

The Anza Trail into Alta California: Puerto Real de San Carlos and the Cahuilla village of Pawkí

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Preface

This presentation represents a short overview of the Cahuilla village of Pawkí and its role as an important crossroad in the history of the Spanish colonial period in Alta California. This location was given the name Puerto Real de San Carlos by Juan Bautista de Anza, on the 15th of March 1774. Today, the cultural legacy of historic events that transpired here is included within the Cary Ranch, a privately owned 160-acre parcel located in southern Riverside County, California. Cary Ranch is now managed under the governing articles and bylaws of La Puerta Foundation, a California Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation established in December 2003. La Puerta Foundation is committed to the permanent protection and preservation of this highly significant historic and prehistoric interpretive site.

Alta California occupation

The conquest of Mexico began some 250 years before permanent Hispanic settlement reached Alta California. At the time of Anza's expeditions, the Pacific coast territories claimed for the Spanish realm remained almost entirely undeveloped (Mason 1998). In the absence of expanding occupation and the growth of new settlements and outposts in these territories, there was an increasing threat that colonial interests of other European nations would move to impede Spanish development. Expeditions by land and sea moved into Alta California in 1769-1770, establishing San Diego Mission, Monterey Presidio, and Carmel Mission; in 1771, two more missions were established, at San Antonio and San Gabriel.

The development of Alta California was greatly advanced by the route forged by Anza in 1774, stretching from Sonora to the California coastal plain. Although access and use of this passage was soon blockaded as result of tribal uprisings along the Colorado River in July of 1781, the success of Anza's 1775-1776 colonizing expedition more than doubled the colonial population of California.

Following footpaths and trade routes long known and used by native peoples, Anza's route led north and west from Sonora, traversed the Colorado River and the barren desert lands west to the eastern escarpment of the Peninsular Range, and then, rising from the desert floor through Coyote Canyon, into the heartland of the Mountain Cahuilla. Coyote Canyon provided a corridor through the Santa Rosa Mountains, comprised of a series of narrow passages alternating with wider valleys, all the while rising steadily in a northwesterly direction, leading toward the coastal plain. San Carlos pass was recognized in 1924 as a California Historical Landmark (No. 103) commemorating Anza's passage en route from Tubac, Mexico to San Francisco Bay (California Department of Parks and Recreation 1996). These accomplishments are well

documented and include primary references from the diarists of the expeditions themselves and significant scholarly research (Bolton 1930), and a number of popular books interpret this period (Pourade 1960, 1971).

The Mountain Cahuilla village Of Pawkí

The Cahuilla Indians of California belong to the great Shoshonean linguistic family and with their western neighbors, the Luiseño, Cupeño, and Juaneño, form one division of the southern California division of that stock (Kroeber 1925). Three main divisions of the Cahuilla are recognized, whose separation is mainly geographic, though dialectic and some important cultural differences do exist. The Mountain Cahuilla division occupied a large territory in the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountain ranges, extending in the north from the slopes of Cahuilla and Thomas Peaks, south to the lands bordering San Felipe and Borrego Valleys (Bean 1978). This is an area characterized by steep granite ridges and rocky plateaus; small basins and open valleys are found at higher elevations (Holland 1986; Robinson and Rischer 1993; Rogers 1985). The high mountain valleys and deep canyons running up from the desert afforded ideal sites for small groups, but resources were generally not sufficient to support larger occupations (Bean et al. 1991). Partially as a result of these environmental conditions, the Mountain Cahuilla were geographically distributed into small groups of clans, generally divisible into two moieties: wildcat and coyote.

Ethnographic research conducted in the early twentieth century recognized that Cahuilla settlement of this mountain territory exhibited two principal geographic groupings (Barrows 1967; Bean 1974; Strong 1929). The first of these occupied the southern territories, centered mainly in Coyote Canyon; the second was less centralized, composed of clans near Santa Rosa, Thomas and Cahuilla Peaks, and the clans located around Pauí, now called the Cahuilla Reservation.

Pauí appears to have become an important town or village of the Cahuillas by about 1875. No one clan seems to have owned the warm sulfur springs and adjoining territory, for when it was permanently settled, other Cahuilla families scattered over the Cahuilla Reservation came to the warm springs for bathing and laundry purposes.

Farther to the southeast on the southern rim of Terwilliger Flats was the village of Pawkí, located at the top of Coyote Canyon and San Carlos Pass. Here, rugged hillsides defined by eroded boulder formations of exposed granitic rocks marked the boundary between mountain highland and the desert. Vegetation represents an eclectic mix of redshank chaparral, big sagebrush scrub, grasslands, and Sonoran mixed woody and succulent scrub, an ecotone setting between lower elevation cismontane vegetation and the upward reaches of the Sonoran Desert plant communities (Holland 1986). Riparian scrub and woodland mark the watercourse and springs. This environment supports a wide range of native fauna, including bighorn sheep, mule deer, coyote, bobcat and gray fox; woodrat and other rodents; reptiles and amphibians; multiple species of birds; and numerous insects. The lands surrounding San Carlos Pass provided an excellent environment for native settlement.

The physical evidence of Cahuilla occupation at Pawkí is extensive, and includes multiple locations bearing a wide variety of material culture elements associated with settlement, subsistence, and the arts (LaFave 2000). A tantalizing prospect of physical evidence of Anza's passage through Pawkí is the presence of horse-and-rider pictographic elements within the small shelters tucked into the rocks on the eastern margin of the pass.

The village of Pawkí resembled the settlement at Pauí in the variety of its inhabitants, for no one clan appears to have claimed the locality. While Pawkí was closer to the southern territories, its inhabitants appear to have been largely recruited from the northern clans. Some perspective on the importance of this community may be recognized through its association with a number of prominent Mountain Cahuilla leaders who are believed to have come from this village location. Juan Antonio (of the Costakiktum clan), a famous captain of the Mountain Cahuilla in the 1840s and 1850s, is believed to have come from Pawkí. Among the signers of the unratified Temecula Treaty of 1852, Juan Bautista signed as a village head or *alcalde* for “Pow-ki” (Pawkí) showing his connection with this important mountain village (Heizer 1972). Recently, La Puerta Foundation initiated consultation and dialogue with respected Cahuilla elders and other members of their mountain communities, and together we are creating opportunity and providing greater consideration to Cahuilla ideas and interests in protecting and preserving this important physical place in their cultural past.

Concluding remarks

There is continuing development of conservation planning for this highly significant historic and prehistoric interpretive site. Work is being conducted to satisfy federal historic standards, to identify historic properties pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (Public Law 89-665), and in compliance with implementing regulations, Protection of Historic Properties (36 CFR 800).

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