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Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3632q2w5>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 2(1)

ISSN

0191-3557

Author

Johnston, Francis J

Publication Date

1980-07-01

Peer reviewed

Two Southern California Trade Trails

FRANCIS J. JOHNSTON

IT is generally considered by historians that Spanish overland communication from Upper California to Mexico by way of Sonora ceased with the abandonment of the Anza Trail after the Colorado River Campaign of 1781-1783. Communication was maintained by sea, either direct from ports in Upper California or by courier to Lower California and thence to the mainland by sea (Brumgardt 1976:83).

The route was essentially reopened for sporadic mail and dispatch service, and for migration to and from Sonora through a combination of circumstances including military expeditions and operations of the Mexican government between 1823 and 1832 (Bean and Mason 1962:86*ff.*).

However, prior to 1823 certain official Mexican government correspondence had been transmitted by Southwestern and Colorado River Indians using their own trail systems in and out of Southern California and eventually into Mexico. These Indians were also involved in trade with those local California Indian groups under Mission influence as well as with those which remained independent (Davis 1961:17, 22, 36, 45).

This paper is an effort to delineate the locations and use of the two trails crossing the Colorado Desert, i.e., the Maricopa Trail and the Halchedhoma Trail (Fig. 1). The Mohave Trail, which crossed the Mojave Desert to the

Los Angeles Basin, is not considered here, nor is the Yuman Trail from the Yuma Crossing to San Diego.

THE MARICOPA TRAIL

The Maricopa are a Gila River tribe living along that river in Arizona. In historic time they were located well east of the Quechan, who inhabited the area where the Gila and the Colorado rivers come together (White 1974: 128).

In 1821, a Maricopa leader called José Cocomaricopa and a few companions appeared at San Gabriel Mission saying they wanted to trade. José bore a letter of introduction from the commander of the presidio at Tucson. Nevertheless, the friars sent the Maricopas to the presidio at San Diego. Lieutenant José María Estudillo of that company ordered the Indians to return to their river lands and told them they were not welcome in California. Before they left, however, that officer took down a brief description of their general route, which follows. It was seven days from San Gabriel to the Colorado: San Antonio, 9 leagues; San Jose, 15 leagues; San Sebastián, 15 leagues; Jesus María, 26 leagues; Pozo de la Alegría, 12 leagues; Meganos, 8 leagues; river, 7 leagues (Bancroft 1885, II:442).

The critical points about this description are first that the Maricopa live below and east of the Quechan, and second that they appeared first at San Gabriel Mission in the Los Angeles Basin and not at San Diego. Over a period of

Francis J. Johnston, 8395 Bluff Rd., Banning, CA 92220.

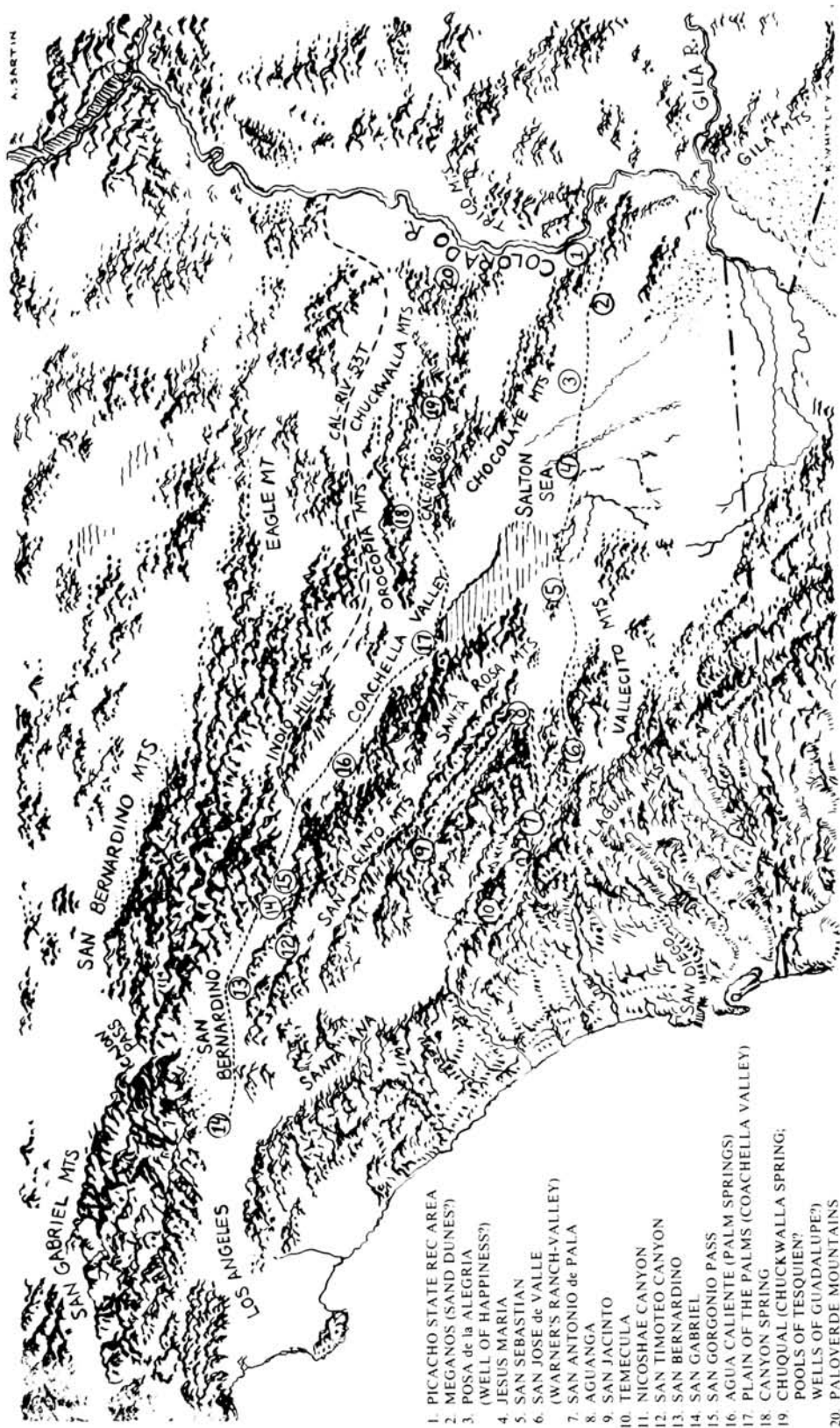


Fig. 1. Aboriginal Southern California trails.

time the Maricopa made known that they did not pass through the Quechan nation to get from their lands on the Gila to San Gabriel (Beattie 1933:67). Thus, they must have angled northwesterly across that corner of Arizona to the Colorado River and thence across the Colorado Desert. It has been suggested that they followed what will be shown below to be the Halchedhoma Trail and that, therefore, the two trails were one (Beattie 1933:67). However, such is probably not the case.

The general location and direction of the trail may be indicated through Lieutenant Estudillo's report of place names and distances. There is only one area in Southern California where a San Antonio, San José, and San Sebastián lie more or less in an east-west line. That is northern San Diego County or the central part of the San Diego Presidial District. Those places are: San Antonio de Pala, San José de Valle, and San Sebastián. The first is Pala on what is now Pala Indian Reservation. The second was the Spanish name for what became Warner's Valley. And the last is the famous desert waterhole near Harper's Well on San Felipe Creek (Pourade 1960:161, 1961:122).

It is approximately 25 miles or nine leagues from Pala to Warner's, and another 30 to 40 miles, or 15 leagues to Harper's Well. An additional source seems to confirm this as the Indian route and hence the Maricopa Trail. Charles E. McCloud of Julian, San Diego County, an old California prospector, when speaking to author Philip Bailey prior to 1940, regarding Thomas L. (Peg Leg) Smith on his 1829 trip across Southern California, said,

. . . he run into the Vallecitos, north of Fish Mountain, probably somewhere near Split Canyon. Here he met some Indians who was living where Carrizo and San Felipe creeks come together [Footnote in source: Harper's Well, the San Sebastián of Captain Anza in 1774], and they told him he'd have to go straight south for here,

or west to find water . . . I believe he kept going west into Vallecito [Bailey 1971:95].

But then why did the Maricopa go up to San Gabriel instead of down to San Diego from Pala? They were seeking to trade in the Los Angeles Basin which was the principal seat of trading in the southland in 1821.

The next year a report was prepared by the Mission Fathers for Mexico's new Emperor Iturbide through the efforts of his agent Reverend Agustín Fernández de San Vicente, a *canon* at the cathedral at Durango. It describes San Bernardino mission rancho and valley as, "traversed by the road to the Colorado' . . . meaning thereby the 'Cocomaricopa trail'" (Beattie 1933:55). Thus, to connect Pala and San Bernardino and then Los Angeles it would appear that the Maricopa followed the well-known trail which has been described a number of times and was later a U.S. Mail route, northerly from Pala via Temecula, San Jacinto Valley, Nicoshae Canyon, and San Timoteo Canyon. Or alternatively they passed through Aguanga, Sage, St. John's Grade, San Jacinto and so on. This specific portion of the Maricopa Trail later became known as the Sonora Road (Quimby 1975:*passim*; Bancroft 1885, II:442-3).

What of the Colorado Desert portion of their trail? Beyond San Sebastián three place names are given by Estudillo: Jesus María, 15 leagues or 37 miles; Pozo de la Alegría, 26 leagues or 65 miles; and Meganos, 12 leagues or 30 miles. The river is next.

This portion of the trail which at that time ran in part where the Salton Sea is now, has been identified archaeologically by the late Malcolm J. Rogers of San Diego Museum of Man. His work is described in *Ancient Hunters of the Far West* particularly on the maps on page 43 and 67 (Pourade 1966:43, 47, 49, 67).

In addition, this trail is discussed in lay terms in at least one popular magazine article (Weight 1949:16). It is shown on the Imperial

County map of the Automobile Club of Southern California as, "A Pre-Columbian Indian Trail," and "Indian Pass." This trail complex came out on the river in the vicinity of the old Tumco-Picacho mining area.

The trail was used in 1822 by Maricopa couriers, at least one of which was José Cocomaricopa, sent by the Mexican government for the purpose of transmitting copies of the new Oaths of Allegiance taken by California officials on April 11 at Monterey. They eventually reached Mexico City by way of Tucson and Sonora (Bean and Mason 1962:9). Thus, despite Lieutenant Estudillo's admonition not to return to California, the Maricopa did in fact return and became of some use to the Mexican government.

Perhaps in confirmation of all the above, one historian has quoted Captain José María Romero, an important Mexican Army explorer of the 1820's in Southern California, as follows: "Although they [the Cocomaricopas] go between the nations, they leave their enemies to the right or left a distance of more than twenty leagues" (Beattie 1933:66).

As the Maricopas and Halchedhomas were on friendly terms (White 1974:127-128), the Maricopas were passing either through Halchedhoma territory or below it and just above the Quechan. The latter route conforms precisely to Trail 2 on Rogers' map (Pourade 1966:66). Obviously, the right or left designation of Romero depended upon which direction the Maricopas were going at any given time. Again, Rogers' trail brings the Maricopa out in the vicinity of Picacho on the Colorado River which is just above the Quechan region. The other desert points designated by Estudillo seem to be nonspecific at this time. Pozo de Alegría seems to mean "Well of Happiness", and could be any small watering spot. Meganos may mean sand dunes. The Algodones Dunes along the southwest face of the Chocolate Mountains run northwest to southeast for over twenty-five

miles, so the exact point of entry is open to question.

THE HALCHEDHOMA TRAIL

The Halchedhoma Trail has been documented by archaeology (Davis 1961:72, Map 1). It first comes to light, however, in the message of Governor Francisco Antonio Crespo of Sonora to Viceroy Antonio María Bucareli y Ursua in December 1774: "Anza should march [on his second expedition] to the Jalchedhunes country, crossing the river there and proceeding to Monterey" (Bancroft 1889:391). So evidently information regarding the Halchedhoma Trail had been gathered on Anza's operation of April through July of that year and made known to Spanish authorities and at least some of them wanted him to utilize it for his second or colonizing expedition. But he declined.

However, Father Francisco Garcés, who departed from Anza on that second expedition at the Yuma Crossing and proceeded on his own journey of exploration, crossed that trail with the knowledge that he was doing so on February 24, 1776. He wrote,

I came to the Pools of Tesquien . . . This place, which is a day's journey from the river, makes it possible to travel from the land of the Jalchedunes to that of the Jeniqueches . . . of the Santa Ana River [Galvin 1961:2-24-76].

These "Pools of Tesquien," are quite probably Chuckawalla Springs.

In general, Spain seems to have ignored the route. But knowledge of it must have resided with the priests of San Gabriel Mission. Commenting on this situation, Bean and Mason (1962:9) write, "In this same year, 1822, San Bernardino was recognized by the administrators of San Gabriel as a point of departure for a route to Tucson . . ." It was, *either* by the Maricopa Trail or the Halchedhoma Trail.

In any case, the Mexican Army explorer, Captain José María Romero, chose to try the Halchedhoma route from San Bernardino through San Gorgonio Pass, Agua Caliente (Palm Springs), Plain of the Palms (Coachella Valley), and the subsequent mountains in his 1823-24 effort to reach Tucson from San Gabriel Mission.

His selection of the Halchedhoma route over the Maricopa route apparently had to do with the unavailability of a Maricopa to act as guide. His original plan had been to explore the Maricopa Trail for possible use as a regular communications route between California and Sonora. He so wrote Governor Antonio Narbona of Sonora in July, 1823 after coming to California from his presidio at Tucson by way of the mouth of the Colorado and Mission Santa Catalina in Baja. His letter of July 7 states, ". . . it only remains for me to see the road by which the Cocomaricopas travel" (Beattie 1933:59).

However, it is apparent from the diary of Lieutenant José María Estudillo that in fact the expedition left San Gabriel Mission on December 15, 1823, ". . . enroute to the east . . ." with no guide at all (Bean and Mason 1962:31).

This Estudillo is the same officer who two years earlier had taken down the Maricopas' description of their route. He of all Mexican officials should have known where their trail ran and whether or not his unit was on it. He does not mention the Maricopas in his diary.

At the mission rancho of San Bernardino on Christmas day Romero and Estudillo obtained two guides, neither of whom were Maricopas.

The Indian Salvador, a neophyte of the Mission of San Juan Capistrano, introduced himself . . . Eleven years ago he fled from the mission, and went as far as Arizpe [Sonora] . . . He said that he learned of my journey to the Colorado River and that he wished to accompany me along with

another named Pedro Celestino [Bean and Mason 1962:35].

It has been assumed that the above statement meant that Salvador followed the Halchedhoma Trail in his escape from San Juan Capistrano (Forbes 1965:242). Indications from his behavior under Estudillo and Romero are that he did not. Rather, it is more likely that he had made his way to San Jacinto Valley (then containing a rancho for San Luis Rey Mission) and from there followed either the Anza Trail or the previously described trails to San Sebastián.

From the area of Agua Caliente (Palm Springs) to the "swamp of the Palms" (in the lower Coachella Valley) the expedition had Cahuilla guides. These Indians and Salvador all told the officers there was no water or pasture from there to the Colorado River, two marching days (Bean and Mason 1962:37, 38, 39).

The actual distance from the east side of Coachella Valley to Blythe over the old route is about 90 miles. At Romero's daily rate of around 20 miles, that is at least four days' marching time. Mohaves, Apaches, and other swift-moving Indians are known to have covered such distances on foot in two days. Between Coachella Valley and the river over that route there are at least four good watering places: Canyon Spring, Tabaseca Tank, Chuckawalla Spring, and Mule Spring. The Cahuillas did not tell the officers of these places. Why? Salvador and Pedro Celestino did not know of them. Therefore, they were not on the Maricopa Trail, and their guides were not knowledgeable, nor were they Maricopa or Halchedhoma.

On January 7, 1824, apparently somewhere north of where Desert Center now is, "Salvador . . . confessed . . . he did not know where he was . . ." He and Celestino were arrested for their ignorance (Bean and Mason 1962:42).

It is important to note that on each of the two days of travel proceeding the 7th during

which Romero's expedition made its way up Salton Wash, between the Orocopias and Chuckawallas, and to the vicinity of Palen Dry Lake, Estudillo records, ". . . paths and trails of the Indians . . . bones on the trail . . . horse-paths and foot-paths . . ." (Bean and Mason 1962:40-41). Hence, they were at all times on well-traveled Indian foot and horse trails.

Romero's first effort ended in failure and he returned to San Gabriel Mission January 31, 1824. But about ten days later no less than 19 Halchedhoma, ten men and nine women, also arrived at San Gabriel. They carried letters of inquiry as to Romero's whereabouts from Sonora's governor dated August 1823 (Bean and Mason 1962:60-61).

At this time the Halchedhoma still lived north of the Quechan but south of the Mohave probably from the Bill Williams River to well below Blythe along the Colorado River. They had not yet been driven out by the Mohave (Kroeber 1925:799ff.). Therefore, their trail lay almost due east from San Bernardino, through San Gorgonio Pass and the Colorado Desert. These 19 confirmed to Romero that if he had borne southerly his last day he could have reached the river that night. It is uncertain just where Romero was on the night of January 6, 1824, but if on the morning of the 7th he had veered more to the south he would have crossed and probably followed at least one of the trail complexes now known to run to the Colorado River along either side of the Chuckawalla Mountains (Davis 1961:72, Map 1).

Actually, of course, the expedition could not have reached the river on the 7th because of its previously noted rate of march. They had two or possibly three more days of travel to reach their objective. This is actually borne out in Romero's subsequent operation.

Nonetheless the presence of these Halchedhomas at San Gabriel shows that they were in comfortable and responsible touch with Mexican authorities at both ends of their trail.

They were not at this time (1823-24) intimidated or displaced by their enemies, the Mohaves to the north or the Quechan to the south. That would come later.

By November 28, 1825, the now-promoted Lieutenant Colonel José María Romero was again preparing to set forth from San Gabriel on the elusive trail. He planned to have José Cocomaricopa with him as guide. He also had a soldier, Julian Valdez, who had been sent with José Cocomaricopa by General José Figueroa from Sonora to learn the route (Bean and Mason 1962:70). It would therefore seem that this time he definitely expected to follow the Maricopa Trail.

However, José Cocomaricopa and his men had remained at the San Bernardino Rancho when they reached that place and had not come on to San Gabriel Mission. Therefore, Romero and his Indian guides did not meet face-to-face until he reached San Bernardino about the first of December, 1825. On the fourth day of that month Romero reported that, ". . . once José and his men were given horses they had left him [Romero] without saying a word . . . they ran away . . ." (Bean and Mason 1962:70). Romero was now at San Bernardino and again with no reliable guides other than the soldier, Julian Valdez. However, he was committed to find some trail through the desert and he had in his train another officer also under orders to find such a route. This was Ensign Romualdo Pacheco, a Mexican Army engineer. Pacheco had been ordered to ". . . join Romero and make 'an itinerary in which you will perfectly describe the road to the Colorado River, constructing also at . . . San Gorgonio the little 'reducto' which you have in a diseño . . .'" (Bean and Mason 1962:69). In other words Pacheco was ordered to develop a strongpoint in San Gorgonio Pass presumably to cover both the Halchedhoma Trail and the developing Sonora Road between San Bernardino and Yuma as previously described. The area was not then called Yuma but was, of course, the

crossing where the Gila joins the Colorado. Incidentally, such a redoubt would have afforded some protection also to the Anza Trail had it been reopened.

Romero was thus compelled to go out through San Gorgonio Pass without appropriate guides even though he himself believed, in the words of Lieutenant Estudillo (found in the cover letter to his diary which he had forwarded to Governor Arguello after their aborted operation),

. . . there are no other roads more suitable than the ancient ones explored by the engineers, Miguel Constanco, José Dario Arguello, Juan Bautista de Anza, Fernando Ruiz, Felipe de Neve, and Pedro Fages [Beattie 1933:62].

Estudillo is, of course, referring to the Anza Trail.

Both Lieutenant Colonel Romero and Ensign Pacheco wrote letters protesting the construction of a strongpoint in San Gorgonio Pass. Possibly as a result of these letters, and despite the protests of the friars of San Gabriel, Romero was ordered on December 12 to release certain neophytes from San Gabriel who had been sent on the operation as construction laborers (Bean and Mason 1962:68-71). Apparently the San Gorgonio redoubt project was abandoned.

Romero and Pacheco left San Bernardino after the fifth of December 1825. They were at a place they called the "Wells of Guadalupe" by December 12 (Bean and Mason 1962:81). Whether or not they went out through San Gorgonio Pass and hence over the Halchedhoma Trail or southerly over the Sonora Road and thence easterly over the Maricopa Trail is speculative. However, there are bits of evidence that suggest they actually followed the Halchedhoma Trail. From San Bernardino to the Wells of Guadalupe was about a five day march for Romero or about 100 miles. At that water point he believed himself to be about

three days or sixty miles from the river. It is known whom he did *not* have as guides. He did not have any Maricopas. He should have had place names for the Maricopa Trail from both his earlier contact with Lieutenant Estudillo and his present association with the soldier Julian Valdez. But he did not refer to any of these names in his letters and reports.

He did have detailed intelligence from the Halchedhoma as to where their trail ran. He knew where he had gone before. He knew where he had gone astray. It seems most probable then that he was on the Halchedhoma Trail. And where was he on December 12, 1825? Given the approximate distances, the horse marching times, and the known watering places, he was at the springs in the Chuckawalla Mountains, Father Garcés' Pools of Tesquien.

The Cahuilla name for that region is *chuqual* [= *chuxh-wal*—Ed.], from which the anglicised corruption developed (Johnston 1977: 192). Romero does not use the term; therefore, it is questionable that he had a Cahuilla guide. Regarding the whole question of Indian influence on the expedition, Romero and his men seem to have had some trouble identifying any of the Indians in the region. Romero sent a dispatch to General José Figueroa by four Indians who were ". . . of a tribe allied with José's people" (Bean and Mason 1962:82). Did he mean Cahuilla, Pima, or Halchedhoma? He sent another message to Governor Echeandia of California in which he said his engineer officer, Ensign Pacheco, was going to return to San Diego after reaching the Colorado. He would take some Cahuillas with him from a place called La Grulla, or "crane" in Spanish. The location has not been identified (Bean and Mason 1962:82, 112, note 2). While today the south end of the Salton Sea is replete with bird life (including cranes), in 1825 it was not. It was an alkali sink or plain. However, the Colorado River had bottom lands, riparian woodland, and marshes, which provided habitat for

cranes. When Lieutenant Pacheco proceeded downriver from the point where Romero crossed to the east side, he called the Indians on both sides "Cahuillas" (Bean and Mason 1962:83 and 112, note 3). In fact, they were Halchedhoma. In view of this, it would seem that the ". . . Cahuilla . . . from . . . La Grulla" most likely were Halchedhoma.

In three more days from the "Wells of Guadalupe" Lieutenant Colonel Romero and Ensign Pacheco were at the river. If they had followed what would become the Bradshaw Trail they would have come out about where the Blythe-Ehrenberg crossing is now (Beattie 1933:66). If they had worked southerly from Chuckawalla, through the Black Mountains, they would have gone down Milpitas Wash from the southern base of the Palo Verde Mountains to its debouchment as surmised by Bean and Mason (1962:82).

After crossing on *balsa* rafts, Romero and his detachment went on to Agua Caliente on the Gila River. By which trail they went is uncertain, except that opposite Picacho he would have crossed and then probably followed the Maricopa Trail. Lieutenant Pacheco traveled downstream, probably along the west bank where the regular Indian trail ran (Davis 1961:72, Map 1), to Punta Concepción, site of one of the earlier Spanish mission-pueblos at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado (Bean and Mason 1962:83).

Beattie writes that

. . . Pacheco had returned to San Diego by the direct road from the Pass of the Yumas, assuring him (Governor Echeandia) that the Cocomaricopa road was impracticable, and the other route traveled was the desirable one [Beattie 1933:67].

The other route referred to here is briefly described by Beattie (1933:67-68) as ". . . the road from San Diego via Warner's to the Pass of the Yumas on the Colorado." It was this route which became the official Mexican mail

and communications road into California and neither the Maricopa nor the Halchedhoma trails were so used.

CONCLUSION

It has been postulated above that in Mexican and probably aboriginal times there were at least two well-defined Indian trade and communications trail complexes across Southern California, neither of which was the famous Anza Trail. The first and northerly, or Halchedhoma Trail, ran roughly east from San Bernardino, through San Gorgonio Pass, to the region of the Halchedhoma or present day Palo Verde Valley. The second, or Maricopa Trail, dropped southerly from San Bernardino to Pala, thence easterly through what is now Harper's Well near the confluence of Corrizo Creek and San Felipe Creek, and across desert land at the southern end of the Salton Sea to the Colorado River in the vicinity of Picacho and Tumco.

It should be noted that both trails, though named for Indian groups in their area of inception, passed through the territories of other Indians, notably Cahuilla and Kumeyaay. Passage in and out of foreign lands such as these required intricate alliance or at least permission agreements (White 1974:120-124).

Use of the Maricopa Trail seems to have declined after the official Mexican California-Sonora route was established. The Halchedhoma Trail eventually developed into the Bradshaw Trail and is still a Southern California desert road from Coachella Valley to Palo Verde Valley.

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