

The Coyote Clarion

Coyote Valley, South San Jose, California

24 February 2018



As Green As It Gets

Maureen Chandler and Emily peer through the remains of a toppled tree on our hike along the Arrowhead Loop Trail in the Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve just south of San Jose.

As Green As It Gets

It doesn't rain much in San Jose.

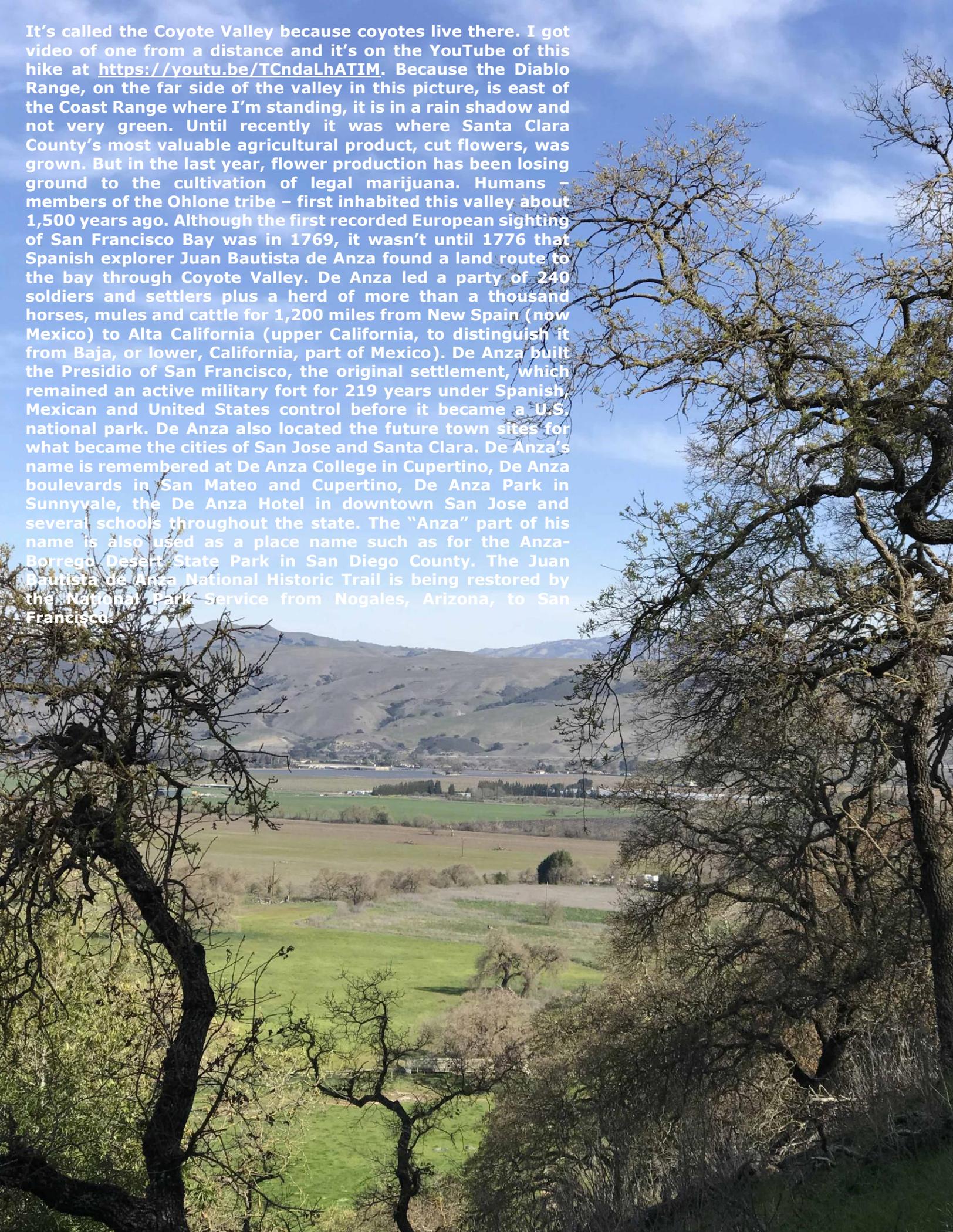
For every drop that falls here, three fall in North Carolina, where I'm from, or Seattle. Two fall in London or Paris and six in Bergen, Norway, where we were last October. Our average rainfall is only 15 inches (380 mm) a year.

Ninety percent of that comes between Halloween and the end of April, The last snow flake that survived contact with the valley floor landed February 5, 1976.

Which means if you're a 5-year-old girl dreaming of Prince Charming, you can plan an outdoor wedding between May and October any time in the next 30 years, count on the cake staying dry and bet the palace on it.

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It's called the Coyote Valley because coyotes live there. I got video of one from a distance and it's on the YouTube of this hike at <https://youtu.be/TCndaLhATIM>. Because the Diablo Range, on the far side of the valley in this picture, is east of the Coast Range where I'm standing, it is in a rain shadow and not very green. Until recently it was where Santa Clara County's most valuable agricultural product, cut flowers, was grown. But in the last year, flower production has been losing ground to the cultivation of legal marijuana. Humans – members of the Ohlone tribe – first inhabited this valley about 1,500 years ago. Although the first recorded European sighting of San Francisco Bay was in 1769, it wasn't until 1776 that Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza found a land route to the bay through Coyote Valley. De Anza led a party of 240 soldiers and settlers plus a herd of more than a thousand horses, mules and cattle for 1,200 miles from New Spain (now Mexico) to Alta California (upper California, to distinguish it from Baja, or lower, California, part of Mexico). De Anza built the Presidio of San Francisco, the original settlement, which remained an active military fort for 219 years under Spanish, Mexican and United States control before it became a U.S. national park. De Anza also located the future town sites for what became the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara. De Anza's name is remembered at De Anza College in Cupertino, De Anza boulevards in San Mateo and Cupertino, De Anza Park in Sunnyvale, the De Anza Hotel in downtown San Jose and several schools throughout the state. The "Anza" part of his name is also used as a place name such as for the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in San Diego County. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail is being restored by the National Park Service from Nogales, Arizona, to San Francisco.



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In the last 30 years, the number of days during this annual dry period – a total of nearly 5,500 days (about 15 years) – it has rained a hundredth of an inch or more only 270 times, five days out of a hundred.

All of this is to say that if you visit in the summer and the grass is dead and brown but come back in January to find the mountains lush and green, that's just the way it is. And the fact that you may think that something's wrong just means you just need to get out more.

Which is what Emily and I did Saturday for the first time this year. We went for a hike with friend Maureen Chandler in our local mountains and enjoyed the green we rarely see except from the far-off office window.

Even though it's our rainy season, we hadn't had any precip since before Christmas until last week. The effect on the landscape was almost instantaneous and welcome. Before the coming week is over, we expect to see snow again on Mount Hamilton, our tallest local mountain at about 4,300 feet (1,310 meters).



Maureen and Emily on the Arrowhead Trail, which is a four-mile (6.5-km) loop with a climb of about 500 feet (150m) valley floor to ridge top.