

People of the Canal

A Story of 20,000 Years

A two-mile interpretive history, from time immemorial, the story of human presence by San Rafael's Canal and what is now the S.F. Bay Area, will reveal largely unknown chapters, a fresh contribution to our knowledge of the past, and an encouraging look into a future dominated by the challenges of our climate crisis.



San Rafael's Canal, meeting the S.F. Bay shoreline, has been occupied by humans for tens of thousands of years, migrating from Asia, most recently by Coast Miwok for over ten thousand years, and today by more recent descendants of European, Asian and Pre-Columbian cultures migrating from the South. It is a story with hidden chapters. We propose to create it over two miles of the San Rafael Shoreline Path, an interactive timeline, a history of the people and their relation to the land and water, told in the voices of its occupants, through archeological, written and spoken evidence, and creative imagination. This will be a collaboration of historians, scientists, artists, writers and poets, and the living community of the Canal district.

[The Canal Arts](#) nonprofit, representing fourteen Marin County educational, business, arts and community service organizations¹, in partnership with the [City of San Rafael](#), the [Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria](#), [Storek Studio/Architecture](#), [Dominican University](#) and the [California Institute for Community Art and Nature](#), will coordinate the creation of the project, in collaboration with community participants, Canal Alliance, Voces del Canal and the Marin Asian Advocacy Project.

The story will be told fourfold: in English and Spanish, to both adult and youth readers, illustrated, with interactive audio and film, at a series of twenty interpretive stations, beginning near the Richmond-San Rafael bridge, the southern end of the 2-mile path, at the Jean and John Starkweather Park beach and parking area, culminating at the Albert J. Boro Community Center and Pickleweed Park/Library with the present, and a vision of possible futures for the Canal community.

Twenty interpretive exhibits over two miles is limited to only the briefest telling of such an epic, inspiring, piece of human history, and much of that will be told with creative imagination where evidence is missing, guided by those closest to the story. We are designing it to be an educational destination. Scale, measured by footsteps, will be an essential part of the experience. The timeline will be logarithmically compressed, giving more space to recent than to ancient time. The historical record of humans here reaches back less than 500 years, but evidence of humans in the area far predates that, for untold thousands of years, before there was a bay.



Artist Louis Choris. 1816

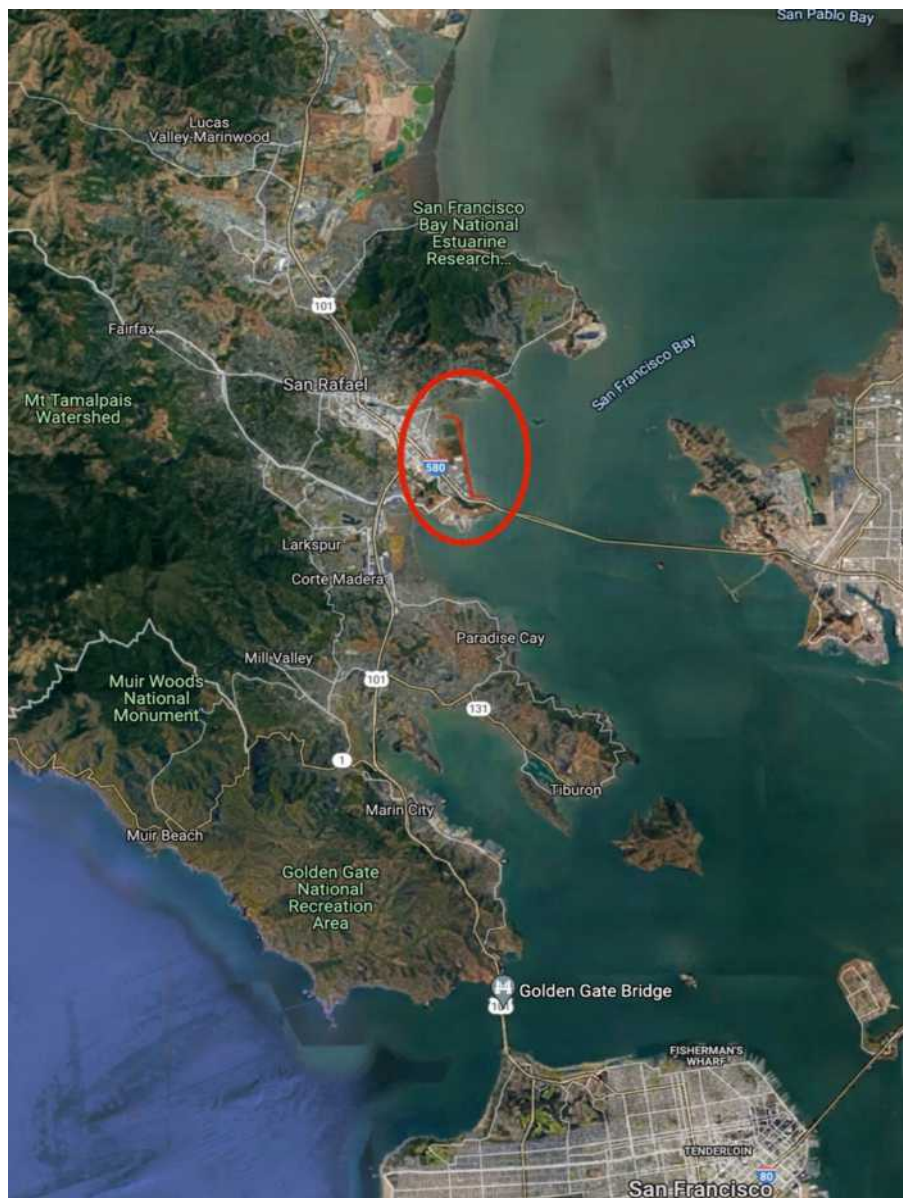
¹ [Canal Alliance](#), [Dominican University](#), [San Rafael Chamber of Commerce](#), [Multicultural Center of Marin](#), [Marin Society of Artists](#), [Art Works Downtown](#), [Marin Open Studios](#), [Marin Museum of Contemporary Art](#), [Team Works](#), [Parent Services Project](#), [Marin School for Environmental Leadership](#), [Storek Studio/Architecture](#), [East San Rafael Working Group](#), [Voces del Canal](#)

The story will be told by a chorus of voices, with room for speculation, interpretation and disagreement, but told with serious respect that still allows for humor, in words that go beyond mere recitation of facts, through art and poetry.

Central elements of the story will be the uniqueness of a changing environment, the adaptability and creative connection of humans to it, the depths of their knowledge, their inventive genius, the soundness of their social institutions that allowed a culture of small tribes to live peacefully and sustainably for thousands of years, their sudden disruption and persistence, and recent newcomers from the South and East.

Speculating on the future is the logical last chapter of the story, faced as we are by witless misuse of our environment and social distress that may be redressed by remembering, returning to the sense of balance of community and relationship to the earth of its early inhabitants, the Coast Miwok.

The People of the Canal project will be created in 2023-2025, for an estimated project cost of \$472,000, of which \$200,000 has now been granted from the California Coastal Conservancy's Coastal Stories Grant Program, \$50,000 by the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and \$10,000 from donor-directed funds of the Marin Community Foundation to date, with the remaining funds being sought through grants and individual donations.





Albert J. Boro Community Center
PARKING

The People of the Canal Project

Starkweather Park Beach
PARKING



1579



ADULTS

KIDS

QR CODE TO MEDIA

ENGLISH SPANISH

The project's immediate audience is the very people of the Canal, the ~12,000-strong mainly immigrant community that frequents the two-mile shoreline path, then beyond, to the City of San Rafael and Marin County, population 262,000. The project is designed as an outdoor destination, an educational experience that will attract a larger Bay Area, a California audience interested in hearing and seeing an untold history on a shoreline hike.

The heart of the project is engagement of the Canal community as participants in its conception and creation with all other partner/contributors. The project contains an outreach and evaluation element that will gauge visitors in number and reaction over time, as well as activity with public schools and other local venues. A website and video document of the project will be made and distributed online as well. The People of the Canal project will be ongoing, evolving content and the focus of events.

A poem by W. S. Merwin, called "Witness," in its entirety reads:

I want to tell what the forests
were like

I will have to speak
in a forgotten language

