

Trail boosters

Some trailblazers get all the glory. Lewis and Clark's trek in 1804? Local historian Charles Best thinks San Diego's "La Playa Trail," established in 1769, is every bit as significant. Best calls it the oldest commercial trail on the Pacific Slope. "And the Indians used it for 10,000 years before that."

Best and fellow members of the La Playa Trail Association are working to restore six commemorative monuments along the 12-mile trail that stretches from Ballast Point in Point Loma, up Rosecrans Street, over to Old Town and out Friars Road to Mission San Diego. (Imagine making that trip on the back of a mule.)

The association hopes to see our hometown trail designated a national historic parkway with trees, fountains and artwork dedicated to all the dusty pioneers who never had to wait for the light to change at Midway and Rosecrans.

Desert diversions

Joe Raffetto, marine biologist, environmentalist and civic-minded owner/operator of California Overland, fell in love with the quiet of the desert after spending years on noisy research vessels. Parlaying his considerable knowledge of all things natural into a business, Raffetto began offering guided excursions into the Anza Borrego backcountry in early 2005.

However, heeding the call of duty, he put his burgeoning business on hold last year. No — not as a soldier in Iraq, but as a Red Cross volunteer, assisting with Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. A New Jersey native, Raffetto sacrificed his prime tourist months to help those devastated by the storm.

Now back in full swing, California Overland invites desert greenhorns (and vets alike) to experience the beauty of the region (before the triple-digit temperatures set in) aboard twin, six-wheel-drive military transport vehicles that can go almost anywhere. Getting to the back of beyond just got easier. ■



Sketch of San Diego from 1850
(check out the depths of the SD Bay)



Joe Raffetto

Anza Borrego backcountry