The People of the Canal
 A Story of Thousands of Years

San Rafael's Canal, meeting the S.F. Bay shoreline, may have been visited or occupied by humans for tens of thousands of years, migrating from the north, most recently by the Coast Miwok for over ten thousand years, and today by more recent descendants of European, Asian and Pre-Columbian cultures. It is a story with hidden chapters. We propose to create it over two miles of the San Rafael Shoreline Path, an interactive timeline, a history of the people and their relation to the land and water, in the voices of its occupants, through archeology, written and spoken evidence, and creative imagination. This will be a collaboration of historians, scientists, artists, writers and poets, and the living community of the Canal.

 The Canal Arts nonprofit, representing fourteen Marin County educational, business, arts and community service organizations[1], in partnership with the City of San Rafael, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Storek Studio/Architecture and the California Institute for Community Art and Nature, will coordinate the creation and implementation of the project, in collaboration with community participants, Canal Alliance, Voces del Canal and the Marin Asian Advocacy Project.

The story will be told fourfold: in English and Spanish, to both adult and youth readers, with text and illustration, audio and video, at a series of twenty interactive interpretive stations, beginning near the Marin end of the Richmond-San Rafael bridge, the southern end of the 2-mile path, at the Jean and John Starkweather Park beach and parking area, culminating with the present, and a vision of possible futures for the Canal, at the Albert J. Boro Community Center and Pickleweed Park/Library, a two-mile shorefront walk to the north.

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[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, Team Works, Parent Services Project, Marin School for Environmental Leadership, Storek Studio/Architecture, East San Rafael Working Group, Voces del Canal

Even twenty interpretive exhibits over two miles is limited to only where am I the briefest telling of such an epic piece of human history, and much of that will be told with a creative imagination where evidence is missing, guided by those closest to the story. The phenomenon of scale, measured by footsteps, will be an essential part of the experience. The timeline will be logarithmically compressed, giving more space to recent than to ancient time. Historical record of humans here reaches back less than 500 years, but evidence of humans in the area far predates that, for untold thousands of years.

The story will be a chorus of voices, with room for speculation, interpretation and disagreement, but told with serious respect that still allows for humor, in words that go beyond mere recitation of facts, in art and poetry.

Central elements of the story will be the uniqueness of a changing 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, and their recent disruption and persistence.

Speculating on the future is the logical last chapter of the story, faced as we are by witless misuse of our environment and social distress that may be redressed by remembering, returning to the sense of balance of community and relationship to the earth of its early inhabitants; here, the Coast Miwok by the Canal.

The People of the Canal project will be created in 2023-2025, for an estimated project cost of $472,000, of which $200,000 is being considered by the California Coastal Conservancy's Coastal Stories Grant Program.

Artist Louis Choris 1816

Albert J. Boro Community Center
PARKING

The People of the Canal Project

Starkweather Park Beach
PARKING

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