



VaRRA News

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Vail Ranch Restoration Association

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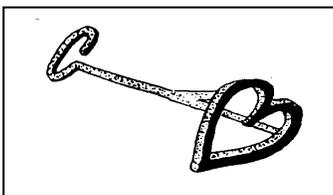
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*“Dedicated to the preservation
and restoration of the Historic
Vail Ranch Headquarters.”*

**Little Temecula
History Center is
Open on Sunday –
In Red Implement
Barn next to Kohl’s
At Margarita and
Temecula Pkwy.**

Sundays 12 – 5 pm
Or by Appointment

***Come see the results of
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Volunteer to be a docent.***



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A Major Cattle Drive in the West

The Diary of a Desert Trail

(Editors Note: Edward, brother of Walter Vail, wrote a series describing a cattle drive that began January 1890 from Vail, Arizona to Temecula, California. The series was originally published in TEXASLAND – The Pioneer Magazine, circa 1893. The Arizona Daily Star ran a continuing column from February 22, 1922 to March 10, 1922, tantalizing readers over a two week period. Locally, the “Diary” has been previously published in the High Country. We will be sharing this piece of history “Diary” in 4 parts. This issue is Part One and is done with express permission of Vail family descendants.)

By Edward L. Vail

The idea of driving a herd of cattle across Southern Arizona to California, was by no means an original one. After the gold discovery in California, many emigrants crossed southern Arizona and the Colorado Desert to San Diego, California, with teams of mules and oxen. In the sixties and early seventies, cattle became scarce on the big ranches in California and many herds from Texas were driven over the Southern Trail. This route came through Tucson, led northwest to the Gila River, followed the river to Yuma, where it crossed the Colorado River to the more dangerous desert beyond. It must be remembered that the early cattle drivers and emigrants who took the Southern Trail to the Pacific Coast had to be prepared at all times to defend themselves, their horses and cattle from the wily Apaches along the trail through New Mexico and Arizona, as well as from the Yuma Indians who were not always friendly. Years afterward, when the old Butterfield stages were still running, graves might be seen at many of the stations and along the trail, with this simple inscription cut on a rough board: “Killed by Indians.”

In 1880, the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Tucson. It was several years after that, however, before there were any surplus cattle to be shipped out of Arizona. My brother Walter L. Vail, who owned the Empire Ranch in Pima county, in those days was the first to use the railroad and up to 1890 had probably shipped as many cattle as any other of the large ranch owners in Arizona. In the fall of 1889, the S.P. Company concluded that the cattlemen in southern Arizona would stand a freight raise, so they increased the rate to certain California points about twenty-five percent. Cattle were low in price and hard to sell at that time, especially stock cattle. A vigorous protest was made by the ranchmen on the grounds that the cattle in question were not beef, but young steers that had to be grown and fattened after reaching the California ranches before the owners could expect to get any return from them. The railroad officials in San Francisco decided, however, that they would make no reduction, probably thinking that the ranchers would be compelled to accept the new rate, or keep their cattle in Arizona, and then ship them over the only railroad there was in this country at that time.

My brother was about to ship 1,000 steers from the Empire Ranch to the Warner Ranch near San Diego, California. Tom Turner, foreman of the Empire Ranch, had worked on the old trail from southern Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, when he was a boy, and he and I concluded that if men had driven cattle from Texas to California fifteen or twenty years before, and fought Indians nearly all the way, that we could do it too.

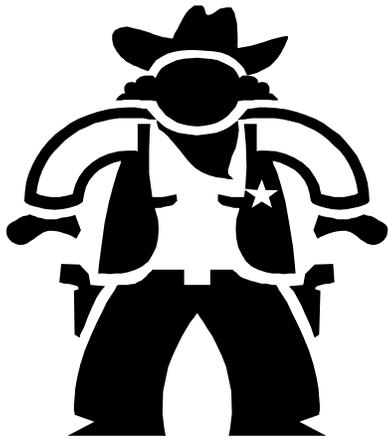
So we told my brother that if he would take a chance on our losing the cattle, we would do our best to reach our destination safely. My brother had recently taken as a partner C.W. Gates, of California, and after talking the matter over together they decided that they were willing for us to try it.

So the herd was gathered and we were soon ready to start. We had eight Mexican cowboys from the ranch and our Chinese cook, known as “John”, who had worked for us for some time. He had cooked on many a round-up and could drive a four-horse team, brand a calf, or make a fair cowhand, if necessary.

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Diary of a Desert Trail (continued from Page 1)

We left the home ranch the 29th of January, 1890, and after watering and camping at the Andradas that night, we drove on and made a dry camp on the desert about fifteen miles southeast of Tucson. Our cattle were all steers and none of them had ever been handled on the trail before. There were over nine hundred in the bunch and as most of the big ones had been gathered in the mountains, they were very wild. The part of the desert where we made camp was covered with cholla, a cactus that has more thorns to the square inch than anything that grows in Arizona. Cowboys say that if you ride close to a cholla it will reach out and grab you or your horse and as the thorns are barbed, it is very difficult to get them out of your flesh. These thorns make very painful wounds.

About midnight our cattle made a run and in trying to hold them, cattle, horses, and men, all got pretty badly mixed up in the chollas. A cholla under a horse's belly is probably not the most comfortable thing in the world. Consequently, we had our hands full riding bucking horses and trying to quiet a lot of wild steers at the same time. The rest of the night was mostly devoted to picking out thorns, so none of us slept much. It was fortunate that we did not lose any cattle as they were not yet off their range and any that escaped would have lost no time in getting back to their usual haunts which might have been miles from our camp. 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 if well located, they usually return of their own accord to their old stamping ground. Also they have their own companions as running mates.

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

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, and over what is now called the "north side," the best residence section of the city. At that time the foundations 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 county was covered with grease wood (creosote-bush). A photographer from Tucson took several shots of our herd from the foundation 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. We had to close-herd them to keep from losing them as the county was full of brush.

We followed the general direction of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The watering places were from fifteen to twenty miles apart until we reached Maricopa, but several times we had to water in corrals. Most of our cattle were wild and had never been in a corral before, and I am sure that many of them did not drink at all.

One 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 had 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 big steers were lying down all around us. I woke Tom quietly and asked him what he thought of our location. He answered, "The only thing to do is to 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 steers don't get scared we are all right." I knew it was the only thing to do, but was a little nervous never-the-less, 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 that 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 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 county was full of washes and holes and "Billito", Tom's horse fell down with him but Tom said that 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.

As soon as it was daylight we counted our steers and found we were short one hundred and fifty head and 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 travelled 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 camp where the rest of our boys were holding the herd.

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Restoration Update . . .

Considerable effort during 2010 surrounded restoration of donated and/or loaned items. A brief update follows:

Work on the **Model T** continues and early in 2010 it was actually started, running long enough to exhibit a serious radiator problem. A replacement radiator has been ordered after determining that the old one is not repairable.

Progress on the **Brougham Coach** restoration has slowed somewhat, but is continuing.

Our old family **buggy** restoration is almost complete, with final trim and upholstery yet to be done.

The **1915 gasoline pump** got a lot of attention late this last year and is now proudly on display, with freshly polished brass parts and new paint.

VARRA had an old **loom** which was in disrepair, but with some able assistance it is now functional and able to be demonstrated.

The **old ice box** once used on the Vail Ranch underwent some clean-up and restoration work, and now occupies a prominent place in the "kitchen" area at the History Center.

Next to the old ice box, is an old Electrolux **gas-powered refrigerator** which also received some TLC scrubbing and a fresh coat of paint.

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History Contest 2011

VARRA has partnered again this year with the Temecula Valley Museum and the Temecula Valley Historical Society to be the location where judging and display of entries in the 3rd Grade History Contest. Public display of the winning entries will be in late April.



Photo taken at the beginning of the Desert Cattle Drive led by Edward Vail. Railroads had raised their rates for shipping of cattle, and the drive west was to seek & verify alternative ways to move herds.

Diary of a Desert Trail (continued from Page 2)

The next day we reached Maricopa. At this point there was a choice of two routes; one went north and then followed the Gila River which makes a big bend to the north near there. This route would give us plenty of water but would take us many miles out of our way. The other way was to follow the old stage coach along the S.P.R.R. to near Gila Station and then drop down to the river. This meant a drive of fifty miles without water, but it was about half as far as the other route and gave us a chance of finding a little more grass for our cattle, as well as our horses, which needed it badly. As we expected, our trail ran through a very poor country to find grass or other feed for either horses or cattle. We had two horses to each man and few extra in case of an emergency although on a large ranch each cowboy has ten or twelve horses. We hauled barley in our chuck wagon and fed all our horses twice a day. We had several young saddle mules and some of them were very "broncho" especially about feeding time. There was one little roan mule in particular that was as wild as a hawk when we started but soon got acquainted with John, the cook, and come to the wagon for pieces of bread. There was also a little brown yearling steer the boys called "Brownie" and said he was "muy valiente" (very brave) because he always travelled with the leaders of the herd when we were on the move. When camp was made Brownie would pay us a visit and eat any scraps.

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.

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Brief Notes . . .

During 2010 VaARRA received many antique and artifact donations, many of which have been added to our exhibits and displays for visitors to enjoy. A brief re-cap follows:

An 1878 3-piece wedding dress, Pioneer fiddle, multiple old automobile manuals, and Knott's Garage receipts.

Multiple old flat-irons of all sizes, a 1947 Champion Bronc Rider Saddle, and multiple books, some for our Native American library, and others antique general interest books.

A framed portrait print of George Washington, original painting done by George Wilson Peale, a 1915 gasoline pump, and bulk oil stand (donated by Otto & Nancy Baron). Multiple pieces of kitchen equipment, including cups & saucers; as well as many misc. hand tools.

Wall mount hand crank phone, an old freight wagon, carriage lamps, an antique stove that can operate with either gas or coal.

Additionally during this past year we were able to add to our exhibit a number of significant antiques that have been loaned to VaARRA including; an old hand made Indian loom, with has a partially completed rug included, a cream separator, and old ice-box that was used by the Vail Ranch up on the Santa Rosa (loaned by the Temecula Valley Museum). Rounding out these display additions is a large flour sifter, and mounted Elk head (loaned by Judy & Duane Preimsberger).

We are proud to be displaying a watercolor painting of an Old Well Drilling Rig located on the Vail Ranch painted and loaned by Roger Honberger.

Diary of a Desert Trail (Continued from Page 3)

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 mothers 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 form 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.

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.