

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

THE WAY WE WERE  
Marking border was 1848 order

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By Anne Marie Tipton  
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*Take a trip through South County, not on its roads but into its past, with tour guides who know the terrain. They are historians with stories to share and a knack for tracing the winding, wild roots of the things around us today. Each week offers a new tale from a different part of South County.*

Chula Vista and Otay Ranch in Mexico? That could have been the case after the Mexican-American War in 1848.

The boundary between the two countries is often a touchy issue. The latest controversy about the triple fence, or Border Infrastructure Project, is no exception.

There is quite a colorful story involved with the original delineation of the border beginning in what is now called Border Field State Park.

In the early negotiations between the United States and Mexico in 1848, boundary commissioners were trying to decide if the Port of San Diego was going to be in California or Baja California, based on old and faulty maps. The United States wanted one of the best ports on the West Coast, and to complicate matters, commissioners couldn't agree on the definition of the Port of San Diego.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was used to determine where the border should be placed. It included authenticated versions of an 1847 map by John Disturnell and the *Plano del Puerto de San Diego* (Map of the Port of San Diego) drawn by Juan Pantoja in 1782. Article V of the treaty referred to the maps, along with the location of the border near San Diego.

Article V reads: (In) order to preclude all difficulty in tracing upon the ground the limit separating Upper from Lower California, it is agreed that the said limit shall consist of a straight line, drawn from the middle of the Rio Gila, where it united from the Colorado, to a point of the Pacific Ocean, distant one marine league due south of the southernmost point of the Port of San Diego, according to the plan of said port, made in the year 1782 by Don Juan Pantoja.

The main questions: Where is one marine league south of the Port of San Diego? And what should be considered the port? Jorge Vargas, a law professor at the University of San Diego and an expert on the 1849 boundary designation, wrote in a law journal:

In other words, if the true 'port' of San Diego, namely, Ballast Point, had been used in 1850 by the International Joint Commission to establish the limit between California and Baja California, Mexico, the international boundary between both countries would have been traced some 6.5 nautical miles due north of where it is today. Therefore, this boundary would have been found at the northern edge of the city of Chula Vista, at the

south end of the Sweetwater National Wildlife Refuge, approximately 7.5 statutory miles north from the U.S. port of entry at San Ysidro.

There was a binational contingent involved in the demarcation of the boundary, as proscribed by the treaty. On the Mexican side, Gen. Pedro García Conde served as the commissioner and Jose Salazar Ylarregui as the surveyor. On the U.S. side, John B. Weller was the commissioner and Andrew Gray the surveyor.

The U.S. group was delayed in Panama for two months waiting for a ship to take them to San Diego. The delay was based on the hordes of 49ers following the Gold Rush near Sacramento.

The International Joint Commission met on July 6, 1849. It stipulated that both demarcation parties should survey from the Pacific to the junction of the Colorado and Gila rivers. Once each was satisfied with the accuracy of the surveys, then the demarcation of these points shall take place by the placement of monuments, the commission decided.

In other words, the boundary would go where both parties found agreement. Vargas said there were errors in the placement of the border, but the boundary is legal based upon the agreement at that 1849 meeting.

The location of the border was decided Oct. 10, 1849. The first boundary marker, No. 258, was not erected on Monument Mesa, now part of Border Field State Park, until 1851.

Monument Mesa became a popular tourist destination. In 1888, 100,000 tourists visited when the railroad connection between San Diego and Tijuana was completed. Tourists took home pieces of the Border Monument, which had to be resculpted from the damaged original and was installed in 1894.

The Border Monument is on the National Register of Historic Places and can be viewed on Monument Mesa. It can be quite stirring to stand next to the monument and think about this significant period in the history of the United States and Mexico.

For more of the story about the original border survey, go to the San Diego Historical Society's Web site at [sandieghistory.org](http://sandieghistory.org) and look for Jorge Vargas' article.

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