

Ohlone-Portolá Trail Project to Mark History

By Korrine Skinner, Board Chair

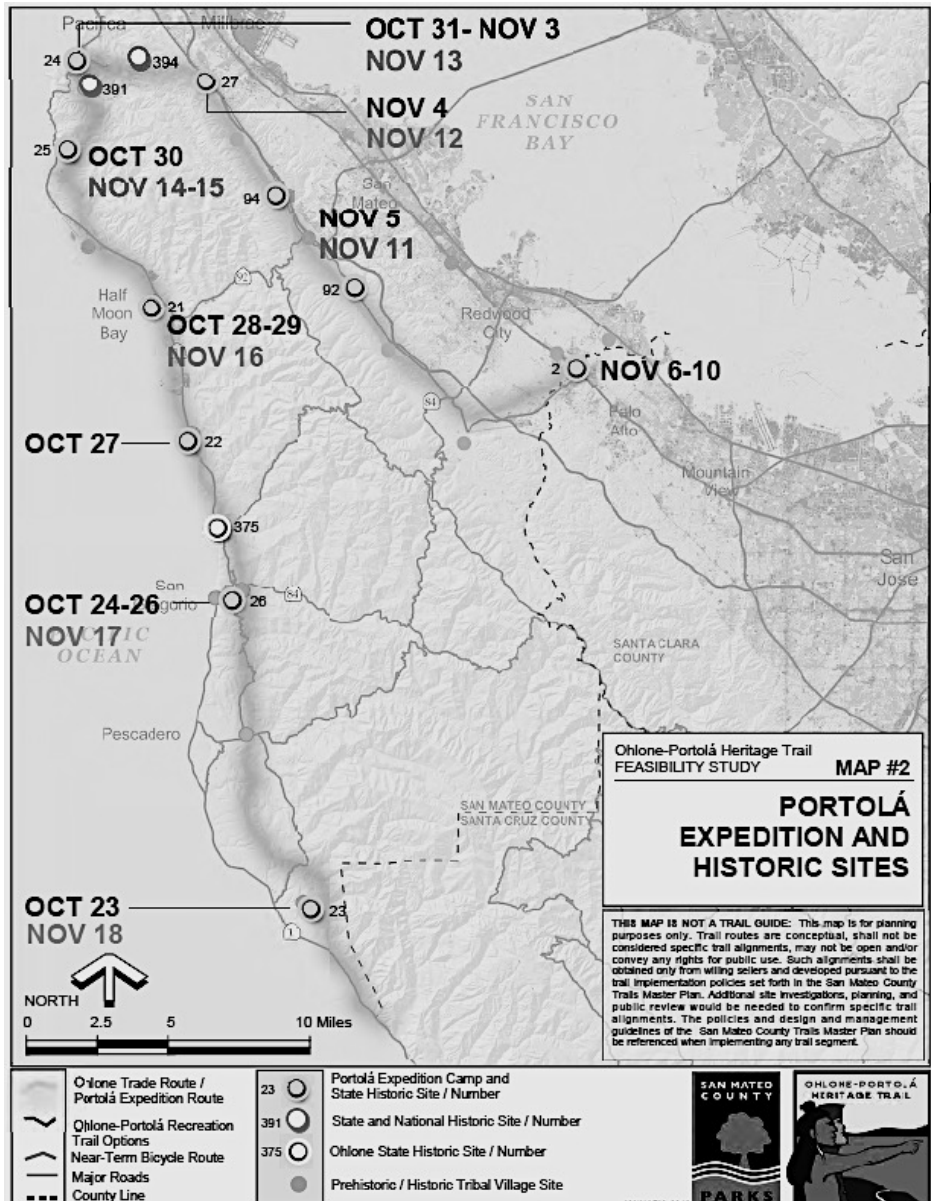


Two hundred and fifty years ago, an expedition led by Gaspar de Portolá, traveled 1,200 miles up the Alta California coast, under orders to explore an overland route for establishing Spanish harbors at San Diego and Monterey Bay.

That expedition traveled farther north, following the well-established footpaths that marked trade routes between native villages, to become the first Europeans to see the San Francisco Bay. The Parks Foundation is supporting efforts to commemorate this history and honor the region's native culture with an interpretive, multi-use recreational trail and automobile route.

Under the directions of the San Mateo County Parks department, The Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail Feasibility Study is nearing completion. The planned 90-mile regional trail will follow the Portolá Expedition's route between Native American villages and become the first trail to fully link the bayside and coast. Interpretive signage will tell the story of the indigenous Ohlone culture, as well as the expedition's 27 days in San Mateo County in 1769.

The expedition was chronicled by Portolá himself, Father Juan Crespi and Miguel Constansó, the party's engineer. According to those surviving journals, the expedition did not



recognize Monterey Bay from Spanish sea-explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno's 167-year-old description and continued north in search of a suitable harbor.

As the expedition entered what is now San Mateo County near Año Nuevo State Park, they were welcomed by the *Quiroste* people, who inhabited one of the largest villages along the coast. Historians estimate that indigenous peoples have lived in this area for approximately 10,000 years. These natives, collectively called the Ramaytush Ohlone due to their shared dialect, numbered more than 2,000 throughout the county in 1769. California's rich resources supported the highest concentration of Native Americans west of the Mississippi River—an estimated 300,000 in comparison to the roughly 250,000 spread across all of the other western states combined. Local tribes were generally organized in territories bounded by watersheds, with small groups living in multiple villages, spaced about 3-5 miles apart along the creeks and valleys. While these 10 tribes were separate entities, descendants now refer to themselves as Ohlone.

The *Quiroste* provided much-needed nourishment to Portolá's men, reviving scurvy-ridden soldiers, and told of two large bodies of water about 3-days walk north. They sent guides to lead the party to neighboring villages at San Gregorio, Tunitas Creek and Half Moon Bay. At Montara Mountain, Costansó recognized the *farallones* to the west, a known landmark even in those times, and knew they'd passed Monterey Bay. Atop the mountain, they met a group of about 25 *Aramai* from the village of *Pruristac*, in Pacifica where the Sanchez Adobe now stands.

As the party camped nearby in San Pedro Valley, a small group went up the hills to hunt deer. They came back after nightfall describing a giant estuary surrounded by smokes from the fires of native villages. These hunters became the first recorded Europeans to see what we now call San Francisco Bay, most likely atop the coastal ridge now known as Sweeney Ridge.

November 4, 2019 will mark the 250th anniversary of this historic encounter. While the full trail will take time to complete, about half of the anticipated route aligns with existing trails along the California Coastal Trail or on public lands maintained by County Parks, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Mid-peninsula Regional Open Space District, State Parks and the Golden Gate Recreation Area. The county has funded a documentary film that will begin playing this fall at the new interpretive center being built at Sanchez Adobe.

Stay tuned for other local commemorative events and follow the progress of the Ohlone-Portolá Trail Project on the County Parks web page:

<https://parks.smcgov.org/ohlone-portola-heritage-trail-project>.

You can support the Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail and other San Mateo County Parks Foundation projects with your donation at <http://supportparks.org/donate>.

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Newsletter Winter 2019*