

The People of the Canal

A 2-mile Story of 20,000 Years

San Rafael's Canal, joining the S.F. Bay shoreline, has been occupied by humans from time immemorial, tens of thousands of years, first migrating from Asia, most likely on the "kelp highway," most recently by the Coast Miwok Indians for over 12,000 years, and today by more recent descendants of European, Asian and Pre-Columbian cultures. We propose to tell this story over two miles of the San Francisco Bay Trail. It is designed as an interactive timeline, a history of place and people and their unique connection to their environment, told in their voices, through archeology, written and spoken evidence, and creative imagination, including thoughts on the future reality of climate crisis. This will be a collaboration of historians, archivists, scientists, artists, writers, poets, and the living community of today's Canal—an education destination.

[The Canal Arts](#) nonprofit, supported by Marin County educational, business, arts, and community service organizations,¹ in partnership with the [City of San Rafael](#), the [Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria](#), the [California Institute for Community Art and Nature](#), [the Voces del Canal](#), and the [Marin Asian Advocacy Project](#), is coordinating the project.

The story will be told fourfold: in English and Spanish, to both adult and youth visitors, with text and images, audio and video, through a series of 20 interactive interpretive stations.



¹ [Canal Alliance](#), [Dominican University](#), [San Rafael Chamber of Commerce](#), [Multicultural Center of Marin](#), [Marin Society of Artists](#), [Art Works Downtown](#), [Marin Open Studios](#), [Marin Museum of Contemporary Art](#), [TeamWorks Art Mentoring Program](#), [Parent Services Project](#), [Marin School for Environmental Leadership](#), [Voces del Canal](#), [Storek Studio/Architecture](#), [East San Rafael Working Group](#)

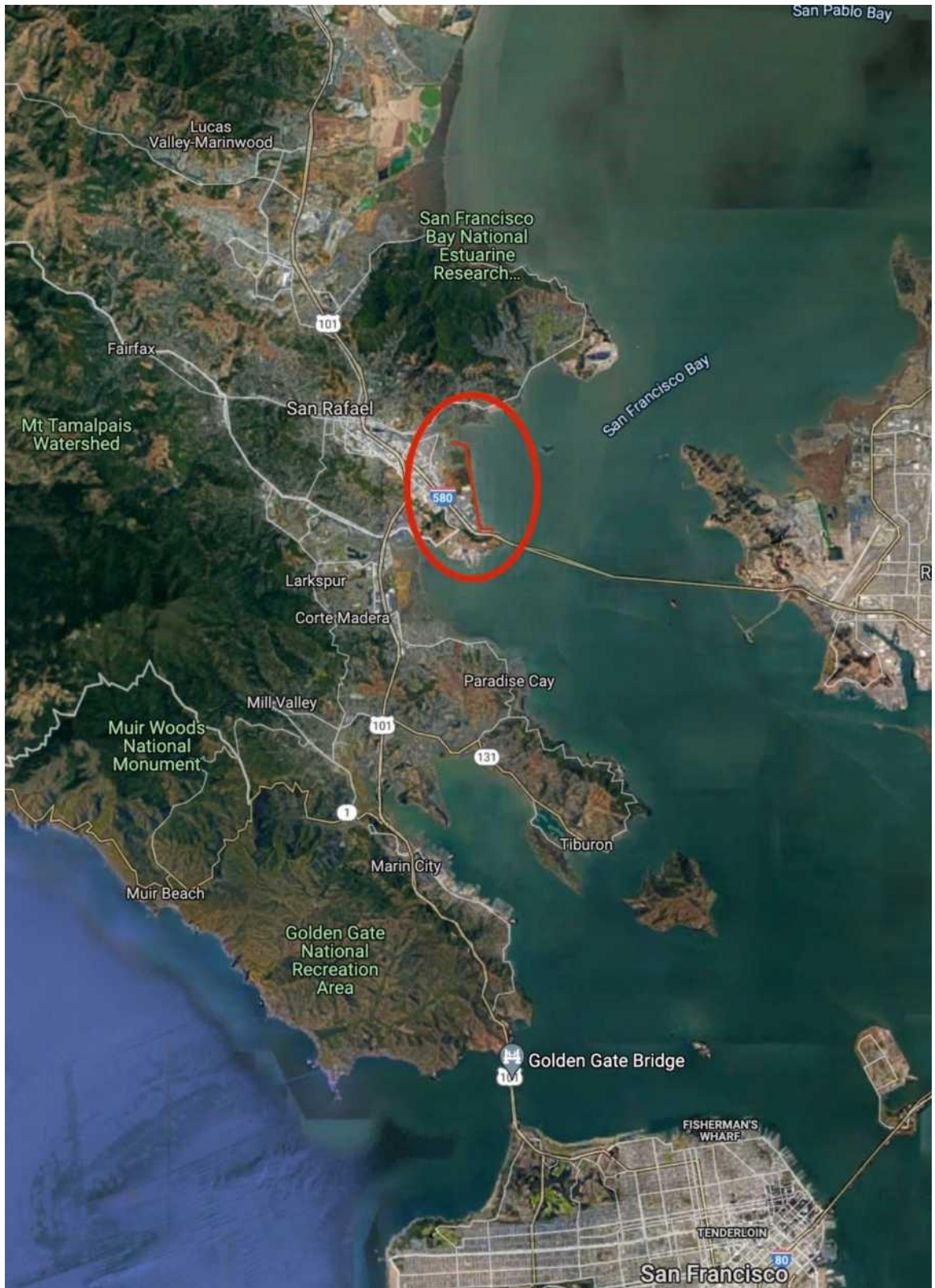
Much of it will be told with creative speculation where evidence is incomplete, guided by those closest to the story. The phenomenon of scale, measured by footsteps, will be an essential part of the experience. The story will be a chorus of voices, with room for interpretation and disagreement, but told with serious respect that still allows for humor, in words that go beyond recitation of facts, toward poetry.

Central elements of the story will be the uniqueness of the environment, the adaptability and connection of humans to it, the depths of their knowledge, their inventive genius, the soundness of their social institutions that allowed a culture of small tribes to live peacefully and sustainably for thousands of years, its eventual disruption, and its persistence to the present.

The future is the last chapter of the story, faced as we are by witless misuse of our environment and social distress that may be righted only by recall, returning to the sense of balance of community and the relationship to the earth of its early inhabitants: the Coast Miwok living for thousands of years by the Canal.

Funds are sought to match the already secured \$250K to complete the project, now being planned.







A poem by W. S. Merwin, called "Witness," in its entirety reads:

I want to tell what the forests
were like

I will have to speak in a
forgotten language