

San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(760) 737-2201**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact interp@parks.ca.gov.

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San Pasqual Battlefield SHP
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*Detail of Battle of San Pasqual painting by
Col. Charles Waterhouse, USMCR*

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*The concept of
“Manifest Destiny” held
that the United States
had a divine right to
expand its borders from
the Atlantic to the Pacific.
After the battle at
San Pasqual, that concept
came closer to reality.*



From high on the slope of a south-facing hill, **San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park**

commands a sweeping view of the San Pasqual Valley. The park also overlooks the site of the bloodiest battle fought in California during the U.S.-Mexican War. During this skirmish, American forces sought to take California while Mexican forces sought to keep it. At the end of the battle, both sides would claim victory.

THE BATTLE OF SAN PASCUAL

On December 6, 1846, General Stephen W. Kearny led a contingent of the First Dragoons into battle against a group of Californios (people of Hispanic descent living in California after Mexico's War of Independence) in what is now the San Pasqual Valley. Led by Captain Andrés Pico (brother of Pío Pico, one of Mexican California's last governors), the Californios were resisting American occupation of their homeland.

United States vs. Mexico

When President James K. Polk took office in March 1845, relations between the U.S. and Mexico were already severely strained. Once Texas was made the 28th state of the Union,

Mexico quickly broke off relations with the U.S. and prepared for the prospect of war.

Realizing the potential of Mexican California's coastline for maritime trading, Polk sent an envoy to Mexico with an offer to purchase California. When Mexico refused, President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and his troops south to the Rio Grande River, into territory claimed by both sides.

The U.S. claimed that the Rio Grande was Mexico's border with Texas, but Mexico said that the border was the Nueces River, 150 miles farther north. Taylor's men built a small fort across from the city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas. This action brought a detachment of Mexican cavalry across the Rio Grande to attack the U.S. patrol, killing or wounding 16 American soldiers. Citing that Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood," Polk declared war on Mexico.

The San Pascual Pueblo

The native Kumeyaay, known as the Ipai, were the largest indigenous group in today's San Pasqual Valley.

After religious missions were secularized, mission lands were divided into large ranchos. In 1835 the Mexican government

established the San Pascual ("Pasqual" is used today) Pueblo with 81 native residents. Following the death in 1874 of their highly respected chief, Capitán José Pedro Panto, non-Indians increasingly homesteaded the remaining acreage in the valley. With the formal eviction of native people in 1878, the pueblo ceased to exist, so its residents were resettled elsewhere.

Stephen W. Kearny

In June 1846, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny and his soldiers were ordered by President Polk to take Santa Fe for the U.S. The First Dragoons left Fort Leavenworth (in what is now Kansas) and peacefully seized Santa Fe.

In October, Kearny, now a Brigadier General, led the Dragoons to California. En route to California, he encountered frontier scout Kit Carson in New Mexico. Carson told him that Commodore Robert F. Stockton had raised the American flag over San Diego, and California was now in American hands. Believing the war over, Kearny sent most of his troops back to Santa Fe. Guided by Kit Carson, Kearny continued to San Diego with 120 men.

On December 5, the First Dragoons met Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie and 45 volunteer riflemen, sent to escort Kearny to San Diego. Gillespie told Kearny that Andrés Pico was camped at San Pascual village with a force of insurgents.

Andrés Pico

Captain Andrés Pico led his group of 125 local Californio ranchers and landowners south from Los Angeles, headed to San Diego. The Californios, with homes in Los Angeles and



Stained glass images of American soldiers (left) and a Californio (right), on view at visitor center

San Diego, were intent on defending their land from the Americans. On December 5, during a heavy rainstorm, the Californios took shelter in the San Pascual Pueblo.

Engagement

Kearny sent Lieutenant Thomas Hammond to scout the valley, and his presence was betrayed by a barking dog in Pico's camp. A sentinel fired at Hammond and his men. Fleeing, they dropped pieces of military equipment marked "U.S. Army."

When Hammond reported that they had been seen, Kearny gathered his men to attack the village. The Dragoons and their mounts, exhausted from their desert trek, were in no condition to fight. The riders' cold hands could barely maintain a grip on their reins. Wet gunpowder made their weapons useless, and the low-lying fog obscured their vision.

Spotting Pico's campfires, Kearny ordered Captain A. R. Johnston to trot into the village. In error, Johnston passed on the order to charge. When Pico's men fired on them, Captain Johnston was the first fatality.

A return charge by the mounted Californios inflicted heavy casualties among the American soldiers. Some Americans, astride mules and unable to discharge their firearms, could only use their inadequate sabers against expert horsemen

armed with long, sharp lances. Twenty-one Americans fell; the Mexican forces lost at least one man and several were wounded.

The Americans spent the rest of the night burying their dead. The next day, as they continued toward San Diego, they were again engaged by the Californios at a place now called Mule Hill. On the morning of December 11, Commodore Stockton's troops, arriving from San Diego, reached Kearny's men and escorted them to San Diego.

On December 29, a combined force of Stockton's and Kearny's men, the California Battalion, and some Californios sympathetic to the American cause set out for Los Angeles. In early January, General José Maria Flores, commander of the Mexican Militia, proposed to the Americans that both sides should try to come to an agreement. Refusing the offer, the Americans continued toward Los Angeles.

On January 10, 1847, the Mexican Militia surrendered to the Americans. On the 13th, Andrés Pico, newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mexican forces in California, signed the Articles of Capitulation, thereby ending the war with Mexico in California.

EVENTS AND EXHIBITS

Battle Day—On the first Sunday of December, the historic battle is commemorated with

an annual event featuring entertainment, a military encampment, children's activities, and craft demonstrations.

Living History Days—These are scheduled for the first Sundays of January through June, and in October and November.

San Diego Archaeological Center—Located on state park property, the center curates historic artifacts found in the San Diego area.

TRAILS

Battlefield Monument Trail—This 1.5-mile round-trip trail is near the visitor center, where it connects with the Nature Trail.

Nature Trail—This 0.5-mile round-trip trail beginning behind the visitor center connects with the Battlefield Monument Trail.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The visitor center may require entry assistance. Most exhibits, restrooms, and travel routes are accessible. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Cuyamaca Rancho State Park
13652 Highway 79
Julian (760) 765-3020
- Old Town San Diego State Historic Park
San Diego Ave. and Twiggs St.
San Diego (619) 220-5422



Legend

	Major Road		Amphitheater
	Paved Road		Nature Trail
	Unpaved Road		Non-Park Building
	Trail: Hike		Park Building
	Paved Path		Parking
	Cultural Area		Picnic Area
	Parking Area		

San Pasqual Battlefield
State Historic Park



This park receives support in part through the nonprofit San Pasqual Battlefield Volunteer Association, P.O. Box 300816 Escondido, CA 92030 • www.spbva.org



PLEASE REMEMBER

- Park hours are limited. Before your visit, call the park at (760) 737-2201 or visit www.parks.ca.gov.
- Except for service animals, no dogs are allowed in the park or on trails.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.

