

## Hiking to California History

**Flores Peak and the Portola Expedition campsite: Remnants of older California history that many residents are unaware of**

By **Kat Avila** | Published on LatinoLA: June 25, 2013



This past Sunday, June 23, I borrowed a car and drove to the [Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary](#) in Modjeska Canyon to do some birding. When I got there, I discovered Cal State Fullerton was having a Summerfest fundraiser for the preserve. There were lots of vendors. Children were running around. Loud live music was playing. Out the window went my bird count.

So, I joined a nature walk led by Kurt and assisted by Patisu. The hilltop benches we sat on gave us a good view of the canyon. I learned how feral cats are reducing the local quail population and about the destructive 2007 wildfire that burned here. Additionally I got to hear a good story about Flores Peak which rose to our right.

Juan Flores was the Spanish California or Californio version of Jesse James. The *bandido* fled to this area to escape the posse that was chasing him. Trapped, Flores took his horse and leapt from the side of the peak. If you saw the slope, it was amazing that he and his horse survived the jump. Eventually his story ends with his lynching in the area of what is now present-day downtown Los Angeles.

Flores's story reminds me of another piece of history. While hiking in the nearby Arroyo Trabuco Wilderness this past February, I came across a small, dark brown wooden structure. The structure protects what little remains of the c. 1810 Trabuco Adobe from early cattle ranching days. In front of the structure is a plaque mounted on a stone and concrete base that is surrounded by a steel bar fence.

The plaque says, "SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO named by the Portola expedition that camped here on July 24th and 25th 1769, while opening the first overland trail through California. Dedicated El Viaje de Portola Ride, April 1966." However, the area is known today as [Arroyo Trabuco](#) due to the blunderbuss (Sp. "trabuco"; a gun with a flared muzzle) that a soldier lost here around that same period of time. (By the way, the gun was eventually found this past century and now rests at [Bowers Museum in Santa Ana](#).)

[Captain Gaspar de Portola](#) (pictured) and his expedition camped in this wilderness 244 years ago this July. This historical site is seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Mountain bikers, trail runners, and hikers like myself discover it by accident.

As our nation gets ready to celebrate the 1776 signing of the Declaration of Independence with fireworks and barbecues, here is yet another remnant of older California history that many Southern California residents are unaware of or even care about.

The site is not a tourist attraction. It is not easy to access. But I think it is worthwhile and respectful to take a moment to recall the history of this area on the eve of Spanish and English colonization, before housing tracts and shopping malls moved in.

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