

## **Bus Tour of Southern California Suburbia from San Diego to Los Angeles**

### **SDSU-Erasmus+ Cooperative Partnership on Urbanism and Suburbanization in the EU and Abroad**

**SUBEUA Transnational Meeting, San Diego and Los Angeles, Sept 7-9, 2023**

#### **Bus Tour Notes**

##### **Old Town San Diego:**

Today's tour begins in San Diego's "Old Town," the historic heart of the city. Established in the 1820s with Mexican independence from Spain, it marked the birthplace of a new civil society in San Diego. Brush shelters housing the city's majority Kumeyaay Indian population and Adobe structures built by the families of Mexican soldiers and officers clustered around a central plaza in a form recognizable across colonial Latin America. Old Town grew through the 1860s with American newcomers adding new brick and timber buildings alongside the old Adobes. In 1867, an Anglo businessman, Alonzo Horton, built a wharf on San Diego Bay, 8 miles to the south, and established "New Town" San Diego. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, New Town had become San Diego's *downtown*. Businesses moved away from Old Town, but the neighborhood remained a core for Mexican San Diego. In 1968, civic leaders and preservationists hoping to "revitalize" the area, established the "Old Town State Historic Park" as a living museum to Mexican and early American Era California. Ironically, authorities evicted a number of original "Californio" families so that their adobe homes could be made exhibits to this history.

##### **Mission Valley – Center of the 20th-Century Auto City:**

California's post World War II boom hit San Diego like a hurricane. Mission Valley was at the heart of the storm, becoming the new commercial center of an auto-oriented "suburban" city.

This broad valley of the San Diego River marked the northern limits of town in 1940. Dairy farms were a major activity, including some owned by Japanese Americans who would be removed to prison camps during the war. Wartime migration swelled San Diego's population. The city grew from 150,000 in the 1930s to over one half million by 1960 and 700,000 in 1970. Growth concentrated in mass suburban-style communities north of town. New highways fanned out – including the **intersection of 5 major freeways** here - and Mission Valley was transformed into the commercial heart of the sprawling city. New circular roads, "**Hotel Circle**" and "**Auto Circle**," were built to provide easy access to car dealerships and tourist lodging. The **Mission Valley Mall** opened in 1961, a pioneer of this new urban form. A competitor, **Fashion Valley Mall** opened just a few miles away in 1969. Stores relocated from downtown, and San Diego's central business district declined. In 1965, San Diego voters paid to build a new **municipal stadium** for professional baseball and football in the Mission Valley. Traffic congestion in "Mishmash Valley" was a daily complaint.

During the last 20 years, Mission Valley has been in dynamic transition. The Green Line of the **San Diego Trolley, the city's light rail system**, was completed in 2005, connecting the malls, stadium and universities to efficient mass transit for the first time. Thousands of new apartments and townhouses have replaced old parking lots and gravel quarries, bringing new activity to fading commercial areas. Walkways have been built along the San Diego River through the efforts of the San Diego River Park Foundation. The old stadium was recently torn down (and crushed into concrete gravel) to make way for a new stadium and branch campus of San Diego State University (look to your **left** as we merge onto Interstate 15).

The grip of the auto city can be hard to escape, however. Most residents and visitors use cars to travel around the Mission Valley, and traffic here is still a subject of complaint.

### **Mission San Diego de Alcalá - A Little History Lesson:**

As we turn north on I-15, you may catch a glimpse of **Mission San Diego de Alcalá** (1774) to the **right**, on a hill above the San Diego River. This reconstructed adobe church was one of the first outposts of Spanish colonialism in California.

The history of California's Spanish missions is fraught with controversy and tragedy. In operation between 1769 and 1821, the system included 21 mission settlements from San Diego to Sonoma (just north of San Francisco). Missions were the main institution of Spanish colonial settlement, intended to convert Native Californians to Christianity and transform them into Spanish colonial citizens. In practice, the Missions were religious plantations reliant on Native labor to support Spain's ambitions in California. Once baptized, Native converts were forbidden to leave and required to follow a strict routine of worship and work for the rest of their lives. Most would perish from disease and malnutrition. The founder of this system was a Franciscan priest named **Junipero Serra**. In 2015, the Roman Catholic Church conferred Sainthood on Father Serra for his contributions to the Church. California Indian tribes, in particular, objected strongly, countering that Serra's missions introduced suffering, disease and death, unfree labor and the destruction of their cultures and ways of life. Following the police murders of George Floyd and others in 2020, many California cities began rethinking their commemorations of the Mission system. Statues to Father Serra were removed from public places. Students in the master-planned community of Tierrasanta (on the **right** and just uphill from the Mission as we leave the Valley on I-15) petitioned to have Serra's name removed from their High School and their mascot changed from a "Conquistador" to a Rattlesnake.

The Franciscans built their Mission settlements an average of 30 miles (50k) apart – about one day's ride by horse or mule. We will follow the chain of the first four missions today on our journey to Los Angeles.

### **'Rancho this, Rancho that'**

Many suburban communities in Southern California include the title "**Ranch**" or "**Rancho**." There is a lot of history wrapped into these names. Many such places descend directly from the

giant cattle ranches that were distributed as **land grants** to Mexican citizens in the 1830s and 1840s when California was part of Mexico. Later, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Anglo boosters created a compelling mythology of ranch and mission life in colonial California to attract American migrants to the region. This was a vision of leisure, comfort, ownership and romance – and white superiority – wrapped up in a landscape of “Spanish style” architecture. Writer Carey McWilliams called this California’s **‘fantasy Spanish past,’** a vision of the California ‘good life’ that shaped the idea and landscape of suburban living in the Golden State.

Today, California real estate developers continue to cash in on the ‘romance of the Ranchos’ with abundant use of **“Spanish style”** architecture and ornaments – red tile roofs, arcaded fronts, and earth-tone stucco exteriors. Keep your eyes peeled for the “Spanish style” as we travel. You won’t have to look too hard.

**For more on the ideology of the fantasy Spanish past, see:**

\* Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (University of California Press, 2006).

\* Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1946)

**Corporate Real Estate Development – (Interstate-15 corridor):**

Many of southern California’s **land grant ranchos** remained intact through the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when they were purchased for suburban development. The size and scale of these ranches – often many thousands of acres in extent – required exceptional resources to develop, and they invited investment by a new class of corporate-scale real estate firms, and global scale capital investors, which remain dominant players in California real estate today.

The Interstate 15 corridor has many examples: Scripps Ranch, Carmel Mountain Ranch, Rancho Peñasquitos, and Rancho Bernardo to name a few.

**Boomburbs? Defining Questions:**

One result of large-scale landholding in southern California is a pattern of large-scale suburban communities. Many Southern California suburbs are quite BIG. In Metropolitan San Diego, suburban cities such as El Cajon and Carlsbad have over 100,000 residents. Oceanside is home to 170,000, while over 275,000 people live in Chula Vista. Laguna Niguel and Mission Viejo in Orange County have between 65,000 and 95,000 residents. In contrast to the quaint suburban “villages” of 5,000-25,000 people, which surround many older U.S. cities – such as Boston or San Francisco - southern California’s suburbs are often small cities in their own right. These independent municipalities have their own local governments and land use powers. Many have their own school districts, but they can be hard to distinguish from the outer neighborhoods of the “central city,” which were often built by the same development firms.

These extra-large suburbs raise questions about what counts as a suburb. Scholars have debated new terminology such as “boomburbs,” “technoburbs,” and “edge cities” to define

some of them. What features distinguish these places from central cities or from other suburbs, especially in metro areas like San Diego and Los Angeles where large parts of the “city” and “suburbs” were built in the same mold, by the same builders, and at the same times. What do you think?

### **On landscape planning and regulation:**

Like the rest of the United States, most California land-use planning is controlled by local government. So, in the City of San Diego, the City Council has final say on land-use matters - changes in zoning, development permits, environmental review, future planning, etc. Nine council members represent different districts of the city with approximately 180,000 people in each district.

Many of the same powers are exercised by the myriad of cities in small suburban municipalities across the state and country. Suburban scholars of the US have emphasized the value of small scale local government to the culture of suburbia for its residents, **but also its costs in balkanized authority, exclusion, and the dominance of narrow social interests** in shaping the landscape. Suburban **municipalities played key roles in racial segregation and exclusion**, for instance by zoning lands for large lots or for single family houses only, excluding apartments or mobile home communities, and a variety of other tactics.

Many scholars and activists have called for regional government as an antidote to suburban parochialism. Sunbelt cities like San Diego present opportunities to test this idea. During the 20th century, fast growing cities in the southwest grew by incorporating large areas of outlying land (their future ‘suburbs’) under authority of the central city government. So, today, the first 45-55 minutes of our tour will take place **inside the city of San Diego**. Despite municipal authority approaching a “regional” scale, San Diego has historically been a racially segregated city, with working class families and people of color predominating to the south and wealthier, middle class, and white families concentrated in a segregated north. At the same time, San Diego’s northern neighborhoods (built in a suburban form) are far more racially and ethnically diverse (though not especially class diverse) than the suburbs of most older cities in the eastern U.S.

### **Mira Mesa – Catalyst for Comprehensive Planning:**

The San Diego neighborhood of Mira Mesa emerged in the building boom of the late 1960s. With little advance planning or coordination, several of the largest US home building firms squared off in a fast-paced competition to sell new homes on the basis of price rather than quality or amenity. In just two years, firms hammered up more than 3,000 houses in disconnected subdivisions surrounded by a tumult of earth movers and construction. By 1970, more than 10,000 people had moved to Mira Mesa, which lacked stores or other community services. Children attended school in ‘model homes’ donated by the developers. Two-lane Mira Mesa Boulevard was the only access in or out. San Diego’s new mayor, Pete Wilson, responded to the “mess in Mira Mesa” with the threat of a building moratorium and new policies requiring

developers to pay for the infrastructure to serve their communities. San Diego began a new era of planned growth in its northern tier.

### **Golf and Gates - Carmel Mountain Ranch:**

Our first Site visit is the **Carmel Mountain Ranch** neighborhood. Built in the 1980s, it illustrates common features of Reagan-era suburbia: an emphasis on privacy, affluence, amenity and security, and, of course, Sunbelt automobile sprawl. We are 23 miles (37 km) from downtown San Diego but still inside the city limits. Like many upscale suburbs of its time, Carmel Mountain Ranch was built around a golf club, which buyers were encouraged to join. Many houses backed onto fairways, allowing the developer to build large houses on small lots without sacrificing buyers' connection to green space.

Carmel Mountain Ranch reveals other notable characteristics of the period. Its 4,996 homes are part of a **common interest development (CID)** where shared ownership of common areas and amenities are managed by a **Home Owners Association (or HOA)**. [The Carmel Mountain Ranch Residential Community Association](#) charges HOA fees, provides services for residents, and imposes rules and regulations through a legal agreement with buyers known as **covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs)**. [Click here for a critical and humorous look at HOAs by comedian, John Oliver.](#)

Becky Nicolaides writes in her new book: "CIDs emerged in the 1970s, with the greatest growth occurring after 1980. In California, by 2004, nearly one-quarter of the housing stock was part of a CID." This privatization of responsibilities typically performed by local government led political scientist, **Ewen McKenzie**, to refer to such places as "**Privatopia**." McKenzie's case study community, **Rancho Bernardo**, is two exits north on I-15.

### **Behind the Gates:**

Like many CID's in the region, a number of CMR neighborhoods are behind gates. Keep a lookout on the **left** for the gates to the "Cambridge" subdivision. "Gated communities were one subset of CIDs," according to Nicolaides. "In the LA metro area, by 2000, 11.7% of housing units were behind gates, while 18.2% were behind walls. This was much higher than the national average, though typical of Sunbelt Cities which led the way in walled-off communities." In Southern California, "fear of rising crime in the 1980s and racial violence during the 1992 Rodney King uprising fueled some of this demand."

Carmel Mountain Ranch also illustrates more recent trends in suburban retrofitting with the closure of the **Carmel Mountain Ranch Golf Club** in 2018. Approximately 1,000 golf courses in the U.S. have closed in the last 15 years, victim to changing tastes and rising costs. With water prices climbing in the arid southwest, at least **ten San Diego golf courses have closed** in the last decade. The result is a new suburban land rush and political controversy as developers and suburbanites square off over the fate of shuttered clubs.

After a two-year public process, the former Carmel Mountain Ranch Golf Course will be redeveloped for new housing – **The Trails at Carmel Mountain Ranch** - with 3 new community parks, six miles of trails and 1,200 new apartments and townhouses, including 15% restricted to families with low incomes. The green space of former fairways will be repurposed for new homes. Click here for a hypnotic [aerial drone flyover](#) of the re-development site. Note construction and chain link fencing to the **left and right** along Rancho Carmel and Shoal Creek Drives.

Carmel Mountain Ranch boasts another quality highlighted by Nicolaidēs' survey of recent SoCal suburbia – racial diversity. While CMR's first residents were predominantly white and politically conservative, today, less than half of residents are white, while Asian Americans make up over 30 percent. Latinos, African Americans and mixed-race families comprise the remainder. This part of San Diego elected a Democrat to the City Council for the first time in 2018.

**For reading on Common Interest Developments and Gated Communities, see:**

Evan McKensie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (Yale Press, 1994).

Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (Routledge, 2003).

## **Carmel Valley**

The freeway corridor we will travel to the coast along **State Route 56 through Carmel Valley** was the scene of forward-looking urban planning and contentious environmental politics beginning in the 1970s.

**Planned Growth:** In response to the chaotic situation in Mira Mesa in the early 1970s, San Diego's new mayor and city council established a policy of **phased growth** for the North City region, the sweep of coast-facing land between Carmel Mountain Ranch and Interstate 5. The area was a mix of farms, horse ranches and open space, but many large properties were already in the hands of big builders, such as Pardee Construction, which was owned by the forest products giant, Weyerhaeuser Corporation. Carmel Valley was set aside as a **"Future Urbanizing Area,"** postponing development here until a city-wide vote in the late 1990s.

The construction of **SR 56** (completed in 2004) facilitated a construction boom in new master-planned communities such as **Carmel Valley, Del Sur, 4S Ranch, and Pacific Highlands Ranch**. One of San Diego's fastest growing areas during the last 20 years, the Carmel Valley has attracted upper-middle-class families, many of whom work in nearby life science and tech industries. The median home price in Carmel Valley is over \$1.5 million. The population is approximately 60,000. Carmel Valley is also racially diverse. Over 1/3 of residents are Asian American or Pacific Islanders.

## Environmental Planning.

Carmel Valley's growth coincided with rising concerns over environmental protection. In 1997, the City of San Diego entered into an agreement with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to balance real estate development and habitat conservation under the federal **Endangered Species Act**. San Diego's **Multiple Species Conservation Plan or MSCP** is the first metropolitan-scale **Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)** in the U.S. and the template for several hundred HCP's in the U.S. today. (Note, the first suburban HCP was established in Orange County at Irvine in 1996). The trigger was the addition of a small grey bird, the **Coastal California Gnatcatcher**, to the Endangered Species list in 1992. The Gnatcatcher lives in Coastal Sage Scrub habitat (the low, grey-green vegetation you see on many hillsides throughout Carmel Valley). This *habitat* was also some of the most expensive *real estate* in California. Because the U.S. **Endangered Species Act (1973)** protects *individual* members of endangered species, the protection of the Gnatcatcher threatened to shut down real estate development across coastal southern California, as every project where a Gnatcatcher lived could become the target of a law suit!

Led by the Irvine Company (see below), SoCal real estate developers worked out a compromise with government officials and a few environmental groups to **set aside habitat sufficient to prevent the extinction of the Gnatcatcher** (plus a group of 85 associated rare species). Meanwhile, development outside the preserve could continue without obstacle. Biologists mapped critical habitat, and from 1992-1997, developers and environmental groups fought over the final plan. The City of San Diego ultimately set aside 50,000 acres (20,000 ha) of habitat as part of the **MSCP**. Other parts of the county promised to set aside over 100,000 acres in the future. One important feature of the MSCP was the recognition that species survival required not only large tracts of **core habitat**, but also **wildlife corridors** between them.

Both features of the MSCP are visible along State Route 56 in Carmel Valley. South of the highway is the **Del Mar Mesa Preserve**, a 1,000 acre island of biodiversity, which is home to several dozen threatened or endangered species. SR-56 was re-routed to avoid the preserve, resulting in a long sweeping S-curve. In addition, open plan bridges carry the highway across undeveloped canyons, to protect wildlife corridors connecting Del Mar Mesa with a regional network of open space, which can be seen in the distance to the north, south, and west of the preserve.

### Sorrento Valley - Bio-Tech meets Biodiversity:

The intersection of human and environmental pathways at the juncture of SR 56 and Interstate 5 in Sorrento Valley brings together **San Diego's multi-billion-dollar life sciences industry** (and the **University of California at San Diego** which spawned many of them), with its status as a "**global biodiversity hotspot**." Sleek bio-tech campuses overlook the valley from coastal bluffs home to native species that live almost nowhere else on earth. A notable example is the **Torrey Pine. (*Pinus torreyana*)**, whose wind-sculptured silhouettes can be seen on the red hillsides above the Lagoon. These trees survive in this dry region by condensing coastal fog on their

needles and dripping it to their waiting roots. On earth, they grow *only here* and in one small grove on Santa Rosa Island, 200 miles away and off the coast. San Diego's environmental movement ignited here in the 1960s as developers began bulldozing these trees for the housing you can see on the slopes overlooking the Lagoon (to the **left** of the bus as we join Interstate 5).

### **Interstate Highways:**

For most of our tour, we will travel on roads built as part of the U.S. Interstate Highway system. Construction of the interstates in the 1950s and 1960s played a key role in post-WWII suburbanization, facilitating real estate development and auto dependence in the suburbs, while disrupting huge parts of central cities – especially neighborhoods of immigrants and people of color, which were often targeted for demolition. For example, clearance for Interstate 710 in Pasadena, where we will stay tonight, wiped out a historic African American neighborhood, although the highway was never completed.

We will follow **Interstate 5**, the most westerly of the U.S. Interstate Highways for much of our trip. It runs almost 1,400 miles from Mexico to Canada, linking San Diego, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Seattle.

U.S. Interstates are numbered sequentially. Odd numbered interstates run north/south from I-5 on the west coast to I-95 on the east. East-west Interstates have even numbers, starting with I-8 in San Diego through I-90, which connects Seattle and Boston. Metropolitan connectors, such as I-405 we will drive in Irvine, have three numbers connected to the root Interstate. In a regional colloquialism, Californians refer to this freeway as "*The Five*."

### **'Where the Turf meets the Surf': Del Mar Racetrack**

To the **left** as we cross the San Dieguito River Valley is the Del Mar Racetrack. Developed in the 1930s by a partnership of entertainment stars, including singer Bing Crosby, Del Mar hosts a summer horse racing season with pomp and pageantry – including lots of fabulous hats. For fun, listen to [Bing Crosby's musical homage to his racetrack](#). Raceday crowds sing this song at the start of every session.

The pink stucco racetrack with its red tile roofing is the gateway to **San Diego's suburban horse country**, where Crosby and other Hollywood figures kept second homes. The San Dieguito River wends eastward past **polo fields and horse farms** to the planned exclusive suburb of **Rancho Santa Fe**, where the average home price today is \$4 million and a restrictive covenant has, since the 1920s, required approval of new homes and renovations by an "Art Jury." The original covenant, enforceable until 1948, also restricted residents to members of "the Caucasian race." Domestic workers, many of them Mexican and Mexican American, couldn't live in Rancho Santa Fe. They built a community of their own nearby, Eden Gardens, which is just north of the track to our **left**.

### **San Diego's Lagoons:**



As we travel north on I-5, we will cross a number of coastal “Lagoons,” estuaries where the freshwater that flows during the winter meets the sea. Some, such as the Del Mar race track site, were developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but most remained unbuilt until the 1970s, when they became the focus of conservation efforts. Developers had plans for each of them - including a nuclear power station in San Elijo Lagoon. However, all were eventually preserved as natural spaces in one form or another.

### **Disappearing Agriculture:**

A handful of farm fields remain along the highway in North County San Diego, a reminder of the county’s past as a major agricultural producer. A few derelict greenhouses mark where growers perfected ornamental plants such as the Poinsettia and sold them to the world. Here on the coast, a handful of flower fields and U-Pick strawberry patches continue to attract visitors every season. Inland San Diego continues to produce high value crops such as landscape plants and avocados (which cling to hillsides too steep for houses), but the vast orange groves, tomatoes, spring turkeys and cattle are all but gone.

### **‘El Camino Real’ – the Royal Highway – Native Pathway**

Interstate 5 follows the path of California’s first north-south auto route, the so called “**El Camino Real.**” Established by the California Automobile Club during the booster campaigns of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, El Camino Real vaguely follows the route connecting California’s twenty-one Spanish Missions. The “Camino” runs from San Diego to San Francisco, and the route is marked along the way by iconic brass “**Mission Bells**” with a weathered green patina. El Camino, the old Highway 101, runs to the west of I-5 in San Diego County and is the main street of several historic beach towns, including Cardiff, Encinitas and Carlsbad.

Nostalgia for a fantasy Spanish past aside, the path of the El Camino Real existed long before the arrival of Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. California Indians used this path - and many like it - to travel between family-based villages, which were located at the head of every lagoon that we pass this morning. So well established were these routes that Spanish missionaries who first walked this way overland in 1769 often referred to their path as a “road.” Untracked wilderness this was not. While California’s history has been imagined as short and new, today we are traveling a route that people in this place have followed for thousands of years.

### **What’s in a Name? Languages on the Land:**

Coastal California is famous for its Spanish place names, which are a legacy of Spanish and Mexican colonialism. San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and San Diego owe their names to the Spanish Missions that were located there in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Other names highlight landmarks or events memorable to Spanish colonists. For example, the freeway

exit we will pass at '**Cristianitos Road,**' marks the site of the first Catholic baptism of Indian children in California (1769).

Developers of suburban real estate have extended this linguistic conquest of California by naming innumerable streets and subdivisions in fanciful Spanish (plus a mix of other languages and place names from the Mediterranean basin). Bonus points for the most absurd street name you see today!

It is easy to forget that this Spanish legacy does not extend to much of inland and northern California, which were not settled by Spanish or Mexican colonists. These were Native lands until the American takeover in 1846. English names predominate in these parts of the state – e.g., Stockton, Barstow, Bakersfield, Booneville, Fort Bragg – and these names reflect their own legacy of dispossession, violence and resettlement.

In a few parts of California, Native place names have endured. Anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber identified several hundred such places in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some are famous; for example "**Yosemite**" is a Miwok language phrase meaning, "those who kill," a reference to the Miwoks' fearsome neighbors who lived in the fabled granite valley. Other names such as San Diego places, Jamul, Jamacha, and Inyaja, all contain the local Kumeyaay language word 'Ja' – meaning 'water.'

Such California place names are hints to lost worlds of meaning and memory contained in the more than 100 Native languages that were spoken in California before the arrival of Europeans.

### **On the Matter of Water:**

Everyone knows that Southern California is dry, but it is a very particular kind of dry. Our climate is **Mediterranean**. It rains during a few winter months followed by long months of drought in Spring through Autumn. Average yearly rainfall in San Diego is under 10 inches (25 cm). Seasonal rains are unpredictable, and many years it rains much less than average.

Complicating matters, **97% of California's freshwater falls north of the Transverse Ranges** - the northern edge of Los Angeles. However, **over half of California's population lives south** of these mountains.

To make this precarious existence possible – much less the well-watered landscapes of suburbia, Californians re-engineered the region's hydrology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, harnessing watersheds far to the north and transporting the water over hundreds of miles and mountain ranges to reach the thirsty south.

The City of **Los Angeles**, famously and secretly captured water from the **Owens Valley** on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains - 225 miles from LA - in the 1910s. That story is depicted in the Academy Award-winning film, *Chinatown* (1974). Since then, state and federal authorities have built even larger projects to move water from the northern Sierra Nevada and

from the Colorado River to southern California. **The State Water Project** (constructed 1961-1997) includes hundreds of miles of aqueducts and irrigation canals, 21 massive earth and concrete storage dams and pumping facilities necessary **to lift a river over a mountain range**. The top of the system on the Feather River near Oregon is 700 miles (1,125km) from San Diego.

Still, the thirst of southern California has not been slaked. San Diego and Orange Counties have recently embarked on expensive plans to recycle water (from “toilet to tap,” as critics say). The [Carlsbad desalination plant](#) – to the **left** of I-5 after Cannon Rd – opened in 2015 and is the largest in the U.S. In an age of warming climate, the water supplies to Southern California remain a topic of critical importance and continuing controversy.

Be on the lookout for signs of California’s water infrastructure and water uses in this dry region.

### **Camp Pendleton:**

At the north end of San Diego County, our route crosses **U.S. Marine Corps Camp Pendleton**, the largest military base in coastal California. Established during WWII as the basic training facility for U.S. Marines on the west coast, it retains that purpose today. It is a small city with close to 38,000 Marines and family members living on base and 40,000 daily personnel. It is home to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division as well as a Naval hospital serving southern California. It is a reminder of the major impact of military and defense spending in modern California.

It is also an example of the scale of 19<sup>th</sup> century cattle ranching and the legacies of Mexican-era land policy in California. Camp Pendleton comprises two **Mexican-era land grants** that were joined into the vast **Santa Margarita y Las Flores cattle ranch**. At 125,000 acres (over 50,000 ha), Camp Pendleton covers 17 miles of coast. It will take us nearly over a quarter of an hour at highway speed to cross it.

Camp Pendleton also marks the dividing line between the San Diego and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. Many San Diegans perceive the Camp gratefully as the last obstacle to the **“Los Angelization”** of their city. To the east and north, the Camp buffers a roadless stretch of coastal mountains, which have been designated a Federal Wilderness Area. All this sits in the midst of a metropolitan complex of 20 million people.

North of Camp Pendleton, **land grant ranchos** in Orange County would become major suburban developments after 1960. These include ranch lands that became the planned communities of **Mission Viejo, Laguna Niguel, and** our next stop, **Irvine, California**.

### **Points of Interest on Camp Pendleton:**

The original ranch buildings, the [Las Flores Adobe](#) (a National Historic Landmark), and the ruins of a Mission chapel from the Spanish era can be visited off **Las Pulgas Road**.

Keep your eyes open for Marine Corps units training here, especially at the southern end of the base.

At the north end of Camp Pendleton is one of San Diego's **U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Check Points**. These were established in the 1990s to deter undocumented immigration. In past years, this check point required a stop and visual inspection of all traffic traveling north on I-5. Traffic tie ups and **visual profiling** of drivers by uniformed Border Patrol Agents generated intense political criticism. The check point rarely operates today, as the completion of a **border wall** between San Diego and Tijuana has pushed most unauthorized migrants to try crossing through the inhospitable and dangerous desert and mountains to the east.

### **What's that complex on the left?**

Also located on Camp Pendleton is **the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station**, with its characteristic dual globe reactors. The plant was built here in 1968, when this part of California's coast seemed remote. It was closed permanently in 2013 after defects were found in its systems.

### **Surf's Up! Trestles Surf Break**

To the *left* of the highway, as we approach **Cristianitos Road**, you may glimpse surfers in the water beyond a railroad bridge at the mouth of San Mateo Creek. Known as "Trestles," after the structure of the bridge, this is one of the premier surf spots on the West Coast and one of a handful of California surf breaks on the **World Surfing League** tour. Look for surfers carting their boards up the trail after a morning "session" at this landmark of California surf culture.

### **San Clemente: Beach Resort – Political Hideaway**

Leaving Camp Pendleton, we will enter the seaside town of San Clemente, which was established as a beach holiday getaway in the early 20th century. The railroad line from Los Angeles stops right across the street from the beach! San Clemente's most famous resident was U.S. **President Richard Nixon**. Nixon's San Clemente home was the "western White House" during his presidency, and it was here that Nixon returned after resigning from office in the Watergate Scandal. You can still see pictures of an older Nixon, smiling with patrons, on the walls of local restaurants.

### **San Juan Capistrano: Where the Swallows (no longer) Come Back**

Take a good look to your left as we leave San Clemente. This is the last we'll see of the Pacific Ocean today. I-5 turns inland at **San Juan Capistrano**, which was home to the third of the Spanish Missions on the way north from Mexico.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Mission San Juan Capistrano** became famous for its Spring bird migration – the regular return of swallows to roost in the historic Mission towers. A popular song of the

1940s and 1950s celebrated the **Swallows of Capistrano** ([Here's the 1940 hit by the Ink Spots](#)). Unfortunately, renovation work to the Mission in 1990 removed the swallows' mud nests. Developers drained wetlands where the swallows once fed, and today, migrating swallows return elsewhere. Take note of the highway artwork that captures this example of ecological decline with metal swallows swooping and diving along a fence and frozen in relief on a concrete retaining wall.

### **Conservative Orange County - Free Enterprise and Private Toll Roads**

In the postwar decades, Orange County became famous as the heart of American conservative politics. Military installations and defense manufacturing helped anchor these views. Reflecting the free-market, anti-communist, and anti-government sentiments that dominated the region, Orange County granted rights to a private firm to construct new toll roads in the south County. These alternatives to the state and federal highways on which we are driving are just half completed. Two segments of this system were built and are well used today, for a fee, but the system collided with suburban coastal politics when the private **Tollways** company sought to build a road through a State Park and the beloved Trestles surf spot.

### **Irvine, California**

Our next tour stop - Irvine, California - is an exemplar of the large-scale suburban development which has shaped so much of southern California since the 1960s. It is one of the **largest privately planned suburban communities** in the world and a pioneering "edge city" whose growth and development reflects the trends in other U.S. metropolitan areas.

Irvine's history reaches into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and two large cattle ranches - **Rancho San Joaquin and Rancho Lomas de Santiago** - granted to the Sepulveda and Yorba families by the Mexican government in the 1840s. After the Mexican and American war (1846-48), and the cession of California to the United States, these ranches were purchased by a group of Americans, including James Irvine. In 1876, Irvine bought out his partners and formed the massive **Irvine Ranch**, a tract of **110,000 acres (44,500 ha) that stretched 23 miles (37 km)** from the beach to the foothills.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ranch produced a variety of agricultural products, including thousands of Merino sheep and Longhorn cattle, lima beans, and vast groves of Valencia oranges (it's not called "Orange County" for nothing). In 1894, ownership was consolidated in a family trust known as **The Irvine Company**.

In 1959, as postwar suburban development swept across northern Orange County, The Irvine Company hired the **architect and city planner William Pereira** to draw up a master plan for development of the ranch. [Pereira's Master Plan](#), included outlines for the **University of California at Irvine** and the neighboring city of Newport Beach. It remains the guideline for development in Irvine today.

Since the 1960s, The Irvine Company has developed housing, commercial and industrial buildings, shopping malls, office parks, hotels, and recreational facilities for a brand new suburban city with over 300,000 residents.

All told, Irvine Company has built more than 100,000 housing units in the community. About 55% of Irvine residents rent their homes, reflecting the Company's emphasis as a landlord and developer of apartments. The city of Irvine is divided into "villages" built by the firm over time. Each is distinguished by its own architectural style, with separate shopping, parks, places of worship and schools. Building continues today with new home communities and high-rise buildings are under construction, 60 years after the establishment of the Master Plan. The median price of a single-family home in Irvine is over \$900,000.

Like other "OC" suburbs, Irvine started out as a predominantly white community, but today it is racially diverse. Approximately 44% of residents are white, 44% are Asian American with a balance of residents claiming heritage in more than one race. You will see churches, stores, and other institutions reflecting many ethnic heritages as we tour Irvine.

The Irvine Company remains the largest landowner and most important civic influence in the City. The Irvine Company lured the University of California to establish a new campus here in 1960 with a grant of 1,000 acres (for the cost of \$1). The John Wayne International Airport sits on land once owned by the Irvine Ranch. The Irvine Company owns major office parks, shopping malls, and high-rise towers throughout the community, and it is responsible for more than 57,000 acres of natural open space, which surround the city, dedicated from the original Irvine Ranch. Environmental stewardship continues to play an important part in the history of the Company and City of Irvine.

Agriculture continues on the Irvine Ranch with avocado groves in several neighborhoods, however, the Ranch ceased raising cattle in the 1980s.

### **California's Largest Developer:**

In 1977, The Irvine Company was purchased by the developer **Donald Bren**, who remains CEO today. **The Irvine Company is often ranked as California's largest real estate developer, and Bren is the wealthiest real estate developer in the U.S**, worth somewhere between \$15 - \$20 billion.

**Control of the Irvine Company by a single private owner**, distinguishes the firm from most corporate-scale developers in the U.S. So does Bren's careful (and detailed) supervision of Irvine's holdings. Bren's tastes are conservative. So, The Irvine Company **invests in proven designs and repeats them** (over and over), and it **holds what it buys**.

Irvine owns property throughout California, including Orange County, San Diego, West LA and the Silicon Valley. In all these places, the Company's **distinctive architecture and landscaping**

(even its plant palette) are easily identifiable. It builds the same buildings in the same style with the same landscaping (and often the same names) in all of its developments.

Unlike many real estate firms, **The Irvine Company invests in property for the long term**, rarely selling what it owns, aside from single-family homes. Irvine's portfolio includes ["more than 590 office buildings, 125 apartment complexes with 65,000 units, 40 shopping centers, five marinas, three golf courses and a coastal resort."](#)

**For reading on Irvine, see:**

Ann Forsythe, *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands*, (UC Press, 2005)

Michael Stockstill and Pike Oliver, *Transforming the Irvine Ranch: Joan Irvine, William Pereira, Ray Watson, and THE BIG PLAN* (Routledge, 2013)

**Other features to look out for on the road to Los Angeles:**

How many lanes are on the freeway? Bonus points for the person who can find and count the largest number of freeway lanes at any point on our tour.

Take note of the **sound walls** and **art work** that line the freeways, especially in Orange County. Less common in other parts of the U.S., OC sound walls separate high-decibel traffic from some of the choicest residential real estate in the state. Embossed concrete designs and ceramic tiles depict natural features and cultural scenes of communities in the highway's path.

Be on the lookout for Poppies, Pelicans, and Hummingbirds, street lights in the shape of Mission Bells, Pepper trees and of course, red tile roofs.

**Los Angeles:**

A group of urbanists will have noted over the last number of miles that we are approaching Los Angeles. Some may wonder whether we started out there this morning. Like other very large world cities, the "loom" of Los Angeles can be felt for a long distance into its suburban hinterland. From a political perspective, our entrance to Los Angeles County begins when we leave 405 Freeway and head north toward Lakewood.

Historian Jenny Price offers the following summary: "L.A. County spreads out over 4,084 square miles. It is the second largest U.S. metropolis (after New York) by size and population: **more people live in the entire four-county greater Los Angeles area than in each of the least populous forty-two states**. L.A. ranks as the largest U.S. industrial center and hosts the nation's busiest port... As the city with measurably more sprawl, pollution, ethnic diversity, economic

inequality, and homicide than most other cities, L.A. has always tended to push all things American—our trends, ideals, and narratives—to the outer edge.”

### **Signal Hill - LA Petroleum Industry**

**The Port:**

**The LA River:**