

The Diary of a Desert Trail

Edward Vail, 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

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.

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 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 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.

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.

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 mother's 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.

The next day we drove the cattle about ten miles down the winding canyon along the railroad towards Gila and made our third dry camp west of Maricopa. Before leaving Estrella I begged water enough from the section foreman there to water our wagon team.

My brother, Walter Vail, and I had many warm friends among railroad men of the Tucson division and often when driving or holding our cattle along the railroad track, the conductor and trainmen would wave their caps at us from a passing train and sometimes throw us a late newspaper.

We expected to reach Gila Bend on the river the next evening and started the cattle early in the morning toward the Gila Valley. When we had reached a point which was clear of the hills on a big flat that gradually sloped towards the river, the big steers in the lead suddenly threw up their heads and commenced to sniff the breeze, which happened to be blowing from the river, and a weird sound like a sigh or a moan seemed to come from the entire herd. I had been driving cattle many years then, but had never heard them make that noise before. They were very thirsty and had suddenly smelled water! They had been dragging along as if it were hard work even to walk, but in a minute, they were on a dead run. Every man but one was in front, beating the lead cattle over the head with coats and slickers trying to check them. As we feared they would run themselves to death before the water was reached. Close to the river we turned them loose, or rather, they practically made us get out to the way.

Then we found that one of our men had been caught in the rush of cattle. They had outrun his already tired horse but he was doing his best to keep it on its feet. If it had fallen with him the cattle would probably have trampled the man to death. Here several of our men showed quick action. Pushing their horses against one side of the string of cattle that was rushing towards their companion they pressed it back far enough to release him from his dangerous position. The lead steers plunged into the Gila like fishhawks, drinking as they swam across to the other side. The drags (or slow cattle) must have been at least three miles behind us when the first steers reached the river, and after watering our horses, which we did carefully, some of the cowboys went back to help the man we left behind to follow them in.

We grazed our cattle and horses at Gila Bend for several days and gave them a chance to rest. Turner or I generally did some scouting ahead to find a good watering place for our cattle and the next day's camp. We were looking for a

short cut to Oatman Flat as we did not want to drive the cattle over the long, winding, rocky road. On the south side of the river and about thirty feet above it there was a narrow trail cut in the side of the mountain. This had formerly been the old stage road but was so badly washed out by high water that in places it was barely wide enough for the steers to travel single file. On the other side of the river was a steep mountain.

We finally decided to drive the cattle over the narrow trail by the river and send the wagon by the longer road. So, we started them on the trail with a rider leading, as usual, and as soon as a few of the lead steers were on the way the others followed like sheep. So many cattle walking single file was an unusual sight. All reached Oatman Flat safely. There we met the Jourdan family with whom we were acquainted. They were farming and also had some cattle. Turner and I spent the evening rather pleasantly at their house.

Oatman Flat is a nice piece of land that was named for the Oatman family, nearly all the member of which were killed by Apaches in 1852.

Gila Bend is about half way from Tucson to Yuma and from what I saw of the Gila Valley I did not think much of it as a cattle county. We had some trouble with quicksand when watering cattle in the river. If a steer got stuck in the sand the only way to get him out was to wade in and pull out one leg at a time and then tramp the sand around that leg (this gets the water out of the sand which it holds in suspension). When all the legs were free, we would turn the animal on its side and drag it back to the bank with our riatas. I never saw so many quail in my life as I saw in that county. Frequently John, the cook, would take my shotgun and kill a lot of them. At night when he called us to supper he would say, "All the boys come plenty quai tonight." He could not say "quail".

There were very few incidents of particular interest on the trail down the Gila Valley to Yuma. One evening when we were ready to camp for the night, John drove his team down on a little flat near the river where there were quite a number of willow and cottonwood trees. When Tom rode over and saw the place, he told the Chinaman to hitch up his team and drive up on higher ground near where the cattle were to be held that night. But the cook did not want to go and said, "See what a pletty place this is, Mr. Tom!" Tom replied that it was a "Pletty" all right, but too far from the cattle in case of trouble, and too far for the men to go in the night when the guards changed.

The next morning when we awoke, we heard a great roaring from the river. We lost no time in riding over to see what had happened and found the Gila was a raging flood, and the place John had picked out to camp was eight or ten feet under water. If we had slept there that night the men on guard would have been the only survivors of our outfit. Later we heard that the Walnut Grove Dam, situated on a branch of the Gila River, had given way, and quite a number of people were drowned in the valley below the dam.

We were compelled to leave some of our cattle before we reached Yuma, as there was scarcely any grass or weeds and the mesquite and other forage had not yet budded out. Some steers died, but most of them gave out and we turned them loose. I kept a list of those we left. I think there were about twenty-five or thirty in all.

While we were at Gila Bend, I went with the cook and his wagon to Gila Station and bought barley for our horses, also provisions. Before we reached the Agua Caliente (Hot Springs), near Sentinel, I rode ahead, as we had heard there was a store there, and laid in another supply. The Hot Springs are on the north side of the Gila River and as there was considerable water in the river, a man with 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 if there is any better in the country. At that time the accommodations were very poor for persons visiting the Springs especially for those who were ill.

About thirty miles from Yuma, Jim Knight and one of his cowboys met us. Knight was foreman of the Warner Ranch and a cousin of 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 ever since we left the Empire Ranch.

There was one very important thing that Jim failed to do however, and 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 one hundred 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 yet to come, Knight's report did not cheer us much.

The mules Jim brought were young and unbroken and as stubborn as only mules can be. It was hard to turn one around on a ten-acre lot. Two of our boys refused to ride them. We told them if they would go as far as Yuma, we would pay

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. So, 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 to one side of the neck they will turn in the opposite direction. Tom took a piece of rope which was long enough to pass through the rings of an American Snaffle-bit, allowing enough slack for the rider to use as reins, and fastened the ends 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 on 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 during the rest of the trip.

A few days later we reached Yuma and camped on the Colorado River, about three miles southwest of the town. The river was rather high owing to the 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 our cowboys go to town to buy clothing, which some of them needed badly, and we gave them free rein to enjoy themselves as they pleased. Of course, they did not all go at once as some had to stay and herd the cattle. Among the last of our men to get back to camp that night was Servero Miranda, known among the cowboys as "Chappo," which is Spanish for "Shorty." 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, but 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 Chappo," as he is now called, 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 had served in the U.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 across the river. We rowed two or three miles up and down the Colorado 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 have to land. Finally, we found an island near the west bank of the river where the landing was better. The water was not very deep on the other side of the island, with a good landing on the California side. We then returned to the Arizona side of the river and found it was impossible to drive the cattle into the river there, as the bank formed a ten-foot perpendicular wall above the water. So, we hired a lot of Yuma Indians with picks and shovels to grade a road to the water. This work occupied a day or two. We were then ready to attempt to swim the cattle across. The herd had not been watered since the day before as we were anxious to have them thirsty.,

The current was very strong and the river very deep, and because of the swift current we found it would be impossible for men on horseback to do anything in guiding the cattle across, so we hired Yuma Indians and three or four boats. We placed them so as to keep the cattle from drifting down stream. The idea was not to let them turn back nor land down far enough to miss the island. We got the cattle strung out and travelling as they had on the trail, with the big steers in the lead and men on each side to keep them in position to go down the grade which we made to the river. Most of the large cattle reached the island all right.

Then our troubles began! Two or three hundred of the smaller steers got frightened as the current was too swift for them and they swam back to the Arizona side. About this time the Sheriff from Yuma showed up and said he had orders from the District Attorney to hold our cattle until we paid taxes on them in Yuma County. I told him I thought the District Attorney was mistaken, but we were too busy to find out just then. Cattle were scattered all along the river on the Arizona side and as they could not climb the banks and get out, many of them were in the water just hanging to the bank with their feet. We hired all the Indians we could get and with the help of our own men we pulled all except two or three of the cattle up that steep bank.

It was about ten o'clock at night. The Yuma Indians quit and said they were hungry and tired. I did not doubt them a bit, as we had eaten nothing since breakfast before daylight. So, we made it unanimous and all quit and went to Yuma. We were all terribly dirty so we went to the hotel at the depot, got a bath, some supper, a bed and a good sleep!

In the meantime, this is the way we were situated. Our chuckwagon, cook and blankets were across the river; our six hundred cattle were loose on the island in the river where we could not herd them; nearly three hundred steers were loose on the Arizona side in the thickest brush I have ever seen; and we were in the hands of the Sheriff of Yuma County!

The next morning, C.W. Gates, my brother's partner, arrived on the train from Los Angeles. He went down with us to the scene of the previous day's operations. The first thing we did was to pull out the two steers we had left clinging to the river bank. Then we told Mr. Gates that if he would take what men we could spare and start to gather the cattle we had turned loose in the brush that Tom and I would go over in a boat to the island and swim the cattle over to the California side of the river. We threw our saddles into the boat, led the swimming horses and soon reached the island. The cattle seemed to be alright. We did not have any trouble in getting them over as we found the big steers could wade across but most of the younger ones had to swim a short distance. When we got them all across, we looked up at the best place we could find to hold them, and made camp.

When we got back to where we had left Mr. Gates, we found him and Chappo sitting on a boat on the river bank. Mr. Gates said that we could never gather the cattle in that brush, and I admit it did not look possible. At that time Mr. Gates had been only a short time in the cattle business and had never worked with cattle on the range. So, Tom and I told him if he would go to Tucson and see his attorney about the tax matter we would gather the lost cattle, if possible.

I forgot to say that our Chinese cook left for Pantano on the train soon after we arrived in Yuma. He said that if he crossed the river he would never get back again. The day before he left, he bought a large Colorado salmon alive from a Yuma Indian who had just caught it. John took the fish, which was over two feet long, up to Mr. Gondolfo's store and got permission to put it in a large galvanized water tank as he wanted to take it back to the Empire Ranch for Mrs. Vail. When John went to get his fish, the tank was full of water. So, with the permission of the owner the water was drawn off, but John could not wait for all of it to run out. When the water was still two feet deep, he could see the fish and became so excited that he jumped in, clothes and all. I was watching and it was quite a circus. He grabbed at that fish several times before he caught it; then his foot slipped and he rolled over in the bottom of the tank, but when he got up, he had the fish. If

anything, I think he was wetter than the fish, but all he said was, "Mr. Ned that fish pletty dam quick, but I catche him allite." John wrapped the fish in his slicker and was soon on his way to the Pantano. When he arrived there, in his anxiety to present the fish to Mrs. Vail in good condition, he telephoned for a team to meet him.

Before Mr. Gates left Yuma, he telegraphed my brother who was at the Empire Ranch that we were swimming the cattle and that I was in trouble over the tax matter. When the message reached Pantano it was transmitted over the telephone to the Ranch. The line was not working well and the only thing that my brother could understand was, "Ned trouble, swimming river." He at once concluded that I had been drowned in the river. He saddled his fastest horse, "Lucero," and I am told, made the fastest time on record to Pantano. When he read the message and found that trouble was about taxes, he said: "That word never looked good to me before."

At first, we did not make much progress in gathering those steers. The brush was so thick we could not get through it on horseback. It was screw-bean mesquite which does not grow high but the limbs are long and drooping so that the ends lie on the ground. Between them arrow-weed was as thick as hair on a dog and higher than a man's head. We found that we could run some of the steers out of the brush afoot by starting near the river and scaring them up to the open mesa as the brushy only extends back a short distance from the river. After a few days the cattle commenced coming out themselves and we soon had quite a bunch together.

In the meantime, Mr. Francis J. Heney who at that time was acting as attorney for Vail & Gates at Tucson, decided our tax troubles as follows; viz, that the taxes had been paid on our cattle before they left the home ranch, and that cattle in transit were not subject to taxation any place in Arizona. Mr. Heney also advised the Yuma attorney to read the Arizona Statutes and let Pima County cattlemen alone.

Then the sheriff's deputy wanted us to pay him for holding our cattle but I told him we never hired him and as the sheriff put him there, he had better collect from him. The deputy's name was Green. He had a livery stable in Yuma where we had kept our horses ever since we arrived. He was a pretty good fellow. I think Mr. Gates was in favor of paying him as we had worked him like one of our men holding the cattle. Tom and I were pretty sore by that time and said we would see

that bunch of Yuma politicians in a hotter place than Yuma – if there was such a place – before we would pay any of them a cent. After four or five days we had gathered most all the cattle on the Yuma side. Then I ordered cars and shipped them across the bridge. We made a chute of an old wagon box and railroad ties and unloaded them. It would no doubt have been cheaper to have shipped all our cattle across the bridge at \$2.50 a carload but we did not like the idea of depending on the railroad in any way on this drive.

We soon got all our cattle together on the California side and were ready to move. We were all glad to get away from Yuma and take our chances on “The Great Colorado Desert,” as it was then called. We followed the river and met a man, named Carter, who had a small cattle ranch from whom we bought a half a beef that he had just killed. Our cattle were too poor for beef and a whole beef was more than we could haul and as the days were warm, we were afraid it would spoil before we could eat it.

Carter was said to know the desert well and I tried to hire him as a guide and offered him \$20 a day to show us where the water was on the desert but he said he had “not been out there for some time. Sometimes there was plenty of water out there and often no water at all as it depended entirely on whether there had been rain.” We decided that Mr. Carter was probably right about the water on the desert and what we saw afterward confirmed that opinion.

We did not travel very far down the river before we were overtaken by two young men with four or five very thin horses. They said they had been following us for some time and were anxious to cross the desert and heard we were driving cattle across to California and asked if we could give them a job. Tom Turner told them we had plenty of help for the cattle with us and they said they were afraid to cross the desert alone as they knew nothing about the country. We told them if they were willing to help us when we required help, we would let them go along with us. Tom told them that they could turn their horses in with our horses and he would let them ride some of our mules which came from the Warner Ranch.

We were close to the line of Lower California at that time and soon after we had crossed it we came to a Cocopa Indian Rancheria. The men wore breech cloths and the women wore aprons made out of the bark of willow trees. They were fine specimens of Indians, the men all looking like athletes. I have been told that they came up from Cocopa Mountains in Mexico in order to farm during the summer, raising mostly corn, pumpkins and melons, then in the winter went back

to the mountain again. We had not been around their camp long before we got a message from the chief. He sent us word that we were on their land and had no right to pass through there with our cattle and that "all good people" who passed through gave them two steers. We sent word to the chief by one of the Indians who could speak Spanish that we would like to have a conference with him, so the meeting was arranged and we went to the Indian camp. After a parley in Spanish we told him that we were considered "good people" where we came from but that we did not own the cattle we were driving, therefore we would have no right to give them away.

We told them if they would send one of the men to the chuckwagon we would be glad to give them some sugar and coffee. We were very sorry that we did not have more to spare but as we had a long way to go and no stores along the trail, we could not give them more than we did.

We followed the old stage road down to where it left the river. I have forgotten the distance but it could not have been over 20 miles. In this place there was quite a lagoon of water, so we camped there. Next day Tom and I followed the old road into the desert looking for water for our next camp. I never saw so many rattlesnakes in my life as we saw that day. They seemed to be of two varieties. One was the ordinary large diamond-back and the other was a little rattlesnake with horns over its eyes called the "side-winder."

We rode a long way that day and came back to camp late quite discouraged. Owing to the condition of our cattle which had grown quite thin we were afraid of driving them a long distance. When we reached camp, we were surprised to find several tents pitched close to us on the lagoon. We inquired of our men who the people were. They did not know, they thought they were engineers of some kind. Tom and I immediately went over to see and introduced ourselves to the head man who proved to be a civil engineer. His name was D.K. Allen, and he told us he was surveying the line for a railroad from Ensenada, Lower California, to Yuma, and that he had been out on the desert all winter. We then told him our troubles about finding water and he assured us there was plenty of water on the desert and that the first water that we would find was only 17 miles from our present camp. This he said was not sufficient water for all our cattle but that ten miles further on just across the line, near the boundary monument on New River there was quite a large charco in the channel of New River which would probably water all our cattle for a week. (Ed. Note: "charco" is Spanish for "pool of water".)

While we were at Mr. Allen's camp his cook was preparing supper and we asked him what he was cooking. He said it was a rattlesnake and he invited us to have some. We passed it along to all our crew who had gone with us to call on Mr. Allen. People were scarce in that country and those men were as much interested in meeting someone as we were. The only man among us who tasted the snake was Jesus Maria Elias, who told us that when he was with General Cook as his chief trailer, he had frequently eaten it. I had known Elias and his family well for many years but I had never known that he was as celebrated a man as he really was. Afterward I found out that he had been the leader of the celebrated so-called "Camp Grant Massacre". He, with William Oury, eight Americans, several Mexicans and a lot of Papago Indians marched over to the mouth of Arivipa Canyon, which was right in sight of the old Camp Grant then occupied by American troops, and nearly exterminated the band of Apaches. They killed all but the children whom they brought to Tucson as prisoners. This expedition was sent out because of the constant raids the Apaches made against the settlers on the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers. A full account of this interesting expedition can be found in the 2nd volume of Farrish's History of Arizona.

I found Mr. Allen to be a very interesting man. He had traveled extensively throughout Old Mexico and was very much interested in everything that he saw in the wild part 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 because he had not other meat. So, we sent him a part of the beef we had bought from Joe Carter. We asked him in regard to the trail across to 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 that 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 a very generous man who did not expect any compensation for helping us. Mr. Allen was afterwards editor of a Yuma paper, I think it was The Sentinel.

The next afternoon we bid good-bye to Mr. Allen and the Colorado Valley and drove out 10 miles and camped for the night. Early the following morning we were on our way and in the afternoon we reached the first watering place that Mr. Allen had referred to. 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 that the cattle

would rush for the water. After looking at the water we decided we would be able to water only the weakest of the cattle. We then 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 old New River stage station on the old overland road just across the California line, where the town of Calexico now stands. We were quite pleased with the looks of the country thereabouts. The mesquite was beginning to bud out and there was plenty of old grass around. The grass was the kind that is commonly called guayarra.

The green shoots grow out of the old roots and come to a head like timothy. Also, there was a great deal of what cattlemen call the "careless weed". All the cattle ate heartily and enjoyed the first good meal they had had for days. We concluded to stay several days and give our cattle a chance to rest.

The next day Turner 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 striking peak. It was 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. We stretched out under the trees to rest. I soon fell asleep. Some kind of bird cried over my head and made a noise like a rattler. Turner afterward told me it was a cat-bird. I don't know what it was but at the time I nearly jumped into the water. As it was getting late, we concluded that we had better be getting back to camp. While we were there, Turner's horse was taken sick and seemed to be in considerable pain. So, we decided to leave it there and tied it up. I was riding a little horse which, although small, proved to have plenty of endurance. We put both of our saddles on my horse, 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 and ride. Alternation in this way we had no difficulty in getting to camp.

While camping at New River we found many things of interest. Most of the country was covered with very small snail shells. They were so small that at first, I took them to be seeds of some weed. However, they were perfect shells although not larger than the head of a pin. I gathered some of them as curios. In looking around we found signs of cattle herds which had crossed the desert years before. At one place we found where cattle had been bedded for the night and the tracks

of the horses and wagons were still distinct. The soil was a sort of heavy clay which must have been wet when the cattle were there. Judging from the size of the bedding ground and from the bones of the cattle that we found scattered around, some of the skeletons were complete, it must have been quite a large herd. We followed the wagon tracks a short distance and found that large mesquite trees had grown up between the wagon tracks. Those tracks must have been made at least 20 years before as the trees were easily that old, judging from their size, as trees have such a slow growth on the desert. Later on, we found a human skull which we put in the wagon and carried the rest of the way with us. We also found a wrecked wagon, with the axle broken, which apparently had been abandoned. Afterwards I heard that it probably belonged to some people who had perished on the desert. I believe if the history of that desert could be written it would prove very interesting reading for anyone who cared for real tragedy.

From our camp at New River we dropped to Indian Wells, north of Signal Mountain. Later on the next day, we started for Carrizo Creek, which makes the western boundary of the desert. This was the longest drive without water we had to make in crossing the Colorado desert. I think it was about forty miles. Our cattle had done well while camped at New River as there was more pasture for them there than at a place on the trail since we left the Empire Ranch. The country was open so we loose-herded them. Strange to say the only steers we lost on the desert were the two that were drowned in the charco at New River. They were young and very weak and probably got their feet fast in the mud of the middle of the pool. In the morning we found them there, dead, with their heads under the water.

We drove frequently at night as the days were warm on the desert. We hung a lantern on the tailboard of our wagon and our lead steers would follow it like soldiers. Before we reached Yuma only one man was necessary on guard; so we changed every three hours, which gave the men more sleep, but it was rather a lonesome job for the fellow that had to watch the cattle.

The road had a decided grade as it approached the mountains and there was much heavy sand most of the way which made it quite tiresome. I am not quite sure how long we were making that part of the drive, as we had to rest the cattle every few hours. When we reached Carrizo we found a shallow stream of water in a wash, the banks of which were white with alkali. Not only the stream

but the hills, barren of all vegetation, were full of the same substance. I never saw a more desolate place in my life.

In all of Arizona there is nothing to compare with it that I know of. The next morning the cattle were scattered up and down the creek, most of them lying down, but a few of them were eating what little salt grass they could find. They had come through all right from our last camp, except for one young steer that could not get up. We tried to lift him to his feet but he could not stand, so I told the boys that I was going out to see if I could find bunch grass along the hills and the youngest of the Fox brothers offered to go with me. He was a good-looking young man nearly six feet tall and about 20 years old, I should think. His brother was rather short and heavily built. These boys had worked cheerfully since they met us and were on good terms with all of our men. Young Fox was a pleasant young fellow and said that Tom Turner had offered to give them work on the Empire Ranch if they would go back there with our men.

A little later, I was surprised to see a carriage with four men in it coming toward our camp from the west. One of the men beckoned to me and I walked over to see what he wanted and who they were. They were the first people we had seen since we left the Colorado River about a hundred miles back. He said he was a sheriff from Arizona, and as he spoke, I recognized him. He then asked if we had two Americans with us who had joined us near Yuma and I replied that we had. Then he introduced me to the other three men, one of whom was his deputy, and the other, his driver, who was from Temecula, California, was I think he said a deputy sheriff there. The fourth man, the sheriff told me, came with him from Arizona and was the owner of some horses which he said the Fox boys had stolen from his ranch. The sheriff then told me that he and his deputy had followed the Fox brothers all the way to Yuma and then they had followed our trail after the boys had joined us, until we crossed the line. They then returned to Yuma and took the train for California, as the sheriff could not go into Mexico.

As nearly as I remember I said: "Sheriff, you know the reputation of our outfit; it has never protected a horse thief and has always tried to assist an officer in the discharge of his duty." I also told the sheriff that the boys had done the best they could to help us in crossing the desert and that I was sorry to hear they were in trouble. I felt it was my duty to tell him that the boys were well armed and quick with a gun. "You have plenty of men to take them" I said. "Be careful, I don't

want to see anybody hurt." He sheriff answered, "If they ask you anything tell them that we are mining men, going out to look at a mine."

I knew if the boys were sure that the men were officers there would be bloodshed at once. It was a very unpleasant position for me as I really felt a good deal of sympathy for the brothers and I knew them to be young and reckless. The older one came to me and said, "Who are those men and what do they want?"

I had to tell him what the sheriff told me to say, viz., that they said they were mining men going out to look at a mine near there. I could see he was not satisfied and was still anxiously watching the sheriff's party. The newcomers then said they were hungry and I told the man who was cooking to get them something to eat. While they were eating, they talked about the mine they were going out to see and I think the boys were less suspicious of them.

Very soon after that while I was standing on one side of the chuck wagon and the elder brother was leaning against the tailboard, with the other brother standing near the front wheel on the opposite side of the wagon from me, I suddenly heard a scuffle and when I looked up I saw the sheriff and another man grab the older boy and take his gun. His deputy and an assistant were holding his brother on the other side of the wagon. They had quite a struggle and young Fox pulled away from them, ran around the wagon past me with the deputy in pursuit. He had run about a hundred yards up a sandy gulch when the deputy who was quite close to the boy suddenly raised his gun and fired. Young Fox dropped and never moved again. I was close behind the deputy, as I had followed him. When he turned toward me his six-shooter was still smoking and he was wiping it with his handkerchief. "I hated to do it," he said, "but you have to sometimes."

I was angry and shocked at his act, as it was the first time I had ever seen a man shot in the back. I then saw the other Fox boy walking towards his brother's body which was still lying on the ground. The officers who had him handcuffed tried to detain him, but he said, "Shoot me if you like, but I am going to my brother." He walked over to where the body lay and looked at it. Then he asked me if we would bury his brother and I told him he could depend on us to do so.

Then I told the sheriff there was no excuse for killing the boy as he could not get away in that kind of a country. He replied that he was very sorry about what had happened, but said, "You know, Vail, that I got my man without killing him, and that it was impossible for me to prevent it, as I had my hands full with the other fellow at the time."

Tom Turner was not in camp when this happened as he was riding around the cattle. The sheriff and his posse left shortly after and took their prisoner with them but they left the body of young Fox lying on the ground where it fell. We dug a grave and wrapping the young man's body in his blanket we buried him near the place where he fell. It was the best we could do. I saw a man in Tucson last week who told me he was at Carrizo Creek a few years ago where he saw the grave which has a marker with the inscription: "Joe Fox, age 19, Murdered." (Ed. Note: Later determined to be Frank Fox, Age 15.)

We were all glad to leave Carrizo the next morning and be on the way to our destination, the Warner Ranch. The country was dry and barren until we reached Vallecito Creek which is in a pretty little valley with green grass growing in it. Between Vallecito Creek and Warner we passed the San Felipe Ranch and from there on to Warner's the road ran through better country for cattle. Finally, we reached the 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 or eight inches high and the entire ranch of 50,000 acres was as green as a wheat field.

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. 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 was glad to have all of them share with Tom Turner and myself in the success of our drive. After we reached Warner, the justice of the peace sent for me 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. I believe they did obtain 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 groups and wash their own and sometimes borrow soap from the Indian girls. There was a good deal of laughing and joking in Spanish during the performance. The water as it comes out of the ground is hot enough to cook an egg. Close by and 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 some time here and at Temecula gathering data for her celebrated novel, "Ramona".

Very soon all the cowboys were sent to Los Angeles where they remained 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 [later the Occidental] in Tucson, which was then owned by Maish & 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 for cattle from Tucson to California. From our experiences I was able to make some suggestions, viz.: to build a flat boat to ferry cattle across the Colorado River; to clean 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.

When the Southern Pacific Railroad Company heard of the proposed meeting they 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 the bartender was absent. At once they saw a chance to have some fun at the expense of Mr. Maish 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. Our fine host, Maish, 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 this kind of an 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 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.