

Why is it called Los Trancos?

Los Trancos is a fairly common place name in California. A quick search on the internet found me the following: Los Trancos Creek (in more than one county), Los Trancos Open Space Preserve, Los Trancos Woods (neighborhood and street name, both more than once), Los Trancos Trail in Foothills Park and Los Trancos Open Space, several businesses with Trancos or Los Trancos in their name, at least one water district, a couple of beaches and a few variants like Tranca... With so many places to choose from getting the exact derivation of the name correct may be difficult. I have several possibilities.

I started by translating the term into English from Spanish; it means "the big steps" or "strides." In this area many Los Trancos' are in hilly areas. Big steps may refer to Foothills as steps up to mountains. Another possibility may be that they refer to passes through the foothills to interior valleys or to the coast, i.e. routes along which you could take "big steps" or "strides." Roads, streams and valleys along those routes could easily have picked up the name.

In the book California Place Names, Los Trancos is listed as a variant of Las Trancas (along with Tranca) and is defined as a term meaning "barriers" usually referring to cattle guards (fences or ditches across roads). Again looking at the hilly areas around here, it is very easy to find box canyons (steep walled valleys with only one way in). Many years ago when the Spanish were colonizing California much of the land was given away as ranchos in land grants to encourage settlers. One of the most valuable commodities in the days of the rancho was cattle; cows could provide you with milk, meat and were excellent draft animals working in your field and transporting you and your goods to market.

If you need a place to keep your cattle a box canyon requires much less fencing (along with much less work to install and maintain it) than a large flat area. I can imagine telling people to go to the valley with the cattle barrier, or to the creek or along the road that runs through that valley, or simply to refer to "Los Trancos."