

Cattle Stampede Near Rillito Creek and Cowboys Round Them Up in Night Clothes, Writes Edward Vail in Diary.

University Foundations being Laid at the Time of Drive, 1890

[Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

Installment No. Three]

Arizona Daily Star. Vol. XLIV (283) Friday, AM Ed.

Society Women's Activity section, p. 7, column 1, February 24, 1922.

From the diary of Edward Vail. Written on the old trail from Tucson to southern California. The Star is each "day" publishing the interesting experiences which Mr. Vail recorded while driving a herd of cattle across the desert in 1890. Yesterday, Mr. Vail wrote of the uneasy night which the company spent on the desert and the experience with the ugly cholla cactus. His story continues today.

From the diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward Vail

Cattle and horses raised on the open range generally stay pretty close to the location where they are raised: they may change at certain seasons on account of better grass or early rains to another part of the range, but they usually return on their own accord, if well located, to their old stamping ground. Also, they have their own companions as running mates. 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 all the little calves from coyotes, dogs, or any other enemy until their mothers return.

With breakfast before daylight our cattle were headed toward Tucson and "yours truly" rode on ahead to buy a new chuck-wagon and have it loaded with provisions and ready for the road. I had two 40-gallon water barrels rigged up, one on each side. John, the cook, came into town after breakfast and exchanged his old chuck-wagon for the new one.

Camp at Rillito Creek

Our camp that night was to be on the Rillito Creek, just below Fort Lowell, about eight miles northeast of Tucson. We drove the cattle east of Tucson, past the present site of the University of Arizona and over what is the "north side" now, the best residence section of the city. At that time, the foundation of the University's first building was just being laid and it was about a mile from there to the nearest house in town. The surrounding country was covered in greasewood (creosote bush). A photographer from Tucson took a shot at our herd from the foundations of the University, but as I never saw any of the pictures, I think they must have been a failure. That night after we had watered the cattle in the Rillito, they were very restless and hungry and it kept us busy to hold

them. The country was full of brush and we had to round them up to keep from losing them.

Cattle Stampede

We followed the general directions of the S. P. railroad. The watering places were from 15 to 20 miles apart until we reached Maricopa, but several times we had to water in corrals. Many of our cattle were wild and had never been in a corral before and I am sure many of them did not drink at all.

That night we camped between Casa Grande and Maricopa. Turner and I concluded we would try to get a good night's sleep for once. We had been sleeping with all our clothes on and our horses ready saddled near us every night since we left the ranch, but as the cattle had been more quiet than usual for several nights past, we concluded to take off our outside clothes and get a more refreshing sleep. Sometime near midnight I awoke and was surprised to find we were in the middle of the herd and a lot of steers were lying down all around us. I awoke Tom quietly and asked him what he thought of our location. He answered, "The only thing to do is keep quiet. The boys know we are here and will work the cattle away from us as soon as they can do so safely. If the brutes don't get scared we will be all right."

I knew it was the only thing to do, but was a little nervous, nevertheless, and every time I heard a steer move or take a long breath it made me more so. The boys moved the cattle away from us a short distance, and not long after we had the worst stampede of the whole trip. Tom and I jumped on our horses without stopping to dress and we finally got most of the steers together, but as it was still very dark we could not tell whether we had them all or not. As soon as we had the cattle quieted, we made a fire and put on our clothes. We were nearly frozen.

I have rounded up cattle at all seasons of the year, but never before in my night clothes in the early part of February and at midnight. To make it worse, the country was full of washes and holes and "Billito" Tom's horse fell down, but when he got up without his rider, he commenced to herd the cattle on his own account by running around them and pushing the stragglers in.

150 Steers missing

As soon as it was daylight, we counted the herd and found we were short about 150 head: we missed a good many of the big mountain steers that we remembered as the wildest of the bunch. We soon found their trail going north and from their tracks could easily tell that they were on the run. We must have traveled eight or ten miles before we caught sight of them and they were still on the trot. We were then on the Pima Indian Reservation near the Gila River. The Indians were on the hills all around us and they made some objections to our driving the cattle back, but we paid no attention to them and took the bunch back to our last night's camp where the rest of the boys were holding the main herd.

In Saturday's Star Mr. Vail will tell of the two routes that travelers might take from Maricopa, one choice the old stage route along the S. P. railroad, which meant a drive of 50 miles without water and the other a much longer one following the Gila River. The dangers of this part of the journey across the country at that time are vividly told by the writer of the diary.