

## **Diary of a Desert Trail**

By Edward L. Vail  
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The preceding chapters in The Diary of a Desert Trail have given an interesting description of the trip downstream in the Colorado river while Edward L. Vail, Tom Turner, foreman of the Empire Ranch and eight Mexican cowboys drove a herd of cattle across the country.

The last story told of the camp made along the river bank and the loss of some cattle in the brush wood. – Ed. Note.

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When we got back to where we had left Mr. Gates we found him and Chappo on a boat along the river bank. Mr. Gates said, "Tom, you can never gather those cattle in that brush," and I admit it did not look possible. At that time Mr. Gates had only been a short time in the cattle business and never worked them on a range. So Tom and I told Gates 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 how our Chinese cook left for Pantano on the train soon after we arrived in Yuma. He said if he crossed the river he would never come 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 foot long, up to Mr. Gondolfo's store and got permission to put it in a large galvanized water tank in the back yard. John said: "I am going to take that fish back to the Empire Ranch for Mrs. Vail."

When John went to get his fish the tank was full of water. So with permission from the owner the water was drawn off, but John could not wait for all of it to run out. When the water was about two feet deep he could see the fish and became so excited that he jumped in, clothes and all. I was watching him 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 he only said: "Mr. Ned, that fish pretty dam quick, but I caught him alitte."

John wrapped the fish in his slicker and was soon on his way to 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 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 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 he made the fastest time on record to Pantano. When he read the message and found the trouble was about taxes, he said: "That word never looked so 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, which does not grow high but the limbs are long and dropping on the ground and lying there 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 brush 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. Frances J. Heney, who was at that time acting 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 the cattle in transit were not subject to taxation any place in Arizona. Mr. Heney also advised the Yuma county 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 own men, holding the cattle. Tom and I were getting pretty sore by that time and said we would see that bunch of Yuma politicians in a hotter place than Yuma if there was before we would pay any of them a cent. After four or five days we had gathered most of the cattle on the Yuma side. Then I ordered cars and shipped them across the bridge there. 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 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.

We soon got all our cattle together on the California side and were ready to move. All were glad to get away from Yuma and take our chance 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 half a beef that he had just killed. Our cattle were too poor for beef and a while 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. He said, "he had not been out there for some time. Sometimes there was plenty of water out there and often no water as it depended entirely on whether there had been rain."

(To Be Continued)