

[Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

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Vail Tells How His Tired Herd Rushed to Water

Veteran Cattlemen Knew Many Railroad Men in Early Days

The fifth Story from the "Diary of a Desert Trail," written by Edward L. Vail for The Star is given today. Mr. Vail's stories are written in a most interesting manner, giving a vivid description of the dangers encountered in driving a herd of cattle across country from Arizona to the coast of southern California.—(Ed. Note.)

By Edward Vail

Both my brother and I had very warm friends among the railroad men of the Tucson division, and often when driving or holding our cattle along the track, the conductor and trainmen would wave their caps to us from the 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. We had reached a point which was clear of the hills on a big flat that gradually sloped toward the river; suddenly, the big steers in the lead threw up their heads and commenced to sniff the breeze, which happened to be blowing from the river, while a weird sound like a sigh or moan seemed to come from the entire herd.

I had been driving cattle for 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 was hard work even to walk, but in a minute they were on the dead run. Every man but one was in front, beating the head cattle over the heads 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 made us get out of their way.

Then we found that one of our men had been caught in the rush of the cattle. They had outrun his already tired horse, but he was doing his best to keep the horse on his feet. If his horse had fallen with him the cattle would probably have trampled the man to death.

Here, several of our men showed courage and quick action. Pushing their horses against one side of the string of cattle that were rushing towards their companion, they pressed it to the other side far enough to release him from his dangerous position.

The lead steers plunged into the Gila River like fish hawks, drinking as they swam and crossing 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 had left behind to follow them in.

(To Be Continued)