


FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE APACHES 1886.

THE MEXICAN BAILE

THE CHIRICAHUAS



By E. L. Vail
(Tucson)

Mr. Vail came to Arizona in 1879. The story of Following the Trail of the Apaches covers his experiences of a few days in June 1886. The three sketches were written by Mr. Vail in 1920 and review his experiences and observations of those early days in Arizona.

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CHARLES MORGAN WOOD

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE APACHES.

By E. L. Vail
(Written in 1920)

The Heart round-up which had been working the mountain-enclosed ridges and valleys of the Happy Valley Ranch about twenty-five miles north of the S. P. Station of Pantano, Arizona, had finished its work and on the following day--the fifth of June, 1886--reached our ranch with a tired herd of stray cattle.

We expected to cut the cattle the next day. There were cow-boys there from San Pedro, Rillito and Santa Cruz Valleys, also quite a number from the Empire Ranch. It is customary for men whose ranches are in the same direction, to put their cattle in the same bunch and help each other part them out and drive them home.

Geronimo's blood-thirsty bands of Apaches had been raiding Southern Arizona for some time, killing women and children, ranchmen and lonely prospectors without partiality. General Miles, who had recently succeeded General Crooke in command of this Department, had evidently studied the Apache methods of warfare, and had placed troops of cavalry at available points on, or near the trails the Indians followed

in their raids between the Reservation, in Arizona, and Geronimo's stronghold in Sonora. Pantano was near one of these trails. When the round-up outfit arrived at Pantano, they found Major Lebo camped there with three troops of the Tenth U. S. Cavalry, colored.

Among the "Buffalo" soldiers at Pantano, the cow-boys discovered the regimental Glee Club, so a committee was appointed to wait upon the Major and ask his permission to let the Club sing for us. At Woolfolk's little hotel we had quite a concert that night. The Club was the guest of the cow-boys, and between every selection, drinks and cigars were passed and cigars were passed around. Those niggers could certainly sing. There was one very big fellow, named Wilson, with a fine bass voice, and the boys said that when he struck a very low note, the glasses on the bar would ring. I remember, another called "Curley" - who they said was part Cherokee. He was quite a minstrel performer, and danced and sang comic songs. Everything was peaceful, and although a good deal of liquor was consumed, nobody got full. The cow-boys who worked on big ranches in those did not get to town as often as they do in the movies, and probably drank less than the men in the towns who drank at all-popular opinion to the contrary, notwithstanding.

Most of the boys had ridden forty or fifty miles that day, but it was near midnight before we decided to adjourn. We had hardly reached our camp and gone to sleep that night when an old man on horse-back aroused us from our slumbers. As soon as a light was brought, we found he was Cal Mathers, the father of our foreman, from the Happy Valley Ranch. He was covered

with blood, as were his horse and saddle. As soon as he was able, he told his story as follows:

After the round-up outfit left with the cattle, that morning, he and his son, Wallace, who was in charge of the ranch, decided to hold about fifteen of the best saddle horses near the old ranch house until the next day before driving them out to their regular range. So the old man drove them up among the live oaks to a little opening not far from the house. Mathers said he was sitting in the shade of a big oak, holding his buckskin horse by the reins, while the other horses were grazing quietly around, when he saw an Apache ride down a Canon from the direction of the Rincon Peak, and start to run the horses together. Mathers jumped on his horse and tried to start the loose horses down toward the ranch. Another Indian then appeared and jumping off his horse, commenced shooting at the old man with a big Springfield rifle. Mathers had no gun so he made a run for the house, keeping under cover as much as he could. As he expressed it, "Me and old Buck did some tall dodging, and the Indian fired several shots before he hit me." The ball passed through his left arm, just grazing his ribs. Wallace bandaged his father's wound. It was a bad flesh wound but no bones were broken. Wallace decided to stay and protect the ranch house and as his father needed medical attention it was decided that he should start for Pantano alone as soon as it was dark. The old man lost a good deal of blood on that twenty-five mile ride over a rough mountain trail and was pretty weak when he arrived. He was over seventy years old, and a Mexican War veteran

from California.

We went over to Major Lebo's camp as soon as we could, awoke him and reported the Indians' attack at Happy Valley. A short council was held and it was decided that the Apaches were a part of Geronimo's band that had raided through Ora Blanco and the Santa Rita Mountains a few before, and for whom Lebo was then on the watch, and that they were probably going South.

Lon Mathers, the Empire Foreman, and brother of Wallace, decided to start at once for Happy Valley to see if his brother was safe, and two young men, Frank Farish and Fred Moore, who were working for the Empire Company volunteered to go with him. It was arranged that I would act as guide for a troop of the Tenth Cavalry under Lieutenant Bigelow, a young officer just out of West Point, and that the Mathers party was to meet us at the Pacheco Ranch, about ten miles south of Happy Valley, in the Page Canon, as early as possible in the morning. When we reached the Pacheco Ranch, we found the Empire party there, and Wallace Mathers with them. We found that they were right on the trail of the Indians. Farish and Moore then returned to Pantano to change horses and look after the cattle. The Mathers Brothers then joined me in acting as trailers for Lieutenant Bigelow.

The trail of the Indians was not very difficult to follow as they had about twenty horses, and had crossed the open mesa near Mescal Station, between Benson and Pantano. We thought we caught sight of them once, and the Lieutenant deployed his men, but when we came nearer, we found that what we had taken for men

were only "Palmies" (yuccas). The Indians were making for Kinneer Springs at the north end of the Whetstone Mountains. On their trail, we found the body of an old and very thin horse which had evidently given out and had been killed with a knife or spear. It was not one of our horses and had probably come a long way. The Indians had killed a cow near the spring, cut the meat off one side and had also taken part of the hide. We found burro tracks at this point. From there, they followed the old Apache trail which runs along the west side of the Whetstone Mountains. About three miles further on we stopped on a little flat to rest our horses. I told the Lieutenant that I knew of a good spring just above there and was going up to water my horse and get a drink. It was at this spring three years before, that a camp of wood-choppers and teamsters was attacked by Apaches who were said to have been led by a chief called Chatto. Four men were killed and fourteen mules stolen. The owner of the mule team was a Frenchman, and he was one of those killed. A party of men from the Total Wreck Camp brought the bodies in and buried them. From that time on the Spring has been called Apache Spring.

When I reached Apache Spring, close beside it I found the body of a man who had been murdered by the Indians, and as a grim joke, they had killed his little black dog and laid it by his side. They had also killed a large white burro which was still tied to its stake rope. The men's cabin nearby had been ransacked. Flour, beans and everything the Indians did not want were scattered about. I at once went back to the troop and told Bigelow what I had found. We all went up to the Spring and the Lieutenant searched

searched the pockets of the dead man and found a memorandum book, but it did not contain his name. We learned afterwards that his name was Goldbaum, and that he lived in Tucson and had been prospecting in the Whetstones. I had known him slightly but did not recognize him though I knew his sons quite well. The soldiers dug a grave and buried the body, and we piled large rocks on the grave. We afterwards learned that a man who was with him was killed on the way to Benson on the same day, not far from where we found the burro tracks in the trail, near Kinneer Spring, but we did not find the body. I believe the man was a Scotchman by the name of McKim.

After we buried Goldbaum, we followed the trail up in the hills above the spring and out on a point. The Apaches had stopped there and cooked the meat from the cow which they had killed on the trail. Their fires were still burning, and scraps of meat and rib bones were scattered around. They had shod the stolen horses there with the raw hide cut from the cow. Their method of doing this is to cut a round piece of hide about a foot in diameter. Small holes are then cut along the edge of this piece and rawhide strings run through these holes and fastened around the horses' ankles just above the hoof. As soon as the hide dries a little, it shrinks over the hoof and will wear for a few days. The Mexicans call these shoes "Gauaraches." We found them on some of the horses abandoned by the Apaches. There were moccasin

tracks from the fire to the big rock out at the point of the hill, and we could plainly see where an Indian had calmly sat there, chewing a big mescal stalk and spitting the pulp out all around him. He could no doubt see the cavalry for at least two miles back on the trail, and our dust, much further.

By this time it was getting pretty late. Our horses had traveled about fifty miles or more. We knew it would soon be dark and we could not see the Indian trail. We felt assured that by daylight, the Apaches would be many miles away from there. In fact, the next day they attacked a wood camp miles away in the west end of the Huachuca Mountains, not far from Ft. Huachuca, and killed several men. One of the Apaches was killed by a man now living in Douglas, whom I recently met in Tucson. We learned several days later that this same band of Indians had killed Dr. Davis, near Yutey Ranch. Davis was driving from his ranch on the San Pedro, to Tucson, in a buckboard with a team of mules. At the time of the stealing of the horses from the Happy Valley Ranch, the Apaches left the Davis mules at that ranch. Dr. Davis was a brother of W. G. Davis, one of the founders of the Consolidated Bank of Tucson.

So this was the end of the trail so far as we were concerned. Our horses were never recovered, with the exception of a private horse of Lon Mathers, which probably made a sneak in the night, escaped from the Indians and came back to Happy Valley.

Lieutenant Bigelow went on to Ft. Huachuca with his troop. Afterward he wrote an article for the Outing Magazine of New York, in which he gave a very good account of this adventure.