

Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

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The last story from the Diary of a Desert Trail is given today, telling of the restoration of the old freight rate for shipping cattle during the year 1890, when Edward Vail the writer of the diary drove across the desert to California from the Empire Ranch northeast of Tucson. (Ed. Note)

We were glad to leave Carrizo the next morning and be on the way to Warner Ranch. The country was dry and barren until we reached Vallecinto creek, which is in a pretty little valley with some green grass growing in it. Between there and Warner, we passed the San Felipe Ranch and from there on to Warner the road ran through a better country for cattle. Finally we reached Warner Ranch and it looked good to us and I have no doubt our horses and cattle enjoyed the sight of it as much as we did. The grass was six to eight inches high and as green as a wheat field all over the ranch, which covers about 50,000 acres.

We had been about two months and ten days on the trail since we left the Empire Ranch. There was not a man sick on the trip that I remember. We had slept on the ground all the way except at Yuma for a few nights when our blankets were in the wagon across the river. Our men had been loyal and cheerful all the time and I am glad to have all them share with Tom Turner and myself in the success of our drive. After we reached Warner, the Justice of the Peace sent for men and inquired about the trouble at Carrizo Creek. I told him what I saw just as I have related it in this diary, he then told me that the officers were out of their jurisdiction in California as they had no papers from the California Governor at that time, but I believed they obtained them later.

We had to hold the herd for a few days until they were counted and received. Most of our men were at liberty and we all went to the Warner Hot Springs and took baths which all enjoyed. The Indian women seemed to be always washing clothes and our men would join the group and wash their own and sometimes borrow the soap from the Indian girls. There was a good deal of laughing and joking in Spanish during the performance. The water was as it comes out of the ground is hot enough to cook an egg. Close and by running parallel to it is a stream of clear cold water.

The San Luis Rey river rises on the Warner Ranch and there are large meadows and several lakes as well as beautiful live oaks on the foothills of the mountains that surround the ranch. Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson spent sometime here and at Temecula gathering data for her celebrated novel, "Romona."

Very soon all the cowboys were sent to Los Angeles where they remained for a few days to see the sights of the largest city they had ever visited, but after a short time

they said their legs and feet were sore from walking and that they were all right on horseback but no good on foot, so we shipped them back to Tucson and the ranch.

A short time after our return, a meeting of cattlemen was called at the Palace Hotel (now the Occidental) then owned by Marsh & Driscoll who were at that time among the largest cattle owners in Arizona. The object of the meeting was to consider the matter of establishing a safe trail from here to California for cattle. From our experience I was able to make some suggestions, viz: To build a flat boat to ferry cattle across the Colorado River. To clear out the wells at the old stage stations on the Colorado Desert and put in tanks and watering troughs at each of them and if necessary to dig or drill more wells. Without delay all the money necessary for this work was subscribed.

The Southern Pacific Railroad company when they heard of the proposed meeting asked permission to send a representative and the cattle association notified the company that the cattlemen would be pleased to have them do so. Therefore the S.P. agent at Tucson was present. The meeting then adjourned to meet at the Hotel Bar where they found that the bartender was absent. At once they saw the chance to have some fun at the expense of Mr. Marsh who had assumed his job. Every man agreed to ask for a different kind of mixed drink which they knew the old man could not make. We all lined up at the bar and proceeded to call for various drinks we liked best. Mine Host, March, looked along the bar at our smiling faces, stuttered a little and then said, "Damn it, boys, I can't make those things, take it straight on me." We did not refuse his kind invitation and then took a few more on ourselves and on each other and departed.

Soon after our cattle meeting, we received an official letter from the S. P. Company at the Empire Ranch saying that if we would make no more drives, the old freight rate would be restored on stock cattle. The company kept its promise and it held for many years. Therefore the trail improvements were never made.

THE END.