

San Luis Rey de Francia



Eighteenth Mission

Founded: June 13, 1798 by Father Fermin Lasuen

Named for: Louis IX, King of France (1215-1270)

Location: on a hill in the town of San Luis Rey

Nicknamed "King of the missions", Mission San Luis Rey was the largest and most populous of all the California missions. Its buildings covered 6 acres of land, and its Native American population reached 2,700 at its peak. Its important location filled the critical gap between San Diego and San Juan Capistrano. It was the ninth and last mission founded by Father-President Lasuen before his death in 1803.

The quick success of this mission is owed to Father Antonio Peyri, who stayed with the mission for 34 years. Not wanting to see the destruction he believed secularization would bring, he retired two years earlier and returned to Spain.

Within 2 years most of the buildings were up and covered with tile roofs and work had begun on the big church that would be able to accommodate up to a thousand worshippers. Eventually even this was replaced with an even larger church with a single tower used as a lookout. With two people always stationed there, they were able to quickly announce the arrival of visitors, friendly or otherwise, and with flags were able to signal messages to the workers in the fields.

Within the quadrangle was planted the first pepper tree in California, and in a sunken garden in front of the mission were many exotic plants and fruit trees. The mission's open-air laundry was also located in the sunken garden where water flowed from the mouth of a stone gargoyle. The water then flowed down the tiles to be reclaimed for other uses. The mission's extensive water irrigation even had a charcoal filter purification system for drinking water.

Mission San Luis Rey also had the largest herd of livestock of any of the missions. In addition to the greater than 50,000 cattle and sheep, they had 1,300 goats, 300 pigs, and almost 2,000 horses.

After the loss of the revered Father Peyri the mission's decline began. The Native Americans attempted to maintain the mission for several years after secularization, but eventually, in 1846, all the buildings were sold. For a time the site was occupied by the United States Army. Though the mission was returned to the Church in 1865, it was mostly ignored until 1893, when it was rededicated. By then most of the quadrangle walls had collapsed, and much of the church was destroyed. Major reconstruction was begun immediately, and continues today.

What is the nickname this Mission? _____

What was the single tower used for? _____

Explain what a stone gargoyle is. _____

Altogether how many animals were thought to be on this Mission: _____

Read the description of this Mission and draw an illustration of the different parts of this Mission.

