

From Missions to Motels

Today, hundreds of travelers move between the Bay Area and Los Angeles. About 300 years before today, the route we know now as Highway 101 was a Native American trail. What followed included the establishment of 21 missions, the creation of train lines, and, eventually, the founding of the first motel.

Small Beginnings

El Camino Real, or Highway 101, began as a Native American trail. In 1769, during the Portola Expedition, Junípero Serra established the first mission in San Diego. Serra stayed in San Diego, while Juan Crespí and Gaspar de Portolá continued north. The two followed the coastline as much as possible, and were eventually prevented by continuing north by the entrance to the San Francisco Bay.

In 1770, Junipero Serra traveled by ship to Carmel, where he founded the second mission, which became Serra's Alta California (California) mission headquarters. From 1775-1776, during the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition, de Anza and his companions found travel easier by crossing through several inland valleys rather than staying on the

rugged coast. De Anza traveled through the San Fernando Valley and Salinas Valley, where Highway 101 runs today.

To facilitate overland travel, mission settlements were approximately 30 miles apart, so that they were separated by one (long) day's ride on horseback. Originally, any road under the ruling of the Spanish crown was considered to be a *camino real*, but once Mexico won its independence from Spain, no road in Mexico, including California, was a *camino real*. The name was rarely used after that and was only revived during the Mission Revival movement in the early 1900's.

The Camino Real provided a vital interconnecting land route between the 21 Spanish missions of Alta California, from San Diego to Sonoma. Because of the weather and the nature of the dirt road, the path changed slightly over time. Today, some missions, like the Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo in Carmel, do not follow the exact route of today's El Camino Real.

Between 1906 and 1904, the El Camino Real Association succeeded in placing more than 400 roadside markers along an approximation of the original footpath. Today, it would take about 10 hours to travel along the El Camino Real, from San Diego to Sonoma.

Online Bonus: For pictures of bells and missions, click the link on the exhibit page.

The Invention of the Motel

Before automobiles, tourists still found the California Coast beautiful. To serve the need of visitors, train lines were created, with stations at hotels. That way, visitors could enjoy the natural beauty and spend the night along hotels along the coast.

After the invention of the automobile, many car owners wanted to drive to destinations rather than just into town. However, the poor roads of the era, combined with the vehicle speeds and reliability of automobiles, required two or more days of nearly all-day driving to travel between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Travelers along the stretch often had to look for places to pitch their tent or sleep in their automobile.

Arthur S. Heineman, who worked in Pasadena as a real estate speculator, often traveled the route. Eventually, he got the idea to build an area for overnight travelers that allowed guests to park their cars outside their rooms. The combination of the convenience of a campground with the comforts and respectability of a hotel prompted the creation of the motel. The only other hotels at the time were hotels that were only along train lines, not automobile routes. Heineman chose the location of San Luis Obispo because it was a day's drive between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The first motel was called the Milestone Mo-Tel and cost \$80,000 to build in 1925. The motel included both bungalows and attached apartments with parking outside each unit,

though some would have a private garage. The motel originally charged \$1.25 per room, and was popular among visitors. The motel's restaurant attracted locals, as well. The motel was what we would consider a fancy hotel, just with parking outside each unit—not cheap, often run-down hotels like the Econo Lodge or Super 8.

Originally, the motor court's name included phonetic symbols to make it easier for travelers to pronounce the new word. Eventually, the Milestone Mo-Tel was changed into the Milestone Motel, and, later, the Motel Inn. Arthur Heineman trademarked the name, but it was hard to keep the word trademarked forever. In the 1950's, the word was put into the dictionary, which resulted in the loss of Heineman being able to trademark it.

Arthur and his brother Alfred's Milestone Interstate Corporation was incorporated to seek investments in order to build a chain of 18 motor courts at 150-200 mile intervals in response to the growth in automobile travel in California, Oregon, and Washington state. At the time, the spacing would have represented a day's drive between sites. The Milestone Mo-Tel was intended to be the prototype for the proposed chain.

Due to the Great Depression, the corporation was unable to build any of its other planned motor courts, and even lost the motel to foreclosure. However, new owners purchased the motel. In 1991, the motel closed, after being purchased by many series of owners.

The motel's two remaining buildings can still be seen at the end of Monterey Street, just a few minutes from downtown San Luis Obispo. The exterior of the buildings was modeled after the Spanish missions in California, as you can see in the picture below. The three-stage bell tower, one of the two remaining structures, was a reflection of the Mission San Luis Rey de Francia in Oceanside.

From the creation of missions to the founding of the first motel, El Camino Real has its share of history. In 1957, Interstate 5 was created, causing many drivers to travel through the Central Valley on their way from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Interstate 5 was quicker and more direct than driving along the coast on Highway 101/El Camino Real. Today, the majority of San Francisco to Los Angeles drivers travel along Interstate 5. But what other options are there for traveling? Does a bus or train ride cost less than fuel costs? And what will the future of traveling be? Learn about the present and future of traveling in the other parts of the *SF → LA* exhibit.

Online Bonus: Now that you've learned a little bit about the invention of motels, it's time to play the Hotel Logo Quiz Game! Your goal is to try to correctly guess as many hotel logos as possible. Good luck!