

Juan Bautista de Anza & Cuerno Verde

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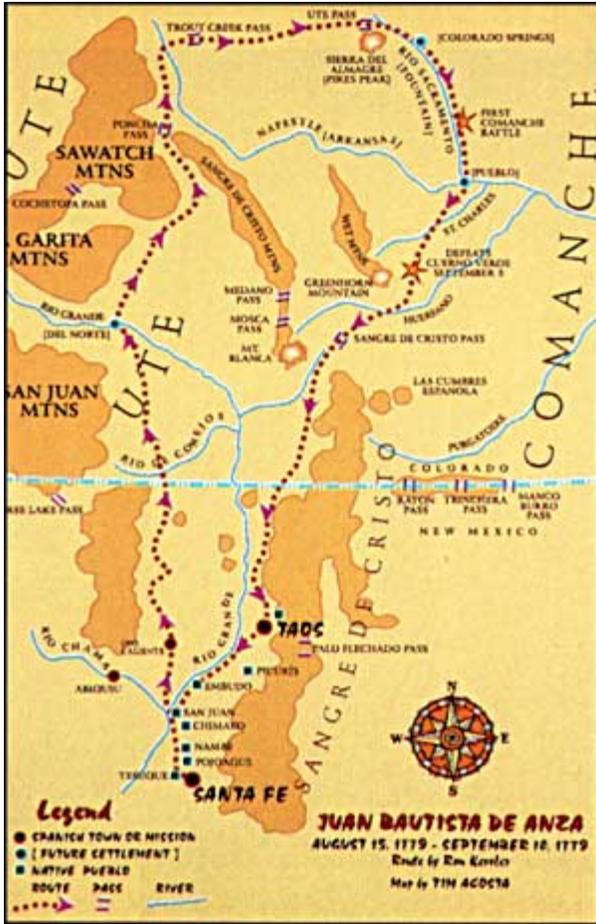
Nuevo Mexico, New Spain's far northern frontier in the 18th century, consisted of a score of native Pueblos and a half-dozen Spanish villages and missions. Since it was founded by Don Juan de Oñate in 1598, Nuevo Mexico extended for hundreds, if not thousands, of miles in all directions from Santa Fe, at least in the Spanish mind. Nuevo Mexico was a hard won piece of the Spanish Empire but Oñate's legacy didn't last 100 years. (That's Juan Bautista de Anza on the left)

In 1680 the Pueblo peoples united against their foreign oppressors and drove the Spaniards out. Don Diego de Vargas remarked that the province was "remote beyond compare" after his reconquest of the Pueblo tribes in 1693-96. At that point the Spanish settlements still had 20 years of war with the Navajos ahead of them. At the same time, a chain of events was slowly pushing the Comanche south on the Plains and into Colorado. As the Comanche came, they cleared the countryside of other tribes, mostly Apache. By the mid 1700's, southern Colorado was dominated by the Utes in the mountains and the Comanches on the Plains, the Jicarilla Apaches having been driven into what is now northern New Mexico.

The Comanches had the horse, and their lifestyle required regular horse-stealing raids to support themselves. At the same time, the Comanches would engage in trade with the same folks whose horses they were stealing. Comanche bands would enter Taos, Pecos or Ojo Caliente to trade, then one side or the other would provoke violence and the attack and counter-attack was on.

Sporadic Spanish records show occasional punitive forays against the Comanches in the mid 1700's. In late October, 1768, 500 Comanches attacked Ojo Caliente before dawn, attempting to wipe out the Spaniards. But Spanish firearms killed their charismatic leader, Cuerno Verde. Comanche beliefs bound his family to avenge his death. The chief's son took his father's name and his distinctive leather headdress with green-tinted buffalo horns and dedicated himself to killing all the Spaniards.

"Cuerno Verde" was the Spanish name given to the wearer of that headdress. The son's real name was Tabivo Naritgant, or "Dangerous Man."



Juan Bautista de Anza grew up on the Sonoran frontier in a family of proud Basques. Both his father and his grandfather were killed by Apaches, his father when he was four years old. By the time de Anza was 25, he was in command of the presidio at Tubac, south of Tucson, Arizona. In 1774 he blazed a trail from Sonora to San Gabriel Mission in Alta California, near today's Los Angeles. In 1775-76 he led 240 settlers north to Monterrey, the stepping stone to settlement of San Francisco Bay. In 1777, Teodoro del Croix, Commander General of the Internal Provinces, appointed de Anza Governor of New Mexico in hopes that he could do something about the Comanche problem.

Upon his arrival in Nuevo Mexico, de Anza quickly determined that previous forays against the Comanche all failed for the same reason: the Spaniards always took the same route east over the Sangre de Cristo's and then north over the Ratons. The Comanches saw them

coming and just retreated to wait for a better day. De Anza determined to use a completely different route to the plains of Colorado, to sneak up on the Comanches.

He left Santa Fe with some 600 men: soldiers, settlers and allied Pueblo Indians. De Anza mustered his force at San Juan de los Caballeros, near the junction of the Chama and Rio Grande rivers. He then marched north at night along the western edge of the San Luis Valley over Poncha Pass, across South Park, then east to Ute Pass (north of Pike's Peak).

De Anza's scouts reported an encampment of Comanches on the plains near today's Wigwam, Colorado (south of Colorado Springs). He attacked them immediately, successfully. However, Cuerno Verde and his warriors were absent on a raid against Taos. So de Anza and his men hurried south along an ancient trail later known as the Trapper's Trail to the area we know now as Pueblo. From there they headed down the flank of the Wet Mountains (Sierra Mojada) heading for Sangre de Cristo Pass.

Somewhere just east of Greenhorn Mountain the Spaniards met up with Cuerno Verde's raiders returning from their unsuccessful raid on Taos. The two groups skirmished a bit, then separated and regrouped. The next day the Comanches came up very close against the Spaniards and fired their muskets. The Spaniards identified Cuerno Verde by his headdress and cut off him and his closest warriors, trapping them in a gully. Cuerno

Verde dismounted and, from behind his fallen horse, made his final defiance of the Spaniards. A hail of lead balls claimed his life and those of his followers. When it was all over, the Spaniards scoured the field for useful items and de Anza claimed the distinctive headdress as proof of his endeavors. He forwarded the headdress to Teodoro del Croix, who, rumor has it, forwarded it to his superiors who forwarded it all the way to the Vatican.

De Anza finally made a lasting Spanish-Comanche peace in 1787. That cleared the way for the Arapaho and the Cheyenne to move onto the plains and trade peacefully with the Spanish comancheros and ciboleros riding out of Santa Fe and Taos.

What's left of Cuerno Verde adorns a mountain: Greenhorn Mountain, and a valley: Greenhorn Valley. Neither signifies the location of the battle in which the Comanche chief fell.