

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



Wolf Store

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It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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Vail Ranch Headquarters

National Historic Site and Trail Celebration

Sunday, Sept. 17th
11:00am to 4:00pm

Learn more online at: www.temeculahistoricalociety.org

The Temecula Valley Historical Society invites the public to a free event at Vail HQ on Sunday, September 17 from 11 to 4 to celebrate the recent designations of Vail HQ as a National Historic Site and the trail inside Vail HQ as part of the Butterfield Overland National Trail. A grassroots group of local people advocated for restoration of the location beginning in 1996, so it is with great satisfaction they offer the community a chance to celebrate with them on the goal achieved.

Visitors will not find a National Historic monument or plaque at Vail HQ yet because it takes a few months to receive placards and other signage, but the Temecula Valley Historical Society is eager to share their happiness with the community. Another celebration will be planned to do an unveiling of the monument sometime in 2024.

The Blacksmith Boys Band will open the September 17 event with old-time family-friendly music. The band has played in prestigious venues including the Stagecoach Country Music Festival and the Huck Finn Bluegrass Jubilee. At noon local dignitaries will say a few words. The Blacksmith Boys and other blacksmiths will entertain visitors by showing their skills in the blacksmith shack at the back of the property. Stagecoach rides will be available three dollars per ticket. Actors from the Temecula Valley Historical Society's Notable Men and Women will dramatize area characters of the past and the Horsewomen of Temecula will patrol the grounds to provide an Old West feel.

For more information about the event, please email Rebecca Farnbach at info@temeculahistory.org.

A Major Cattle Drive in the West The Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

PART TWO *(Continued from last month)*

I must say a few words about our Mexican cowboys; most of them were very good hands and some of them as fine ropers as I have ever seen. They knew how to handle cattle on a ranch and in a roundup. Driving cattle a few miles to a corral or throwing them together in a rodeo is a very different thing, however, from driving them five hundred miles on the desert with water fifty miles apart in some places. Practically the only trouble we had with our men was to keep them from driving too fast. Traveling behind a herd day after day on a dusty trail is certainly a monotonous job, but we knew the only possible way we could expect to reach the Warner Ranch with our cattle alive was to hurry them only when it was necessary.

After the cattle got used to the trail, at night we usually had only two men on guard at a time. When camp was made, the first guard had supper and four hours later were relieved by the men who, in turn, went off duty when the last guard went on about two A.M. As soon as it was light the latter would start the cattle grazing in the direction we were traveling, and most of the day our steers wandered along browsing on mesquite, sage, and sometimes a little grass. Even traveling that way they did not get much to eat and I often wondered what kept them alive. When we reached Maricopa, the only water we found for our cattle was a ditch near the railroad and it was probably an overflow from the water tank or from a recent rain. We finally got all the cattle and horses watered and let them rest a while.

Watering cattle in a small water hole, a ditch or a mud tank, takes considerable time and a lot of patience. A few at a time are allowed to go to the water and then are driven on to make room for others, while the main herd is held some distance away to keep them from interfering with those that are drinking. It is a tedious job and everyone is tired before it is finished.

I will quote some remarks overheard on a cattle trail, made by an irritated cowpuncher to his companion: "Tex, I think that if a full-grown man can't learn enough to make a living at anything but punching cows he should be locked up as loco! Now just look at that -- -- old long-horned steer! Why he sucks a few cups of muddy water out of that old wagon track?"

But the foreman speaks up and says, "Let him alone boys! I reckon he likes it as it is the nearest imitation of water we have offered him for some time past on this trail!"

Cattle naturally begin to graze as soon as they leave their watering place and as the grass nearest the water is eaten first, the distance between water and feed is gradually increased. In dry season cattle are frequently compelled to travel five miles to water. Young calves, of course, are not able to make the trip, so their mothers – by instinct or reason – place their calves under the protection of some friendly companions in the herd. It is no uncommon thing to see a cow, or even an old bull, watching a lot of very young calves whose mothers have gone to water. The guardian will protect the little calves from coyotes, dogs or any other enemy until their mother's return.

A cow will place her calf behind a bush and, apparently, tell it to stay right there until she returns. If you should happen to go near the calf it will lie down and pretend it does not see you. If you chase it a short distance and then watch it for a few minutes you will find that it will go back to the very spot where you found it. If a mother comes back and doesn't find her calf just where she left it she is very much worried, she will sniff all around the spot where she left it and run around bawling for it.

In the afternoon we hit the trail for Gila Bend and driving out slowly about ten miles on the old stage road along the north side of the railroad, we made a late camp for the night. The next afternoon we reached Estrella which is at the head of a rather pretty valley if it were not so dry; there are desert mountains on each side and south of the little station a mountain higher than the rest from a Rincon. Tom concluded we would turn the cattle loose that night by grazing them in the direction of that mountain and guarding them only on the lower side, thus giving them a chance to lie down whenever they liked or eat any grass or weeds they could find. I remember it was a beautiful night and not very cold. In the moonlight I could see the cattle scattered around on the hills and could hear the boys singing their Spanish songs as they rode back and forth on guard. I am not sure whether cattle are fond of music or not, but I think where they are held on a bed-ground at night they seem better contented and are less excitable when the men on guard sing or whistle. This custom is so common on the trail that I have often heard on cowpuncher ask another how they held their cattle on a roundup. The other would reply, "Oh, we had to sing to them!" meaning they had to night-herd them.

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When cattle have to be night-herded, the foreman usually rides out and selects a suitable "bed-ground," a place where they are as free from rocks and holes as possible. Bottomland should not be chosen as it is apt to be colder at night. The cattle are grazed in the direction of the spot selected and the men ride slowly around them pushing the stragglers in until they commence to lie down.

Mexican cowboys seldom use a watch when guarding the cattle at night. Instead, they use the clear sky of Arizona as their time-keeper, and it is astonishing how closely they can measure the time by the stars.

The Great Dipper revolves around the North Star once in twenty-four hours; so, in six hours it completes a quarter of the circle. When the first guard goes on, the boys notice carefully the position of "the pointer" (as they call the two stars Alpha and Beta), in their relation to the North Star, and when "the pointers" or "hands" have reached the right position, the next guard is called.

The Mexican cowboys call this big celestial clock of theirs "El Reloj de Los Yaquis," – The Yaquis' Clock – because it is used by the Yaqui Indians.

Tom Turner told me a story of a black man in Texas who evidently had not studied the stars. Tom pointed out the North Star to him and said, "When that star sets call me."

Just as it was getting light that poor man rode into camp and said "Mista Tom, I dun watch dat dar star all night an he nevah move a bit!"

There was one thing about our trip that may seem funny now, but it did not seem so at that time. When we commenced making dry camps and using water from the barrel on our wagon, we found it had a very disagreeable taste. I supposed the barrels I bought in Tucson had been used for whiskey or wine, a flavor to which I think a cowboy would not seriously object, but they proved to be old sauerkraut barrels! We had no chance to clean them thoroughly until we got to the river; then I took the heads off the barrels and cleaned out all the kraut and soaked them in the river.

The next day we drove the cattle about ten miles down the winding canyon along the railroad towards Gila and made our third dry camp west of Maricopa. Before leaving Estrella I begged water enough from the section foreman there to water our wagon team.

My brother, Walter Vail, and I had many warm friends among railroad men of the Tucson division and often when driving or holding our cattle along the railroad track, the conductor and trainmen would

wave their caps at us from a passing train and sometimes throw us a late newspaper.

We expected to reach Gila Bend on the river the next evening and started the cattle early in the morning toward the Gila Valley. When we had reached a point which was clear of the hills on a big flat that gradually sloped towards the river, the big steers in the lead suddenly threw up their heads and commenced to sniff the breeze, which happened to be blowing from the river, and a weird sound like a sigh or a moan seemed to come from the entire herd. I had been driving cattle many years then, but had never heard them make that noise before. They were very thirsty and had suddenly smelled water! They had been dragging along as if it were hard work even to walk, but in a minute they were on a dead run. Every man but one was in front, beating the lead cattle over the head with coats and slickers trying to check them. As we feared they would run themselves to death before the water was reached. Close to the river we turned them loose, or rather, they practically made us get out to the way.

Then we found that one of our men had been caught in the rush of cattle. They had outrun his already tired horse but he was doing his best to keep it on its feet. If it had fallen with him the cattle would probably have trampled the man to death. Here several of our men showed quick action. Pushing their horses against one side of the string of cattle that was rushing towards their companion they pressed it back far enough to release him from his dangerous position. The lead steers plunged into the Gila like fish-hawks, drinking as they swam across to the other side. The drags (or slow cattle) must have been at least three miles behind us when the first steers reached the river, and after watering our horses, which we did carefully, some of the cowboys went back to help the man we left behind to follow them in.

We grazed our cattle and horses at Gila Bend for several days and gave them a chance to rest. Turner or I generally did some scouting ahead to find a good watering place for our cattle and the next day's camp.

We were looking for a short cut to Oatman Flat as we did not want to drive the cattle over the long, winding, rocky road. On the south side of the river and about thirty feet above it there was a narrow trail cut in the side of the mountain. This had formerly been the old stage road but was so badly washed out by high water that in places it was barely wide enough for the steers to travel single file. On the other side of the river was a steep mountain.

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We finally decided to drive the cattle over the narrow trail by the river and send the wagon by the longer road. So we started them on the trail with a rider leading, as usual, and as soon as a few of the lead steers were on the way the others followed like sheep. So many cattle walking single file was an unusual sight. All reached Oatman Flat safely. There we met the Jourdan family with whom we were acquainted. They were farming and also had some cattle. Turner and I spent the evening rather pleasantly at their house.

Oatman Flat is a nice piece of land that was named for the Oatman family, nearly all the member of which were killed by Apaches in 1852.

Gila Bend is about half way from Tucson to Yuma and from what I saw of the Gila Valley I did not think much of it as a cattle county. We had some trouble with quicksand when watering cattle in the river. If a steer got stuck in the sand the only way to get him out was to wade in and pull out one leg at a time and then tramp the sand around that leg (this gets the water out of the sand which it holds in suspension). When all the legs were free we would turn the animal on its side and drag it back to the bank with our riatas. I never saw so many quail in my life as I saw in that county. Frequently John, the cook, would take my shotgun and kill a lot of them. At night when he called us to supper he would say, "All the boys come plenty quai tonight." He could not say "quail".

There were very few incidents of particular interest on the trail down the Gila Valley to Yuma. One evening when we were ready to camp for the night, John drove his team down on a little flat near the river where there were quite a number of willow and cottonwood trees. When Tom rode over and saw the place he told the Chinaman to hitch up his team and drive up on higher ground near where the cattle were to be held that night. But the cook did not want to go and said, "See what a pletty place this is, Mr. Tom!" Tom replied that it was a "Pletty" all right, but too far from the cattle in case of trouble, and too far for the men to go in the night when the guards changed.

The next morning when we awoke we heard a great roaring from the river. We lost no time in riding over to see what had happened and found the Gila was a raging flood, and the place John had picked out to camp was eight or ten feet under water. If we had slept there that night the men on guard would have been the only survivors of our outfit. Later we heard that the Walnut Grove Dam, situated on a branch of the Gila River, had given way, and quite a

number of people were drowned in the valley below the dam.

We were compelled to leave some of our cattle before we reached Yuma, as there was scarcely any grass or weeds and the mesquite and other forage had not yet budded out. Some steers died, but most of them gave out and we turned them loose. I kept a list of those we left. I think there were about twenty-five or thirty in all.

While we were at Gila Bend I went with the cook and his wagon to Gila Station and bought barley for our horses, also provisions. Before we reached the Agua Caliente (Hot Springs), near Sentinel, I rode ahead, as we had heard there was a store there, and laid in another supply. The Hot Springs are on the north side of the Gila River and as there was considerable water in the river, a man with a boat rowed me over. I took advantage of the opportunity and enjoyed a good bath in the warm water, which is truly wonderful. I doubt if there is any better in the country. At that time the accommodations were very poor for persons visiting the Springs especially for those who were ill.

About thirty miles from Yuma, Jim Knight and one of his cowboys met us. Knight was foreman of the Warner Ranch and a cousin of Turner's. He brought us saddle mules and horses and they were all fat. These were to take the place of some of the horses we had ridden ever since we left the Empire Ranch.

There was one very important thing that Jim failed to do however – and that was to find out if there was any water on the Colorado desert for our cattle, and where it was. I think he said he only watered his horses once between Carrizo Creek and the Colorado River, a distance of over one hundred miles, and he knew of no other water out there. As we were then only about half way on our road to the Warner Ranch, and the worst yet to come, Knight's report did not cheer us much.

The mules Jim brought were young and unbroken and as stubborn as only mules can be. It was hard to turn one around on a ten-acre lot. Two of our boys refused to ride them. We told them if they would go as far as Yuma we would pay their fare back to Pantano, as that was the agreement we made with our men before leaving the ranch. But I think they were homesick and I could not blame them much. So we paid them off and they took the next train for Tucson at the nearest station to our camp.

Those mules had a surprise in store for them, and I will admit it was new to me at that time. On the

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ranch when breaking colts we use either a hackamore or an American snaffle-bit until they become well reined, so that by pressing the rein to one side of the neck they will turn in the opposite direction. Tom took a piece of rope which was long enough to pass through the rings of an American Snaffle-bit, allowing enough slack for the rider to use as reins, and fastened the ends to the cinch rings of the saddle on either side. If one of those California mules got fresh and took it into his head to run through a mesquite thicket with you all you had to do was pull hard enough and you could double his nose back on the saddle on either side as the rope ran freely through the rings in the bit, which acted as pulleys. Before long those Warner mules were doing their share of the work, which helped us very much during the rest of the trip.

A few days later we reached Yuma and camped on the Colorado River, about three miles southwest of the town. The river was rather high owing to the unusual amount of water flowing into it from the Gila, which joins it on the north side of the town. The next day we let all our cowboys go to town to buy clothing, which some of them needed badly, and we gave them free rein to enjoy themselves as they pleased. Of course, they did not all go at once as some had to stay and herd the cattle. Among the last of our men to get back to camp that night was Servero Miranda, know among the cowboys as "Chappo," which is Spanish for "Shorty." He was somewhat lit up and made a short speech to Tom Turner in Spanish, which translated amounted to this: "Mr. Tom, I am sorry that I am pretty full tonight, but you know that no matter what you tell me to do I am always ready and willing to do it – riding mean mules or anything else."

"Pa Chappo," as he is now called, commenced working at the Empire Ranch about 1880, and is still on the payroll. In February, 1922, his grandson was buried in Tucson, a victim of the World War. He had served in the U.S. Navy and contracted tuberculosis at that time.

Turner and I got a boat, with an Indian to row it, and spent the day looking for the best place to swim the cattle across the river. We rowed two or three miles up and down the Colorado and prodded the banks with poles to see how deep the quicksand was. We found it very bad, especially on the west bank where the cattle would have to land. \

Finally we found an island near the west bank of the river where the landing was better. The water was not very deep on the other side of the island,

with a good landing on the California side. We then returned to the Arizona side of the river and found it was impossible to drive the cattle into the river there, as the bank formed a ten-foot perpendicular wall above the water. So we hired a lot of Yuma Indians with picks and shovels to grade a road to the water. This work occupied a day or two. We were then ready to attempt to swim the cattle across. The herd had not been watered since the day before as we were anxious to have them thirsty. The current was very strong and the river very deep, and because of the swift current we found it would be impossible for men on horseback to do anything in guiding the cattle across, so we hired Yuma Indians and three or four boats. We placed them so as to keep the cattle from drifting down stream. The idea was not to let them turn back nor land down far enough to miss the island. We got the cattle strung out and travelling as they had on the trail, with the big steers in the lead and men on each side to keep them in position to go down the grade which we made to the river. Most of the large cattle reached the island all right. \

Then our troubles began! Two or three hundred of the smaller steers got frightened as the current was too swift for them and they swam back to the Arizona side. About this time the Sheriff from Yuma showed up and said he had orders from the District Attorney to hold our cattle until we paid taxes on them in Yuma County. I told him I thought the District Attorney was mistaken, but we were too busy to find out just then. Cattle were scattered all along the river on the Arizona side and as they could not climb the banks and get out, many of them were in the water just hanging to the bank with their feet. We hired all the Indians we could get and with the help of our own men we pulled all except two or three of the cattle up that steep bank

(Continued next Month)

Membership News

Thanks to renewing Members:

Dale & Colleen Garcia

Volunteers Needed

We would like to invite you to join the dynamic group of people who help the Temecula Valley Historical Society provide so much educational fun for people at Vail HQ and the Little Temecula History Center.

Don't sit around feeling bored! Do something fun and make new memories! Please contact our volunteer coordinator Bonnie Reed at 760-484-6019 for details on how to get started!

100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected items from Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column — September 1923

September 7, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Kerry of Los Angeles were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Mahlon Vail last week. The Pauba Ranch is closed to all hunting again this season. Mr. Will Rogers and Mr. Lewis of the Lewis Packing Co. both of Los Angeles were weekend visitors at the home of Mahlon Vail. George Sawday shipped another train of 11 cars of beef cattle to Los Angeles last Friday. School will open Tuesday, September 11. The Vail Company shipped three cars of beef cattle to Los Angeles on Saturday and another two cars Tuesday. Mr. and Mrs. O. Gonzales entertained Mrs. Gonzales' mother, Mrs. C.A. Van Nest and two nephews, Neil and Edmond Fernald of Inglewood over the weekend.

September 14, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

The Misses Welty's have leased the hotel and with their mother, Mrs. John Welty have moved to San Bernardino, where they have purchased a beautiful and modern home. The Weltys are one of the pioneer families of this valley and will be missed by their many friends. The eclipse of the sun on Monday was very nearly total here and could be seen with the naked eye on account of the cloudy weather. Joe Welty left Saturday for San Bernardino where he expects to make his future home. L.S. Powell has leased the Temecula hotel and took possession last Saturday. Miss Myrtle Milburn of National City, who is to teach the primary grades this year, is domiciled at the hotel. Mrs. W.M. Friedemann had as dinner guests on Monday the Misses Rita Domenigoni and Myrtle Milburn. Vail Company shipped a car of hogs to Deez last Friday. Mrs. Eva Heintz, teacher for the little Temecula School is domiciled at the hotel again this year. A.F. Nienke is building a modern six-room residence on his lot opposite the G.A. Burnham home. The Misses Rita and Peggy Domenigoni are domiciled at the hotel for a few weeks until A.F. Nienke vacates the Barton cottage.

September 21, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

The sudden passing away of Augustine Servell at his home between Temecula and Murrieta Hot Springs last Sunday, September 16th, was a shock to his relatives and friends, whom had considered Mr. Servell in

good health, excepting attacks of acute indigestion which would, at times cause him great pain, but apparently with no ill results. Saturday evening and Sunday morning Mr. Arthur Servell, his brother, remained with him as he had been suffering somewhat during the day and night, and when Mr. Arthur Servell departed Sunday morning on a short business trip to the springs there was no indication that his brother was in any worse condition than he had been experiencing off and on for years, but when he returned in the afternoon accompanied by a friend, Mr. Charles Carstensen, they found that a weakened heart resulting from acute indigestion had failed to function. Mr. Servell is survived by three sisters in France, brothers Leon and Arthur of Temecula and Ernest of Los Angeles. Services were conducted from the Catholic Church in Temecula at 2 o'clock Tuesday afternoon, Rev. Father Rally of Elsinore officiating. Interment was made in the Temecula Cemetery. Mr. and Mrs. A. Knott and children motored to San Bernardino Tuesday to see the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey combined circus. George Sawday shipped eleven cars of beef cattle to Los Angeles last Friday. This will probably be the last shipment Mr. Sawday will make this season. Mr. Sawday has shipped one hundred and ten cars of cattle since June 15th besides Mr. Sawday's cattle there has been almost one hundred cars of cattle out of here this season.

September 28, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Richard Escallier, who is in training prior to joining the navy at San Diego, spent the weekend here with his mother, Mrs. Jack Escallier. Louis Escallier has been seriously ill and is no better at this writing. The Temecula Indians and Banning played ball on the Murrieta Hot Springs diamond Sunday afternoon. It was an interesting game from the very first inning; several brilliant plays were made by both teams. The final score was 7 to 5 in favor of the Indians. Next Sunday Temecula will journey to Banning for the return game. The R.C. Lacy ranch shipped a car of beef cattle to W. C. Moore at Highgrove Wednesday. S.A. Seiple, of this city, has the contract for wiring A.F. Nienke's new residence, now under construction for electricity.