We [Anza NHT staff] understand the risks such a project could signal to tribal communities and deeply respect their right to protect themselves, their ancestral knowledge, their sacred areas, and their relations.”²⁶ Finally, I note that as staff “work to preserve Indigenous data sovereignty ... we are mindful of what conversations and documentation might become part of the public record and thus potentially subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.”²⁷

The onboarding document also includes a two-page review of best practices for establishing relationships with Tribes along the trail and asks the staff to prioritize people, not projects or deadlines, so staff can create more ethical and flexible approaches. The list includes the importance of understanding oneself as a guest, not an expert, and insists staff do not defend or rationalize harmful past actions of staff, partners, NPS, or the government. In conjunction with these best practices, I supervised Sandra Amezcu, an intern via the Hispanic Access Foundation, as she compiled the initial research for the second part, a report on the 70+ tribal communities along the trail, which I then edited and revised for Anza NHT's use. This report allows trail staff to “do their homework” or review vital information about the Tribe before reaching out as a way to (a) ensure engagement occurs through the proper and appropriate channels and (b) reduce the burden on Tribal communities. The report was compiled from publicly available information, largely authored by Tribes themselves, and privileges community-created maps and information whenever possible.

The external Tribal outreach document reflects the lessons in the internal onboarding document. In the “Education and Interpretation” section, the document explicitly references the subjugation and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples' land and relations, as well as their continued survival against ongoing occupation. Under “Caretaking and Preservation,” the document discusses the limitations of a stewardship framework under ongoing occupation and describes the limitations of language such as “stakeholders,” as mentioned above. Importantly, the work clarifies that the designation of Anza National Historic Trail is *not* a legal claim to the land along the trail, and the designation cannot be used as legal grounds to appropriate the land. In “Community-led Projects,” the trail acknowledges the past limited involvement with Tribal communities and the funding of colonial re-enactments. The work states that, “As we [the Anza Trail staff] reckon with these harmful practices, we have shifted our focus to community-centered education, partnerships, and ways to channel resources toward Native-centered projects.”²⁸ The section “Transparency and Flexibility” emphasizes the trail's commitment to Tribal protocol and process, protections from further state harm, an awareness and commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty, and the right for Tribes to refuse participation.

As part of the financial arrangement of the Mellon Fellowship, the position brought funding that was directed to Tribes and Native-led organizations along the trail. In an attempt to reduce extractive approaches, I asked that funds be used only to support projects and programming dictated by the community, and that projects and programming did not need to be public-facing. Further, Tribes did not need to invite Anza NHT staff nor “advertise” the trail or use the logo in any way. In short, the funding should be used to support Indigenous resilience and the resurgence of cultural and educational programming for their communities; it is money owed and long overdue and should be offered with as few strings as possible. As a result, Anza NHT, with the support of American Conservation Experience and the Anza Trail Foundation, was able to support a variety of communities and projects including the construction of traditional structures, educational programming centered on food sovereignty and cultural preservation, and programming that brought Tribal Elders and youth together to share cultural practices.

As we undertook this work, the staff and partners planned for Anza 250, which marks 250 years since the colonizing expedition. Again, this planning was used as an opportunity to revise and re-approach the trail's branding materials. I contributed to the feedback process as the commemorative

FIGURE 1. After extensive revisions, a new version of the brochure for Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail was published in 2025.

Ancient Pathways, Captivating Histories, and Modern Landscapes

The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail commemorates the complex histories and compelling landscapes of the 1775-1776 Anza colonizing expedition from present-day San Miguel de Horcasitas, Sonora, Mexico, to San Francisco, California.

The modern 1,200-mile trail in the United States retraces an ancient historic route through remote desert valleys, crowded city streets, rugged coastlines, and rolling hills.

The route is a thread on the landscape stitching together the past and present.

Caminos Antiguos, Historias Cautivadoras y Paisajes Modernos

El Sendero Histórico Nacional Juan Bautista de Anza conmemora las historias complejas y los fascinantes paisajes de la expedición colonizadora de Anza de 1775 a 1776 desde la actual San Miguel de Horcasitas en el estado de Sonora, México, hasta San Francisco, California.

El sendero moderno de 1,200 millas en Estados Unidos recorre una antigua ruta histórica a través de valles desérticos remotos, calles urbanas atestadas, costas escarpadas y colinas ondulantes.

La ruta es un hilo en el paisaje que cose el pasado al presente...

History and Legacy of the Anza Expedition

People have been following America's rivers and coasts and crossing its great mountains and deserts for millennia. The ancestors of today's Cochino, Ojeban, Cochino, Chumash, Ohione, and countless other Native communities created trails connecting landscapes, homelands, and cultures. Throughout history, these Native trails have cradled the footprints of many. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail is one name for these collective paths, pieced together by native guides and expedition leaders between 1774-1776.

Lieutenant Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza, accompanied by Father Pedro Font, led the expedition to establish New Spain's first overland route linking the empire in present-day Mexico to its peripheral northern edge in Alta California. The expedition was geographically driven and military focused: its goal was to bring 240 colonists from Mexico to settle Native lands and then defend those lands. Other colonial forces, such as Russia, were moving south to claim territories along the Pacific Coast in the late 18th century.

Anza recruited the colonists for the expedition from present-day Sonora and Sonora, Mexico. On September 29, 1775, they raised the dust around the village of San Miguel de Horcasitas (Sonora) with their many horses, mules, and cattle. They traveled north to join other colonists in Tubac (Arizona) before following the Santa Cruz River further into the Sonoran Desert on October 23. That night, the expedition suffered its first and only fatality when María Ignacia Manueta Píruela died shortly after giving birth. Four infants were born during the journey.

Indigenous guides led Anza and the colonists along the route. Notably, Sebastián Tarabai of the Cochino people was pivotal in leading the expedition through the sand dunes on the edge of the Mojave Desert, the most perilous section of the trek. Some Native leaders and villages cautiously formed alliances with Anza. Enough goodwill and new arrivals to be wary, but assisting them ensured the expedition could continue their journey. Anza also prevented any immediate violence. Their vast and intimate knowledge of the region allowed the expedition to safely ford the wide Colorado River, find food and water in the desert, and communicate with other tribes.

The Anza expedition would not have been possible without Native alliances. However, the resulting expansion of New Spain came at the cost of Indigenous life and culture.

In late June of 1776—days before the signing of the Declaration of Independence on the other side of the continent—the expedition arrived on the site that would become San Francisco.

Families made up most of the Anza expedition: 30 soldiers, their wives, and over 100 children. The Spanish Empire knew that recruiting and sending families to settle on Native lands was a far more effective method of colonization than sending only men and soldiers. These families would leave their homes forever, risking tremendous hardship and death for an uncertain future.

Though we have few individual accounts from colonists, we can study their social status and identity for clues to explain their determination. The group primarily reflected the lower castes of colonial New Spain—a mix of Indigenous, African, and European heritage. The journey offered these individuals the opportunity to own land, establish towns, and hold high-ranking government and military positions. This tenacity gave their descendants an opportunity to transcend social barriers. Today, Perata, Martinez, and Castro are some of the influential names present in the cities and communities of California.

The colonists brought their languages, customs, and rich traditions with them to Alta California. They claimed lands occupied by Indigenous peoples by building military outposts and establishing extensive ranchos. Native peoples were forced to build the missions in which they were confined and often enslaved. These actions would lay the foundation for what California would become. It serves as a reminder of our complicated American story.

Juan Bautista de Anza

Historia y Legado de la Expedición de Anza

Los seres humanos durante milenios han seguido los ríos y costas de Estados Unidos y han cruzado sus grandes montañas y desiertos. Los antepasados de los actuales ojeban, cochino, chumash, ohione y otras innumerables comunidades indígenas crearon senderos que conectaban paisajes, tierras nativas y culturas. A lo largo de la historia, estos senderos indígenas han sostenido las huellas de muchos. El Sendero Histórico Nacional Juan Bautista de Anza es uno de los nombres que reciben estos caminos colectivos, conectados por guías indígenas y líderes de expediciones entre 1774 y 1776.

El teniente coronel Juan Bautista de Anza, acompañado por el padre Pedro Font, dirigió la expedición cuyo fin era establecer la primera ruta terrestre de la Nueva España que unía el imperio en el norte con México con su periferia septentrional en la Alta California. La expedición tenía fundamentos geopolíticos y militares. Sus objetivos eran que 240 colonos se trasladaran de México para colonizar tierras nativas y luego defender dichas tierras. A finales del siglo XVIII, otras fuerzas coloniales, como Rusia, se estaban desplazando hacia el sur para reclamar territorios a lo largo de la costa del Pacífico.

The Anza Trail Today

Today, the Anza Trail weaves through iconic American landscapes and connects communities, cultures, ecosystems, and a great diversity of people. Each year in early October, thousands of people journey from their homes in Arizona and Mexico to Magdalena de Kino in Sonora. Many travel over 100 miles, mostly on foot or horseback. The pilgrimage predates the Anza expedition but follows the same pathways, a reminder of the route's long history.

In California, migrant farm workers still follow the seasons along the Anza Trail corridor between El Centro and the Salinas Valley.

Indigenous people continue to struggle for recognition, sovereignty, and justice. Freeways have taken the place of footpaths, separating communities. Development encroaches deeper into wild spaces. Water is scarce and natural disasters are more common.

But hope endures.

Native cultural traditions are resilient, and efforts continue to return traditional lands to tribes.

Explore the trail by foot in the summer months. Trails & Rails guides offer interpretive programs onboard the Coast Starlight between Santa Barbara and San Jose.

Experience the Trail

Exploring the Anza Trail today is an act of connecting people and cultures through time. The many interstates, highways, streets, and hiking and biking paths we see today overlay the Native trails of the historic corridor of the Anza expedition. By retracing the trail, we play a role in keeping its pathways and heritage alive.

Recreation trails offer opportunities for walking, hiking, horse riding, and cycling. Historic sites provide tangible contact to Spanish colonial history and the enduring impacts of colonization. Hours, fees, and rules may vary for every site and recreational trail segment.

Experience the history and heritage of the trail by car. The Auto Route approximates the historic expedition path.

Explore the trail by train in the summer months. Trails & Rails guides offer interpretive programs onboard the Coast Starlight between Santa Barbara and San Jose.

Explore the sendero en tren en los meses de verano. Los guías de Senderos y Rieles ofrecen programas interpretivos a bordo del tren Coast Starlight de Amtrak entre Santa Bárbara y San José.

Identifique estos hitos a lo largo del Sendero de Anza

- Ruta histórica:** indica que una carretera se encuentra adentro del camino transitado por la expedición.
- Ruta para automóviles:** indica una ruta de conducción continua que se aproxima a la expedición histórica.
- Marcador de senderos:** identifica segmentos de senderos recreativos que siguen la ruta de expedición y marca los puntos de partida de los senderos.

En 1990, el Congreso de EE. UU. incorporó el Sendero de Anza al Sistema Nacional de Senderos. En Estados Unidos, este sendero de 1,200 millas conecta Nogales (Arizona) con el área de la Bahía de San Francisco. Otras 600 millas del sendero histórico se encuentran en el norte de México. Explore la ruta en coche, a pie, a caballo, en bicicleta o en tren.

Experience the Anza Trail

Visit www.nps.gov/ubalplan/yourvisitmaps.htm for an interactive trail map.

Visit www.nps.gov/ubalplan/yourvisitmaps.htm para un mapa interactivo del sendero.

El Sendero de Anza en el Presente

En la actualidad, el Sendero de Anza serpentea por paisajes emblemáticos de Estados Unidos y conecta comunidades, culturas, ecosistemas y una gran diversidad de personas.

Cada año, a principios de octubre, miles de personas viajan desde sus hogares en Arizona y México hasta Magdalena de Kino en Sonora. Muchos recorren más de 100 millas, la mayoría a pie o a caballo. La peregrinación es anterior a la expedición de Anza, pero sigue los mismos caminos, lo que nos recuerda la larga historia de la ruta.

En California, los trabajadores agrícolas migratorios siguen las estaciones a lo largo del corredor del Sendero de Anza entre El Centro y el valle de Salinas. Los pueblos indígenas siguen luchando por el reconocimiento, la soberanía y la justicia. Autopistas ahora ocupan el lugar de los senderos, separando comunidades. Desarrollo urbano invade cada vez más tierras salvajes. El agua es escasa y los fenómenos naturales son más frecuentes.

Pero la esperanza perdura.

Las tradiciones culturales nativas son resistentes, y continúan los esfuerzos para devolver las tierras ancestrales a los tribus.

Disfrutar el sendero

En el presente, explorar el Sendero de Anza es un acto de conexión entre personas y culturas a través del tiempo. Las numerosas carreteras interestatales, autopistas, calles y rutas de senderismo y ciclismo que utilizamos hoy en día se superponen a los senderos de los indígenas y al corredor histórico de la expedición de Anza. Al recorrer el sendero, participamos en mantener vivos sus caminos y su legado.

Los senderos recreativos ofrecen oportunidades para caminar, hacer senderismo, montar a caballo y practicar el ciclismo. Los sitios históricos nos proporcionan un contacto tangible de la historia colonial y el legado de Anza. Horas, tarifas y reglas pueden variar para cada sitio y segmento de sendero recreativo.

Conozca la historia y el legado de la ruta en coche. La Ruta para automóviles se aproxima al camino histórico de la expedición.

mark was designed. The finalized commemorative Anza 250 official mark “displays [a] vibrant palette [that] reflects the diverse heritage of the Anza expedition and the landscapes of Arizona and California. The symbol developed is based on the poppy, a flowering plant and unifying element found along most parts of the trail.”²⁹ The trail’s main logo was a sticking point when Anza staff and I attended Tribal-led events. The commemorative mark, though temporary and not a wholesale replacement of the main logo, represents an important intervention in the trail’s ability to hand out branded materials to Tribal partners, especially considering the way Indigenous personhood is represented on the main logo, designed some 30 years ago.

Further, Anza NHT’s main brochure was heavily revised under Interpretive Program Manager Bentley’s guidance and finalized in spring 2025 (Figure 1, above). This was the first significant revision of the colonial narrative of the trail’s previous brochures and reflects rounds of feedback provided by Native scholars, Native NPS staff, and myself. The visuals within the brochure also reflect more contemporary works and images of Indigenous life. The brochure’s redevelopment allowed the trail to incorporate paintings created through a 2014–2017 partnership with the California Indian Heritage Center, which sought Native artists to depict the Anza expedition’s impact on Native peoples. The two paintings, “Survivors of Genocide / Warriors for Future Generations” by Antonio Moreno (Comanche/Otomi/ Costanoan-affiliated), Alicia Maria Siu (Nawat-Pipil/Maya), and Elijah Pfothenauer (Choctaw), and “First Contact” by Alicia Maria Siu, Antonio Moreno, Vicente Moreno (Comanche/Otomi), and Vicente Teo-xiutleko Moreno (Comanche/Otomi), depict and celebrate Indigenous lifeways, storytelling, and resilience.³⁰

CONCLUSION

As I hope is clear, the materials I developed were only one part of a consistent and concerted effort by Anza NHT staff to integrate Tribal engagement and Native storytelling and history into interpretive materials. Several other initiatives have been developed with trail staff and partners. In January 2023, the Anza Trail Cultural History Park opened in Tucson, Arizona, the result of a project designed with staff and students from Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB). This universally accessible park includes an art installation archway created by Tohono O’odham/Kiowa multimedia artist Quinton Antone. It is depicted in the newly revised Anza NHT brochure (Figure 1, upper image). Over the course of 2025, Estrella Sainburg, Anza NHT’s recreational trail planner, has worked on developing a toolkit of approaches to help partners

integrate Tribal engagement in conjunction with the trail’s plan to designate a continuous, non-motorized recreational trail to complement the historic route. The toolkit includes guidance for municipal offices who work in partnership with NPS to certify segments of the recreational trail and reflects Anza NHT’s commitment to Tribal engagement as a crucial and necessary aspect of trail planning. Prior to her departure in spring 2025, Superintendent Torres built a partnership with the American Indigenous Tourism Association (AITA, formerly the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association). In March 2025, the AITA released the *Travel Guide to Tribes along the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail* (Figures 2–3). Almost 100 pages long, the guide highlights the histories and practices of Tribes along the trail and provides tourism information. Importantly, the guide features cartography by Margaret Pearce (Citizen Band Potawatomi), which provides “traditional Indigenous place names and significant sites along the Trail, contributed by leadership and cultural advisors from the Nations and communities whose places they are. The names remind us that these lands are Indigenous homelands and have been so since time immemorial.”³¹

FIGURE 2. Cover of the AITA Travel Guide.

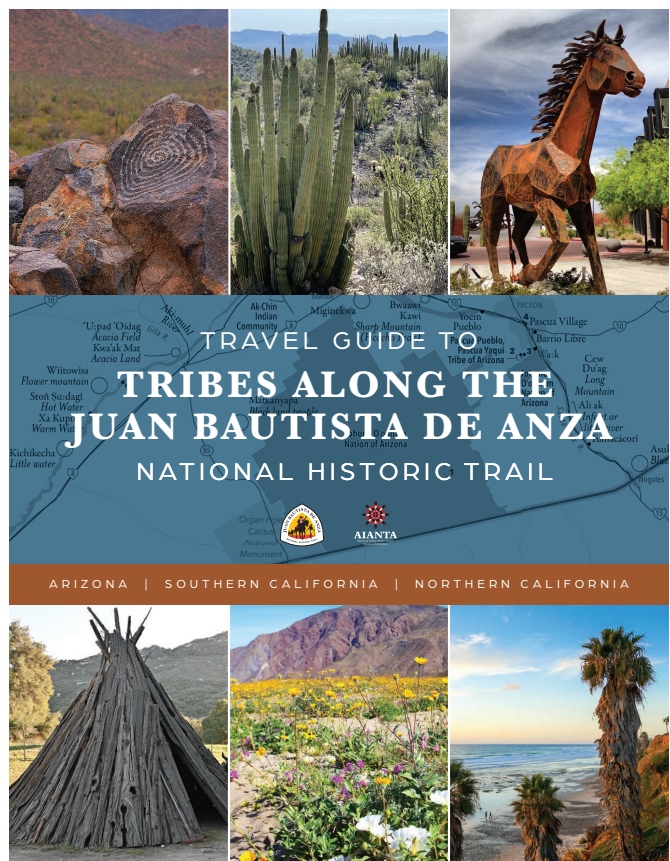




FIGURE 3. Introductory page from the AITA Travel Guide.

Attention to Indigenous history, life, and lands bookends this work and has long guided my work and ethic at and beyond Anza NHT. Correcting historically inaccurate and purely celebratory narratives of colonial seizure and occupation is but a small step in a larger project of decolonial abolition that includes the return of occupied lands to their ancestral kin and relations. A decolonial abolitionist focuses on supporting Indigenous futures and working together toward collective liberation. This approach also leaves room for many new and different ways of being in relation with one another that do not solely recirculate settler-colonial extractive relationships. Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd warns us of the “syllogistic trap of participatory democracy born out of violent occupation of lands,” which continually recenters the settler state as the central and sole apparatus of intervention and resolution for the very violence and inequity it creates.³² Decolonization and returning the land back to Indigenous Peoples is possible and is happening. Corrina Gould, whose words open this piece, sits on the Board of Directors of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, which oversees the return of 2.2 acres of a sacred shellmound site to Ohlone peoples in March 2024.³³ In June 2025, over 47,000 acres along the Klamath River was returned to the Yurok.³⁴ While there remains much work to do to uphold Native sovereignty, I am ever heartened and emboldened by Indigenous resurgence.

ENDNOTES

1. Corinna Gould, “Ohlone Geographies.” Colonization and Resistance Panel, *The Catalyst Project*. Oakland, March 2018. Reprinted in *Counterpoints: A San Francisco Bay Area Atlas of Displacement and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021): 71–73.
2. Contact with various colonial agents occurred previously, but the Spanish mission system marked the first sustained occupation of California. Stephanie Lumsden, “Missionization, Incarceration, and Ohlone Resilience,” *Counterpoints: Bay Area Data and Stories for Resisting Displacement* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021): 84–85.
3. *Ibid.*, 85.
4. United States, Journal of the Senate, Second Session of the Twenty-Seventh Congress, “An Act to Appropriate the Proceeds of the Sales of Public Lands, and to Grant Pre-Emption Rights,” 1841. Washington, DC: *GovInfo*, United States Government Publishing Office, 453–458; https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-00394_00_00-001-0000-0000.
5. Gould, 73.
6. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8:4 (2006): 388. For formative work on settler colonialism, see Wolfe’s *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London and New York: Continuum, 1999), Lorenzo Veracini’s *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). For regional histories, see Jack Norton’s *Genocide in Northwestern California: When Our Worlds Cried* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1979), Deborah Miranda’s *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2013), Kaitlin Reed’s *Settler Cannabis: From Gold Rush to Green Rush in Indigenous Northern California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2023). See also the all-Indigenous-written special issue of *The Journal of Arizona History* on “Indigenous Histories of Arizona,” guest edited by Maurice Crandall (2023).
7. “Unpacking Indigeneity, Identity, and Heritage of the Anza Expedition” (New York: The Mellon Foundation, 2023), unpaginated.
8. Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail brochure (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2025), unpaginated; <https://www.nps.gov/juba/planyourvisit/upload/Juba-Unigrid-508-Accessible-120925.pdf>.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail brochure (Washington, DC: National Park Service, ca. 2020), unpaginated.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. For a review and critique of the impact of multiculturalism and education in the United States, see M. Christopher Brown and James L. Ratcliff's "Multiculturalism and Multicultural Curricula in the United States," *Higher Education in Europe* 23:1 (1998): 11–21 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/0379772980230102>); and Abdeljalil Akkari and Myriam Radhouane's "Multicultural Education in the United States," chapter in their *Intercultural Approaches to Education: From Theory to Practice* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022). For more on the circulation of the figure of "the Indian" in settler society, see Jodi Byrd's *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
15. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): 11.
16. *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement: Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, Arizona and California* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1996): 74.
17. Ibid., 80–81.
18. Ibid., 82–83.
19. For more on the complexities of working with under-resourced tribes, see "Historical Overview" by Mark David Spence and "Indigenous Connections at Rocky Mountain National Park: Notes from a Collaboration in Progress" by Brooke Neely and Natasha Myhal in *National Parks, Native Sovereignty: Experiments in Collaboration*, Christina Gish Hill, Matthew J. Hill, and Brooke Neely, eds. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2024).
20. *Foundation Document: Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, Arizona and California* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2023): 21.
21. Ibid., 6.
22. Contemporary federal Indian law stems largely from the "Marshall Trilogy," based on the court majority opinions of Chief Justice John Marshall in three cases: *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). Marshall's logic in these cases demonstrates the derivation of US law from established European law, and the racial underpinnings of his argument seek to justify conquest and possession. The regime of racial terror under Andrew Jackson's murderous tenure as president coincided with the final two rulings. For more on the structure of federal Indian law, see Keith Richotte's *The Worst Trickster Story Ever Told: Native America, the Supreme Court, and the U.S. Constitution* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2025). For an overview of settler legal history and NPS, see Mark David Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For more on NAGPRA, including its intersection with NPS, see Kathleen S. Fine-Dare's *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
23. For more on anti-Indigenous ideologies and rhetorics in settler law, see Robert A. Williams, Jr.'s *Like a Loaded Weapon: The Rehnquist Court, Indian Rights, and the Legal History of Racism in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). See also Nicholas Blomley's "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93:1 (2003), 121–141; <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.93109>.
24. "History and Contexts of Approaching Indigenous Nations Along the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail," (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2024): 7.
25. Simpson offers refusal and ethnographic refusal as a "political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one's distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized. Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so?" Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014): 174.
26. "History and Contexts," 7.
27. Ibid., 6. For more on data sovereignty, see the collection *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda*, Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor, eds. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2016). See also the work done by The Collaboratory for Indigenous Data Governance at indigenoustatalab.org.
28. "Anza Trail Value Statement: Creating Partnership, Investing in Communities," Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 10 March 2025); <https://www.nps.gov/juba/learn/management/values-statement.htm>.
29. "Anza Expedition 250th Commemoration," Juan

- Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2025); <https://www.nps.gov/juba/getinvolved/anza-expedition-250th-commemoration.htm>.
30. To view all created artworks, see the webpage “Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition 1775–1776: Native American Art Project” on the *California Indian Heritage Center Foundation* site at <https://www.cihcfoundation.org/art-project>.
 31. American Indigenous Tourism Association, *Travel Guide to Tribes Along the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail* (Carson City, NV: American Indigenous Tourism Association, 2025); <https://www.americanindigenoustourism.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Anza-Travel-Guide-1.26.25-For-web-1.pdf>.
 32. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): xiv.
 33. Inés Ixierda, “The West Berkeley Shellmound Sacred Site Will Be returned to the Lisjan Ohlone through Sogorea Te’ Land Trust!”, *Sogorea Te’ Land Trust*, 13 March 2024; <https://www.sogoreate-landtrust.org/2024/03/13/the-west-berkeley-shellmound-sacred-site-will-be-returned-to-the-lisjan-ohlone-through-sogorea-te-land-trust>.
 34. “Land Back: 47,097 Acres Returned to Yurok Tribe,” *Native News Online*, 3 June 2025; <https://www.nativenewsonline.net/sovereignty/land-back-47-097-acres-returned-to-yurok-tribe>.