

**[Diary of a Desert Trail**

By Edward L. Vail

Installment No. Five]

Arizona Daily Star. Vol. XLIV (285) Sunday, AM Ed.

Society Women's Activity section, p. 5, column 1, February 26, 1922.

*Take Gila Bend On Cattle Drive to Coast*

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Water Barrels formerly Used for Sauerkraut Give Queer Flavor

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Today's story from the diary of Edward Vail is the fourth in a series of reminiscences, which Mr. Vail is giving to The Star authentically written while on the old desert trail, driving a herd of cattle to the coast of southern California while in the company with eight Mexican cowboys and Tom Turner, foreman of the Empire Ranch. Mr. Vail's story is expressive of the old days on the cattle ranches and the desert. He still preserves the old map which was used on the trail during the trip. – (Ed. Note)

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Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

In the afternoon we hit the trail for Gila Bend, and driving out slowly about ten miles on the old stage road riding 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 valley which would be rather pretty 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 forms a rincon. Tom concluded we would turn the cattle loose that night by grazing them in the direction of that mountain and then guarding them only on the lower side, thus giving them a chance to lie down whenever they liked, or to 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 one cowpuncher ask another how they held their cattle on a roundup. The other would reply, "Oh, we had to sing to them!"

There is one thing that may seem funny now, but it did not seem so at that time. When we commenced making dry camps and using the water from the barrels on our wagon, we found it had a very disagreeable taste. I supposed that the barrels I had bought in Tucson had been used for whiskey or wine, a flavor to which I do not think a cowboy would 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 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 toward 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.

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Mr. Vail will tell to The Star's readers of Tuesday, the many warm friendships the party made while on the trail, numbering among them the railroad men, cowboys, and dwellers of the desert.