

## A Story

### Joaquin Murrieta

Joaquín Murrieta was born about 1829 in Sonora Mexico; he supposedly died in 1853. Joaquín Murrieta is California's most famous bandit. He and his gang are alleged to have committed all sorts of crimes from petty larceny, to horse and cattle theft, to bank robbery, rape and murder. The crime spree became so bad that on May 11, 1853, then California Governor John Bigler signed a legislative act authorizing the organization of California Rangers under the command of Captain Harry Love. Their purpose, to capture or kill a "party or gang of robbers commanded by the five Joaquíns," specified as Joaquín Botellier, Joaquín Carrillo, Joaquín Murieta, Joaquín Ocomorenia, and Joaquín Valenzuela. These men were believed to be responsible for the majority of all cattle rustling, robberies, and murders perpetrated in the Mother Lode region since 1850.

In July of 1853, a group of Love's rangers came across a group of Mexican men at the mouth of Cantua Creek, near the alleged hideout/headquarters of the famous bandito. A confrontation occurred, and two of the Mexicans were killed. The rangers cut off the hand of one and the head of the other, and later placed them in jars of brandy to preserve them. They claimed the badly mutilated hand to be that of the notorious "Three-fingered Jack," and the head to be that of Joaquín Murieta.

Despite the fact that no positive identification of the appendages were ever made—and despite the fact that only one Joaquín was alleged to have been killed, the governor paid a reward of \$1000 to Captain Love, and the matter was considered settled. (Later, the legislature approved an additional \$5000 bonus.)

The following year John Ridge, known as "Yellow Bird," romanticized Murrieta's criminal career with the 1854 publication of *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*. With the publishing of this novel, Yellow Bird became our nation's first Native American novelist and *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* became California's first published novel.



**JOAQUÍN MURIETA**  
*The California Bandit*

From page 6 of *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*

#### — References —

- Latta, Frank F. *Joaquin Murrieta and His Horse Gangs*. Santa Cruz, California: Bear State Books. 1980.
- Ridge, John Rollin. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit*. San Francisco: 1854. University of Oklahoma Press: 1955.

## The Story Behind that Name

### *Cantua Creek*

Known historically, well before 1850, as Arroyo Cantúa, the name commemorates, Guadalupe Cantua. (See "Guadalupe Cantua," April edition of *The Three Rocks Report*). The earliest map proving this name was used is Goddard's 1857 map. The creek was also commonly referred to as Arroyo Grande by members of the Murrieta gang, and they referred to region as the "Cantua." According to a 1908 meeting of the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, Wartham Creek near Coalinga had also formerly been know as Cantua Creek.

Cantua Creek was made famous because it was the hideout of California's most famous bandit Joaquín Murrieta and his gang. Another famous bandit, Tuburcio Vásquez and a few other lesser-known bad guys also used this place as their hideout. Cantua Creek is also famous for short-lived end-times cult, lead by Mariana La Loca that drew about 500 people here during the 1880s. The area is also rich fossils and rare petrification stories. The following is from *History of Fresno County California*, by Wallace W. Elliott & Co., Publishers, 1882:

#### WEST SIDE RICH IN PETRIFACTIONS

There is no portion of the State that affords a greater or more interesting field to the student of natural history than the scope of country lying along the western border of the county, and known as the Coast Range Mountains. Rising rather abruptly from the plains these mountains reach an average height of about 4,000 feet, though some of the peaks reach a higher altitude, notably that of Mount St. Carlos—the loftiest peak in the range, which reaches an altitude of 4,977 feet, two hundred feet greater than the noted Mount Diablo. The San Carlos quicksilver mine is near this peak. The mountains are irregular, and are intersected by sinuous canons, which pursue in their course every point of the compass, seemingly wriggling in agony to find an outlet to the plains.

It was in the fastnesses of these mountains that the noted bandit, Joaquin, and his later prototype, Vasques, made their headquarters. In future years these mountains will be one of the leading mining sections of California.

#### PETRIFIED TREES AND SHELLS

The mountains of the west side seem to have been forced from the bed of the ocean by some giant convulsion, as their whole surface is covered with traces of old oceans. Some parts are covered with immense beds of shells of the oyster, mussels, etc., many of which are very large and well preserved. In other places, the shells appear in beds of petrified mud or sand. J. G. Crump, a resident of the section, has collected over forty varieties of shells. Beautiful and strange petrifications are also found, among the rare ones that we have seen being a petrified tarantula's nest.

#### PETRIFIED FORESTS OF FRESNO COUNTY

Among the wood petrifications that deserve especial notice are two trees; one a juniper, about forty feet long and three feet in diameter at the butt, (five feet, counting the swell of the roots), and one foot at the top. On it are a number of small limbs and knots, and all nearly as hard as flint. Were this tree removed to San Francisco and set up in one of the squares, it would be as great a curiosity as Cleopatra's Needle is to the sight-seers of New York. The other tree is a redwood. Two sections of it have been transformed into solid rock, These sections are each some forty feet in length. Originally, the tree was some two hundred feet in length, and six feet in diameter. Some fine specimens of quarts are found in it. Mr Crump states that he found one piece of petrified wood that bears plainly the marks of having been cut by a sharp-edged tool before being transformed into stone.

#### — References —

- Goddard, George H. 1857. *Britton & Rey's Map of the State of California*.  
 Latta, Frank F. 1980. *Joaquin Murrieta and His Horse Gangs*. Santa Cruz, California: Bear State Books  
 Gudde, Erwin G. 1949. *California Place Names*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.  
 Elliott, Wallace W. & Co. 1882. *History of Fresno County California*. San Francisco, California: Wallace W. Elliott & Co.



## Pioneers and People

### *Mariana la Loca*

Raymund Wood, author of *Mariana La Loca, Prophetess of the Cantua & Alleged Spouse of Joaquin Murrieta* writes on page 16:

Mariana Andrada, arrived in California some time late in 1852 or early in 1853, according to Teodora Arredondo. She was then about twenty-two years of age, quite attractive, and evidently not the type to live quietly at home. She seems to have embarked on a career as a dance-hall girl, and perhaps also augmented her income by making her favors available in other ways.

...

To enhance her attractiveness with a certain class of fandango house customers, Mariana began to let it be known that she was the widow of the famous bandit Joaquin Murrieta.

Of course, there are a few problems with the story. First, the Idria mine didn't become a real mining operation until around 1857-58 and the little community, New Idria didn't come into existence until 1858. Secondly, according to the story, Mariana arrived into the area the same year Joaquín was supposedly killed or vamoosed to Mexico.

However, regardless of where she came from, we do know that she lived in Central California for the rest of her life. Somewhere around the age of forty she became a "housekeeper" for one or more of the shepherders who grazed their animals on the plains and foothills in the general area of Avenal, Coalinga, and the Kettleman Hills of today.

Sometime prior to 1880, Mariana moved to an adobe building located near Martinez Spring just below Las Tres Piedras. From here, she probably left her adobe home whenever her housekeeping duties permitted to climb to the summit of the ridge and search for the gold allegedly buried by the Murrieta gang. Regardless of her original purpose in coming to this area, it appears that the solitude, the wild aspect of this mountain, and the fantastic shapes of the wind-worn rocks began to prey upon her imagination. Mariana soon got the idea for the large-scale religious revival based on the notion that the world would soon come to an end. She convince as many as four hundred people from surrounding communities that only the followers who joined her would be saved. (Wood)

Mariana convinced her followers that the deceased Father Magin was now living within the "hollow" rock that we call La Catedral Grande and that he had shown her the temple door which is guarded by Saint Peter. She also convince her followers that the surrounding rocks were in fact godly buildings; they only looked like rocks because God was concealing the truth from them and that God had not yet opened their eyes. She assured them that God would reveal everything to them in good time and that at an appointed time God would open the Temple Door to La Catedral Grande and allow all of the faithful to enter and be saved from the coming destruction.

#### — References —

Hillhouse, Clarence. 1931. *New Idria Quicksilver and Letters: 1858-1859*. Unpublished.

Wood, Raymund F. 1969. *Mariana La Loca, Prophetess of the Cantua & Alleged Spouse of Joaquin Murrieta*. Fresno, California: Fresno County Historical Society.

# *The Three Rocks Report*

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## *In this Issue*

Joaquin Murrieta	1
Cantua Creek	2
Mariana la Loca	3

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