



Voices from Intersecting Paths

An Oral History of Collaborative Efforts between Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and Tumacácori National Historical Park

Employees of Tumacácori National Historical Park and Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail have been collaborating since the trail became part of the National Trails System in 1990. The Anza Trail extends from the border in Nogales, Arizona to San Francisco, California, commemorating the route of the 1775-1776 colonizing expedition led by Anza. A one-mile segment of the trail is within Tumacácori NHP.

The collaboration between the two part units is mostly informal and it arises from opportunities that exist because their interpretive stories and resources overlap.

Current and former staff members of both park units spoke about how working together has mutual benefits as well as benefits to other entities that they share common elements with in southern Arizona (Tubac Presidio State Historic Park, Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area, other government agencies, and nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations). Here, they tell their story.

Intersecting Paths Between a Park and a Trail

Christopher Bentley We share history and share the resource. But Tumacácori manages a park and we administer a trail, and they're very different. We benefit each other by being different.

Alex La Pierre The whole dynamic of a trail is interesting. A park feels like a place, whereas a trail feels like an itinerary.

Naomi Torres Although my title is superintendent, we are considered administrators. A lot of national historic trails don't own any land; it's all done in partnership. We work with communities, county representatives, cities, and anybody along the trail to develop and create the story. Our job is to be the cheerleaders and technical support.

Mike Medrano I approach park landscapes like a GIS map. You have these different layers of activities that have happened at different points in time over the same space. The trail is another layer that we have to share with visitors and make sure that they understand that resource and its context and story.

Alex One of the most beautiful stretches of the whole Anza Trail passes through Tumacácori National Historical Park.

Rick Collins Tumacácori has changed focus in the five years that I've been there so that the trail is much more important to Tumacácori. The river is integral to who we are. It's the reason we're all here.

Melanie Rawlins The trail, because of its geographic nature, is in a very powerful position to link the stories between park units and other places like Tubac Presidio State Historic Park.

Anita Badertscher Our history is entwined. Tumacácori even owns a piece of land containing a segment of the Anza Trail. It would be crazy not to be working together.

Christopher The section of Anza Trail between Tumacácori and Tubac Presidio is about four or five miles long. It's important to both historic sites. For us, it's five miles out of the 1,200 that we administer, but it is very important to the Anza Trail story. The expedition stayed at the mission on their way north.



Mike Medrano
Superintendent,
Tumacácori NHP



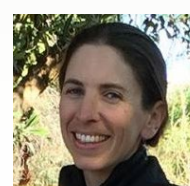
Naomi Torres
Superintendent,
Juan Bautista de
Anza NHT



Christopher Bentley
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Anita Badertscher
Chief of
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Melanie Rawlins*
Training Specialist
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Rick Collins*
Seasonal Park
Ranger, Tumacácori
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Tumacácori NHP



Alex La Pierre
Seasonal Park
Ranger (former),
Juan Bautista de
Anza NHT

Reasons to Collaborate

Mike We collaborate because the two units overlap. With the trail as long as it is, Naomi and her staff can't be everywhere at once. It helps that we are here on site with the trail.

Anita You don't collaborate just for the sake of collaboration. You collaborate because there would be a positive outcome for both entities.

Melanie This collaboration didn't come out of a need or a problem. It was an opportunity that could be seized.

Christopher A collaborative approach is the way we work. It's partially because we're a small staff, but also it's how we operate. We can help the park financially and that can free up park funds for other interpretive programming or needs. But I hope that our collaboration is more significant than that. We can share the ways that we approach the Anza Trail story and the tensions that naturally exist within its colonial story. I hope there's a mutual benefit to sharing that knowledge.

Melanie Our story is their story and their story is our story. It's just two different angles. We have the mission angle on colonization and they have the military angle.

Anita I think the push in the NPS Centennial to collaborate and work together was a big positive. I suspect we aren't the only park that sort of ramped up our collaboration after that.

Christopher We're both Spanish colonial stories told in the framework of the National Park Service. This commonality lends to a natural partnership. The National Trails Act and the enabling legislation for the Anza National Historic Trail clearly state that the agency administers the trail but relies upon partners and volunteers to fulfill the NPS mission. It's just really natural for us to gravitate to a NPS unit that the trail crosses through. We can leverage each other's stories and create stewards. We also share a sometimes difficult history, which is something that we've been working on together recently. That is, the reframing of some of the stories and being aware of the changes that are going on in the country in how we tell these colonial stories.

Working with Other Partners

Anita There's been a real benefit to Tubac Presidio State Historic Park. They are often part of these team efforts, especially our programming along the Santa Cruz River and the Anza Trail. The state park is an important historical site that is very much under supported and very connected to our history. Anza was the captain of the Tubac Presidio.

Mike I'm the NPS liaison for the Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area that was designated in 2019. I'm also an ex-officio member of their board and participate in most of their board meetings. They're transitioning from the planning phase into implementation, so a lot is in flux right now. But they're marching in a good direction and there will be opportunities for collaboration with them. I could definitely see the NHA trying to secure access for parts of the Anza Trail that are aren't currently available, funding exhibits along the trail, or sponsoring cleanup events.

Christopher The Anza Trail seems to be the backbone of new national heritage area because trail pulls together so many other groups. It builds on the initial successes in collaboration with Tumacácori.

Naomi We had a big project with Pima County, the Anza Society, and the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind to create an outdoor inclusive exhibit adjacent to the school. We're all about partners, leveraging, their resources and their skills for something much bigger than any individual group.

Alex Given Tumacácori and Anza Trail's proximity to Mexico, there's been a lot of positive outreach to our Sonoran neighbors. There's been a really wonderful push under Naomi's direction to ensure that the education and interpretation that's going on the American side can help education and interpretation in Sonora as well. We've shared information at conferences and built relationships with the state government and the cultural affairs bureau.

Naomi Our job is to know the rules, and the context of how we can work with partners, and then to hear from partners what they'd like to do. We know the rules enough that we can figure out how to make it happen.



"We work together because we have common purpose. I wonder if we should formalize what we want to do. In the past, it's just been opportunistic when we saw a benefit of leveraging or resources."



Naomi Torres

“I think in these situations where you have overlapping resources and can leverage against each other, you can provide a better product and a better service to the public.”



Mike Medrano



Communication and Ways to Work Together

Mike Beyond the work that we do on the ground—the programs that we provide and the maintenance we do on the trail—I think we need more regular discussion between Naomi and her staff and our staff. If we set up quarterly meetings to talk, we may see that there are additional opportunities for us to provide services to the public.

Anita Naomi and I can communicate about our programs with a few sentences on either end of the season. But it would be positive to have more actual interaction with conversation and feedback on how it went. That way, she could hear success stories of how her money was used and all the great compliments the program got. Basically, it is probably a matter of time; everybody’s so busy. So we cover the basic necessities, and don’t take the extra step to share feedback and positive things.

Christopher Whenever we can be in person, it’s great. There’s still a great value about being able to be in-person and just share a space, even if we’re not making a lot of important decisions in meetings. Those in-person visits reinforce a partnership.

Melanie As a field interpreter in a park site, my first instinct is to just get things done—complete the deliverable product. The biggest lesson I’ve taken from this collaboration is that sometimes you need to slow everything down. Instead of just plowing ahead, maybe lengthen your project timeline a little so that every member of the group is fully on board every step of the way.

Collaborative Outcomes

Melanie Without this collaboration, we would be down some interpretive products and a few events a year. We would lose a certain number of visitor contacts, which would be unfortunate. We would lose the fellowship of working with other colleagues around the system toward a

shared goal, which I find valuable and fulfilling. Rather than just being in my little spot and what I’m doing at Tumacácori, I’m working on things that are bigger than my park. I get to share that sense of satisfaction with professional colleagues.

Melanie The benefits of the collaborative approach is that it provides more voices, more ideas, more varied expertise, a wider network of contacts. It multiplies one’s efforts.

Christopher Without collaboration, we would be working with partners in the area, but we wouldn’t have this central hub or regional home base that we’ve created. Everything seems to come through Tumacácori for us. Even our non-government partners, like the Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona and the Anza Color Guard of Arizona. We wouldn’t be as successful in our mission without this collaboration.

Insights about Challenges

Rick Keep it simple. This collaboration has been so simple to do. Don’t complicate the world. I say this with all the love in my heart, but the NPS is really good at making things difficult if it can. Just keep it simple.

Christopher We allow trail partners the space to tell the story from their perspective and we listen to them and work with them to find common ground to work towards. There are changes in the ways that colonial stories are being told and centering Indigenous voices.

Mike We’ve had some staff changeover and vacancies, but I don’t think they’ve impacted the relationship. We have people that have maintained contact with Naomi and Chris. And one of the first calls that I made when I became superintendent was to Naomi to say, “Let’s keep chatting. Let’s continue our collaboration and relationship.”

Alex Given the sometimes polarized environment with the border, NPS interpreters really need to tell the story about the Indigenous and the Hispanic heritages here in the Southwest, and their places among the other histories we learn in school.



“I think collaboration should be used more. For us, it’s what we do. When you have a collaboration, naturally you will have a better result because more people are involved. That also can bring more challenges or difficulties, but I think ultimately the outcome is always going to exceed what an individual or a siloed team could do. It’s more than the pooling of resources, it’s also the sharing of ideas and learning from one another with everyone’s specialized experience and skills.”



Christopher Bentley

Final Thoughts and Lessons Learned

Melanie I don’t think collaboration is a magic bullet that can solve every problem. It’s a partnership, so it has to be with the right partner. If it’s good, then it’s good. If it’s not good, then you should stop. No one should feel trapped in a collaboration that they don’t feel is beneficial.

Mike It’s good for us to collaborate. We might be able to be more efficient if we communicated more often and figured out more ways to work together.

Anita Collaboration is always beneficial. You’re always enriching your program, and doing more than you could have done on your own. For some people, in some situations, it could be a distraction or it could be an unnecessary pull in a different direction, but that has not been our experience.

Melanie I would love to see a good professional collaboration among Spanish colonial parks, or parks that contain that story—Anza Trail, Tumacácori, San Antonio Missions, and everyone else. This story impacts a big part of the continent and many parks. There’s a lot of us in these parks who are individually trying to work this out. The colonization subject is very sticky and you really need as many minds on board as you can. We can’t be the only ones who are pondering these topics. It would help to have consensus and common language that we could use.

Naomi We work together because we have common purpose. I wonder if we should formalize what we want to do. In the past, it’s just been opportunistic.

Mike I’m all about partnerships. I’m all about collaborations. There are folks out there that may have solutions to your problems that you’ll never get if you don’t interface with them. Having a collection of experience and education can really provide creative solutions to problems.

Christopher When you collaborate, you are naturally going to have a better result because more people are involved. That also can bring more challenges or difficulties may arise from having a lot of people involved in a project. But ultimately the outcome will exceed what an individual or a siloed team could do. And it is from the pooling of resources, but also the sharing of ideas and learning from one another, with everyone’s specialized experience and skills.

Melanie I wish that every park had a trail partner, or some kind of unifying regional or interpretive entity that they could turn to for support or to be part of something bigger. We’re very blessed in Arizona because we have the Southern Arizona Office. They work with the state tourism board, and they send archeologists to parks that don’t have them in-house. Trails can be networks like that. I feel very fortunate that Tumacácori is on the Anza Trail, and it’s so closely connected with the park’s interpretive history and recreational meanings. It’s a really productive match. We’re really lucky.

The National Park Service Collaboration Network is a group of dedicated employees who recognize the value of collaboration.

To learn more, read the [case study](#) about the collaborative efforts between Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and Tumacácori National Historical Park available from the [NPS Data Store](#).

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