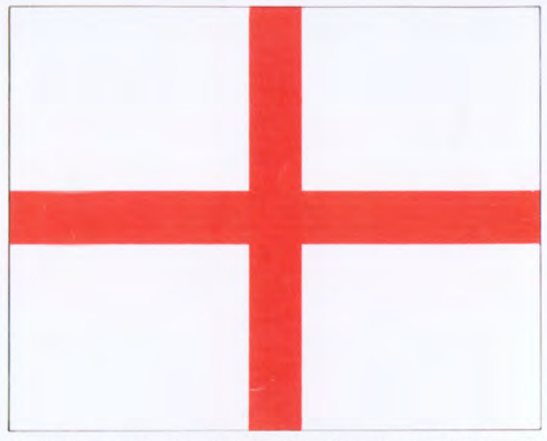
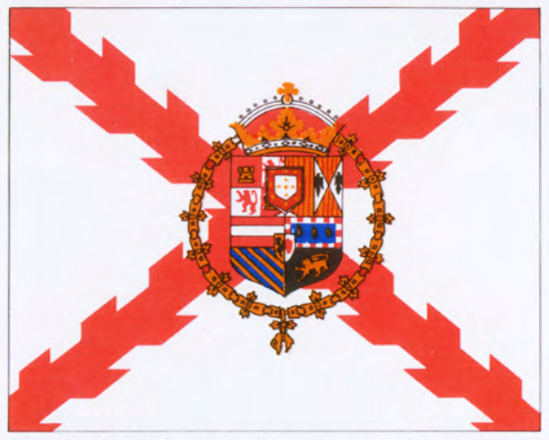
Flags flown over California since 1542

1. Spanish Empire flag planted by Cabrillo at San Diego, 1542

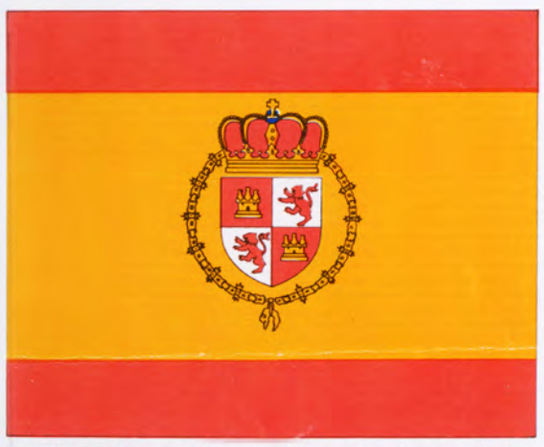


2. Flag of England raised in Northern California by Drake, 1579



3. Vizcaíno's Spanish flag, flown at San Diego in 1602

4. Spanish flag of 1769, raised at San Diego by Portolá



5. Flag of Spain flown at Monterey from 1785

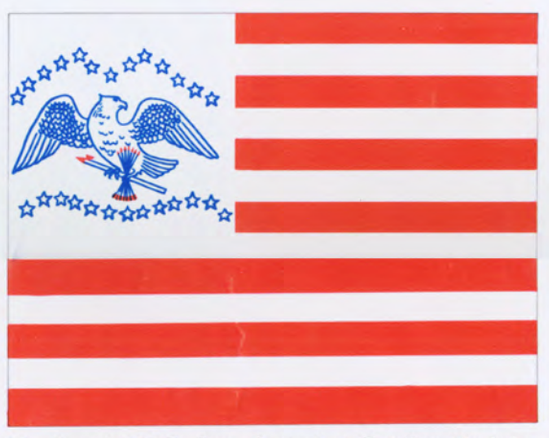
6. Russian American Company flag hoisted at Fort Ross in 1812

7. Flag of Argentina, flown by Bouchard over Monterey in 1818

8. Mexican Empire flag raised at Monterey, 1822

9. Flag of the Mexican Republic, Monterey, 1823

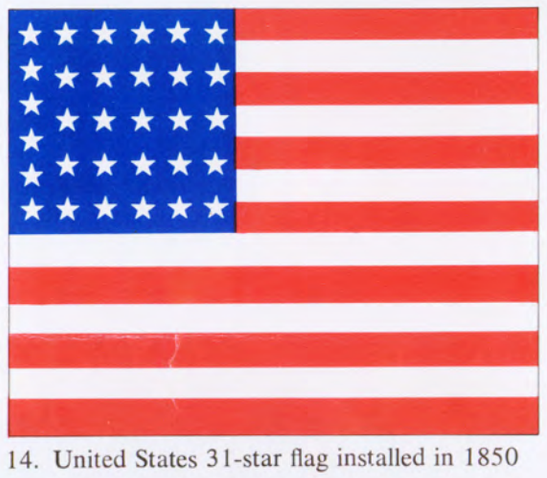
10. California flag of 1836, at Monterey



11. Special U.S. flag planted at Gavilan Peak by Frémont, 1846

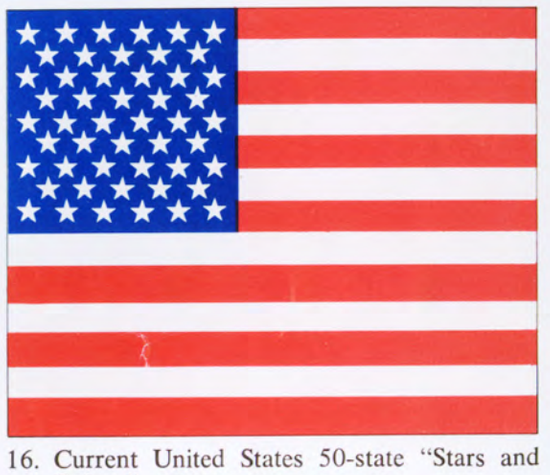
12. California Republic "Bear Flag" raised over Sonoma in 1846

13. United States flag flown by Sloat at Monterey, 1846



14. United States 31-star flag installed in 1850

15. California state flag adopted in 1911



16. Current United States 50-state "Stars and Stripes"

THE FLAGS OF CALIFORNIA

The flags that have flown over California are as colorful as our State's unique history. The California Department of Parks and Recreation hopes the flags and brief commentaries that appear on this poster will inspire you to look further into California's rich cultural heritage, and to visit some of the state parks that are of special historical interest. The publishers of Sunset Magazine and Books, who have cooperated in the production and cost of this poster, join with the Department in this wish.

All of the flags on this poster are currently flying over the mobile history trailer now touring the State as part of the Department of Parks and Recreation's attempt to bring parks to the people. A publication on California history and the historical units of the State Park System can be obtained by visiting the mobile history trailer, or by writing the Department.

For further information about the trailer and its schedule, please contact the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Post Office Box 2390, Sacramento, California 95811.

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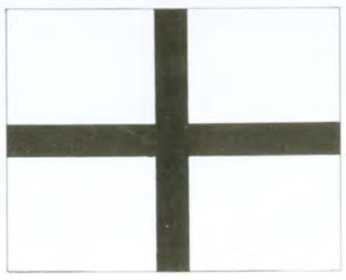
Interpretive Services Section, Department of Parks and Recreation

1. SPANISH EMPIRE 1542

On a September day in 1542, the Indians on the shore of San Diego Bay saw two ships with great white sails come into the harbor. All but three of the Indians ran and hid in fright. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, commander of the expedition, rowed to shore with some of his men and spoke with the three Indians. He gave them gifts and convinced them the Spaniards meant no harm. In claiming the land for Spain, Cabrillo raised the flag of Carlos V, who was the king of the Spanish Empire from 1519 to 1556.



2. ENGLAND 1579

In search of a "convenient and fit harborough" in which to careen and repair his ship, Francis Drake anchored in a northern California bay. Before he left, Drake claimed "her maiesties, and successors right and title to that kingdome. . . ." That claim was never enforced, but during 1579—for more than a month—the flag of England flew over California.

3. SPANISH EMPIRE 1602

"The next day, Sunday, the 10th of the month [November, 1602], we arrived at a port, which must be the best to be found in all the South Sea, for, besides being protected on all sides and having good anchorage. . . . It has very good wood and water, many fish of all kinds. . . . On land there is much game, such as rabbits, hares, deer, very large quail, royal ducks, thrushes, and many other birds. . . . This port was given the name of San Diego."

Vizcaíno had come north from Mexico to find a harbor of refuge for the annual Manila Galleons. He raised the flag of Philip III, king of the Spanish Empire from 1598 to 1621.

4. SPANISH EMPIRE 1769

". . . the commander went to take formal possession of the land in the name of our king, Don Carlos III (whom God save), raising again the royal standards, which they unfolded after the erection of the holy cross, adding the usual ceremonies of pulling up grass, throwing stones, and performing all the acts of possession."

Portolá and Serra had made their way north to begin colonization of Alta California. In 1769 they had established a mission and presidio at San Diego. The following year, they established the mission and presidio at Monterey, performing the ceremonies described above.

5. SPANISH EMPIRE 1785

This flag was raised over the capitol at Monterey in 1785. Carlos III had ordered that a Spanish national ensign be designed, ending the custom of each new king bringing his own flag to the throne. The new flag had a field of red and yellow; the insignia included the arms of León and Castile, enclosed by the Collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece, with the crown of Spain on top. It flew over California until the end of Spanish rule in 1822.

6. RUSSIAN AMERICAN COMPANY 1812

The flag of the Russian American Company was used by the sea otter hunters stationed at Fort Ross between 1812 and 1841. The Russian American Company also maintained other outposts along the coast of California including one of the Farallon Islands and on one of the Channel Islands off the coast of Santa Barbara. The settlement at Fort Ross was intended to supply food for the Russian American Company colonies in the Aleutian Islands far to the north. When sea otters became scarce along the California coast, the tools and animal herds and scattered acreage of Fort Ross were sold to John Sutter.

7. ARGENTINA 1818

California was spared almost all military involvement in the colonial wars for independence from Spain. However, in 1818, two ships flying the revolutionary flag of Argentina came to anchor in Monterey Bay. Their commander, Hippolyte de Bouchard, demanded the surrender of the "city with all the furniture and other belongings of the King," indicating that he had come "to make war with all the seriousness of purpose and with all the rights of nations." The Californians were defiant, but unable to defend the town—Bouchard's men sacked, looted, and burned it. They stayed a week, then sailed south where they looted and burned Refugio Rancho and the mission at San Juan Capistrano.

8. MEXICAN EMPIRE 1822

Spanish colonies in the Americas gained their independence from the Spanish throne in 1821, and a new Mexican "empire" was proclaimed by Augustín Iturbide. The Spanish speaking people of California had not expected this outcome and had remained loyal to the king of Spain. However, when news of Mexican independence reached Alta California, the state declared its allegiance to the new government in Mexico, and Governor Solá in Monterey had the Spanish flag replaced with the flag of the new Mexican Empire.

The central feature of the new flag was the legendary Aztec eagle topped by an imperial crown, standing on a prickly pear cactus. The green stripe stood for unity, the white for religion, and the red for independence.

9. MEXICAN REPUBLIC 1823

The Mexican Empire lasted only two years. In 1823 Emperor Augustín was thrown from power and Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos was formed in the image of the new republic that had recently been established to the north, the United States of America. Luíz Argüello, governor of California, raised the flag of the new Mexican Republic over Monterey, and it continued to be the official flag—California's official flag until the American conquest.

The new flag differed only slightly from that of the Mexican Empire. The eagle no longer bore a crown, and instead held a serpent in its beak. An oak branch standing for strength, and a laurel branch for victory were added below the prickly pear cactus.

10. THE CALIFORNIANS 1836

Impatient for more local control in California's affairs, Juan Bautista Alvarado, Isaac Graham, and a band of some 100 men captured Monterey in November 1836. Having forced the Mexican-appointed governor to surrender. they proclaimed California a "free and sovereign state." Shortly afterward Alvarado wrote to his uncle, Mariano Vallejo: "It is wonderful, Uncle, with what order our expedition has been conducted. Everybody shouts vivas, for California is free." The Californios and their American allies named Alvarado as governor and put Vallejo in charge of the military. A lone star flag was fashioned but it is uncertain whether it was ever flown in public. It is clear that after 1837 it was largely forgotten and that the Mexican flag continued to fly over California.

11. UNITED STATES — FREMONT 1846

John Frémont led a "scientific" expedition to California in 1845. Mexican authorities gave him permission to winter in California on the condition that he stay away from the coastal settlements. When the party was discovered marching toward Salinas in early 1846, officials ordered Frémont out of the country. In reaction, Frémont and his men retired to Gavilán Peak.

"Arriving at the summit, I proceeded immediately to build a rough but strong fort of solid logs. . . . While this was being built a tall sapling was prepared, and on it, when all was ready, the . . . flag was raised amidst the cheers of the men."

In order to assure the Indians of his friendly intentions Frémont modified his U.S. Corps of Engineers flag by crossing the arrows held by the eagle with a *calumet* (peace pipe).

12. CALIFORNIA REPUBLIC 1846

In June 1846, a group of American frontiersmen captured the Sonoma garrison and announced that California had become a free and independent state —to be known as the Bear Flag Republic.

A flag was fashioned from the materials at hand and hoisted "amid the hurrahs of the little party who swore to defend it if need be with their lives." To symbolize "strength and unyielding resistance" a grizzly bear was chosen as the central feature of the new flag.

It flew over Sonoma until news of the Mexican American war reached the "Bears." On July 9th, the Bear Flag was replaced by the Stars and Stripes.

13. UNITED STATES 1846

Believing war between the United States and Mexico to be imminent, Commodore Sloat, commander of the Pacific fleet, sailed to Monterey to take possession of the harbor for the United States. On July 7, 1846, after conferring with Thomas O. Larkin, the American consul in Monterey, the ship's company of 250 marines formed up and marched to the custom house. "Commodore Sloat's proclamation to the inhabitants of California was read, the standard of the U. States hoisted, amid three hearty cheers by the troops and foreigners present, and a salute of twenty-one guns fired by all the ships."

14. UNITED STATES 1850

On September 9, 1850, President Fillmore signed the bill that made California the 31st state in the Union. In accordance with law and custom the American flag had one star added to its number for each new state. On the next Fourth of July (1851) the new 31 star flag was raised over the state capitol then located in San Jose. The ceremony officially terminated the provisional military government that had ruled California since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The celebration was one of many enthusiastic occasions during the session of the first civil legislature and gave California the distinction of becoming a state without going through territorial status.

15. CALIFORNIA STATE FLAG — 1911

The State Flag, adopted by the State Legislature in 1911, is patterned after the Bear Flag of 1846. That flag was designed by a group of American settlers who revolted against Mexican rule, and first was flown at Sonoma on June 14, 1846. Raising of the Stars and Stripes 25 days later brought an end to the Bear Flag revolt. For years the original Bear Flag was preserved in San Francisco. It was lost in the earthquake and fire of 1906. The State Flag differs in some minor respects in its design from the original Bear Flag, in order to provide a more balanced composition.

16. UNITED STATES — 1960

Admission to the Union of Alaska, January 3, 1959, and of Hawaii, August 21, 1959, brought to 50 the number of states. The 50 star flag officially was adopted on July 4, 1960, after selection in a national competition of a suitable design for rearrangement of white stars on the blue field. Alaska, first settled by Russia, was purchased from that country by treaty, March 20, 1867, for $7,200,000—a transaction then popularly labeled "Seward's Folly" after Secretary of State William H. Seward, who arranged the purchase. Alaska remained a District until August 24, 1912, when it became a Territory. Hawaii was annexed by the United States July 7, 1898, and became a Territory on June 14, 1900.