**Mission accomplished:** During his 23 years of writing editorials for The San Diego Union-Tribune, former editorial page editor **Bob Kittle** drove to work past the San Diego Presidio, once the base of operations for the Spanish colonization of California. He resolved to one day write an account of the role of Spanish missionaries in the settlement of California.

After five years of research, “Franciscan Frontiersmen: How Three Adventurers Charted the West” is slated for publication in May.

It isn’t Father Serra’s story, as he originally intended, because Kittle discovered three other biographies already in progress. “I focused instead on three of Serra's compadres who have been overlooked in our popular history,” he said.

His book’s goal? “To elevate the three friars to their rightful place alongside Lewis and Clark in our popular history.” After all, Kittle reasons, they preceded the two American explorers and opened up a larger and ultimately more important portion of the North American continent.



Robert A. Kittle, former editor of The San

Diego Union-Tribune editorial page, has

written a history of three 18th century

Spanish missionaries in California. (UT Photo)

Kittle studied diary entries, journals, field notes and letters of **Juan Crespí, Pedro Font** and **Francisco Garcés.** He retraced their travels from the Spanish island of Mallorca to Mexico and to inland and coastal California, logging about 10,000 miles.

“The truth is,” said Kittle, “we learn our English history but ignore our Spanish history, even here in California.”

University of San Diego history professor and California scholar, **Iris Engstrand**, whom he joined on tours in Spain, said: “He was able to convert from journalism to historian and maintain his writing style while still getting the facts.” The end product both humanized a historic subject and created “an indispensable reference for scholars,” she said.

Late California state librarian **Kevin Starr** wrote a cover blurb for the book.

Kittle already is focusing on his next tome about another little publicized slice of California history: a band of Indians at Warner Springs. They were forced to leave the land they had occupied for 700 years and make a 40-mile mountainous march to a new home, a trek that became known as the Cupeño Trail of Tears.

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