



# NEWSLETTER

[www.FortRoss.org](http://www.FortRoss.org)

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## Foot Path Through History: New Cultural Trail at Fort Ross

We are excited to announce that Fort Ross State Historic Park will be getting a new trail! Thanks to funding from Sacramento, State Parks will construct a new interpretive trail which will be part of the California Coastal Trail which runs along the coast. Fort Ross Conservancy was impressed with the great work that UC Berkeley and the Kashia tribe accomplished several years ago to use the marine terrace north of the visitor center to tell the Kashia stories, and FRC successfully advocated to have this project funded. We are proud of our part in bringing this trail to life.

This project provides a much needed recreational trail but as important, it gives focus to the unbalanced historic narrative at Fort Ross. Today, the Russian and Ranch era stories are manifested through the physical buildings that still stand, most notably the historic Fort Ross compound.

In contrast, the Kashia and Alaska Native histories do not have a physical presence at the park. This trail system and associated interpretation gives a voice to the Kashia and Alaska Native stories, offers our visitors much-needed exposure to Russian areas outside of the Russian fort compound, and explores the ranch era history beyond the Call House.

### Kashia Pomo Loop

The trail will include a Kashia Pomo Loop which will highlight the way of life, cultural practices, and historical experiences of the indigenous peoples who still make this coastal region home. Developed in close collaboration with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, California State Parks, and UC Berkeley, this trail highlights the Kashia Pomo through more than 8,000 years of history by using tribal oral histories and traditions, historical documents, and archaeological remains.

### Alaska Native Loop

The Alaska Native loop showcases the landscape where this community lived and worked. The village housed a diverse range of Alaska Native men and women who worked for the Russian-American Company, along with interethnic households composed of Alaska Native men and Native California women. Archaeological investigations have been undertaken at this location and the interpretive content for the trail is being developed in collaboration with contemporary Alaska Native and Kashia Pomo communities.

### Russian Neighborhood

The Russian neighborhood tells the stories of the Russian workers who were employed at Settlement Ross. While higher ranking Russian officials and visitors lived inside the fort compound, lower-ranking Company employees and people of mixed ancestry lived in the village complex of houses and gardens that gradually developed outside the northwest stockade walls.

Construction of the trail is scheduled to begin in 2019. It will be a pleasure to have this new footpath exploring the histories of Metini / Settlement Ross.

Sarah Sweedler  
Fort Ross Conservancy CEO

**Fort Ross Cultural Trail**  
*Step into the Past: Step into the Future*

Soon you will be able to step inside history and explore the deeply layered, multicultural landscape of Fort Ross/Metini. This interpretive multimedia experience, enhanced with augmented reality and virtual reality technologies, will immerse visitors in stories of the past and ongoing cultural connections.

**Hear stories told in descendants' own voices**

Follow the Kashia Cultural Trail Story and explore the state park through the lens of people connected to this place since time immemorial.

Discover the Russian-American Company Story and learn from Alaska Natives, Coast Miwok, Kashia, Native Hawaiians, Russians, and others once connected to Ross Settlement and discover how this land, 20-year summer fell with an indelible imprint on communities to this day.

Explore the American Ranch Story with the Call family's century of living on the Supreme Coast. Discover how their commercial enterprises linked them to the surrounding communities and the vast Pacific maritime highway.

FORT ROSS CULTURAL TRAIL OPENS IN EARLY 2021

The project builds on best practices developed through California State Parks' History and Interpretive, Bolyard 30, and Boreas Coast Digital Park Survey projects.

# The Turkey Vulture: Another Turkey To Be Thankful For

The colors are changing and the air is buzzing with a familiar crisp chill. Fall is officially upon us! While every season has its merits, I've always been a sucker for fall. There's a subtle beauty to this season where you can sit back and watch nature's more humble players get their chance to shine. In honor of this special season, I want to highlight an understated and arguably underappreciated bird: the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*).



Like a bountiful fall harvest, the turkey vulture is one of our most abundant raptors. With an impressive range this species can be found from southern Canada all the way to the bottom of South America, and across North America from coast to coast. Lucky for us, they are year-round residents at Fort Ross and Salt Point State Parks.

Turkey vultures belong to the genus *Cathartes*, medium to large sized vultures of the New World. The word "*Cathartes*" comes from the Greek "*katharsis*," to purify or cleanse, and "*aura*" is derived from the latin "*aureus*" meaning golden. Their scientific name translates as "golden purifier." This is appropriate given their feeding behavior and the role they play in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Like other vultures, turkey vultures are carrion-feeders: they eat the flesh of dead animals which helps to prevent the spread of disease. Perhaps this behavioral feeding niche is the reason these birds seem so sweet and shy when I encounter them on the coastal bluffs; you don't have to be either stealthy or aggressive if your carnivorous diet consists of animals that don't put up a fight! To find their meal, these neighborhood cleaner-uppers rely on their keen sense of smell, an ability that is unusual among the class Aves (birds). Juvenile turkey vultures' heads are brown and turn red as they mature, making them resemble wild turkeys -- hence their common name. Their bald heads help to keep them clean as they effectively rip into decaying animal flesh, and their highly acidic stomachs help to kill bacteria which renders their waste sterile. These birds are beautifully designed to help curb the spread of disease.

People may not think of vultures as beautiful, but too often we as a species put beauty and functionality in opposing categories. Surely there is nothing more beautiful than those among us that support and

strengthen all the rest of us by their very nature -- like a tree that supports dozens of varying forms of life without complaint. The turkey vulture is another prime example of this type of beauty. Perhaps you'll agree and the next time you see a kettle of turkey vultures soaring gracefully overhead, or a venue of turkey vultures having a meal on the side of the road, you'll be persuaded to give thanks to one of our humbler friends in the animal kingdom.

I'd also like to give thanks for these great online resources and references:

Find more fun facts online from the **Turkey Vulture Society**

Find more info and a California Turkey Vulture range map from the **Nature Mapping Foundation**

See the **All About Birds** website for an interesting article on how vultures find their food

--Charon Vilnai  
Programs Instructor and Sea Lion Survey  
Project Lead

## If You Blink You'll Miss It

For the last year, Charon Vilnai and I have been enthusiastically conducting monthly surveys along the bluffs of Fort Ross State Historic Park for the Beach Watch program. We count all live and dead marine mammals, marine and land birds, and we track fishing boats and human presence along Fort Ross' coastal shore.

Part of the joy of this work is to notice the seasonal migratory patterns, including whale populations. With each new whale spotting, we come up with more questions. What species are we seeing and what are their migration patterns? Is there a general 'rule-of-thumb' in regards to which species one can see in a given month? So, dear reader, I will provide an introduction to our local whale population. We see whales nearly every survey throughout the year, but there are distinct spring and fall migrations.

The species of whale we see most frequently, by far, is the Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) whose population is stable at approximately 26,000. They spend the summer months feeding in the Arctic, then migrate to the warmer waters of Mexico to give birth to their calves. Starting in October, the Eastern Pacific Gray Whale population begins their two-plus month, 11,000 mile trip south. By February, some males and females without calves start the return trip to the Arctic, but the bulk of the migration runs from March to mid-April. Mothers traveling with their new calves tend to swim more slowly, so you'll see them toward the end of this time range. If you see two blows very close to one another, you have probably spotted a mother and her calf migrating together. They feed in the shallow waters off the coast, sifting amphipods from the mud through their baleen.

The second most common whale species we see is the Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). The three main populations are the North Pacific, North Atlantic, and Southern Hemisphere. Our local population, the North Pacific, has a population of about 8,000 - 15,000 whales and thankfully, their population is on the rise.

Humpbacks are known for their amazing breaching behaviors, showing off their distinctive tails, slapping the water with their giant pectoral fins and propelling themselves out of the ocean in amazing feats of acrobatics. North Pacific Humpbacks follow a very similar migratory path and timing as the Gray Whales. Their surface blows are low, rounded and "bushy."

Our Beach Watch survey takes us along the edge of the bluffs, where the shelf falls away quickly to deep, deep waters where we've seen not only a Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), but also a Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), both of which I was lucky enough to photograph.

Fort Ross is an ideal place to watch for whales. Although whale watching does require a keen eye and patience, if you know when and where to look, your patience may be richly rewarded with a rare glimpse at nature's most majestic creatures. But don't blink -- you might miss them!

--Song Hunter  
Director of Programs



When watching for Gray Whales, it's helpful to know their cycles. Typically, they take three to five breaths, each 30 seconds apart, which we see as heart-shaped "blows." They then dive for three to six minutes.

## In Memory

Laurie Horn, granddaughter of George W. Call and Mercedes Leiva Call

Born July 26, 1918; Died October 18, 2018

### Interview with Laurie Horn on March 28, 2004, in conversation with Tom and Marilyn Fujiyoshi

I am the daughter of Laura Call, she was fourth from the youngest [of nine]. She was born (1877) at Fort Ross in the Rotchev House. My father was from Guerneville, and he met my mother because he was driving horse and wagon, hauling boilers up to the mills, and he was hauling tanbark down to the wharf and they became acquainted, because Mr. Call, my grandfather, wanted his children to marry certain people. And there were certain people in the neighborhood that he didn't approve of, so when my father and mother were going together, and Mr. Call was ill, this was about 1906, he said to my mother, "I hope you marry Will Carr because he's good and he's honest and he'll make you a good husband, and I want you to do it before I die." And they did. My mother and father were not married at the time, but they were in San Francisco during the 1906 earthquake and they helped. I have a paper that shows they got permission to go across SF bay to go up to Oakland to come north to get away from the earthquake. So, that's kind of how they got together. But they really were married because my mother's father had asked her to do that and they were obedient children...they did what most of them did. I'm speaking for her because she was older, she was 30 years old and so was my father, 32 I think. So it was time. Otherwise she might have been an old maid like Aunt Emma, who always waited for someone to come along. I'd hear my aunts talking. It was very common for them to sit out on the cottage steps in the sun and talk and visit. And the sisters would come up from the Bay Area and the ones who lived around here would come and they would all sit on the porch and talk family stuff, kind

of catch up on the gossip, I guess we'd call it. But I don't think any of them were malicious, because they weren't that kind of people. They were kind; if they told something that was not really nice, it was told in a nice way. Now I'm getting sidetracked here. Anyhow, when my father and mother got married, there was a house on top of Fort Ross hill, where Fort Ross Road and Seaview Road come together, on the southwest corner, [there was] a house called the Green House. And that's where my folks lived and that's where my oldest brother was born.

*"Mom celebrated her 100th birthday in July with a big party attended by 125 friends and relatives. She loved flowers, gardening, going to Fort Ross, and spending time with her friends. Throughout the years, especially when her children were grown and gone she volunteered and helped others. "*

-- Kati Aho, Laurie Horn's daughter



Call House curator Lynn Rudy and Laurie Horn in the Call garden

## Redwood Fort, Redwood Export

The Fort Ross compound is a redwood fort located in the middle of the coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) range which stretches from Big Sur to southern Oregon. Though the Russians' first Alta California outpost was Port Rumiantsev in Bodega Bay, the ancient Kashia Pomo village of Metini -- where redwood is plentiful -- was chosen as the site for their expanded settlement.

While the Spanish colonizers to the south constructed most of their buildings out of adobe, the Russians were accustomed to building with wood and found redwood to be a very suitable building material.

The Russian, Alaska Native, native Siberian and Californian laborers of Colony Ross were busy constructing the Fort Ross settlement and the Russians' ranching communities to the south and inland from Fort Ross. These workers also constructed redwood barrels, furniture, caskets for their departed, and even prefabricated redwood houses that were shipped to California, Alaska, and Hawaii as early as 1827.

No redwood structures from the Fort Ross era have survived in Hawaii, but California redwood has been identified in the 19th century exterior lap siding of the surviving Russian structures in Unalaska and Kodiak, Alaska.

Fort Ross State Historic Park was established when the fort compound was set aside for protection in 1906. In 1970, Save the Redwoods League purchased 2100 more acres, greatly enlarging the park and establishing our state park as not just a monument to a redwood fort but also establishing it as a redwood park.



*"Timber. It is possible to derive large profits from the local forest. Redwood is very soft and splits easily and straight, and lumber can be readily finished from it..."*

Kiril Khlebnikov (1827-1832 report) *Russian California, 1806-1860. A History in Documents, Vol. II.* Edited by James R. Gibson and Alexei Istomin, Hakluyt Society.

*"We went with Mr. Shelekhov to view his timber production. In addition to the needs of his own settlement he cuts a great quantity of planks, beams, timbers, and the like, which he sells in California, in the Sandwich Islands, and elsewhere; he even builds entire houses and ships them disassembled. The trees felled are almost all conifers of several kinds and especially the one called palo colorado (redwood)..."*

*A Voyage To California, the Sandwich Islands, and Around the World in the Years 1826-1829.* Auguste Dehaut-Cilly, University of California Press, 1997, 1999.

--Hank Birnbaum  
Bilingual Guide, Historical Specialist & ELP Instructor

## 200 years ago...



In October 1818, the Russian frigate *Kamchatka* dropped anchor at Fort Ross and Port Rumiantsev during its round the world expedition. On board, accompanying Captain Vasily Golovnin, was the Russian artist Mikhail T Tikhanov (1789-1862). Though only one of Tikhanov's images – of Alexander Baranov – was published during his lifetime, Tikhanov's portraits from the northwestern coast of America and beyond leave us now with a unique window into early 19th century Alta California, Alaska and beyond.

*Balthazar, Inhabitant of Northern California.*  
Mikhail T. Tikhanov, 1818.

Collection of the Scientific Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts. Photo courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art.



*"...This same day I went on shore, and since the entire area was deserted and hilly, I walked along the shoreline. About a mile beyond the anchorage I saw a puff of smoke from behind a small promontory. I climbed it and saw a band of New Albion nomads. They all looked at me, but since I was aware of their peace-loving nature and special affection toward Russians, I approached them boldly and soon noticed our painter in their midst. Surrounded by savages, he laughed and played with them, while drawing their pictures. Most of all, he amused them when they saw some one of them on paper. Mikhail Tikhonovich (Tikhanov) drew many of them just for pleasure, and from these he made two paintings. One represents their chief, lying in a hut of branches and reeds, at the point of death. His wife is in tears, and several men surround his bed. One of them, with a bunch of feathers, seems to be acting both as a physician (for he is pulling straps across the sick man's stomach) and as a priest, telling the sick man's fortune. The other painting shows a woman cooking food..."*

Excerpt from "A Journal of a Round-the-World Voyage on the Sloop *Kamchatka*, under the Command of Captain Golovnin" by Fyodor F. Matiushkin. *To the Shores of the New World: From Unpublished Writings of Russian Travelers in the Early Nineteenth Century*. Moscow: Nauka, 1971. Pp. 66-70. Translated from Russian text by Stephen Watrous.

# Highlights of Upcoming Events

## 2018

**November 10 & December 8**  
**Save the Redwoods "Free Second Saturday"**  
 Join us for redwood "Talks and Walks" at the Fort Compound and Spyra Grove at FRSHP.  
 See [www.fortross.org/events](http://www.fortross.org/events) for details.

**December 8**  
**Community Potluck: 12pm -3pm**  
**Fort Ross Visitor Center**

## 2019

**January 1**  
**First Day Hike**

**April 13**  
**Annual Members' Meeting**

**May 18**  
**Alaska Native Day**

**July 27**  
**Fort Ross Festival**

**October 12**  
**Harvest Festival**

**December 14**  
**Community Potluck**

Our website is updated daily.  
 For details go to:

[www.fortross.org/events.htm](http://www.fortross.org/events.htm)



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### SAVE THE DATE!!

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**July 27**  
**Fort Ross Festival**

**October 12**  
**Harvest Festival**

**Please see the entire list of  
Events at**  
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