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# The Portolá Expedition of 1769-1770

By THEODORE E. TREUTLEIN

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THE YEAR 1969 is the first year of the Bicentennial (1769-1770) of the Portolá Expedition which began the Spanish colonization of California, the Spaniards' "Upper" or "New" California. The salient accomplishments of the year 1769 were the opening of a land route from Lower to Upper California, the founding of the San Diego Presidio and Mission (in May and July), the marking of a land trail from San Diego to the San Francisco Peninsula (in broad outline the beginning of *El Camino Real*), and the discovery of San Francisco Bay.<sup>1</sup>

The original objective of the expedition, as ordered by the Visitor General of New Spain, Don José de Gálvez, was the exploration by land and by sea of the port of Monterey, which had been discovered by Sebastián Vizcaíno in 1602, and its occupation for the Crown through the founding of a presidio and mission. This objective, as shall be noted, was not attained until April in 1770. The immediate occasion for the Monterey program, thought of as a revival of the Vizcaíno plan, was the alarm felt by Spain's policymakers at the ambitions of the Russians (and doubtless also the English) in the North Pacific, still considered by Spain to be a "Spanish possession," a part of their *Mar del Sur*.

The program for exploration and colonization was specifically projected in the Council of War held on May 16, 1768, at San Blas,<sup>2</sup> although the San Blas council, in turn, rested upon a royal order of His Majesty Don Carlos III of January 23, 1768. The soldiers, sailors, missionaries, muleteers, sappers, and Lower California Indians who made up the several parts of what is called the Portolá Expedition after its leader, Don Gaspar de Portolá, Governor of Lower California, were the instruments of state policy involved in the international rivalry of that day.

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On the eve of the Portolá Bicentennial it is fascinating to contemplate the vicissitudes of the Spanish pioneers as they came by land and by sea into sparsely populated Indian California. Modern anthropologists have measured the Indian population of Upper California in 1769 rather variously, but somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty-thousand souls is probably a fair estimate. The Spanish expansionist program envisaged an ultimately complete inclusion of these natives within the Spanish social order, and the first stage of Indian policy was to make friends with the natives. The poundage in glass beads and other trinkets which was carried by muleback with the explorers could have been better used to transport flour for the hungry members of the land party had it not been considered important to please the natives. After making friends, the Franciscan Fathers with the expedition were to found missions as centers for the spreading of the Faith and for the general "civilizing" of the Indians. To most Spaniards a "good Indian" was a pacified, Christianized Indian, not a "dead Indian," as many in Anglo-American frontier regions preferred him to be. Actually, many members of the Portolá Expedition were themselves Indian, or part Indian (mestizo), and there were at least three in the land party which explored the coast searching for Monterey who are referred to in the diaries as mulattoes.<sup>3</sup>

When the expedition made its start from Lower California the only known route to Upper California was by the sea, but a land route up the Lower California Peninsula was considered a possibility. The expedition was organized into four parts: the flagship *San Carlos* (alias *Toisón de Oro*), skipper Vicente Vila; the *San Antonio* (alias *El Príncipe*), skipper Juan Pérez; and the two land parties, in the van and second in command, Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada;<sup>4</sup> and lastly, Commander Gaspar de Portolá his very self, accompanied by the Franciscan Father President of the future California missions, Fray Junípero Serra.

Visitor Gálvez had decreed that not only should the several parts of the expedition rendezvous in San Diego but also that (in Gálvez' own words) "one of the most interesting objects of this expedition should be to explore, and settle if it be possible, the port of San Diego."<sup>5</sup> The expedition's ships arrived at San Diego in April (*San Antonio* on the 11th and *San Carlos* on the 29th), the ships' companies having suffered

frightfully from a virulent, mortal infection referred to as scurvy, but its ravages among crew and passengers were so extreme as to raise a question about its true nature.

After the arrival of the ships at San Diego the illnesses increased. An enclosure was built “close to the beach, on the east side of the port, with a parapet of earth and brushwood, and mounted with two cannon. Some sails and awnings were landed from the vessels and, with these, two tents suitable for a hospital were made. On one side were placed the tents of the two officers (Fages and Costansó), the missionaries (Father Fernando Parrón of the *San Carlos*, and Fathers Juan Vizcaíno and Francisco Gómez of the *San Antonio*), and the surgeon (Pedro Prat). When everything was ready to receive the sick, they were brought on shore in the launches, and were housed in the tents as comfortably as possible.

“These measures, however, were not sufficient to restore their health; for medicines and fresh food, most of which had been used up during the voyage, were wanting. The surgeon, Don Pedro Prat, supplied this want as far as possible, with some herbs which he sought with much trouble in the fields and whose properties he knew. He himself needed them as much as his patients, for he was all but prostrated by the same disease as they. In the barracks the cold made itself severely felt at night, and the sun by day: extremes which caused the sick to suffer cruelly. Every day, two or three of them diéd and the whole expedition, which had been composed of more than ninety men, was reduced to only eight soldiers and as many sailors who were in a condition to assist in guarding the ships, handling the launches, protecting the camp, and waiting upon the sick.” So wrote the “color-sergeant of engineers and cosmographer” who had arrived aboard the *San Carlos*, Miguel Costansó, in his *Diario Histórico*, translated as *The Narrative of the Portolá Expedition of 1769-1770*,<sup>6</sup> “the first book that relates exclusively to California,” concerning the unhappy conditions in the spring of 1769 at San Diego, before the land parties reached that port.

The Rivera party arrived on May 14, all in good health. After a rest of one day the officers decided to move the camp close to the river “which had not been done before because it was not deemed advisable to divide the small force they had for the protection at once of the vessels and of the people lodged on shore; at the same time, the greater

convenience of a shorter distance for the transportation had to be taken into consideration, in order not to tire unduly the men who were handling the launch, as the want of beasts of burden obliged them to carry on their shoulders everything that was brought on shore.

“All moved to the new camp which was transferred one league further north to the right of the river,<sup>7</sup> on a hill of moderate height, where it was possible to attend with greater care to the sick, whom the surgeon, Don Pedro Prat, did not leave for a moment and nursed with the utmost kindness.” This move occurred on the 15th of May 1769, which may then be taken as the beginning of the San Diego Presidio (at Presidio Hills, Old Town, San Diego), and Captain Rivera, then in command, was its founder.<sup>8</sup>

Commander Portolá reached San Diego with a few soldiers of the second division of the land force on the 28th of June (the rest of his party arrived on 1 July), all members of his group also being in good health. Despite the difficulties at San Diego, Portolá decided that he would as soon as possible continue the march to Monterey.

The force which now would attempt to reach Monterey numbered something over sixty men. Father Fray Juan Crespi who had arrived with Rivera was the official diarist, and he listed some members of the expedition by name and others by number, so that from his account simple arithmetic provides us with a total of sixty-three to sixty-four persons. Yet, oddly, Crespi in making a total of the membership of the expedition stated that it numbered seventy-four persons in all.

Lacking as we do a complete roster of the exploring party, it is possible only to provide the following description of its membership.<sup>9</sup> There were Commander Don Gaspar de Portolá; Captain Rivera y Moncada and his twenty-seven cuirassiers, referred to as *soldados de cuera* or “leather-jackets,” because the usual armor of these mounted soldiers was replaced in the northwest Mexican frontier with a sleeveless jacket of quilted deer or sheepskin; Lieutenant Pedro Fages and six or seven Catalan Volunteers (one of whom was named Antonio Yorba); Engineer Miguel Costansó; Fathers Juan Crespi and Francisco Gómez; the great scout, Sergeant José Francisco Ortega; seven muleteers and fifteen Christian Indians. The two missionaries and Portolá and Rivera are each known to have had a personal servant. Among the soldiers whose names can be provided were in addition to Yorba, Pablo

Antonio Cota, Juan José Robles, José María Soberanes (founder of that numerous family), Sergeant Pedro Amador, Juan Bautista Alvarado (grandfather of the later governor of California), Bernardino Alvarado, José Raimundo Carrillo (founder of that famous early California family), perhaps a Guillermo Carrillo, Francisco Javier Aguilar, Francisco and Gerardo Peña, Juan Bautista Valdés, Juan Ismerio Osuna, one Romero, Ignacio Lugo, Mariano Verdugo, and Sergeant Juan Puig.

Before the expedition was scheduled to make its start “the governor ordered out six soldiers and a corporal to explore the country for the distance of the first two days’ marches. These soldiers left on the 12th of July, and returned on the afternoon of the following day with the information that they had found a watering-place sufficient for the men and horses at a distance of six or seven leagues” (or roughly eighteen to twenty-one miles).<sup>10</sup>

We do not know the name of the corporal who led the first party of scouts north of San Diego and whether he continued with the exploring party or remained at the San Diego Presidio. During the expedition it was often Sergeant Ortega who scouted the route. The esteem in which Ortega was held is revealed in the writings of Father Serra in his March, 1773, report to Viceroy Bucareli in Mexico.<sup>11</sup> Serra stated that during the march from Lower California to San Diego Portolá had instructed Ortega to explore ahead daily the route which would have to be followed, and so “for more than a month that our journey lasted, he continued to go ahead the whole time, covering more than three times the distance that the rest of the expedition had to cover. He forged ahead in search of watering places and camping spots; then he would come back with the information, and guide us to the spots he had discovered. The single soldier who was his companion was sometimes changed, but the Sergeant never.”

Serra further informed the viceroy that Ortega continued his good work when the expedition moved to the north. “Fathers Crespi and Gómez, who accompanied the expedition as far as the Port of San Francisco, told me,” wrote Serra, “that, during all the trip, the part taken by Señor Ortega was most remarkable. Even though Captain Rivera was appointed as first explorer, always was the Sergeant employed in the same capacity, especially when they tried to find the port in various directions. And he was the man that went the farthest in

exploring the estuaries of San Francisco, in search of a crossing to the other side, which was never found.”

When the expedition was ready to leave San Diego, Miguel Costansó tells us what happened:

The departure of the expedition from San Diego took place on the 14th of July 1769. The two divisions of the land-expedition marched together, the commander making this disposition on account of the great number of animals and packs. This was because provisions and supplies alone required one hundred packs, which he believed necessary to supply the whole company during six months, and to provide for them in case of delay of the packet-ships, although it was thought impossible that in the meantime the one or the other of them should fail to reach Monterey.

The following order was observed on the marches: at the head rode the commander with the officers, the six men of the Catalan volunteers who had joined the expedition at San Diego, and some friendly Indians with spades, pick-axes, crowbars, axes, and other implements used by sappers to cut the brush and to open a passage wherever necessary. Next followed the pack train which was separated into four divisions, each one with its muleteers and an adequate number of soldiers of the garrison as an escort. In the rear-guard came Captain Fernando de Rivera, with the rest of the soldiers and friendly Indians, convoying the spare horses and mules.

The soldiers of the presidio in California [from Loreto, on the peninsula], of whom justice and fairness oblige us to say that they worked incessantly on this expedition, use two sorts of arms—offensive and defensive. The defensive arms are the leather jacket and the shield. The first, whose shape is like that of a coat without sleeves, is made of six or seven plies of white tanned deerskin, proof against the arrows of the Indians, except at very short range. The shield is made of two plies of raw bull's hide; it is carried on the left arm and with it they turn aside spears and arrows, the rider not only defending himself, but also his horse. In addition to the above they use a sort of leather apron, called *armas* or *defensas*, which, fastened to the pommel of the saddle, hangs down on both sides, covering their thighs and legs, that they may not hurt themselves when riding through the woods. Their offensive arms are the lance—which they handle adroitly on horseback—the broadsword, and a short musket which they carry securely fastened in its case. They are men of great fortitude and patience in fatigue; obedient, resolute, and active, and we do not hesitate to say that they are the best horsemen in the world, and among those soldiers who best earn their bread for the august monarch whom they serve.

It must be borne in mind that the marches of this body with so great a train and [so many] obstacles, through unknown lands and on unused roads, could not be long. Not to mention other reasons that made it necessary to halt and camp early—the necessity of reconnoitering the country from day to day in

order to regulate the marches according to the distance between the watering-places, and consequently to take the proper precautions. Sometimes they resumed their journey in the afternoon immediately after watering the animals, upon the reliable information that on the next stage there was little or no water, or a scarcity of pasture.

Stops were made, as the necessity demanded, at intervals of four days, more or less, according to the extraordinary hardships occasioned by the greater roughness of the road, the labor of the sappers, and the straying of the animals—which happened less frequently with the horses—that had to be sought by their tracks. At other times, because it was necessary to accommodate the sick when there were any—and in course of time there were many—whose strength gave way under the continuous fatigue, and the excessive heat and intense cold.

But the pack-animals themselves constitute the greatest danger on these journeys and are the most dreaded enemy; though without them nothing could be accomplished. At night, and in a country they do not know, these animals are easily frightened. The sight of a coyote or fox is sufficient to stampede them—as they say in this country. A bird flying past, or dust raised by the wind is likely to frighten them and to make them run many leagues, throwing themselves over precipices and cliffs, defying human effort to restrain them, and it afterwards costs infinite pains to recover them, nor is this always possible; and those that were not killed by falling over a precipice, or lamed in their headlong race, are of no service for a long time. This expedition, however, suffered no serious detriment on this account, owing to the care and watchfulness which were always observed; and although, on some occasions, the animals were stampeded, no accident or injury whatever followed, because the stampede was of short duration.

In the order and manner described, the Spaniards made their marches over vast territories which became more fertile and more pleasant the further they penetrated to the north.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that Spanish voyages of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had provided the Portolá Expedition with a detailed navigators' description of the West Coast of North America, as far as Cape Mendocino. Such information was summarized in a navigator's handbook by Admiral José González Cabrera Bueno (*Navegación Especulativa, y Práctica* [Manila, 1734])<sup>13</sup> in the form of sea routes (*derrotas*), including descriptions of coastal islands, headlands, and ports, complete with their latitudes. The diarists of the Portolá Expedition, notably Costansó and Crespi, make direct references to Cabrera's book, their "road map." They hugged the coast as much as possible to take maximum advantage of Cabrera's instructions and also, of course,

because they were seeking the port of Monterey (always spelled correctly *Monterrey* in the early writings).

On July 16, two days after the expedition left San Diego, Father Serra, who had remained there, carried out the orders of Visitor General Gálvez and founded a mission dedicating it to San Diego de Alcalá,<sup>14</sup> owing to the circumstance that in the year 1602 Vizcaíno had dedicated the port to that saint (thereby replacing the name *San Miguel* which had been bestowed upon San Diego when the bay was discovered by Rodríguez Cabrillo in 1542). At the time of the mission's founding, Portolá and his force were a mere eighteen miles north, near Del Mar.

The northward march of the expedition divides itself rather easily into several stages which emerge owing to the nature of the terrain and the objectives of the party during different parts of the journey.<sup>15</sup> The first of these stages was the rather uneventful journey, July 14-28, thirty-three leagues, from San Diego to the Río de los Temblores (Santa Ana); July 29 to August 4, some fifteen leagues, took them across the Los Angeles plain from Santa Ana to a location in the vicinity of the modern Santa Monica; August 5-13, they turned from Santa Monica through the Sepúlveda Canyon, across the San Fernando Valley, over to the Santa Clara River Valley of the South and down it to Santa Paula, travelling twenty-one leagues; August 14-27, from Santa Paula to the coast and along the Santa Bárbara Channel to Point Conception, twenty-seven leagues; August 28 to September 26, the party struggled up the coast from Point Conception and through the Santa Lucía Mountains, near the Salinas River, covering some forty-seven leagues; September 27 to October 30, they searched rather desperately for the port of Monterey, traveling thirty leagues; they left Rincón de las Almejas (corner or nook of the mussels) just north of Montara on the 31st of October, and by the 6th of November were encamped in the vicinity of Palo Alto, nine leagues farther. Engineer Costansó considered this camp, the Estero de San Francisco, as their northernmost position and noted that there they were one hundred and ninety-seven leagues from San Diego.

The Estero camp was left on the 11th of November and the return to the Monterey area covered the period from that date to the 28th of November, with forty-seven and one-half leagues having been traversed; they remained at the Ensenada de Pinos (beyond Río Carmel



near Pt. Lobos) until December 10 and then proceeded as rapidly as they could to San Diego, where they arrived on the 24th of January, 1770.

The duration of the entire exploration, from San Diego to San Francisco Bay and return, had thus occupied the period from July 14, 1769, to January 24, 1770, during which approximately four hundred leagues, some twelve hundred miles, were covered. In this one hundred and ninety-five-day journey were included fifty days of rest stops, or more correctly, "nonmovement" days, to rest the fatigued men and animals, to care for the sick, and to permit local explorations to be made, especially when the explorers were in the known latitude of Monterey Bay.

The period from July 14 to November, one hundred and sixteen days with thirty-one nonmovement days, covered the march from San Diego to the southern end of San Francisco Bay, in the Palo Alto area. From November 11 to January 24, 1770, a total of seventy-five days, with fifteen nonmovement days, the explorers returned to San Diego. It may also be noted that during the northward march eighty days (with fourteen rest days) were spent in reaching the Monterey area, but on the return from there to San Diego familiarity with the route and the shortage of supplies caused the party to cover that distance in forty-four days (with three rest days included). Later, during the successful march to Monterey (April 17 to May 24, 1770), the time was further reduced to thirty-eight days, including two days for rest. As already noted, during the movement into unknown territory the main party was always preceded by the scouts. The distance traversed by scouting parties was thus *three times* the distance traveled by the entire party (not counting local explorations in the Monterey Bay and San Francisco Bay regions). The Spanish explorers were professionals. It seems unlikely that they would have subjected the same individuals to such excessive amount of travel over the distance traveled by all. Often it was Sergeant Ortega who led the scouts. Captain Rivera, however, was sometimes their leader, and on the first day out of San Diego the unknown corporal (possibly Robles) did the exploring.

Notable features of the several stages of the march of Portolá may now be examined. In the journey from San Diego to Santa Ana, Father Crespi's description of the later site of Mission San Luis Rey holds some

interest. The valley appeared so beautiful and green that it seemed to the members of the party that it had been planted. Gifts were exchanged with the numerous Indians, the Spaniards distributing beads and the "heathen" responding with orations and presents of fish nets spun from a hemp-like fiber. Here the women "were modestly covered, wearing in front an apron of threads woven together which came to the knees, with a deerskin in back. To cover the breasts they wear little capes made of hare and rabbit skins, of which they make strips and twist them like rope. They sew these strips together, to protect them from the cold as well as for covering for modesty's sake. Most of the women go clothed in the same manner, but all the men go as naked as Adam in Paradise before he sinned, and they did not feel the least shame in presenting themselves before us, nor did they make any movement to cover themselves, just as though the clothing given them by nature were some fine garment."

From the San Diego area and into the Los Angeles plain the Indians worked with clay, and on two occasions during this part of the journey Father Crespi reported seeing natives smoking clay pipes, though what was being smoked is not reported.

The party reached the Río de los Temblores (where Santa Ana now stands) on the 28th of July, the name being bestowed by Father Crespi because of a "horrifying earthquake, which was repeated four times during the day." Engineer Costansó referred to the earthquake in the same language and explained that one of the natives who was in their camp and whom he took to be a "priest" began "with horrible cries and great manifestations of terror to entreat the heavens, turning in all directions and acting as though he would conjure away the elements" (*conjuraba los tiempos*). This "priest" may have continued to be quite busy, for during the next days as the party crossed the Los Angeles plain quakes were experienced every day (from July 20 until August 3) and their frequency amazed the members of the expedition. Some were convinced that there were volcanoes in the nearby mountain range. The scouting party saw marshes of pitch, boiling and bubbling, and Crespi speculated that the stuff was in such abundance it would serve to calk many ships. (Their path had led them near to the asphalt beds at *La Brea*).

Since the scouts now reported that passage along the coast would not

be possible (this information having been learned from the Indians), the party turned northward through a canyon (probably Sepúlveda) and entered the San Fernando Valley. Here, on August 6, the natives exhibited a good geographical knowledge of their locality by drawing a map on the earth to show the distribution of the Channel Islands and coast line of the Santa Bárbara Channel. According to both diarists these natives imparted the knowledge that in former times bearded people resembling the Spaniards, dressed and armed as they were, had come into their country from the east. Later in one of his writings Costansó was to express distrust of information provided by native sign language.

The party proceeded down the Santa Clara Valley, past Santa Paula, and presently began to move along the coast of the Santa Bárbara Channel. The natives almost overwhelmed the members of the expedition with their hospitality. They brought gifts of seeds, acorns, and honeycombs formed on frames of cane. "They were a very good-natured and affectionate people." In the region of present Ventura the expedition came upon a large native town composed of some thirty "large and capacious houses, spherical in form, well built, and thatched with grass." The population there was estimated at some four hundred souls.

Constansó wrote in his diary:

The natives are well built, and of a good disposition, very agile and alert, diligent and skillful. Their handiness and ability were at their best in the construction of their canoes made of good pine boards, well joined and calked, and of a pleasing form. They handle these with equal skill, and three or four men go out to sea in them to fish, as they will hold eight or ten men. They use long double-bladed paddles and row<sup>16</sup> with indescribable agility and swiftness. All their work is neat and well finished, but what is most worthy of surprise is that to work the wood and stone they have no other tools than those made of flint; they are ignorant of the use of iron and steel, or know very little of the great utility of these materials, for we saw among them some pieces of knives and sword-blades which they used for no other purpose than to cut meat or open the fish caught in the sea. [The natives explained by signs that the metal pieces had come to them from the "east," and Costansó speculated that native barter had brought these "treasures" to California all the way from New Mexico].<sup>17</sup> We saw, and obtained in exchange for strings of glass beads and other trinkets, some baskets or trays made of reeds, with different designs; wooden plates and bowls

of different forms and sizes, made of one piece so that not even those turned out in a lathe could be more successful.

They presented us with a quantity of fish, particularly the kind known as *bonito* [this was the season to catch it, judging from the ease with which they took it]; it had as good a taste and as delicate a flavor as that caught in the tunny-fisheries of Cartagena de Levante and on the coasts of Granada.

We thought that this was the town which the first Spanish navigators—among others Rodríguez Cabrillo—named Pueblo de Canoas.”

A bit farther up the coast the explorers watched some natives constructing a canoe, and the soldiers dubbed the native village *Pueblo de la Carpintería*.

On occasions along the Channel the natives serenaded the expedition all night long with their whistles and pipes. North of Santa Bárbara Crespi commented that the Indians were not content merely in giving presents, but it was clear that there was rivalry and emulation among the towns to come out best in the presents and feasts in order to win their approbation.

In the afternoon (on 20 August) the chief men came from each town, one after the other, adorned according to their usage, painted and loaded with plumage and some hollow reeds in their hands, to the movement and noise of which they kept time with their songs and the cadence of the dance, in such good time and in such unison that it produced real harmony. These dances lasted all the afternoon, and it cost us much trouble to rid ourselves of the people. They were sent away, charged with emphatic signs not to come in the night and disturb us; but it was in vain, for as soon as night fell they returned, playing on some pipes whose noise grated on our ears. It was feared that they might frighten the horses, for which reason the commander went out to meet them with his officers and some soldiers. They gave them some beads and implored them to go, telling them that if they came again to interrupt our sleep they would not be welcome and we would give them an unfriendly reception. This induced them to depart and leave us in peace for the rest of the night.

Costansó noted a special culture trait among the Channel Indians. “Polygamy is not permitted among the people,” he reported. “The chiefs alone possess the right to take two wives. In all of their towns there was noticed a class of men who lived like women, associated with them, wore the same dress, adorned themselves with beads, earrings, necklaces, and other feminine ornaments, and enjoyed great considera-

tion among their companions. The want of an interpreter prevented us from ascertaining what kind of men they were, or to what office they were designed; all suspected, however, a sexual defect or some abuse among those Indians.”

By August 26th the party came in sight of Point Conception and there, in the village of the lame chief (Ranchería del Cojo) Crespi recorded the curious item that “these heathen have European beads, and when asked they said they got them from the north.”

The party now proceeded up the coast, passing Morro Bay on 8th September, and on the 13th they camped at the foot of the Santa Lucía range. Commander Portolá realized that the most difficult part of the journey might lie before them. Therefore he “resolved to rest at this place, and to send out the most intelligent scouts to examine the country completely, penetrating as far as they could without limiting the time of their return. So eight scouts, with Captain Fernando de Rivera, set out after midday.”

From mid-September until the last day of that month with immense toil a way was found through the mountains, much of their path being prepared by road-work in which the entire party participated. By the 30th Engineer Costansó could write:

From our camp we could hear the sound of the ocean, but we could not see the shore. Therefore, desirous of knowing on what part of the coast we were, and convinced that we could not be very far from the desired port of Monterey, and that the mountain range which we were leaving behind was assuredly that of Santa Lucía—as we inferred from the account written by Father Torquemada, which treats of the expedition and voyage of General Sebastián Vizcaíno, and from the sailing-directions of the pilot Cabrera Bueno—our commander resolved that the scouts should set out promptly to explore the coast and the mouth of the river.

They returned to say that the river emptied into an estuary which entered the canyon from the sea; that the beach, bordered by sand-dunes, had been seen to the north and south, the coast forming an immense bay; and that, to the south, there was a low hill covered with trees like pines which terminated in a point in the sea.

When one reads this passage it seems strange that the explorers could not recognize from the description of the scouting party the obvious fact that they had, indeed, reached Monterey Bay. Commander Portolá later told a friend that “although the signs whereby

we were to recognize the port were the same as those set down by General Sebastián Vizcaíno in his log, the fact is that, without being able to guess the reason, we were all under hallucination, and no one dared assert openly that the port was indeed Monterey.”<sup>18</sup>

A council of war was held consisting of the officers and the missionaries; it was decided to continue the march, to find the port, and hopefully also the supply ship, *San José*, which was supposed to communicate with the expedition somewhere along its line of march or meet with it at Monterey. The month of October was one of utter difficulty. The entire expedition was assailed with doubts about their location, and there was much sickness.

They moved on, crossed the Pájaro River, so-named from the discovery of a bird which the Indians had stuffed with straw. This bird measured eleven spans between wing-tips and resembled an eagle. Two days later (10th October) they saw their first coastal redwoods, and Father Crespi described them without bestowing upon them a specific name. The trees were very tall and had wood of red color; their leaves were very different from that of the cedar; and although the color of the wood was somewhat like that of cedar, it was also very different in not having the same odor. Also, of the trees they found, the wood was very brittle. Since nobody recognized these trees, the Spaniards named them “from the name of their color,” wrote Crespi, in a rather precious passage.<sup>19</sup> Engineer Costansó also mentioned these trees in his entry for 15th October. He said they were the largest, highest, and straightest trees that they had seen up to that time; some of them were four or five varas in diameter. Their wood was of a “dull, dark, reddish color, very soft, brittle, and full of knots.” The first mention of the redwoods places them in the area between Pájaro and Soquel.

Though the explorers had time to describe aspects of the natural scene, they were mainly concerned with the problems of illness which afflicted the entire force. The exhausted sick were falling from their mules; the party had to proceed very slowly, and some of the sick were carried on side-saddles, “as the women in Andalusia travel.” However, between October 22nd when recovery commenced (for which reason they called the camp of that day *La Salud*) to October 30th, the sick ones pretty much regained their health. Therefore, they were ready for the great surprise which was to confront them in the next few days;

namely, the clear indication that they had passed Monterey and that they were now in the environs of the port of San Francisco.

On the 31st of October the party left the Rincón de las Almejas (in the lee of the Montara Hills where they had eaten copiously of mussels) and followed the scouts to the top of the ridge. From the summit they saw outer San Francisco Bay, now known as the Gulf of the Farallones. They could see Point Reyes, island-like in the distance, some white cliffs (perhaps at Drake's Bay or Bolinas) lying to the north, and the Farallones, "and it seemed to us beyond all question," wrote Costansó, "that what we were looking upon was the port of San Francisco; and thus we were convinced that the port of Monterey had been left behind."

The party made camp in San Pedro Valley. On the morning of November 1 Commander Portolá sent out Sergeant Ortega with a scouting force; his charge being to explore for three days, and during that time to reach the port of San Francisco (Drake's Bay), described by Cabrera Bueno as lying under Point Reyes. The following day, November 2, soldiers who had gone deer-hunting into the hills above the camp returned with the report of a great "arm of the sea or estuary" which extended inland "as far as they could see, to the southeast." They were reporting the first known sighting of present-day San Francisco Bay.

"We also conjectured from these reports," Costansó stated in his diary, "that the scouts [led by Ortega] could not have passed to the opposite side of the bay, as it was no mere three days' undertaking to make the detour rounding an estuary, the extent of which was greatly enlarged upon to us by the hunters."

When Ortega and the scouts returned on the evening of November 3, they reported excitedly that two days' journey from the place they reached there was, according to the sign language of the natives, a harbor with a ship in it. Commander Portolá now decided to learn the truth of this report, hoping that the supply ship *San José* might be awaiting them. We come, then, to the 4th of November, which in retrospect appears as perhaps the most important day of the Portolá exploration, for in the early afternoon of that day the entire expedition topped the ridge (Sweeney Ridge) east of their San Pedro Valley camp and saw spread out before them the great Bay of San Francisco.<sup>20</sup>

At this time they did not recognize the inner bay as a new discovery, but identified it as *the estuary of Cabrera Bueno's port of San Francisco*, lying under Point Reyes.

In a few years the colonization of San Francisco Bay would become one of the major purposes of the Crown of Spain, and the continuous settlement of the Bay region would date from that event when it finally took place in 1776. However, on November 4, 1769, Portolá's company could think only about the place which Sergeant Ortega had reached and from where in two days' journey he might find the ship. The expedition presumably reached this site on the evening of the 6th of November (in the Palo Alto area). "From this place," Costansó wrote, "the scouts were sent out in order to obtain definite particulars about the port and the ship concerning which the natives had made signs. For this purpose they were allowed four days, and they carried a supply of flour for the assigned period. The sergeant of the presidio went as head of the party, and some Indians accompanied it as guides."

The scouts returned as instructed on the evening of the 10th of November. No port and no ship had been found. On the 11th, a council was convened; the officers gave their votes in writing. The decision was to turn back and search for the port of Monterey which they believed must lie behind them. The missionaries concurred in this estimate of the situation, and Governor Portolá gave the order to break camp.

The return journey may be rapidly summarized. By the 28th of November the party had again reached the site of Monterey; the next day they crossed the peninsula and the Carmel River and set up camp near Point Lobos. Here they remained while local explorations were made to "discover" the port of Monterey. Finally considering that they had failed in this, another council of war was held. On the 7th of December it was decided to return to San Diego. Before leaving on the 10th, two crosses were erected; one near their camp-site, another on the Monterey side of the peninsula, "where the sand dunes and a lagoon are." A lengthy message was buried in a bottle at the foot of the first cross; the second cross contained a message carved upon it with a knife stating that the land expedition was returning to San Diego for lack of provisions.

Their hope was that should the messages be found by the *San José* or the *San Antonio* these vessels would follow along the coast so that



they might be sighted by the expedition and reached by signals with flags or the sound of gunshots.

The discouraged band returned to San Diego on January 24. They approached that settlement with misgivings, for conditions there had been so desperate at the time of their departure in July of 1769. But the first sight of the first California settlement, rude and insignificant as it was, nevertheless cheered them greatly. It is rather amusing to note that Engineer Costansó, the soldier, saw the little cluster of structures as a *presidio*; and Father Crespi, the missionary, referred to it as a *mission*.

The final page of the story informs us that after near disaster at San Diego it was found possible to make a new start to carry out the orders of the Visitor General.<sup>21</sup> This time, in April, 1770, the expedition reached Monterey and recognized it! The formal occupation of Monterey took place on the 3rd of June, 1770, as described by Don Gaspar de Portolá, "Captain of dragoons of the regiment of Spain, Governor of California, and Commander-in-chief of the expedition to the ports of San Diego and Monterey."

Portolá then wrote:

Since it is among the articles of the orders which I am to execute immediately on my arrival at the cited port of Monterey, that I am to take possession in the name of His Catholic Majesty—I ordered the officials of sea and land to assemble, and I begged the Reverend Fathers to be pleased to assist in obeying the said order, directing the troops to place themselves under arms, after notifying them that it had been so ordered, and after these preparations had been made I proceeded to take possession in the name of His Majesty under the circumstances that the decree provides, performing the ceremony of throwing earth and stones to the four winds, and proclaiming possession in the royal name of His Catholic Majesty, Don Carlos III, whom God preserve, and whose possession of the said port of Monterey and other territories that rightfully ought and must be included, must be recognized. After planting the triumphant standard of the holy cross, primary cause of the Catholic, Christian, and pious zeal of His Majesty, which is manifested by the superior orders and perceived in the extent with which his royal exchequer is opened for the purpose of gathering the evangelical seed which is procured to the benefit of the numerous heathen dwelling in it, in order that it may appear at all times I sign it and the gentlemen officials sign it as witnesses. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

Upper California was in a fair way to becoming a Spanish possession!

## NOTES

1. These are the writer's conclusions. The question about the founding of the San Diego presidio is discussed below, p. 4 and note 8.

2. The San Blas Council of War document may be read in its English translation in *The Spanish Occupation of California . . . Junta or Council Held at San Blas . . .* Douglas S. Watson & Thomas Workman Temple II, translators (San Francisco: Grabhorn, 1934).

3. There is no space here to develop at length the subject of Spanish-Indian policy. However, even with reference to the Portolá expedition alone there is a considerable official literature which expresses concern over establishing good relations with the natives and of providing them with the presumed advantages of Spain's civilizing influence. Typical of the official position is the outline on Indian policy found in the Gálvez instructions to Portolá, dated at Cape San Lucas, February 20, 1769, Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Guadalajara 417, Bancroft Library. Paragraphs numbered 3, 9, and 10 in the document are provided here.

Paragraph #3 states: "Among the concerns that will deserve from the Governor all his attention as the head of an undertaking which is directed to the most commendable purposes, and which must be carried out with the wisest direction so as not to upset or to spoil its outcome, I recommend to his zeal and vigilance that he shall cause his soldiers and the muleteers of the company to observe on their part the most complete discipline, especially beyond the frontier of the present missions, making known to all as a point of inviolable ordinance, the good treatment of the Indians, and that punishment will be inflicted as for an unpardonable crime if they commit wrongs or acts of violence upon [the Indian] women, for besides the offense to God which they would commit by such excesses, they might completely endanger this expedition."

Paragraph #9: "While the settlement is being made in Monterey of a presidio and mission with provisional buildings, in accordance with the instruction which I have given upon this point to the engineer, the Governor will remain in that port with all the men of his party and that of Captain Don Fernando de Rivera, and during his stay there he will endeavor to win with affability, sagacity, and prudence the Indians of that province and the vicinity, causing them to understand in whatever way may be possible the great good that will result to them from living in brotherhood with the Spaniards and under the sovereign protection of the King, our master; but of course not enforcing vassalage upon those of other provinces who may come attracted by the novelty, but proposing to them a reciprocal treaty and friendship, drawing up some sort of a document, as well as it can be done, in case conventions or any kind of treaties are made with them."

Paragraph #10: "Since the most proper means for accomplishing the commendable and just purposes to which both the journeys by sea and by land are

directed are certainly to treat the Indians with gentleness and love, without causing them for this reason to believe that they are feared, the Governor must put special thought and care to reconciling these extremes and to cause the rest [of the people] to follow the same example, and not give the natives any just reasons for unpleasantness or distrust. But if, after all prudent measures have been exhausted, there should be any settlements or villages in any of the provinces through which the expedition has to pass which obstinately oppose its passage, let force then be used, such measures being taken as will at the first demonstration make them perceive the superiority of our arms, without shedding any blood, notwithstanding the action. When those who have shown themselves to be enemies yield or render themselves up let them then be readily pardoned, and let the Reverend Father Missionaries do everything that may be dictated by their charity, love, and apostolic zeal with the natives in order to set them right and attract them, but never let the missionaries on the impulse of their fervor and ardent desires expose themselves among the barbarians.”

4. Visitor Gálvez appointed Captain Rivera as second in command in an order dated at Real de Santa Ana, August 20, 1768. After stating that Portolá is to be the chief of the enterprise Gálvez continues “[Portolá] needs a second in command, to assist him as far as possible in bringing about the success of the journey, and who may be capable of substituting for him in any emergency that may occur, in order to prevent the failure of an enterprise of such importance, which is to open the way for the early conversion of many heathen, and the extension of the dominions of the King, our master. Since from the activity and zeal with which you serve His Majesty, and your practical knowledge of the Indian natives of the country, I have well-founded confidence that you will perform the duties of the commission to my satisfaction and that of the Governor, I name you for his assistant and second in command in the entrance by land to the aforesaid place of the port of Monterey. I grant to you for this purpose sufficient authority and power, by virtue of the superior and vice-royal powers that are vested in me . . . etc.” AGI, Aud. de Guad. 417, Bancroft Library.

5. In Paragraph #5, Instructions of Gálvez to Rivera, Real de Santa Ana, August 20, 1768, AGI, Aud. de Guad. 417, Bancroft Library.

6. Edited by Adolph Van Hemert-Engert and Frederick J. Teggart in *Academy of Pacific Coast History, Publications*, I, No. 4 (Berkeley, 1910).

7. The editors of the *Narrative* rendered the phrase *á la derecha del Río* as “on the right bank of the river.” This has been corrected to read, “to the right of the river,” meaning to the right as it was viewed from the harbor. Presidio Hills and Old Town, San Diego, are on the “left bank” of the river, a location than can be pictured best when one recognizes that the river originally emptied into the main harbor, not into what in former times was called “False Bay” (now Mission Bay).

8. Much of the chronology and record of events surrounding the establishment of San Diego’s first settlement can be derived from *The Portolá Expedition*

of 1769-1770: *Diary of Vicente Vila*. Edited by Robert Selden Rose in *Acad. of Pac. Coast Hist. Publications*, II, No. 4 (Berkeley, 1911), summarized as items a to e).

a) The ships had first moored near present Ballast Point (identified in the Vila chart as Point *Guijarros*, i.e., "cobblestones," in the lee of "La Loma que cubre el Puerto").

b) Sunday, April 30, Captain Vila sent out an exploring party to find better sources of water than the brackish pools which had been used by the crew of the *San Antonio*. Lieutenant Fages was a member of this exploring party which discovered the San Diego River.

c) By 6 May the ships had been worked farther into the port. Captain Vila stated that "Don Pedro Fages had found by examination of the river-mouths that at high tide the launch could enter quite easily to fill the casks."

d) Between 6 and 10 May a rude settlement was established a small distance east of the San Diego River delta. This was mainly to accommodate the sick. Two cannon from the "packet" were taken ashore, and Captain Vila set these up on "both sides of the lodgings, so that they could be used to protect the men on shore."

e) Captain Rivera reached San Diego on 14 May, and the little shelter was moved to a new site on the 15th.

On 26 June Lieutenant Fages wrote a letter to Visitor Gálvez stating that all proper precautions were being taken notwithstanding the fact that the disposition of the Indians seemed to be good. He wrote, in part "we have taken shelter behind a breastwork garrisoned by two small cannon which were taken from the *Príncipe* in case of an attack by day, and at night I keep two sentinels on guard, changing them every two hours. Don Fernando Rivera takes the same precautions." (As stated above, Captain Vila reported unloading and setting up two cannon from the "packet," and in the context it appeared that he meant the *San Carlos*. Perhaps that ship contributed two guns to the first shelter and the *Príncipe* two to the second). AGI, Aud. de Guad. 417, Bancroft Library.

Sergeant Ortega in his incomplete diary known as the *Fragmento* specifically named Captain Rivera as the one who "selected a site for the settlement" and that in establishing it the "necessary fortification" was not neglected. Ortega, *Fragmento*, C-C 50, Bancroft Library.

However, it is Engineer Costansó who provides us with the best description of the new settlement (upon his return to San Diego from the northern exploration) in his statement: "Its modest buildings, surrounded by a palisade of logs capable of being easily defended in case of need, were found in good condition." Costansó, *Narrative*, 24 January 1770.

9. It has been found impossible to compile an accurate register of names for the expedition. The leaders are listed in the diaries, and some additional names appear in the Ortega *Fragmento*. H. H. Bancroft's "Pioneer Register" provides

some clues as does the "List of the Crew of His Majesty's Packet Named San Carlos" in Bolton Papers, Alta California section, Item 81, Folder 97, Bancroft Library.

10. *The Portolá Expedition of 1769-1770: The Diary of Miguel Costansó*. Edited by Frederick J. Teggart in *Acad. of Pac. Coast Hist. Publications*, II, No. 4 (Berkeley, 1911).

11. Antonine Tibesar, O.F.M., ed. *Writings of Junípero Serra* (Washington, D.C.: Acad. of Am. Franciscan Hist., 1955), I, 28. Serra to Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, Mexico City, March 13, 1773.

12. Costansó, *Narrative*.

13. The Bancroft Library possesses a copy of this important book.

14. San Diego was the *second* mission founded by Father Serra during the Spanish northward advance to Monterey. The *first* mission founded by the expedition was San Fernando Velicatá (variously spelled in the records), on May 14, 1769. Emphasis often given to San Diego as the *first* mission rests obviously on the fact that geographically it became a part of the new chain of missions in Alta California. To the men of that day it was the next step after San Fernando. See Maynard J. Geiger, O.F.M., trans. and annotator. *Palóu's Life of Fray Junípero Serra* (Washington, D.C.: Acad. of Am. Franciscan Hist., 1955), Ch. XV, note 2, for the founding of San Fernando.

15. Details of the journey referred to in pp. 10 ff. are based upon Costansó, *Diary*, and Father Juan Crespi's *Diary*, the latter found in Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Fray Juan Crespi: Missionary Explorer on the Pacific Coast 1769-1774* (Berkeley: U.C. Press, 1927). Professor Bolton's identifications of modern map locations have been followed in this paper.

16. The canoes were, of course, paddled, but Costansó used *vogan*, from the infinitive in the modern spelling, *bogar*, to row.

17. The Franciscan Guardian, Father Juan Andrés, was greatly worried for fear that the California enterprise was being pushed too rapidly. He also expressed worry over the possibility that the California Indians would be less friendly when they discovered that the Spaniards had come to settle, not just to travel through the country. A part of his commentary, which was really presented as a protest before the Viceroy, is quoted here from the presentation to Viceroy Marqués de Croix, July 26, 1770: "It is necessary, Your Excellency, for the friars who may go to take provisions to keep them for a year, because once settled there they will have no one to ask more from and no one to give it. The same thing will have to be done in the case of the large crew that is necessary. On their arrival the Indians brought their atoles and pinoles which they make of the seeds they gather on those great plains, and enough fish. This was attributed to their friendliness and tractableness, but it must be understood that they brought them to sell and not as presents. This is not the first time these Indians have traded with bearded men or Europeans, for from the Santa Barbara channel

on they began to see hunting-knives, knives, and other steel articles, cloth, blue wool, etc., and these same Indians say that seven days beyond where they were discovered there are people like the Spaniards. From this it can be inferred that they trade with them and have secured the articles mentioned in this way. When they found that our men did not pay them, they stopped their supposed gifts, for we know that in the very port of San Francisco they ate too many acorns because of their great hunger and all of them just escaped being made sick. We also know that on the way back to San Diego they were forced to eat the flesh of mules and donkeys. This is the reason it is necessary to take provisions for a year. This requires many mules. Therefore, since we do not think there is much probability that the Indians will be subjugated, we do not think so great an enterprise desirable all at one time. If our sovereign is anxious to establish and fortify himself in these ports, and for this reason would be willing to pay the necessary amounts, may he be welcome, but even in case it should seem desirable to us to found a single mission at Monte Rey and another at San Diego, to take a large number of people who could work and, if the Indians gave them a chance, plant extensively on those plains, which in this way might provide grain for the founding of others, it will always be as Your Excellency wishes to command us, for this simple, candid statement has no other purpose than to prevent its being said at any time that we put the royal treasury to expense uselessly." Bolton Papers, Alta California, Item 91, Folder 26, Bancroft Library.

Father Andrés' view that the California Indians were "dealers" and would not provide food in the form of gifts is not borne out by the record kept in Costansó's *Diary*. However, the expedition was short of its own supplies and hastened the return journey to San Diego partly because of that circumstance.

18. Charles E. Chapman, *History of California: The Spanish Period* (1930), p. 226.

19. Crespi stated that they had seen some *palos muy altos de madera colorada* and because no one in the expedition recognized them they named them *con el nombre de su color*. See the printed Spanish form of the Crespi *Diary* in *Noticias de la Nueva California. Padre Fr. Francisco Paloué [sic]* (San Francisco: Eduardo Bosqui y Cía., 1874), Tomo I.

20. The Sweeney Ridge has been designated as a Registered National Historic Landmark by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, May 17, 1968, and this designation came about largely through the efforts of the Portolá Expedition Bicentennial Foundation (San Mateo County Historical Museum), shared in by this writer.

21. See Maynard J. Geiger, O.F.M., *The Life and Times of Fray Junípero Serra, O.F.M.* (Washington, D.C.: Acad. of Amer. Franciscan Hist., 1959), I, Ch. XXX, "The Fate of San Diego Hangs in the Balance" for an excellent and thoroughly documented discussion of the near-disaster of the entire northern California enterprise. This chapter is distinguished for its balanced presentation

and should be read as a corrective to the romanticized sectarianism which has surrounded the San Diego crisis.

22. Bolton Papers, Alta California, Item 90, Folder 33, Bancroft Library. Witnesses to this document were Juan Pérez, captain and pilot of the *San Antonio*, and Miguel del Piño, lieutenant captain and second pilot, and Pedro Fages. All testified that possession had been taken of the port of San Carlos de Monterey, the same one described in the history of the voyage of Sebastián Vizcaíno and in the itinerary of the pilot Cabrera Bueno. Viceroy Croix received the news of the successful occupation of Monterey at "9 in the morning" on 10 August 1770.

For a description of the general jubilation which followed the receipt of the news see Geiger, *Fray Junípero Serra, O.F.M.*, pp. 264-65.

Descriptions of the founding of Monterey are also provided by Father Serra (Tibesar, *op cit.*, I), and Matías de Armona, Bolton Papers, Alta California, Item 90, folder 43, Bancroft Library. Armona was governor of Lower California and based his account upon advices received from Costansó, Pérez, and Portolá.