Chapter I – BOUNTIFUL SADDLEBACK

Leather Jacket Soldier
c. 1781
(Courtesy of Jack S. Williams)

Old Saddleback, the affectionate name given to the twin peaks of Santiago and Modjeska, has stood as guardian, landmark and provider for Orange County since California was thrust from the Pacific millions of years ago. She is surely the mother of the adjoining valleys and canyons. Her crumbling rocks, transported grain by grain down the streambeds by the gentle rains and infrequent snows, gradually built the fertile plain beneath her slopes.

Here, after countless suns and moons rose behind her peaks, the first Indians arrived and established camps on the tableland to the west. Birds and small game were abundant, the sea was full of food, seeds and plants were plentiful. With a moderate climate, the Indians found life in the shadow of Saddleback bountifully simple.

Past this scene Juan Rodriguez-Cabrillo sailed during his voyage of exploration in 1542. He could not have missed seeing the twin, mile-high peaks to the east as he guided his two tiny ships up the coast. If he had set out for these shores expecting to find Queen Calafia and her robust black Amazons with their armaments of gold, as described in the 1510 novel *Las Sergas de Esplandian*, he was disappointed. The real gold, as those who followed him found, was hidden beneath the fertile soil, often covered by blankets of golden poppies.

Rodriguez-Cabrillo little suspected that upon his return trip southward a few months later he would be buried on San Miguel Island where the Pacific breezes blow across his grave on their way to the slopes of the mainland. Robert Hiezer of the University of California, Berkeley in 1972 reported the discovery of a stone that may be his gravestone. It is simply inscribed with a cross, the initials "J R" and below a crude stick figure. "J R" would stand for Juan Rodriguez. Cabrillo, by which most

now know him, was of course his mother's maiden name, and would only be added in the most formal of documents.

Southern California remained undisturbed by Europeans for a number of years after Rodriguez-Cabrillo's visit, though occasionally Spanish galleons returning from the Philippines to Acapulco passed its shores. Viscaino with four ships left Acapulco in 1602 retracing Rodriguez-Cabrillo's route northward along the Pacific coast. Viscaino renamed certain geographical features named by his predecessor. He returned to report in glowing terms the harbor of Monterey. His greatly exaggerated tales of the wealth of the Indians aroused interest in establishing a colony there. Unfortunately, by that time the King was more interested in other affairs than in spending money to build an outpost. The spark of interest flickered and died.

One hundred sixty-seven years passed before the flame was rekindled. It became apparent to King Carlos III of Spain that if Spain did not take more decisive action, Alta California would be lost to the more aggressive powers of Russia and Britain. José de Galvez, *Visitador General* of New Spain, who also saw the need to proceed with colonization of Alta California, was selected to guide the project.

To insure the success of the undertaking, Galvez ordered four expedition parties to San Diego where they were to establish a settlement and then proceed to Monterey. Two of the groups, under the command of Lieutenant Pedro Fages, were to sail northward along the Pacific coast in the ships *San Carlos* and *San Antonio* from the port of La Paz near the southern tip of Baja California. The two other divisions were to travel separately by overland routes to San Diego. The advance group under the command of Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada was to leave from Loreto gathering supplies along the way to a meeting place called Velicatá in northern Baja California, while Captain Gaspar de Portolá was to depart later along the same route. Father Serra, in the Portolá party, founded his first mission at Velicatá on their way north.

The *San Carlos* with Lieutenant Fages and twenty-five Catalan Volunteers embarked from La Paz 9 January 1769 on what proved to be a very difficult voyage. Also aboard were Engineer Miguel Costanso, Surgeon Pedro Prat, Father Fernando Parron, a second naval officer, twenty-three sailors, two servants, four cooks and two blacksmiths, all under the command of Captain Vicente Vila. During one storm the ship was blown two hundred leagues off course. Consequently the crew sighted Cedros Island with monotonous regularity as they tacked against the prevailing northerly winds. Faulty charts caused them to fail to recognize San Diego, the error not being discovered until they had sailed two hundred miles too far north. Disease struck the crew during the four-month voyage. Manuel Reyes, the pilot, and Fernando Alvarez, second boatswain's mate, died before Captain Vicente Vila ordered the anchor lowered in San Diego Bay on 28 April 1769.

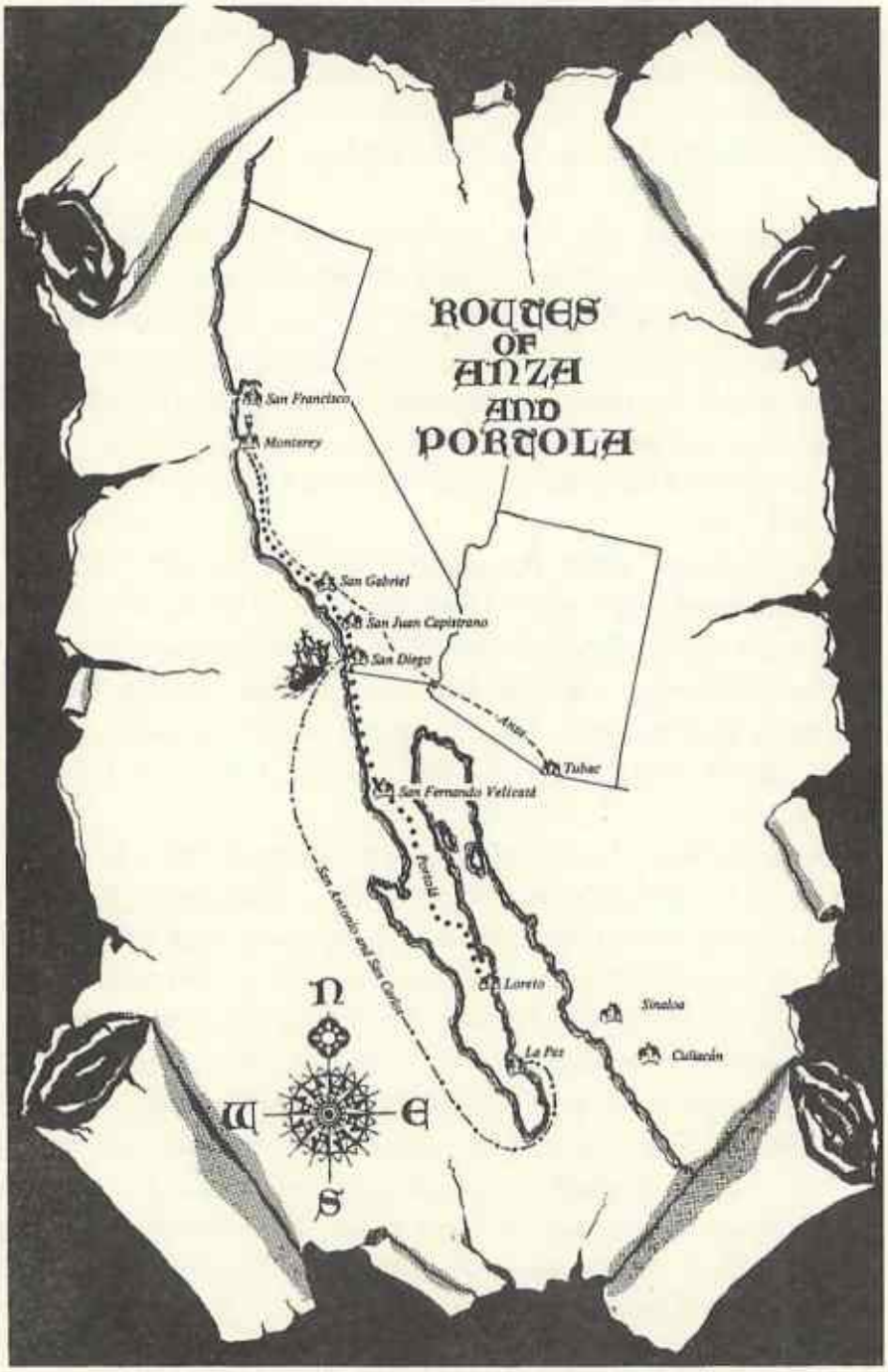
The *San Antonio* sailed from La Paz on 15 February, carrying Fathers Vizcaino and Gomez, a crew of twenty-eight sailors and a few others under the command of Captain Juan Perez. Although starting nearly a month behind the *San Carlos*, the *San Antonio* also had to contend with adverse winds and poor charts. Nonetheless, she fared better than her sister ship. After a voyage of fifty-four days she arrived in San Diego Bay seventeen days before the *San Carlos*. A third supply ship, the *San José*, sailed on 13 June and was never heard of again.

Captain Rivera, meanwhile, set forth overland from Velicatá on Good Friday, accompanied by Father Crespi, twenty-five *soldados de cuera* from the Presidio of Loreto, fifty-one Christian Baja California Indians and three servants. His party drove a herd of approximately four hundred domestic animals, including horses, mules, and cattle. Father Juan Crespi, the chaplain of the party who acted as its diarist, described the country as "sterile, arid, lacking grass and water, and abounding in stones and thorns." Five of the Indians died along the trail and thirty-three deserted before San Diego was reached on 15 May 1769 (Bolton 1966:5, 63).

The principal overland party under Portolá left Loreto on the 9th of March 1769 to Velicatá. Leaving from there to go to San Diego "on May 15th with the Governor and Father Serra are Sergeant Ortega, fifty buff coat soldiers, some Indians and laborers; total, some 70 men." Since food was scarce at the Baja missions, Portolá was forced to commandeer what he needed en route. Unlike those of the Rivera party, there were no deaths and probably fewer desertions along the 750-mile trail from Loreto (Boneu Companys 1983:130).

Gaspar de Portolá was born of nobility probably in Balaguer, Spain, in 1717 or 1718. He became an ensign in a regiment of dragoons in 1734. Subsequently he took part in military campaigns against Italy and Portugal while rising to the rank of lieutenant, then captain in 1764. He was appointed Governor of the Californias in 1767 and assumed office on 6 July 1768 at La Paz. Portolá's first task was the difficult one of expelling the Jesuits from the chain of missions they had built in Lower California over a period of seventy-two years. This duty was performed with such tact that he was able to maintain good relations even with the exiled fathers. The next year he volunteered to lead the expedition to Alta California. Following that, he resigned the governorship and returned to Spain in 1772. Ordered back to New Spain he served as Governor of the city of Puebla de los Angeles in Central Mexico from 1777 to 1784, when he was transferred back to Spain. He died in Lerida, Spain on 10 October 1786.

In the group led northward by Portolá was Father Junípero Serra, who was to leave his indelible mark in Alta California. Born 24 November 1713 at Petra, Mallorca, Spain, Serra entered the Franciscan Order at Palma in 1730. He became a doctor at the Lullian



(Saddleback Ancestors - 1969)

University at Palma, and later, fulfilling a dream of missionary service, he departed for New Spain. On New Year's Day of 1750 he arrived at the Apostolic College of San Fernando in Mexico City. After serving at various missions in Mexico, he was sent in 1768 to Loreto as Superior and President of the Baja California Missions, by then taken over by the Franciscans. The next year he joined Portolá and moved on to Alta California, where he founded nine missions in addition to his first at Velicatá before his death at Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo on 28 August 1784.

Portolá and Father Serra rejoiced when they came to San Diego Bay on 1 July 1769 and saw the two diminutive ships of the advance groups swinging at anchor. Upon reaching the camp on shore, however, happiness turned to sadness when they saw the pitiful condition of the men. Disease had struck the crews of both ships with a vengeance. Of the sea party which had reached San Diego three months earlier, considerably less than one-third survived, and the less ill were busy caring for the more ill.

The surgeon of the expedition, Pedro Prat, was trying to help the sick by gathering green herbs in the hills but was himself seriously ill. Nevertheless Father Serra (Boneu Companys 1983:145) was able to write to his close friend, Father Palou:

> God be thanked, day before yesterday, the 1st of this month, I reached the Harbor of San Diego, beautiful indeed, and rightly famous. This is where I caught up with all who had set out first, both by land and sea, less those who had died . . . The *San Antonio* alias *El Principe*, whose captain is my countryman Don Juan Perez from the shores of Palma, reached here twenty days before the other though sailing a month and a half later. As she was about to set out for Monterey, the *San Carlos* arrived here and on aiding the latter with her crew she caught the infection as well and eight died . . . We shall see what shape the packet *San José* is in when she arrives.

The expedition's leaders decided that the *San Antonio*, manned by such men as were able, must be sent south to obtain supplies and a fresh crew for the return voyage. The sick would wait under the guardianship of Father Serra at San Diego for the *San Antonio's* return. Of the remaining men, sixty-four of the most fit were selected to accompany Portolá overland to Monterey. They set out on 14 July 1769. Nearly two weeks of marching brought the party to the plain west of Saddleback, where they camped along a stream. Father Crespi's diary (Bolton 1966:140) reads:

> Thursday, July 27. We halted after three leagues' travel near an arroyo of running water . . . It has willows, grapevines, brambles, and other bushes. It comes down from the mountains, and shows that it

> must have plenty of water in the rainy season. It was given the name of the holy apostle and patron of the Spains, Santiago. If this watering place should remain throughout the year, it would be a site for building a city on account of the large amount of land and the extensive plain that the arroyo has on both sides.

The next day the party marched only a short distance before encountering a much larger stream. Crespi observed the potentially bountiful land when he commented in his diary (Bolton 1966:140-141):

> Friday, July 28. About seven in the morning we set out, continuing our way to the northwest along the skirts of the mountains which we have on the right to the north, and after traveling a league and a half we came to the banks of a river which has a bed of running water about ten *varas* wide and half a *vara* deep. It is not at all boxed in by banks. Its course is from northeast to southwest, and it empties through this place, according to the judgment of those who sailed to the bay of San Pedro. It apparently has its source in the range that we have in sight on the right, about three leagues from the road that we are following. The bed of the river is well grown with sycamores, alders, willows, and other trees which we have not recognized. It is evident from the sand on its banks that in the rainy season it must have great floods which would prevent crossing it. It has a great deal of good land which can easily be irrigated.

Father Crespi was so taken with the beauty of the spacious land, the river, and the friendly Indians, that religious fervor overwhelmed him and he named the river, The Sweetest Name of Jesus. Soon afterward the travelers decided to camp at this spot. All was peaceful for three or four hours until an earthquake shook the entire area quite violently. Three more shocks occurred during the afternoon. After all tremors had ceased, the beauty of the campsite was as before. However, since earthquakes were not an occurrence to be ignored, Father Crespi expanded his name for the river to El Rio del Dulcissimo de Jesus de los Temblores. "The River of the Sweetest Name of Jesus of the Earthquakes" was too cumbersome a name for the soldiers to use so they shortened it to Rio Santa Ana because it seemed to flow from the Santa Ana Mountains. These they had named several days before on Saint Ann's Day.

During the encampment beside the Santa Ana River, Father Crespi wrote further in his diary (Bolton 196V:141):

> We pitched camp on the left bank of this river. On its right bank there is a populous village of Indians, who received us with great

> friendliness. Fifty-two of them came to the camp, and their chief told us by signs which we understood very well that we must come to live with them; that they would make houses for us, and provide us with food, such as antelope, hares, and seeds. They urged us to do this, telling us that all the land that we saw, and there was certainly a great deal of it, was theirs, and they would divide it with us. We told him that we would return and would gladly remain to live with them, and when the chief understood it he was so affected that he broke into tears.

This reference to an Indian chief of a village on the banks of the Santa Ana River may well be to Mateo, *Capitan* of the Rancheria Ajuibit. He was one of the first baptized at San Gabriel, and his Catholic marriage that same day on 6 June 1774 to Francisca, his principal wife, was the third marriage recorded at San Gabriel, signed by Father Figuer.

Marching northward the Portolá party passed within view of Monterey Bay but failed to recognize it from the description given by Viscaino. They continued on until they came to San Francisco Bay, realizing belatedly that Monterey must have been missed. Returning south they stopped at Monterey Bay, still not recognizing it. There they erected two large wooden crosses, the second bearing the message, "The land expedition is returning to San Diego for lack of provisions, today, December 9, 1769" (Bolton 1966:252).

Rains in the valley, snow in the mountain passes and dwindling food supplies made the return trip to San Diego a difficult one. Even so, their return journey was better however, as they had more success hunting and the Indians provided food at many places. Having been forced to eat some of their mules en route, the explorers were looking forward to more palatable provisions in San Diego. They were due for disappointment, though, as the *San Antonio* had not yet returned. In fact, conditions at the camp were even worse than when they had departed. Portolá decided that if the expedition were to be saved, Captain Rivera must be sent back down the trail to Mission San Fernando de Velicatá for supplies. If aid did not arrive by the 19th of March, they agreed that they would abandon the camp at San Diego and return to Baja California.

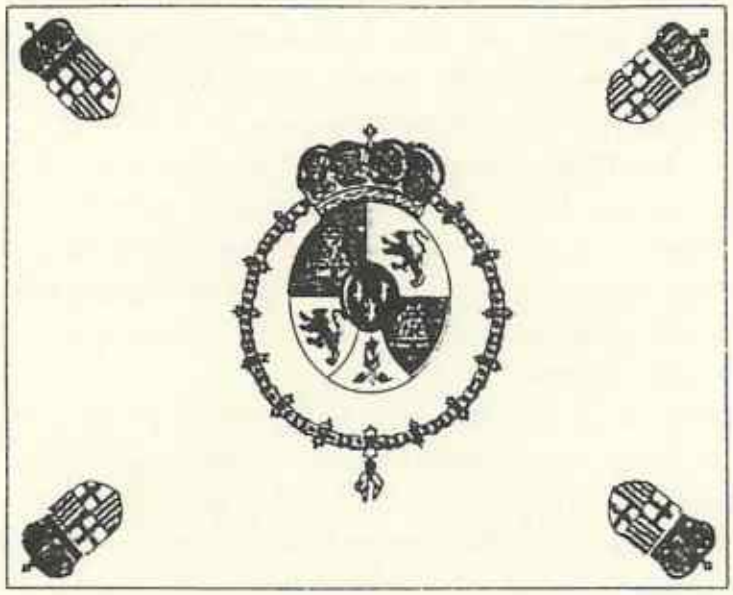
While Portolá was on his first expedition to the north, Father Serra had founded Mission San Diego de Alcalá, which became the first of a series of missions throughout Alta California. Perhaps it was through Serra's faith and prayer that on the last day, Saint Joseph's Day the 19th of March, the *San Antonio* appeared on the horizon laden with vital supplies. The first Spanish beachhead in Alta California was saved! March 19th, St. Joseph's Day, is the day that the swallows return to Capistrano. Was this an omen of things to come?

Health and stamina returned to some of the men although some died, and on 16 April 1770 the *San Antonio* sailed north toward Monterey. The next day Portolá set out by land

for the same destination. Spring had brought new grass along the trail, and conditions were much better than four months earlier. In six weeks the land party reached the large cross upon which they had left their message. Further scouting of the area revealed that this bay was, after all, the long-sought Monterey Bay. The party was pleased with the discovery. Rejoicing began in earnest when a few days later the *San Antonio* sailed into the bay and dropped anchor.

On 3 June 1770 the second mission in Alta California, San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, was founded near Monterey. The entire party took part in the ceremonies. A primitive fort containing crude living quarters was constructed. Portolá's duties to the Viceroy now complete, he placed Lieutenant Pedro Fages in command of the military garrison and boarded ship for Baja California.

To support the colonies at Monterey and San Diego it was necessary to find a land route from the mainland of Mexico to Alta California. A proposal to explore and to establish just such a route had been made to the Viceroy by Juan Bautista de Anza as early as 1773, quoting a much earlier proposal by his father, also named Juan Bautista de Anza, in 1737.[1] He received official approval and soon began preparations for the expedition.



The Spanish Banner carried by Portolá raised in San Diego in 1769
(Public domain)

[1]Personal communication from Donald T. Garate.

Juan Bautista de Anza was born in 1736 of a prosperous and aristocratic Basque family in the Presidio of Fronteras (near the present city of Douglas, Arizona). Only about three years old when his father was killed in a battle with Apache Indians, Anza enlisted in the army as a cadet at sixteen. He became a lieutenant in 1755, a captain in 1759, a lieutenant colonel in 1774, and a colonel in 1782. He served as Governor of New Mexico from 1778 to 1787. It was his exploratory ventures, though, which were avidly followed in the Court of Carlos III of Spain.

On 8 January 1774 Anza, Captain of the Presidio of Tubac, Sonora (near present day Tucson, Arizona), made his first attempt to find a land route to California. He began a march across the desert, leading an exploration party of thirty-four missionaries, soldiers, Indians, and some two hundred domestic animals, although most of the horses were stolen by Indians before they started. The party nearly perished in the sand dunes of the Imperial Desert when their local Indian guides deserted them. On a second attempt, with a smaller party, Anza managed to reach water and to find a low pass through the mountains to the grassy coastal valleys. Padre Pedro Font, chaplain on Anza's second expedition, described what would later be known as San Carlos Pass as "the canyon is formed by various high and very rocky hills, or better, great mountains of rocks, boulders, and smaller stones which look as if they had been brought and piled up there, like the sweepings of the world" (Pourade 1971:159).

Anza proceeded to Monterey where the success of his march was crowned with rejoicing. He soon returned to Mexico and reported his findings to the Viceroy, who decided that Anza should lead a colonizing party to settle at San Francisco. Finding families willing to pioneer a settlement in an unknown, distant land, however, proved to be difficult.

Prior to this second expedition of Anza, only a few married couples had arrived in Alta California. Father Palou in August of 1773 brought married neophytes from Baja California. Father Serra, returning to Alta California in March of 1774 brought with him six artisans, four with families. Captain Rivera y Moncada assembled a group of married soldiers with families totaling over fifty persons in Sinaloa, Mexico. This party crossed into Baja California and arrived at San Diego on 26 September 1774. These groups were the first women and children to come to Alta California. These were the first true settlers.

Anza finally gathered together a group totaling 195 settlers; men, women, and children, 36 families including 27 civilian families. The civilian-settlers had few assets besides strong backs and willing hands. They had been enticed to join the group in exchange for their being provided with clothing, a mule to ride, supplies, and subsistence for five years. It was a motley group that started out in late October of 1775 from Tubac with pack animals laden with everything from seeds to a blacksmith's forge. An assortment of some 1,000 horses, mules, and cattle followed.

Crossing the Colorado River presented no great difficulty at that low-water time of the year, but to traverse the desert the group was divided into three segments, each crossing one day apart. In this way the water holes had time to refill between the stops of smaller parties.

Near Anza's Pass through the mountains a son was born on Christmas Eve to the wife of one of the colonists. Although actually preceded by several children born to soldier families already in the area, Salvador Ygnacio Linares is popularly credited as the first civilian Hispanic child born in California. This, the last of five births which occurred during the expedition, was viewed by Anza with mixed emotions. He ruefully commented that with each new addition the woman could not ride for as much as four or five days, and thus held up the procession.

The travelers passed Old Saddleback en route to Mission San Gabriel, where they stopped for a month or more while Anza and a few of his soldiers rode to San Diego to help put down an Indian uprising. The party then moved on to Monterey, where their reception proved less warm than anticipated. Lacking the Governor's approval to move the colonizers on to San Francisco, Anza continued with a small escort to select a location for the new mission and presidio. Authorization to establish the new colony was still lacking when he returned to Monterey, so Anza and his small escort prepared to return to Sonora, Mexico, leaving the settlers behind. It is said his parting was a sad day because the colonists had become very fond of their leader during the long march.

Francisco de Ortega, who served as a sergeant in the Portolá expedition, returned in 1775 to the slopes of Saddleback in the company of Father Fermin Lasuen, a right-hand man of Father Serra. Their purpose was to establish a new mission half-way between those existing at San Diego and San Gabriel. Coming down the valley of the Santa Maria Magdalena (now San Juan Canyon), they came to the Trabuco, another stream which joined the Magdalena. They saw that the merging streams which flowed two miles to the Pacific had produced a considerable area of flat, fertile land with sycamore and willow trees lining the banks. The Indians had selected this as the location of their little village, Sajivit.

Father Lasuen immediately recognized that here were all the requisites for a successful mission site. Therefore, on 30 October 1775 a simple altar and cross were erected and two bells were hung so that Mass could be celebrated and the site dedicated. This became the setting for Mission San Juan Capistrano. The Indians willingly helped haul timber for the construction of a temporary chapel, but work was halted eight days later when word arrived that the mission in San Diego had been attacked by hostile tribes. The bells were quickly buried, and the small party hurried back to San Diego.

A year passed before the work at the Mission was resumed. Father Serra and his companions came to the place that had been chosen the year before and found the cross still

standing. Digging up the bells that had been buried, he proceeded to found the Mission by celebrating Mass on 1 November 1776. Within a year the first little church had been built - a structure which has come to be considered the oldest building still standing in California. In recent times it has been called the "Serra Chapel," as it is the only church to have survived the ravages of time in which Serra is known to have said Mass. In 1796 construction of a great stone church was begun.

Here, at San Juan Capistrano where the Trabuco and the Magdalena meet, the Spanish, Mexican, and Indian cultures would blend to give birth to a new way of life.

Navios – Ships
Caravels like these linked Imperial Spain
with possessions in the Americas.
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