

## **Diary of a Desert Trail**

By Edward L. Vail

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The sixth article in a series of stories taken from the diary of Edward L. Vail in 1890 is appearing this morning, telling of the experiences which Mr. Vail, eight cowboys and the foreman of the Empire Ranch had during a trip across the desert, driving a herd of cattle to the coast of California.

The stories are each day's experiences as written by Mr. Vail on the trail.—Ed.  
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I kept a list of the cattle we left; I think there were about 25 or 30 before we reached Yuma.

While we were at Gila Bend I went with the cook and his wagon to Gila station and bought barley for our horses and provisions.

Before we reached Agua Caliente (Hot springs) near Sentinel I rode on ahead as we heard there was a store at the springs and laid in another supply there. The hot springs are on the north side of the river, and as there was considerable water in the river there a man in 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 there is any better in the country. At that time the accommodations were very poor there for persons visiting the springs, especially for sick people.

About 30 miles from Yuma, Jim Knight and one of his cowboys met us – Knight was the foreman of the Warner Ranch and a cousin of Tom 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 so far.

There was one of the most important things for us that Jim failed to do, however, - 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 100 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 was yet to come, Knight's report did not cheer us much.

The mules Jim Brought were young and unbroken and as stubborn as only a mule can be. It was hard to turn one around on a 10 acre lot. Two of our boys refused to ride them. We told them if they would go as far as Yuma we would pay for 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. 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 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 on one side of the neck they will turn in the opposite direction. Tom took a piece of rope long enough to

pass the middle of it over the saddle horn and each end through the ring of the bit in the mule's mouth. The ends of the rope were then fastened 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 to 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 on the next part of the trip.

In a few days more we reached Yuma and camped on the Colorado River, about three miles southwest of the town. The river was rather high owing to an 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 of our cowboys go to town to buy some clothing, which some of them needed badly and we gave them free rein to enjoy themselves as they pleased. Of course they did not go all at one time as some had to stay and herd the cattle. Among the last of our men to get back to camp that night was Severo Miranda (Chappo). 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, and 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 Chappa as he is called now, 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 served in the E. 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. We rode two or three miles up and down the Colorado River 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 land.

(To Be Continued)

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