

Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

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The Star is publishing each day an article taken from the diary of Edward L. Vail written while crossing the desert in 1890. Mr. Vail writes interestingly of the old cowboy days and reminiscences pleasantly of many of the old timers in the cattlemen's circles in Arizona. The last story told of the meeting with D. K. Allen, engineer, who was making the preliminary survey for a new railroad, which an English company planned through Lower California and Imperial Valley to Yuma.

Marked Watering Places

I found Mr. Allen to be a very interesting man who had traveled extensively throughout Old Mexico and was very much interested in everything that he saw in the wild parts of that country. He asked us if we had any beef that we could let him have as he had been eating rattlesnakes for some time as he had no other meat, we sent him over part of the beef we bought from Joe Carter. Mr. Allen was afterwards editor of a Yuma paper, I think it was the Sentinel. We asked him in regard to the trail across Carrizo Creek and showed him the maps of San Diego county, which then extended to the Colorado River. He marked out all the watering places that he knew about, the last one of which would bring us to within about 40 miles of Carrizo Creek. He also said he would send one of his own men who knew the country with us if we had any trouble finding the watering places and would send back for the man. He was very generous and did not expect any compensation for helping us.

Drive Ten Miles

The next afternoon we bid goodbye to Mr. Allen and the Colorado Valley and drive out 10 miles and camped for the night. The next morning early we were on our way and about afternoon reached the first watering place that Mr. Allen had referred to. After looking as if we decided we would only be able to water the weakest of the cattle. We had held the cattle back some distance from this water and Turner and I went ahead and looked at it as we were afraid the cattle would make a rush for the water. We cut our herd in two. As the stronger cattle were ahead on the road, we drove them on and let the weaker ones have the water.

About dark that night we reached the second watering place. This was near the New River stage station on the old overland road, but just across the line. This is the present site of the town of Calexico. We were quite pleased at the looks of what we could see of the country thereabouts. The mesquite was beginning to bud out with plenty of old grass around. The grass is commonly called guayella. The green shoots grow out of the old roots with a head like timothy. Also there was a great deal of what cattlemen call the

“careless-weed.” All the cattle ate heartily and enjoyed their first good feed for some days. We concluded to stay for several days. And give our cattle a chance to rest.

Trouble with Mount

The next day Turn and I thought we would take a ride over to Indian Wells, the next watering place. We easily found the water and the ruins of the old stage station. This is near what is called Signal Mountain, a very peculiar peak the only one I saw in the desert as the country all around is very level. The water at Indian Wells was in a round basin with mesquite trees growing all around it. While we were there Turner’s horse was taken sick and seemed to be in considerable pain. We laid down under a tree to rest. I soon fell asleep. Some kind of bird cried over my head and made a noise like a rattler. Turner afterwards told me it was a catbird. I don’t know what it was, but at the time I nearly jumped into the water. As it was getting late we concluded we had better be getting back to camp. We decided to leave Turner’s horse there so we tied him up. I was riding a little horse which although small proved to have plenty of endurance. We put both our saddles on my horse one on top of the other. We took turns riding. One would ride ahead, then dismount and walk, leaving the horse for the one on foot to catch up to and ride. Alternating this way we had no difficulty in getting back to camp.

(To Be Continued)