

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
HRI #

Trinomial

*NRHP Status Code:

DRAFT

Other Listings
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Page 1 of 15

*Resource Name or #: Three Princes' Surf Site

P1. Other Identifier: San Lorenzo Rivermouth

***P2. Location:** ☐ Not for Publication ☒ Unrestricted

*a. County: Santa Cruz and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: Santa Cruz Date: 2018 T ; R ; ¼ of ¼ of Sec ; M.D. B.M.

c. Address: City: Santa Cruz Zip:

d. UTM: Zone: 10S; 587838 mE/ 4091064 mN (G.P.S.) See Location Map for Lat/Long Coordinates

e. Other Locational Data: The site is within the Santa Cruz Anchorage. Elevation: Sea level

***P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

Three Princes' Surf Site is located at the San Lorenzo Rivermouth, a surf break in Santa Cruz. The break is formed by the confluence of the San Lorenzo River and the northern water's edge and shoreline of Monterey Bay. The confluence is bounded in part to the west by Santa Cruz Main Beach (City of Santa Cruz) and to the east by Seabright State Beach (California State Parks). Wave formation at the San Lorenzo Rivermouth is dependent upon the presence of the sandbar, which develops most consistently during the winter months. When the sandbar is present, the wave peak starts approximately a quarter of a mile offshore and peels in both directions creating an ideal wave for surfing. When the sandbar is present at low tide, the break can produce waves with pronounced tubes.

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes) HP36 (Ethnic Minority Property: API Asian Pacific Islander); HP22 (Water/River)

***P4. Resources Present:** ☐ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Object x Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5a. Photo or Drawing (Photo required for buildings, structures, and objects).



P5b. Description of Photo:

View from the bank of the San Lorenzo River showing the sandbar and wave. Camera facing south, November 26, 2023 (Photo 7).

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:**

☐ Historic ☐ Prehistoric
☐ Both

N/A

***P7. Owner and Address:**

California State Parks,
715 P Street, Sacramento, CA
95814

City of Santa Cruz, 809 Center
Street, Santa Cruz 95060

***P8. Recorded by:**

Kathleen Kennedy, Historian
Anne Lindsay, Historian
California State Parks

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe)
California Historical Landmark
Designation

***P11. Report Citation:** None

***Attachments:** ☐ NONE ☒ Location Map ☒ Sketch Map ☒ Continuation Sheet ☒ Building, Structure, and Object Record ☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record ☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List):

Building, Structure, and Object Record

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Page 2 of 15

*Resource Name or # Three Princes' Surf Site

B1. Historic Name: San Lorenzo Rivermouth

B2. Common Name: San Lorenzo Rivermouth Break

B3. Original Use: Surfing Break

B4. Present Use: Surfing Break

***B5. Architectural Style:** N/A

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

The surf break (action of a wave entering the shore or beach) is a natural occurrence that is influenced by the sand bar that develops at the river mouth of the San Lorenzo River. Weather conditions in the Santa Cruz Mountains effect the composition and size of the sand bar making it a primary feature in the winter months due to precipitation in the mountains. The sandbar forms a delta shape causing the waves to run in both directions along the sand in a peeling fashion. The sandbar can develop in a way that abruptly changes the slope of the seabed making the crest of incoming waves move faster than the base of the wave. This interaction pushes the peak of the wave to curl forming a tube or barrel. These dramatic tubes are sought after as a rare quality of wave in the Santa Cruz area.

***B7. Moved?** ☒ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** **Original Location:**

***B8. Related Features:** Santa Cruz Beach and Seabright State Beach

B9a. Architect: N/A **b. Builder:** N/A

***B10. Significance:** **Theme:** Recreation/Surfing **Area:** Santa Cruz County

Period of Significance: 1885 **Property Type:** Site **Applicable Criteria:** CHL

Three Princes' Surf Site at the San Lorenzo Rivermouth was the original location that surfing, as practiced by Native Hawaiian peoples, standing erect on a wooden board, was introduced to the continental United States in July 1885. Surfing caught on amongst Americans in Santa Cruz and has become strongly associated with the city and region. Santa Cruz has been designated as one of the most unique surf locations in the world based in part on this history.¹ Three Princes' Surf Site meets the criteria for a California Historical Landmark for its association with an individual or group having a profound influence on the history of the local area. See continuation sheet.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes:
(List attributes and codes)

B12. References: Geoffrey Dunn, "Riders of the Sea Spray: How three young Hawaiian princes first introduced surfing to Santa Cruz – and to the mainland of the Americas"

GoodTimes (March 31, 2010) <https://www.goodtimes.sc/riders-of-the-sea-spray/> accessed July 22, 2024. See Continuation Sheet.

B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** Kathleen Kennedy

Date of Evaluation: July 22, 2024



¹ "World Surf Reserves: Santa Cruz, California," Save the Waves Foundation, accessed October 21, 2024.

***B10. Significance Cont.**

According to archaeological research and ethnographic history, around 400 CE, Polynesian explorers intentionally seeking new lands arrived and settled on a chain of islands and reefs later known collectively as Hawai'i.² The remote island kingdoms remained relatively isolated from Europeans and colonizers until the arrival of English Captain James Cook's tall ships in 1778. Contact brought foreign disease, forced labor, and American missionaries, which devastated the Native Hawaiian population for over a century.³ Contact also introduced new weapons that exacerbated existing competition between ruling elites (ali'i) and culminated in the years leading up to 1810, when King Kamehameha united the 132 islands under one government. As nations fought for trade and political control on a global scale, the Hawaiian nobility strategically traveled across the world creating connections within the courts of Europe and Asia, to establish themselves as a peer nation, rather than a society ripe for exploitation.

Surfing became known in Europe and the Americans initially through the writings and renderings of Captain Cook and his crew. It was reported as an unusual cultural practice of an indigenous people and not regarded as a sport. There is no evidence that surfing was emulated in other parts of the world based on these writings. By the late nineteenth century, writings from colonizers and merchants in the islands indicated that surfing had declined almost to the point of extinction. Evidence indicates that surfing was still practiced in Hawai'i in this period. Based on lower population numbers, missionary disapproval of the practice, and labor spent in cash crop agriculture, fewer individuals had the ability to engage in it regularly or in the larger groups documented by Captain Cook and described by Native Hawaiians.⁴

Native Hawaiian presence in California in the nineteenth century is well documented by contemporaries, descendants, and historians. Most accounts focus on labor, including the ten Hawaiian men and women who traveled with John Sutter as laborers from Honolulu to San Francisco in 1839, building and establishing Sutter's Fort. Hawaiian labor in the surf at Santa Barbara is documented by Richard Henry Dana in *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). By the mid-1800s, Hawaiians in California numbered in the hundreds.⁵ The Hawaiians who had worked for John Sutter moved upriver and established the fishing village of Vernona. Hawaiians, both living in California and from the Pacific islands, were among those in 1848 who joined the gold rush before the influx of Americans in 1849. By the later nineteenth century, many had established both economic and cultural ties in San Francisco and across Northern California. This tradition continued in 1885 when three Hawaiian princes, David Kawānakou (1868-1908), Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole (1871-1922) and Edward Keli'iahonui (1869-1887) attended St. Matthew's Hall, an episcopal military academy in San Mateo, California.

The three princes were brothers. Their father, David Kahalepouli Pi'ikoi of Kaua'i Island nobility, and mother, Victoria Kinoiki Kekaulike of Hilo District and sister of Queen Kapi'olani, were active in the nobility and political life of the islands. They both passed when the boys were young, David Kahalepouli Pi'ikoi in 1878 and Victoria Kinoiki Kekaulike in 1884. With the death of their mother, their uncle King Kalākaua and aunt Queen Kapi'olani adopted the three brothers. King Kalākaua named the boys heirs to the throne and educated them for their future in leadership and service.

Educational opportunities on the islands to prepare royalty for a reign in this climate of imperialism were limited and in 1880 King Kalākaua established a government program, "Education of Hawaiian Youths Abroad" to provide economic support for Hawaiian scholars to study and make connections throughout the world. While some students

² Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul, *The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2013), 8.

³ The Indigenous population of the Hawaiian kingdoms in 1778 is estimated at 110,000-1,000,000 and reached its lowest point in 1900 at 39,656. Westwick and Neushul, 27; Sumner La Croix, "Economic History of Hawai'i". *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, edited by Robert Whaples. September 27, 2001. <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/economic-history-of-hawaii/> (accessed April 4, 2025)

⁴ Westwick and Neushul, 25-30; Dina Gilio-Whitaker, "Appropriating Surfing and the Politics of Indigenous Authenticity," in *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, ed. Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman: Duke University Press, 2017), 218.

⁵ Jessica Terrell, "Tracing California's 'Lost Tribe' Of Hawaiians" *Honolulu Civil Beat* (May 24, 2020) <https://www.civilbeat.org/2020/05/tracing-californias-lost-tribe-of-hawaiians> (accessed April 4, 2025).

studied in Japan, Italy, and England, the princes and two other students attended the military academy of St. Mathew's Hall in San Mateo, California. The students were established with guardians from the Hawaiian community, sometimes ambassadors or local businessmen or women. The princes spent their school holidays on the coast in Santa Cruz in the home of Mrs. Antoinette "Akoni" Swan (1832-1905). She was a woman of Hawaiian royal decent who married Lyman Swan and relocated to San Jose, California in the late 1850s. Prior to moving to California, Antoinette had been a member of the King's household. Lyman Swan established a bakery near their home on Pacific Avenue and the two became respected members of the Santa Cruz community. During the 1880s, Antoinette returned to Honolulu to serve the royal family for extended periods.⁶

The teenaged princes received attention from the press in both California and Hawai'i during their time at St. Mathew's Hall. Their social activities, grades, and interests were reported on, drawing a picture of athletic, academically successful, and pleasant young men.

The Swan residence was near the Grover Lumber Company planing mill.⁷ Hawaiian religious and cultural tradition reserved the heavy and long o'lo style surfboard for those of the *alii* or ruling class.⁸ The boys commissioned three redwood o'lo boards befitting of their station that spanned almost 20 feet long. Two of the boards have been preserved at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu: Prince David's board (17 feet 9.5 inches long and 175 pounds) and Prince Jonah's board (17 feet 2.5 inches long and 150 pounds).

During a summer visit to Santa Cruz, the princes observed waves that appeared ideal for the Hawaiian traditional cultural practice of surfing. The *Santa Cruz Daily Surf* reported on July 20, 1885, that with an audience of thirty or forty swimmers, the princes surfed the San Lorenzo Rivermouth break and put on an exciting exhibition. This event is noted as the first-time surfing was observed and documented outside of Polynesia. It is not recorded how often they returned to the surf; it is noted that by the 1890s, local youths had their own surf boards. While the presence of the three princes in Santa Cruz was short, their impact has had a long-lasting effect on the sport, culture, joy, and economy of California's beach communities.⁹

The next noted introduction of surfing in California was not until 1907 when Geoge Freeth of Hawaii relocated to Los Angeles and was hired to demonstrate surfing at the "Venice of America" amusement park. This introduction by Freeth was not the traditional Hawaiian surfing practiced by the princes. It was a demonstration of the American influenced sport surfing that had evolved as a tourist attraction in Hawaii by the early twentieth century. Freeth's promotional stunts and surf demonstrations continued as he worked as a lifeguard and swim instructor in Los Angeles and San Diego.¹⁰

⁶ Antoinette Swan was the daughter of Don Francisco de Paulo Marin and adopted daughter of Dr. Thomas Charles Byde Rooke. She was the hānai (informally adopted) sister to the future Queen Emma. *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, December 14, 1941, Page 12. via Newspapers.com <https://www.newspapers.com/article/santa-cruz-sentinel-antoinette-swans-li/1816844/> (accessed May 31, 2024); Geoffery Dunn, "Why is the Grave of Antoinette Swan Unmarked?" *GoodTimes* (May 2, 2017) <https://www.goodtimes.sc/antoinette-swain/> (accessed May 31, 2024).

⁷ Lumber was the largest industry in Sant Cruz during the 1870s and 1880s. In the late 1880s, the local old growth redwood groves were diminished, and other industries began to dominate the economy. Peter T. Young, "The Three Princes" Images of Old Hawai'i (July 20, 2015) <https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/the-three-princes/> (accessed May 31, 2024).

⁸ Matt Warshaw, *The History of Surfing* (Chronicle Books, 2010), 25.

⁹ Geoffery Dunn, "Riders Like the Sea Spray: Three Hawaiian princes introduce surfing to Santa Cruz" *Santa Cruz Magazine*, Spring 2009, <https://history.santacruzpl.org/omeka/files/original/d459c2f21d9325b1ae156356e659ce7a.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2025).

¹⁰ Warshaw, *The History of Surfing*, 47-53.

Evaluation

Three Princes' Surf Site is eligible under the California Historical Landmark criteria of being the "first, last, only, or most significant of its type" within Central California. The surf break is the site of the first introduction of the sport of surfing in California and in the continental United States. Surfing is the official state sport of California and November 20 is the official California Surfing Day. The introduction of surfing in Santa Cruz was the first movement toward the development of a uniquely Californian surf culture.

Three Princes' Surf Site is associated with the three Hawaiian princes who "have had a profound influence on the history of California" as they have influenced the cultural and economic development of the state. The only site that can compare with Three Princes' Surf Site would be Venice Beach, the site of George Freeth's surfing demonstration to promote Abbot Kinney's Venice of America resort. This happened twenty-two years after the princes surfed in Santa Cruz, in a different region of California, and employing a different style of surfing.

References

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<https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/the-three-princes>.

Location/Boundary Map



Point	Latitude	Longitude
A	36.9638366	-122.0100907
B	36.963783	-122.0088840
C	36.9623363	-122.0069175
D	36.9595501	-122.0092639
E	36.9596215	-122.0116550
F	36.9594786	-122.0129511
G	36.9595144	-122.0163925
H	36.9638366	-122.0163032
I	36.9636758	-122.0152082
J	36.9637294	-122.0131969

Total Acreage: 194.85
Land Acreage: 36.05

Page 7 of 11

*Resource Name or # Three Princes' Surf Site

Camera Format: Iphone Lens Size:
Film Type and Speed: Digital **Negatives Kept at:** DPR/HP

November 27, 2024

- 1 of 7 View of San Lorenzo Rivermouth from Santa Cruz Beach, facing southeast
- 2 of 7 View of San Lorenzo Rivermouth from Seabright State Beach, facing southwest
- 3 of 7 San Lorenzo River, view to the north/northwest from Seabright State Beach
- 4 of 7 Development of sandbar at San Lorenzo Rivermouth, view west from Seabright State Beach
- 5 of 7 Sandbar, view to the southeast from Seabright State Beach
- 6 of 7 Wave development, view to the south/southeast from Seabright State Beach
- 7 of 7 View to the southwest, from Santa Cruz Beach

Photo 1 View of San Lorenzo Rivermouth from Santa Cruz Beach, facing southeast



Photo 2 View of San Lorenzo Rivermouth from Seabright State Beach, facing southwest



Photo 3 San Lorenzo River, view to the north/northwest from Seabright State Beach



Photo 4 Development of sandbar at San Lorenzo Rivermouth, view west from Seabright State Beach



Photo 5 Sandbar, view to the southeast from Seabright State Beach



Photo 6 Wave development, view to the south/southeast from Seabright State Beach



Photo 7 View to the southwest, from Santa Cruz Beach

