

(1736–88). Spanish military commander and explorer Juan Bautista de Anza traveled the first overland route from the [Sonoran Desert](#) to the coast of [California](#). In 1775–76 Anza led a group of more than 240 people from [Mexico](#) to the San Francisco peninsula. They established the first European settlement in [San Francisco](#).

Anza was born in July 1736, probably in the presidio (military settlement) at Fronteras, Sonora, Mexico. His father was the commandant of the presidio, and his grandfather was commandant of the presidio at Janos, Chihuahua, Mexico. Anza was most likely educated in Mexico City. He entered the military in 1752. By 1761 he had been promoted to captain and was commander of the presidio at Tubac (in what is now Arizona).

At the time [Spain](#) controlled Mexico as well as parts of what are now [Texas](#), [Arizona](#), [New Mexico](#), and California. The Spanish government was concerned because other European governments—especially Russian and British—were threatening Spanish territory in California. Spain wanted to strengthen its presence in California. To help with this plan, Anza was ordered to find an overland route for supplies and settlers from the Sonoran Desert to California. The Sonoran Desert covers parts of southern Arizona and California as well as northern Mexico.

Anza left Tubac in January 1774 with a small group of soldiers, missionaries (including Francisco Garcés), and others. With the help of the [Yuman](#) Native Americans, they journeyed along the Gila and Colorado rivers across the desert and over the San Jacinto Mountains until they reached Mission San Gabriel in March 1774. The mission was located near what is now Los Angeles, California. The group continued north until they reached the presidio at Monterey in April. Upon his successful return to Tubac, Anza was ordered to lead a group of about 240 soldiers and colonists, including women and children, to the San Francisco peninsula.

Anza and the rest of the expedition began their 1,800-mile (2,900-kilometer) trek in October 1775. They left from Tubac and reached Mission San Gabriel in January 1776. They then continued up the coast until they reached the Monterey presidio in March. Anza continued on to San Francisco, where he chose spots for a presidio and a mission. By June the settlers had moved to San Francisco, and Anza had returned to Mexico.

In recognition of his accomplishments, Anza was appointed governor of New Mexico in 1777. He held the post until 1787. In October 1788 he was again appointed commandant of the Tubac presidio. Anza remained commandant for only a few months before his sudden death on December 19, 1788.

The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail follows the route that Anza took through Arizona and California. The 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) trail begins in Nogales, Arizona, and ends in San Francisco. Sites along the way commemorate the journey of Anza and the settlers.