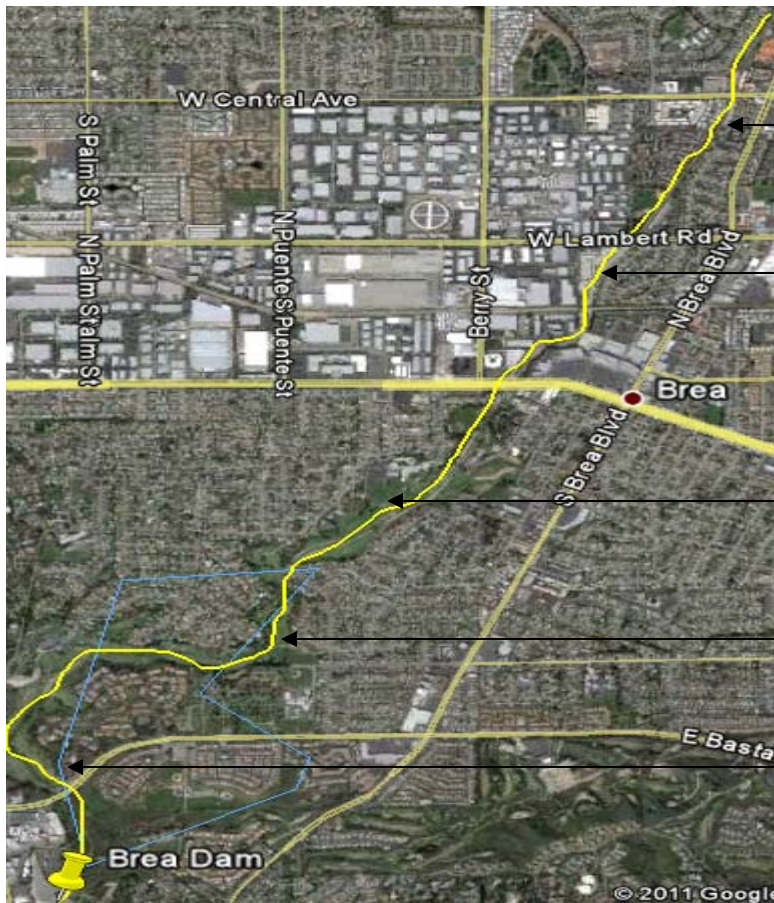


Brea History—the Brea Creek

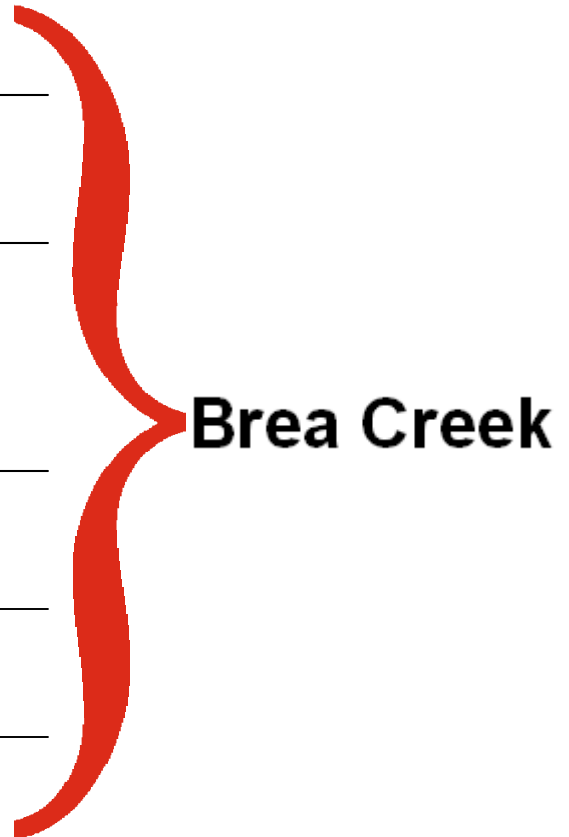


Brea Creek

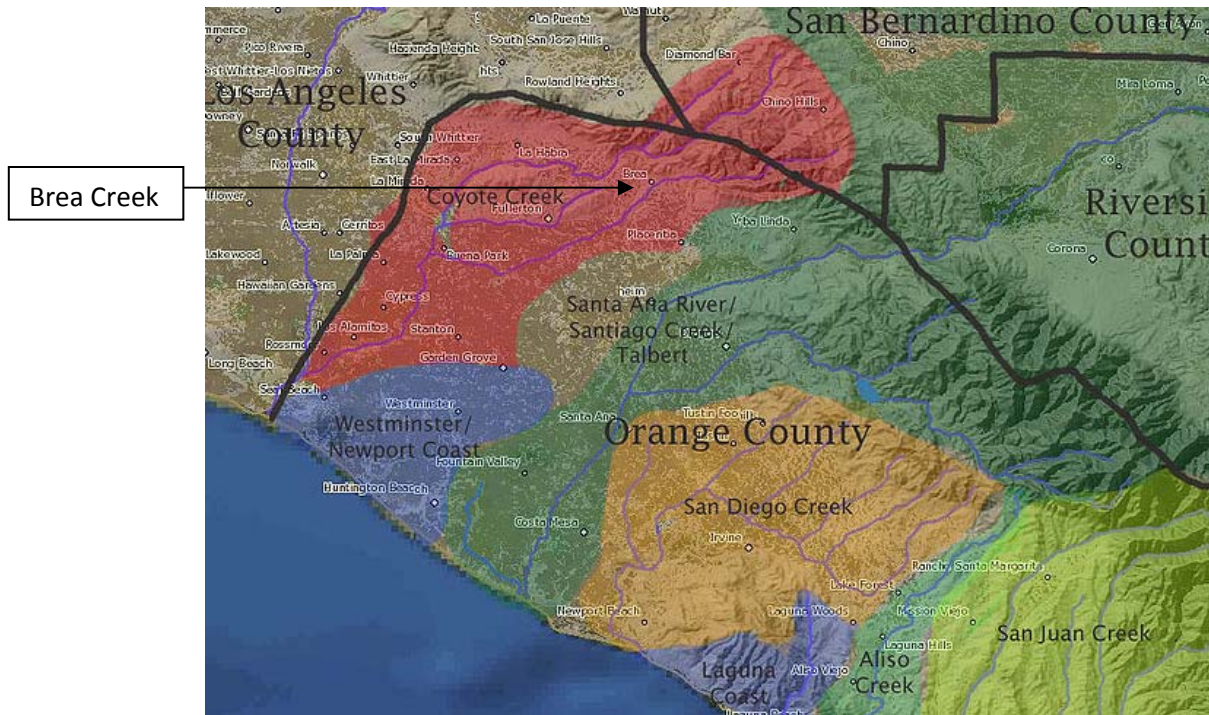
The Brea Creek is the oldest recorded historical landmark in Brea. The City of Brea is located at the foothills of Puente Hills on a plateau at the northeastern tip of Orange County at the mouth of Brea Canyon and Brea Creek. The Brea Creek flows through the entire city from North to South and has been the source of water, navigation, orientation, entertainment and fun throughout the centuries!



Aerial Map of Brea Creek (in Yellow)

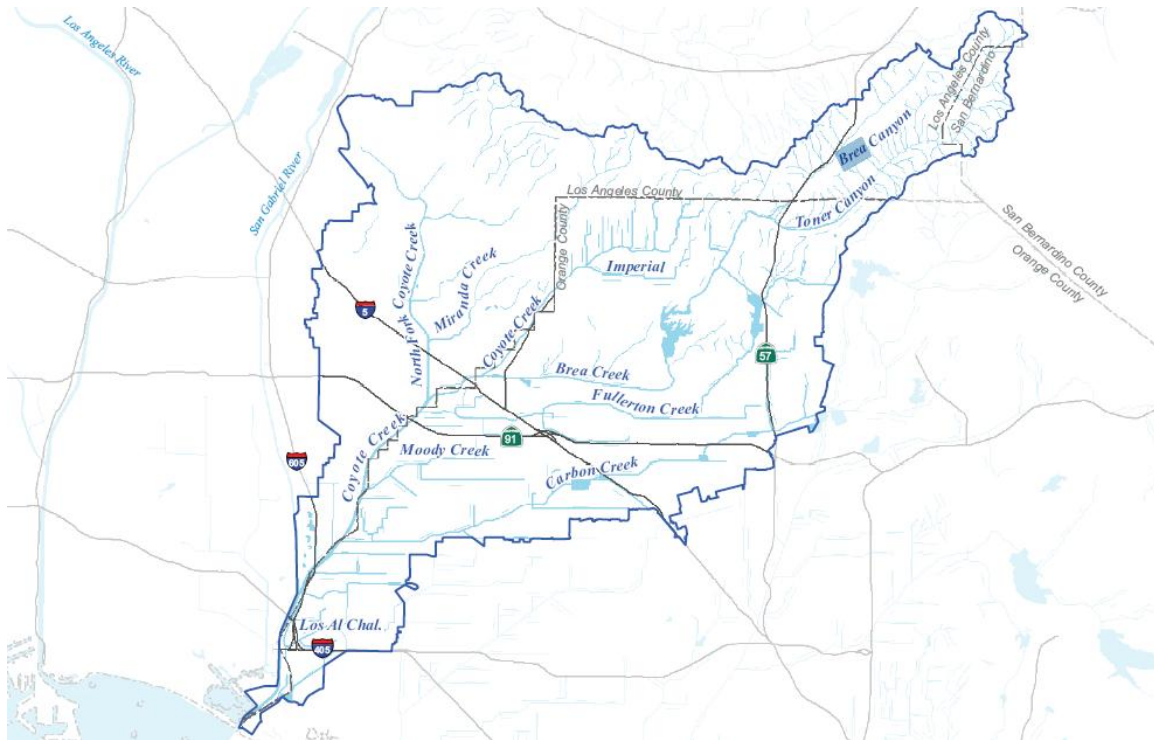


The Brea Creek is technically classified as a stream, which is defined as a linear body of water flowing on the Earth's surface (anabranch, awawa, bayou, branch, brook, creek, distributary, fork, kill, pup, rio, river, run, slough) and comprises one of four principal tributaries of Coyote Creek, which is a lower tributary of and ultimately merges with the San Gabriel River and serves as the county line between Orange and Los Angeles counties.



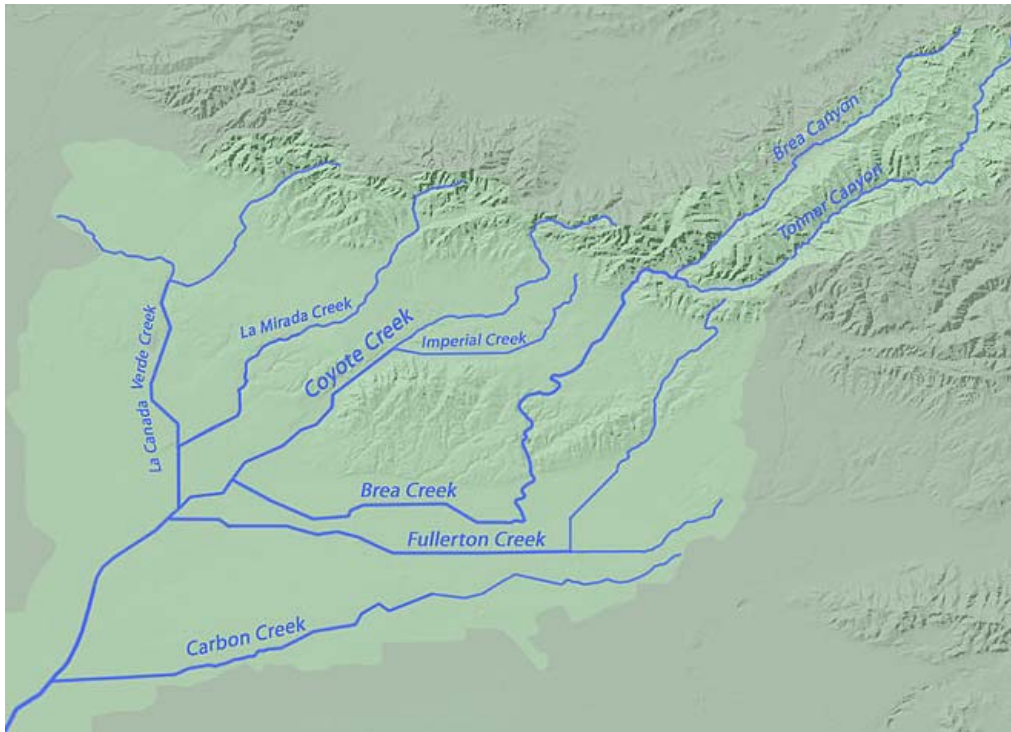
Orange County Rivers Master Map

Moreover, the Brea Creek drains parts of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties, respectively, in southern California. Further, the Brea Creek flows 9.8 miles (15.8 kilometers) in its entirety from the cities of Brea, La Habra, Fullerton, Anaheim to Whittier, where its mouth flows on the left bank of Coyote Creek, at a point 481 feet (147 meters) lower in elevation. Furthermore, the geographic coordinates of the Brea Creek are as follows: Latitude $33^{\circ}52'25''$ and Longitude $-117^{\circ}55'30''$.



Much of the northern portion of the Brea Creek that flows through the Brea Canyon area of Brea has retained its natural state (unadulterated by the human hand) of a sandy bottom as it has been for millennia; however, the preponderance of the rest of the creek as it enters increasingly urbanized landscape within the city areas of Brea and Fullerton has been transformed into a concrete floor pursuant to the post 1940 improvements that were made by the Army Corp. of Engineers as a means of permanent flood control and channel preservation.

The Brea Creek commences in the northeastern most part of the Coyote Creek drainage basin in Puente Hills, in a narrow mountain canyon range known as Brea Canyon, at the Los Angeles County-San Bernardino County line, originating near the natural springs in north Brea. Further, the Brea Creek flows southwest, receiving over ten small right-bank tributaries, before crossing the Orange County-Riverside County line and receiving Toner [Toner] Canyon on the left bank east of Diamond Bar.

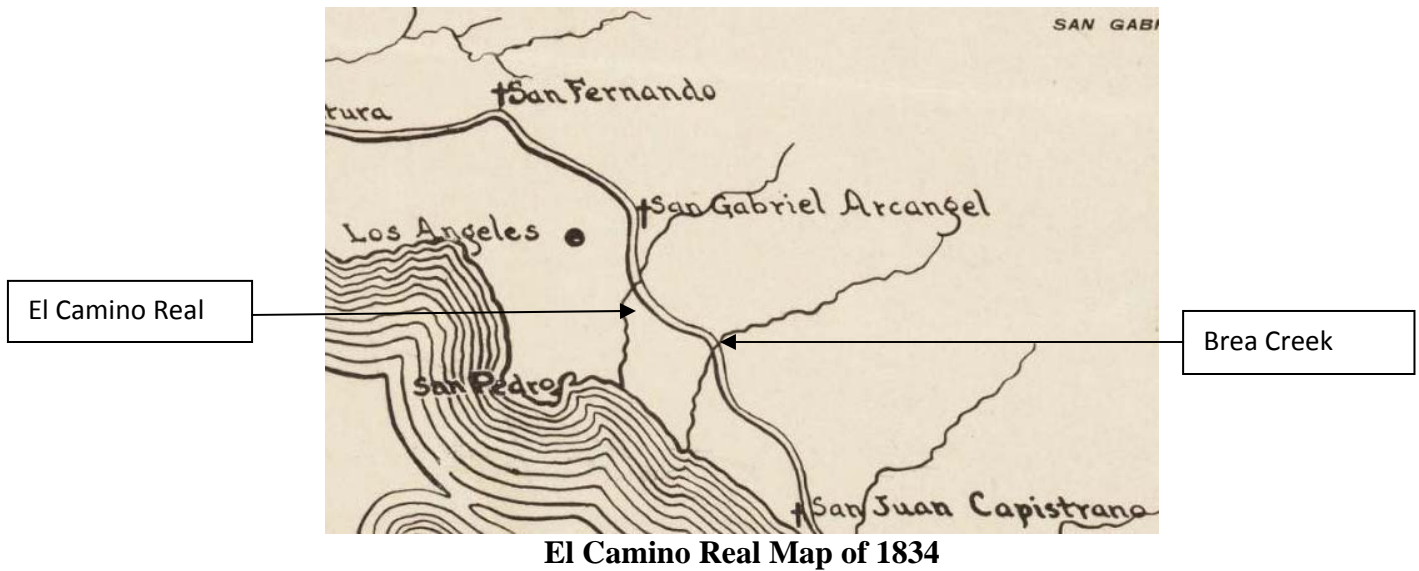


The Brea Creek continues through Brea, parallel to Brea Boulevard (west side), flowing gently passed Tamarack Park, Downtown Brea (Birch Street), and Arovista Park. The Brea Creek bends northwest then sharply southwest, receiving a few more tributaries on either bank and flowing into the northernmost arm of the Brea Reservoir Dam (built in 1942) near Fullerton, having passed through the Brea City Golf Course and subsequently through the Fullerton Golf Course as well. Exiting the Brea Reservoir Dam, the Brea Creek continues through Fullerton bending west-northwest in a straight and channelized course, receiving several small right-bank tributaries, flowing past a retention basin on the left bank, and ultimately joining Coyote Creek in north Buena Park just south of Artesia Boulevard, shortly upstream of Fullerton Creek—the next major tributary.

In ancient times, the Brea Creek was no doubt utilized by the Native American Indian people, known in their indigenous tongue as the ‘Tongva’, which means people of the earth and later referred to by the Spanish as the ‘Gabrieliño’, that inhabited the La Habra valley for the past 10,000 years. Brea was then within the ethnographic boundaries of the Tongva; their village was called Nacaunga in the Tongva language and was strategically located at the mouth of the Brea Canyon adjacent to the Brea Creek.



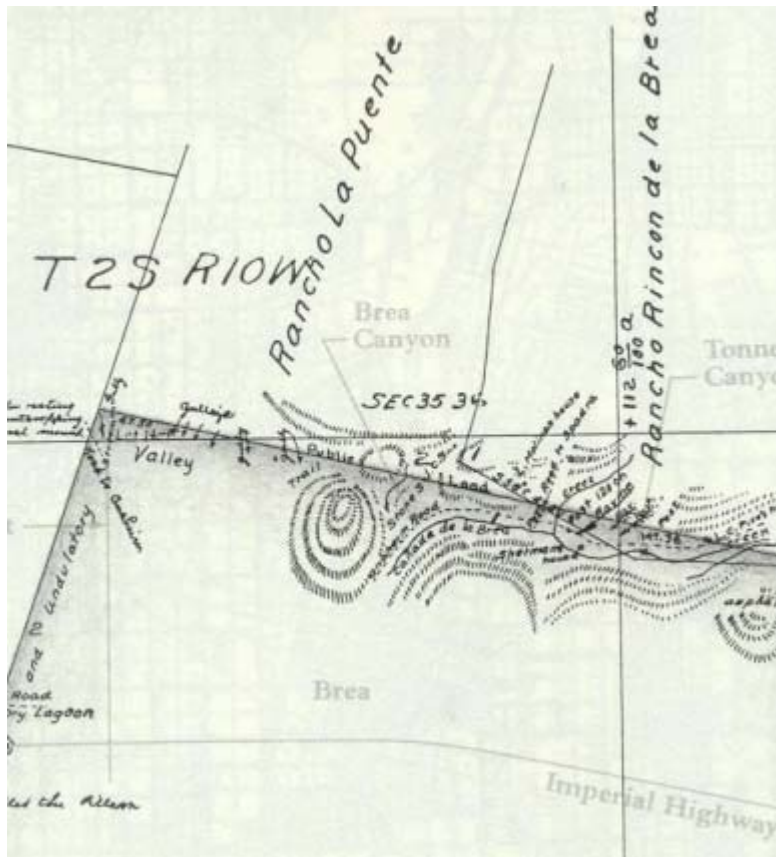
In colonial times, on Saturday, July 29, 1769, the Spanish explorer Don Gaspar de Portolá i Rovira along with Father Junipero Serra and others such as José Antonio Yorba (from whom the City of Yorba Linda in Orange County was eventually named) camped at la Brea Canyon north of Fullerton within the La Habra Valley region near a stream [Brea Creek] and near a canyon [Brea Canyon] called in the Spanish tongue ‘La Cañada de la Brea’, having crossed the Santa Ana River along ‘El Camino Real’, which ran through Anaheim, Fullerton, Brea and La Habra on their famed march from San Diego to Monterrey. Moreover, most of the waterways in the Orange County area received their name from Spanish Conquistadores in the 18th century.



El Camino Real Map of 1834

Actually, the etymology of the City of Brea’s name is derived from both the Brea Canyon and the Brea Creek, which both were named after the Mexican land grant ‘Rincón de la Brea’, dated February 23, 1841. In Spanish (Castilian), the phrase ‘la Cañada de la Brea’ refers to Brea Canyon/Brea Creek. The Spanish word “Cañada” means valley, narrow canyon, dale, dell, gully, ravine, brook and/or stream. Moreover, in the case of the Brea Canyon and Brea Creek, la Cañada de la Brea refers to both a narrow canyon and stream, respectively.

In old times, the Brea Creek was originally called La Cañada de la Brea and has been documented on the old Spanish/Mexican parcel maps used in the 18th century to plot the Rancho boundaries associated to the newly issued and patented land grants. The earliest historical record that specifically names la Cañada de la Brea appears in 1853 in the plot of the Rancho el Rincón de la Brea, in 1855 in the plot of the Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana, and later in 1863 in the plot of Abel Stearns' Rancho.



Plot of the Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana – 1855

Rancho San Juan Cajón de Santa Ana

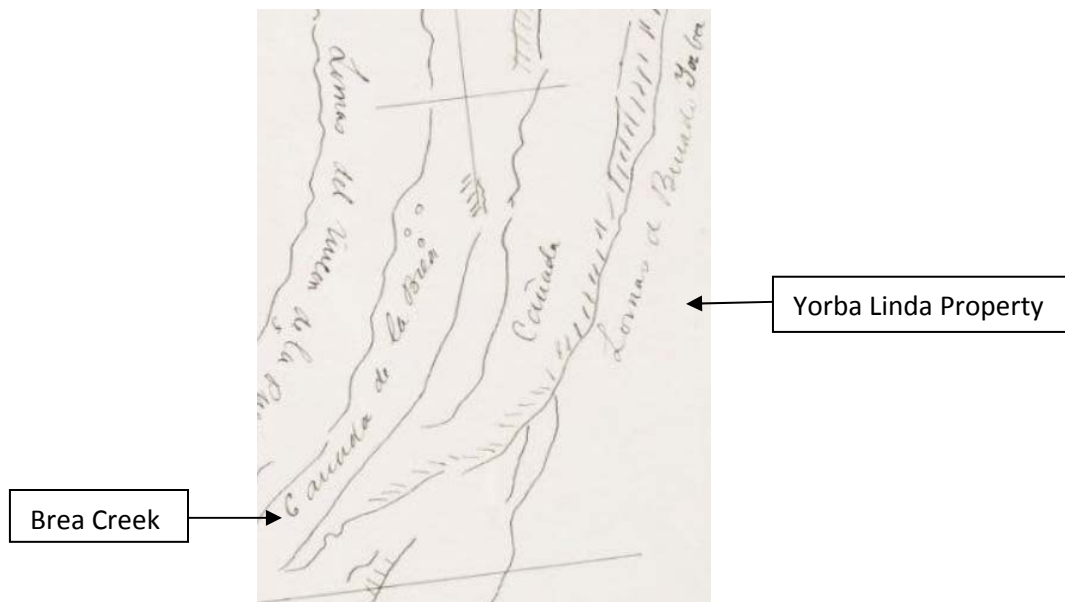
Belonging to Juan Pacifico Ontiveros

Rancho de Los Ibarra

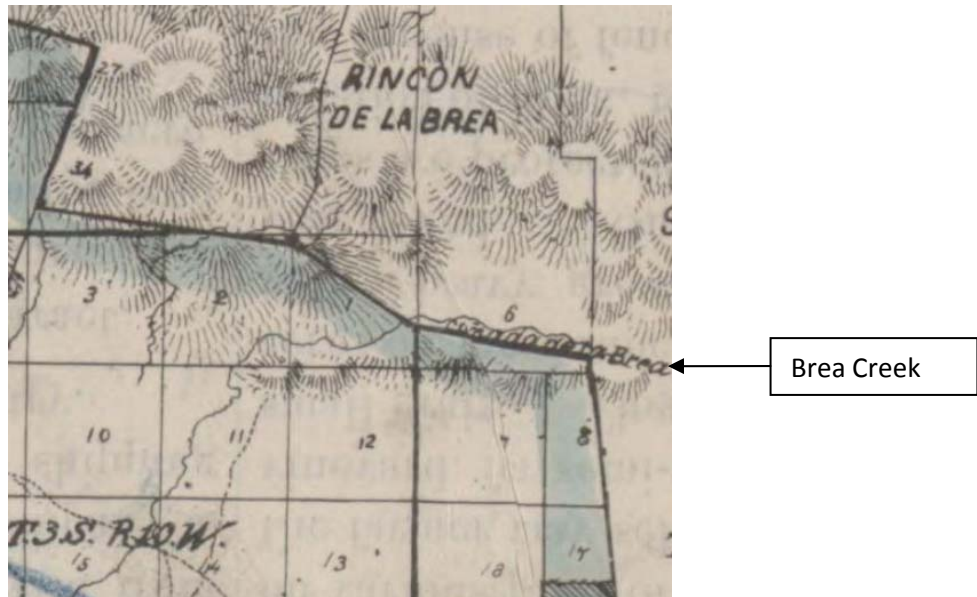




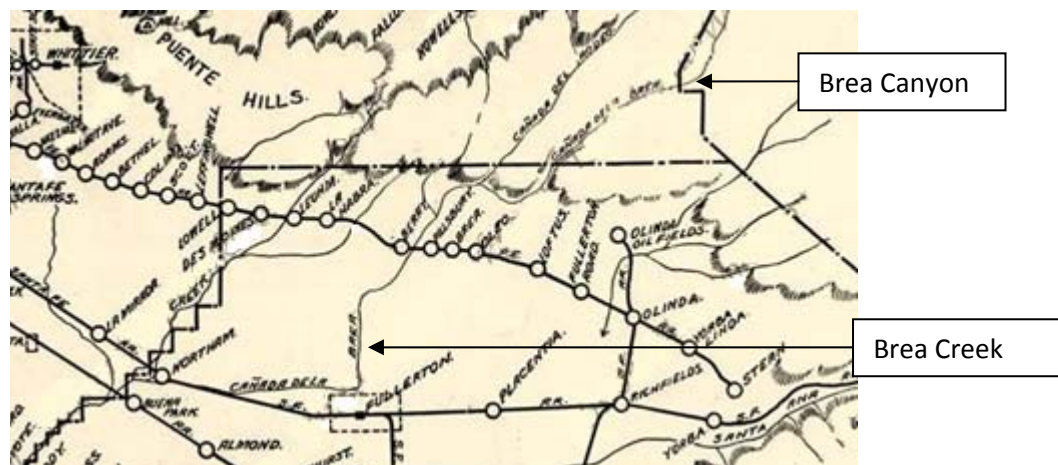
Diseño de las Paraguas Clementes, Coyotes, Bolsas, Alamitos, y Sierritos



Plot of the Rancho el Rincón de la Brea - 1853



In more recent times, the Brea Creek was once again mentioned as the Cañada de la Brea as recent as 1912.



The map depicts the Brea and surrounding areas of Orange County in 1912 including rivers, canyons, streams, railways and old place names of that time. Note the local stream [creek] called the Cañada de la Brea, which begins in Puente Hills north of Brea then coming to a fork in the stream: La Cañada del Rodeo, which is now called Tonner Canyon Creek stems from the left and La Cañada de la Brea continues from the right and they both converge downstream into the combined waters called La Cañada de la Brea [the Brea Creek] and flow south through Brea into Fullerton.

In 1913, the Brea Canyon and Brea Creek became known as Brea Cañon, a Spanish-English transliteration. Then, the topography of Brea Cañon, which was recorded as being located two miles north of Fullerton (H. Hannibal), was described as the Fullerton [Brea] field that lies on the foothills of the Puente range. To the northwest of the first, where the Puente wells are located, the trend of the hills is east and west, and the hilly strip is narrow, not more than two miles in a

north and south direction intervening between Chino and La Habra valleys. Brea Cañon penetrates this hill range, with a course generally from northeast to the point where it is joined by Cañada del Rodeo, then west again, and finally turns south to La Habra Valley.

From 1932 to 1969, the United States Geological Service operated two streamflow gauges on Brea Creek, one at the mouth and one at Brea Reservoir. The highest flow recorded at the mouth (Fullerton) was 3,700 cubic feet per second (100 m³/s) on 14 March 1941. Four other flows during that period exceeded 1,000 second-feet, all before 1941. Further, there are four drop structures on Brea Creek, all of which are built of reinforced concrete, in the lower course of the creek, which became known as the "Brea Canyon Channel". Furthermore, the Brea Creek has been named on various 7.5' quadrangle maps since 1964 (La Habra) and 1965 (Anaheim & Whittier) to the present day. Alternatively, on the 1949 7.5' quadrangle map of Whittier it was called Coyote Creek.

The Brea Creek has always existed and today is considered to be the oldest recorded historical landmark in Brea. People of all color, race, and nation have visited the Brea Creek and have enjoyed the beautiful and plentiful waters that flow from north to south throughout the city. The native American indigenous people first experienced this natural oasis, next the Spanish explorers, then the Mexican Rancheros, and finally the Americans as well as others that have traveled through Brea to visit, shop, work, and/or leisure. Today, the Brea Creek is one of Brea's best kept secrets. Typically, only golfers, children playing at Arovista and/or Tamarack parks, those walking or driving by one of the main thoroughfares, and those who volunteer to clean up the stream from pollution, have remembered and experienced the beauty, tranquility and richness that permeate from the Brea Creek. Therefore, don't forget about Brea's oldest historical landmark; stop by and say hello to the city's old friend that is the Brea Creek and keep the important natural legacy—clean and vibrant going for generations to come!

Written on November 12, 2011



By Scott A. Neal
Board of Directors
Brea Historical Society
Brea Museum & Heritage Center