DESERT TRACKS

Newsletter of the Southwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association
June 2006

A Desert Cattle Drive of 1890

by Phil Brigandi

The last major cattle drive into California on the old Southern Emigrant Trail was in 1890, though the trip is better remembered for another reason.[1]

In the 1880's, Walter L. Vail was one of the leading cattlemen in Arizona. His massive Empire Ranch east of Tucson controlled most of the grazing for hundreds of square miles. In 1888 he decided to expand his operations into Southern California, beginning with a lease on the historic Warner Ranch in northern San Diego County.[2] He used the Southern Pacific railroad to move stock between the two ranches, shipping the cattle to Beaumont, and then driving them down to Warners.

In the fall of 1889 the Southern Pacific Railroad suddenly increased its shipping rates into Southern California by about 25%. Arizona ranchers protested, but the SP refused to back down. In retaliation, the cattlemen decided to go back to driving their herds overland across the desert, as they had before the railroad was built in the 1870's.

Cowboys from the Anza area, out on the desert, circa1900.
courtesy V.F. Clark

Walter Vail took the lead in organizing the first drive. His brother, Ed Vail, got the job of actually accompanying the cattle on the trail, along with Empire Ranch foreman Tom Turner, seven or eight Mexican cowboys, and a Chinese cook. Ed Vail started a diary of the trip, describing their preparations (see "A Note on Sources"). Supplies for the drive included flour, baking powder, beans, sugar, coffee, tea, matches, six cakes of soap, oil, molasses, salt, lard, bacon and beef. Vail lists the cowboys as Chappo, Nestor, Francisco, George Lopez, José Lopez, Jesus Elias, and Rafael.

continued on page 4

Contents

From the Editors

One of the delights of attending the monthly meetings of the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners is sharing stories with John Robinson and Phil Brigandi. In this issue we are pleased to include articles by both Brigandi and Robinson, each of whom has had a long-standing interest in the Southern Emigrant Trail. The Orange County archivist, Phil Brigandi's areas of expertise include the Anza-Borrego Desert, the background of Helen Hunt Jackson's story of Ramona, and the Riverside/San Diego County back country. He is the author more than a dozen books, including *Borrego Beginnings: Early Days of 1910-1960* and *Orange County Place Names A to Z*. A new member of SWOCTA, John Robinson is the author of two hiking guides, *Trails of the Angeles* and *San Bernardino Mountain Trails*, as well as several histories, including *The San Gabriels*, *The San Bernardinos*, *The San Jacintos*, and *Sierra Madre's Old Mount Wilson Trail*. His most recent publication, *Gateways to Southern California: Indian Footpaths, Horse Trails, Wagon Roads, Railroads, and Highways,* is reviewed in this issue. He is a recipient of the Donald H. Pflueger Award for local history, awarded by the Historical Society of Southern California.

On returning from the SWOCTA Trail Turtle's Spring Mapping Trip, Rose Ann Tompkins wrote, "We didn't find much trail, but we did get into Doubtful Canyon, which is a wonderful place." In addition to capturing the spirit of the trip, Richard Greene also raises the issue of the Turtles' future. Our understanding is that the Trail Turtles'ongoing task of mapping the Southern Emigrant Trail will culminate in a much needed book, to which we say, "Keep going, Turtles!" The issues of increased membership and member involvement—crucial for all the trail organizations— were discussed at the informal SWOCTA meeting in Phoenix this spring, as reported here by a new member, Peter Patterson.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Wilma Smith Haines , 1921-2006
A Tribute

Wilma Smith Haines died on May 7, 2006, as the result of a stroke. Born in Cloverdale, Tennessee, May 12, 1921, Haines was raised on a small farm in Dickson County. After her graduation from Nashville Business College for Women in 1941, she worked as a secretary at Montgomery Bell State Park. Later she was secretary to the superintendent at Yellowstone National Park. There, in 1946, she met and married Aubrey Leon Haines, Yellowstone Park's first official historian and author of *Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail*.

Wilma and Aubrey Haines

Wilma Haines was a self-sacrificing person and a dedicated member at Grand Avenue Christian Church in Bozeman and Saguaro Christian Church in Tucson. Predeceased by her husband Aubrey and her daughter, Betsy, Haines is survived by her sons Alan and Calvin, her grandson Robert and her sisters, Mary and Sara.

Book Review

Gateways to Southern California: Indian Footpaths, Horse Trails, Wagon Roads, Railroads and Highways
John W. Robinson. Arcadia, California: The Big Santa Anita Historical Society, 2005. ISMBN: 0961542187. 488 pages, photos, maps, bibliography, index. $69.95.

Historically, the mountains of Southern California posed a tremendous barrier to travel. Almost all overland travel to the populated areas of the region channeled through a small number of mountain passes: the Carrizo-Vallecito Corridor, and San Gorgonio, Cajon, San Fernando and Tejon passes. In *Gateways to Southern California*, John Robinson examines the important roles each of these mountain passes played in the history of Southern California. In doing so, he does a fine job of placing the settlement of Southern California in the wider context of trail development.

Following introductory chapters that examine the Native American trading paths which criss-crossed the area and the early expeditions by Spanish explorers of the region, each of the above "gateways" is treated in separate chapters. Robinson reconstructs the history for each corridor chronologically, from the Spanish/Mexican era through the period of American expansion, to the onset of railroads and highways. His generous inclusion of maps provide useful orientation to the geographic format.

Robinson traces the growth of the various trails and roads into Southern California, their varied uses, and their effects on the landscape. Throughout each section, the author weaves a discussion of the colorful individuals and groups associated with each trail. There is something here for everybody: the Anza expedition; the establishment of Californio ranchos and the secularization of the missions; the expeditions of early trappers such as Jedediah Smith and Ewing Young; the development of the Old Spanish Trail, from the Armijo expedition, through the Rowland-Workman expedition and the establishment of the Hispanic Agua Mansa settlement to the Mormon Salt Lake Wagon Road and the growth of San Bernardino; the Mexican War and the entrance of the U.S. Army under Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny and Lt. Philip St. George Cooke with the Mormon Battalion; gold rush travel and cattle drives over the southern emigrant trail; the Jackass Mail and the Butterfield Overland Mail; the story of Edward Beale, the Tejon Indian reservation and Fort Tejon; the Civil War episodes of Carleton's California Column and of the militarization of the Mojave River Road; and much, much more. The characters who were heavily involved in early Southern California history – Fages, Anza, Garces, Smith, William Wolfskill, Isaac Williams, Jonathan Trumbull Warner, Pauline Weaver, Lorenzo Trujillo, Rowland, Workman, Benjamin Wilson, the Picos, Cave Couts, Peter Lebec, Beale, and Samuel Bishop, and many others--are treated in detail. For railroad buffs, there are several insightful sections delineating the growth of the railroads through the passes, with a complete chapter devoted to the surmounting of the Tehachapi Barrier. The discussion of each gateway concludes with the onset of modern highways.

Clearly *Gateways to Southern California* is not designed for a straight-through reading at one sitting. Given the book's vast scope, a reader without prior knowledge of the subjects might become lost in detail. Instead, the book should be viewed as an incredibly thorough reference guide to the history of particular trails and to the role of the trails in the development of Southern California. A reader seeking knowledge of a specific topic, for example Jedediah Smith's entry into California, will find a very thoroughgoing treatment, put in the context of the history of the area. The research for this book is excellent, and Robinson's citations enable the reader to turn to other sources for more information, offering an excellent starting point for scholars. The author has done his homework, researching government documents, contemporary newspapers, diaries, letters, and guidebooks, as well as both primary and secondary sources.

John Robinson's *Gateways to Southern California* is a comprehensive history of the overland routes into Southern California. It is an invaluable source book. No one interested in the history of California and the Southwest should be without it.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

continued from page 1

On January 29, 1890, they set off from the Empire Ranch with 917 head. The 65-day trip that followed was typical of many of the old cattle drives, but hardly uneventful. The cattle stampeded several times, and often 100 or more head would stray. Over the course of the drive, 71 cows were lost -- many in the brushy areas along the Colorado River.

Tom Turner (1861-1937), the foreman on the 1890 cattle drive. *from King, 1940*

Crossing the Colorado itself was a challenge. It was a wet winter, and the river was running high. Vail and Turner selected a spot south of Yuma to swim the cattle across. They hired Indian workers to dig a cut in the ten-foot high bank. Two hundred thirty head refused to swim in the deep, swift current, and Vail was forced to pay to have them shipped over the SP bridge across the river. "It would no doubt have been cheaper to have shipped all our cattle across the bridge at $2.50 a carload," Ed Vail later wrote, "but we did not like the idea of depending on the railroad in any way on the drive."

"Between nine hundred and a thousand head of beef steers, in charge of that enterprising and extensive cattle dealer, Mr. E.H. Vail, arrived here on Saturday last," the *Yuma Times* reported. "They were forced to swim the Colorado River about three miles south of Yuma and are now on their way across the Colorado desert, overland. Three only were lost by drowning. This is Mr. Vail's second trip across the desert. He has our wishes for as successful a drive as was his last."[3]

After crossing the river, another 113 head that were faltering were cut out and sent on by rail before they reached the worst stretch of the old Southern Emigrant Trail—eleven days from Pilot Knob to Carrizo Creek. Shortly after they left the river, around March 17, two young men rode up on a couple of very thin horses. They gave their names as Will and Frank Thompson, and asked if they could join the men in crossing the desert. Vail agreed, provided they did their share driving the herd. So the boys went to work, and got on well with the other cowboys.

There were several dry camps from Pilot Knob to the New River, then about 25 dry miles to Carrizo—the longest dry stretch of the trip. In 1922, Vail wrote:

From our camp at New River we drove to Indian Wells, north of Signal Mountain. Late on the next day we started for Carrizo Creek, which marks 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 any place on the trail since we left the Empire Ranch. The country was open so we loose-herded them....

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 had 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 very 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 men finally reached the old Butterfield station at Carrizo on March 28, 1890, and turned the cattle out to graze. The next day, Vail was surprised to see a carriage rolling into camp from the north. On board were Sheriff Gray of Maricopa County, Arizona, a deputy sheriff named Slankert, a rancher from Phoenix, and their driver. Sheriff Gray pulled Vail aside, and told him that the two boys who had joined his cattle drive had stolen several horses from the rancher. They had tracked them as far as Yuma, then taken the train to Temecula and driven down to intercept them.

"I knew if the boys were sure that the men were officers there would be bloodshed at once," Vail recalled. "It was a very unpleasant position for me as I really felt a good deal of sympathy for the brothers." But at Sheriff Gray's insistence, he introduced the men as miners, and invited them to supper. "Both boys were in camp," Vail wrote in his diary, "and after stopping about an hour the Sheriff and his deputies had a chance and making a rush on the boys disarmed them and ordered them to surrender at the point of the sixshooter. One of them made a run and was shot dead by one of the deputies, the ball passing through his back and heart." In his 1922 recollections, Vail described the scene in more detail:

> I was standing on one side of the chuck wagon and the elder brother was leaning on 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 towards me his six-shooter was still smoking and he wiped it with his handkerchief. 'I hated to do it,' he said, 'but you have to sometimes.'
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> 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.
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> Then I told the sheriff there was no excuse for killing the boy as he could not get away in the kind of a country. He replied that he was 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.'

After he quieted down, the older brother admitted that their names were really Will and Frank Fox, and that they had fallen in with a band of desperadoes after accidentally witnessing one of their crimes. He claimed they traveled with them for several months before they stole some horses and headed for Mexico. But the law had been hot on their trail, so the gang broke up and the Fox boys ended up joining the Vail drive.

Sheriff Gray and his men soon left Carrizo, with Will Fox still handcuffed, sobbing and cursing. "What are you going to do about the body?" Turner asked one of the lawmen. "Why, he's all right. He can't get away," he replied.

Before leaving Carrizo, the cowboys wrapped the younger Fox boy in a blanket and buried him where he fell under a pile of stones. Later someone set up a tall stone, and carved into it: "Frank Fox killed April 1 1890 age 15."[4] That crude tombstone (and several replacements) has long-since vanished, but Frank Fox's grave can still be seen.

The *San Diego Union* (April 3, 1890) had nothing but praise for the lawmen: "The whole thing was neatly done and reflects great credit on the Arizona Sheriff and his men." The *San Diego Sun* saw things a little differently. "The officers had no warrants allowing them to make arrests in California," they reported on April 19, "and the outrage is such that some official action by the proper authorities must be taken."

Will Fox is said to have spent a few years at old Yuma Territorial prison. After his release, he came out to the Empire Ranch, still swearing vengeance against Deputy Slankert. But the men talked him out trying to kill him. Tom Turner's nephew later claimed that Fox did kill Slankert, and showed up at the Empire Ranch "on a well-lathered horse," picked up a fresh mount, and hurried off, heading south. Not long after that, a posse arrived, but Turner told them he hadn't seen anything out of the ordinary. That story seems unlikely, since Slankert lived several hundred miles away in Phoenix. Turner's nephew added that Fox soon "got a job on a cattle ranch in Mexico and later became the foreman of the ranch. He married and had a family down there."[5]

The story of the shooting of Frank Fox was told and retold by desert cattlemen for years to come. Cowboy historian Lester Reed heard it while on his first cattle drive through Carrizo in 1910. Almost 75 years later he told me, "Old Uncle Ed Vail said this young fellow...was running up this little gully here and this deputy was after him with his gun. Ed Vail was right behind the deputy, yelling, trying to get this deputy not to shoot. And he shot anyway and killed the fellow."[6]

Five days after the shooting, the Vail cattle finally reached the Warner Ranch. Though they had lost 71 head, the drive was considered a success, and other Arizona cattlemen soon began planning their own cattle drives. Vail recalled:

> A short time after our return, a meeting of cattlemen was called at the Palace Hotel (now the Occidental) in Tucson.... The object of the meeting was to consider the matter of establishing a safe trail for cattle from Tucson to California. From our experience 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 to 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.
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> When the Southern Pacific Railroad Company had 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 Southern Pacific agent at Tucson was present....
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> Soon after our cattle meeting we received an official letter from the Southern Pacific 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.

Local travel continued on the Southern Emigrant Trail, but the days of the great cattle drives to Southern California were at an end.

End notes

1. The Southern Emigrant Trail has been known by a variety of different names over the years. In the 1830's, it was the Sonora Road. In the 1840s, it was the Gila Trail, or Cooke's Road, or simply the Southern Trail. (Ed Vail, in fact, called it the Southern Trail in his 1922 recollections.) By 1849, as more and more Americans followed the trail to California, the name "emigrant road" or "emigrant trail" begins to appear. That name continues to show up in the 1850's, though "Fort Yuma Road," or just "Yuma Road" were more common in the 1860's and 1870's. The term "Southern Emigrant Trail" started to become popular in the early 1930's, and remains the most common today. Most old trails, of course, had many different names over the years. I think Southern Emigrant Trail is as good a name as any for this old trail across the California desert.
2. The Vails leased the Warner Ranch until 1916. Beginning in 1905, they began buying up the old Mexican ranchos around Temecula that became known as the Vail Ranch. The property was sold for development in 1964. The Vails also had property in the Imperial Valley, and ran cattle on Santa Rosa Island off the California coast.
3. Quoted in the *Arizona Weekly Citizen*, March 8, 1890.

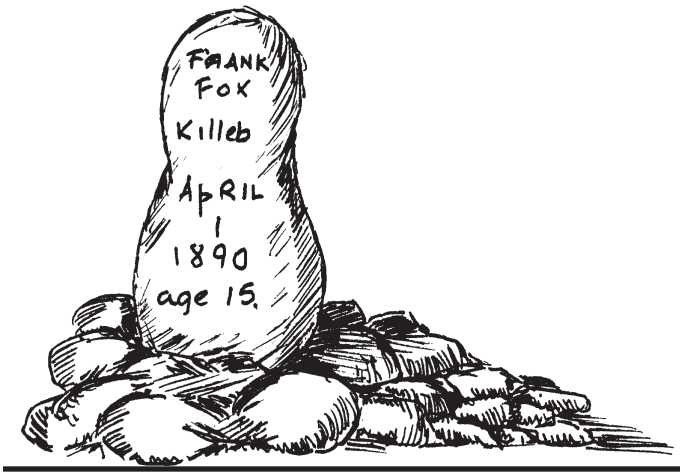
4. Ed Vail's diary is very clear that the actual date was March 29, 1890; his entry even carried over onto the next page, where he carefully changed the pre-printed date at the top.
5. James A Brown, "Cattle Drive Addendum," *The High Country*, Autumn, 1974 (#30). Brown said he heard the story from Peter Fenter, Turner's grand-nephew, who placed the second shooting around 1893 or '94.
6. Personal interview, February 13, 1983. In his 1963 book, *Old Time Cattlemen and Other Pioneers of the Anza-Borrego Area*, Reed wrote: "I saw the Fox boy's grave for the first time in 1910, when on a cattle drive over the old Butterfield Stage Route to Imperial Valley, and as I sat upon my horse looking down at the grave, I could not help but feel the disarmed young man had been murdered. Even though he was no doubt guilty of having stolen some horses, I felt that I would much rather have been the boy who had made the mistake of stealing horses, than to have been the man who shot him."

The Story of a Tombstone

*by Phil Brigand*i

Frank Fox's grave had at least three different tombstones over the years.

The original stone seems to have been a desert concretion, perhaps two or three feet tall. Ed Davis sketched it in 1904, and photographed it in 1911. It read: "Frank Fox Killed April 1 1890 age 15." Even allowing for a difference of three days for the date of the shooting, that age seems much too young. In his 1922 recollections, Ed Vail said the younger Fox brother was about 20 years old. In her 1955 book, *Memories of the Early Settlements: Dulzura, Potrero and Campo*, Ella McCain (1870-1964) claimed that local cattleman Charles Hook carved the original stone in 1894, at the request of Frank Fox's mother.

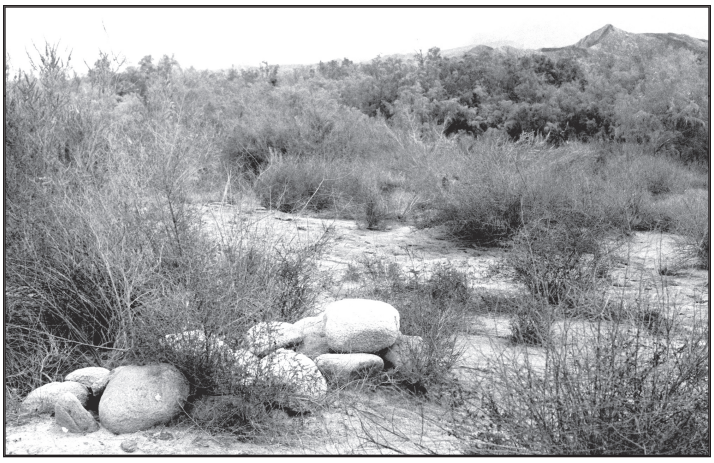


That first stone seems to have disappeared between 1911 and 1924. Sometime before 1939, a new one was carved into a slab of soft stone that read: "Frank Fox, killed 1882". A photo of it accompanies Ed Davis' article in *Desert Magazine* in June, 1940, with the note that it had vanished a few months before.

Around 1943, Bud Sackett, an Old West buff from Anaheim, carved a replacement tombstone, still with the 1882 date. When Randall Henderson visited the site on New Years Day, 1945, he found that stone still in place, and a note in a tobacco can from Bud Sackett: "This stone was erected through the courtesy of one horse thief to another."

Then somehow, Sackett found the original "1882" stone and returned it to the grave. His copy then went to "Happy" Sharp's museum at Jacumba. The recovered tombstone may have still been in place as late as 1952, when another photo of it appeared in *Desert Magazine*. But it seems to have disappeared once and for all by the mid-1950s.

The grave is still identifiable however, just upstream from the site of the old Carrizo stage station. Though a comparison of old photographs suggests that the stones have been moved around, perhaps more than once. Lester Reed told me it was "dug up and destroyed by people looking for Indian relics."



The Fox grave, along the banks of Carrizo Creek, as it appeared in 1984. It is still in place today. *Photo by Phil Brigandi*

A Note on Sources

Ed Vail (1849-1936) never tired of telling the story of his 1890 cattle drive, both in person and in print. Cowboy historian Lester Reed (1890-1984) remembered hearing it from him when he worked on the Vail Ranch in Temecula in the early 1930's. Reed later included the story in his first book, *Old Time Cattleman and Other Pioneers of the Anza-Borrego Area* (1963), though he mistakenly places it in 1886—perhaps because that was the year of Tom Turner's first drive to California. That error that has misled some later writers.

Mesa Grande pioneer Edward H. Davis (1862-1951) wrote the story for *Desert Magazine* in June, 1940 as a "Forgotten Tragedy of Carriso Creek." He first heard about the killing in the 1890's from some of Vail's men on the Warner Ranch. In his article, the date appears as 1882, apparently based on a tombstone that had marked the grave until just a few months before. Yet Davis knew better. In 1904 he had sketched the original tombstone and made notes about the story. His earlier account can be found in his notebooks, available on microfilm at the San Diego Historical Society's Research Archives.

Author Frank M. King retells the story in his book, *Longhorn Trail Drivers* (Los Angeles, 1940), supposedly based on Tom Turner's recollections, but seemingly drawn more from Ed Vail's published account.

Ed Vail first seems to have written up his recollections in 1922. They were published as "Diary of a Desert Trail" in *The Arizona Daily Star* in 12 installments from February 22 to March 9, 1922. An editor's note accompanying the first article places the drive in 1896, and a typographical error puts the SP rate increase in 1898, but Vail clearly states that they left on January 29, 1890.

These articles were revised and published as "The Diary of a Desert Trail" in *Texasland* magazine in three installments beginning in May, 1926. For some reason, the SP rate increase was placed in the fall of 1890, though the correct start date of January 29, 1890 follows. When this series was reprinted in 1973-74 in *The High Country*, someone decided to leave the first date uncorrected, and instead changed the departure date to 1891.

Fortunately, Ed Vail's original diary has survived, which combined with contemporary newspaper accounts destroys any doubt about the year of the big Vail cattle drive. His little pocket-sized "Excelsior Diary for 1890" can be found in Special Collections at the library of the University of Arizona in Tucson (AZ 271), along with an interesting collection of Empire Ranch Papers.

Phoenix in the Spring

OCTA's mid-year board meeting was held in Phoenix the weekend of March 18-19. On Saturday afternoon, an informal meeting of the Southwest Chapter took place at the home of Reba Wells Grandrud. The purpose of the meeting was to provide opportunities for new chapter members to meet others and for everyone present to talk about the future of the chapter. Those attending were Harland Tompkins, Rose Ann Tompkins, Reba Grandrud, Mary Mueller, Margaret Patterson, Peter Patterson, Linda Rushton, Roger Blair and Susan Doyle. Three members present were charter members of SWOCTA when the chapter began in 1987. Several are also members of other trail societies, including the Old Spanish Trail Association (OSTA) and the Anza Trail Society (ANZA).

The attendees discussed a range of issues, including the loss of members, a perceived lack of attention by OCTA for the southern trails, new challenges to historic emigrant trails and a request from the board that SWOCTA consider planning and hosting a national OCTA convention in Arizona or New Mexico. These new challenges are beyond the capacity of SWOCTA, OSTA and ANZA/Maricopa to resolve by working separately. Both Grandrud and Peter Patterson spoke to the need for partnerships of trail societies and coordinated action to address new issues and opportunities.

A rough consensus began to emerge around new activities, which will include a symposium to be co-sponsored with the Anza Society, Anza NH Trail and Old Spanish NH Trail organizations, as well as a membership campaign. The ongoing activities of the SWOCTA Trail Turtles were considered by all to be valuable to the future of the southern trails and will continue. Linda Rushton, Arizona rep for the Anza Society and a tour leader (TourAZ4Fun) volunteered to help organize symposia and tours. Margaret Patterson, a retired travel agent, volunteered to assist Linda.

An ad-hoc planning committee will be convened with an assignment to bring forward to the SWOCTA membership a proposed work plan for the next 6-12 months. Planning Committee volunteers to date include Reba Grandrud, Linda Rushton and Peter Patterson. Please contact Reba (602-992-0339) or Peter (623-748-3241) if you are interested in helping to plan the expanded activities.

Peter Patterson

Spring 2006 Mapping Trip:

Doubtful Canyon

by Richard Greene

Say it ain't so!

The Trail Turtles' leader, Rose Ann Tompkins, announced: "This is my last week-long mapping trip." A lot of work is involved in preparing for these trips. For twelve years, Rose Ann and Harlie have carried the load. At this time, nobody has stepped forward to lead the group, so it will be interesting to see where the Turtles go from here. I'd hate to see this all come to an end… say it ain't so!

The Turtles on this trip: Don and Velma Buck, Tracy and Judy DeVault, Richard and Marie Greene, Kay Kelso, Rose Ann Tompkins, Cam Wade, Ken and Pat White.

Wednesday, May 10

The group arrived at the town of Bowie and gathered at the Fort Bowie kiosk by the road to the fort. We then drove to Ft. Bowie where Larry Ludwig (Head Ranger and SWOCTA member) welcomed us. Larry and a new Park Security Officer, Coral Conway, soon left to go on the day's final patrol. Coral said that her major concerns were illegal immigrants entering the park and the taking of artifacts. When Larry returned, he said he would give us the number of a local landowner to clear our visit to Doubtful Canyon. Later in the evening when it got cooler and the beauty of the sunset was all around, some of the group took a stroll around the ruins of the fort.

Checking out the maps on the hood of the car. Left to right: Pat White, Rose Ann Tompkins, Tracy DeVault, Don Buck, Cam Wade, Kay Kelso. *photo by Ken White*

Thursday, May 11

Ft. Bowie to Doubtful Canyon: 54 miles of driving today. Larry drove up at 7:30. He gave us directions and the phone number for Ed Barton, the landowner. When we arrived at the town of Bowie and passed the cemetery, Tracy mentioned that the grave of John Tevis is there. John Tevis, a local historical personage of the emigrant period, had carved his initials on a rock in Siphon Canyon on the way to Apache Pass. Bowie Cemetery is surrounded by candle-like cypress trees and is well cared for. There were many grave sites dating back to the mid-1800's.

We drove down I-10 to San Simon. From there we followed a gas pipeline road that Larry had shown us on the map. At the "Rooster Comb" landmark, we turned into Doubtful Canyon. We called the landowner and left a message on his answering machine about our visit and then headed into Doubtful Canyon. At first we drove into a broad valley that led us in to a gray, sandy wash. The channel got narrower as we progressed past a shady, picturesque corral until we ended up in a box canyon by the trail. We parked close to the slope leading to the trail and had lunch in the shade.

Searching for trail, Don, Tracy and Richard hiked more than two miles to the Giddings grave site. Giddings had worked for a stage line and was killed by Indians. Recently, his relatives have placed an inscribed granite stone in memory of the event. Larry later told us that the site of the grave was questionable and was probably that of a mail rider named "Abrams" who was also killed by Indians.

What we thought was a possible section of trail proved to be the route of a water line. The trail through Doubtful Canyon was not seen except for a couple

The Giddings gravestone, located near the New Mexico/Arizona border in Doubtful Canyon. *Photo by Tracy DeVault*

of small sections by the slope. Even the diligent Ken and Pat could only identify one small section of trail, with artifacts that included a mule shoe and wagon parts, which Tracy identified. The route of the trail is probably the well-traveled ranch road.

We drove back to the corral to camp. We spread out under trees and by the high cliffs beside the wash. After dinner and lots of conversation, Rose Ann dropped her bombshell: "This is my last full week of mapping." We discussed the Turtles' future. There was another full moon over us and a nice cool evening for sleeping. A bat flew around the corral, enjoying a meal of flies that were drawn to the water in a stock tank.

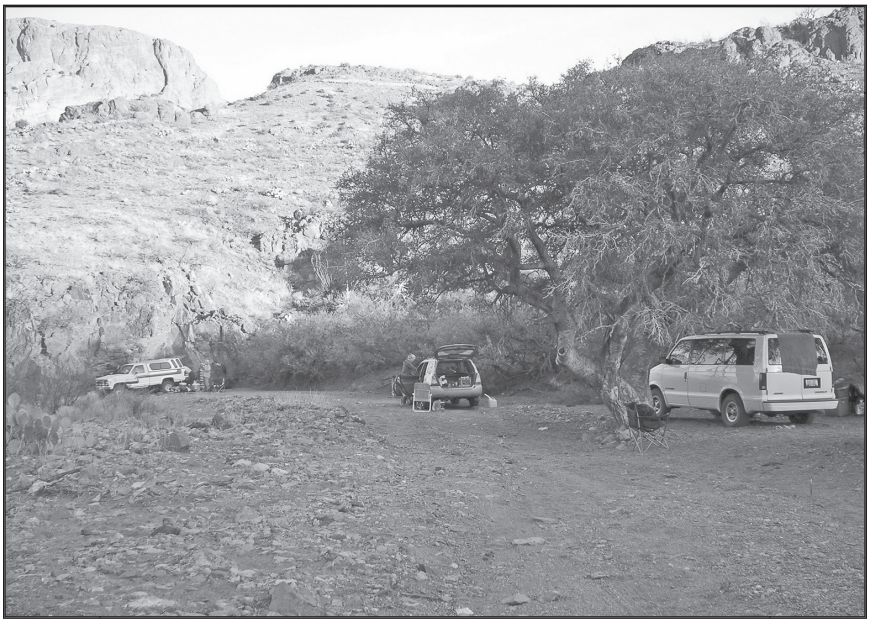
Friday, May 12

Everyone was up by 5:30 A.M. and we were on our way by 6:30. We wanted to enjoy the early morning coolness before the heat of the sun became a factor.

We stopped along Doubtful Canyon a few times to check out possible traces. We saw possible swales but no evidence of trail. We made our way out of the gray sandy base in the wash of canyon. Floods probably had washed away the trail, as the banks were 8-12' higher than the canyon floor. Rose Ann's Navigator got caught on a rock. Richard crawled under the car and managed to dig out the tightly-wedged rock without having to jack up the car. We drove to the pipeline road and pump station junction and took a lower road to hike the trail. Tracy and Richard, who were at the back of the group, missed the the lower road and drove by. After they returned to the group they received Rose Ann's call.

Don, Tracy and Richard walked 4.2 miles down the trail (labelled "Pack Trail" on the map) to a levee. However, the trail proved to be a well-bladed auto

Pat White walks down a trail trace into Doubtful Canyon. *Photo by Ken White*



Camping in Doubtful Canyon. *photo by Cam Wade*

road that had fallen out of use. The others shuttled the cars to the levee near the irrigated fields in San Simon. We drove past the San Simon High School (with the only patch of grass to be seen in the town) and on to the 4K Truck Stop where everybody had lunch at the Subway.

We returned to the Ft. Bowie parking lot to camp for the night. Larry told us about the location of the San Simon stage station (walk down riverbed) and that a mound of adobe was all that remained. A Fort Bowie worker gave us some home grown jalapenos and told us about the ice machine. We helped ourselves to ice, showers, and shade and then had dinner. We went to bed at 8 P.M. and slept under a full moon.

Saturday, May 13

The day started cool then warmed into a sunny/cloudy day. We decided to search for the San Simon stage station.

We parked off the road down a steep slope and walked under off-ramp and I-10 bridges down the dry, sandy bed of the San Simon River, which was full of clumps of willows. We walked over a mile to the "cutout" where we left the river bed to get on top of a flat sandy, bushy plain. Using a house as a landmark, we headed north a mile, as advised by Larry, to search for the adobe remains of the San Simon station. We didn't find it; instead, we found some adobe clumps in a depression. Further search southwest of the house led us to the remains of an adobe chimney and scattered debris (glass, chards, rusty metal). Tracy and Don felt that the wood used in the chimney was too new to be the ruins of the stage station era.

After further search, having found nothing, we returned to the cars and drove to the San Simon Truck Stop. We said our good-byes and headed home.

Don Buck stands by the remains of an adobe chimney found in the area of the San Simon stage station. It is more recent than stageline times. *Photo by Tracy DeVault*

Rushing for Gold Via the Southern Overland Route: Part 1

by John W. Robinson

James Marshall's discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on the South Fork of the American River on January 24, 1848, set in motion a frenzied rush for riches unique in American history. California gold fever became an epidemic on May 12,1848, when Sam Brannan, enterprising businessman and editor of *The Californian*, ran through the streets of San Francisco waving a bottle of gold dust and shouting, "Gold, gold from the American River!"[1] Within a few weeks, almost every community in California had lost a large portion of its male population. The San Francisco *Californian* (May 29,1848) complained:

> The whole country from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and from the sea shore to the base of the Sierra Nevada, resounds with the sordid cry of gold, GOLD, GOLD! while the field is left half-planted, the house half-built, and everything neglected but the manufacture of shovels and pickaxes.

By the summer months of 1848, the contagion had spread to Oregon and Hawaii, and by autumn to Mexico, Peru, and Chile.

The news of California gold filtered east in the summer of 1848, but was generally underplayed in eastern newspapers. This relative non-interest in events in California abruptly changed after Lieutenant Edward F. Beale arrived in Washington, D.C., with eight pounds of gold from the newly discovered mines. Gold fever really hit the nation after President James Polk's message to Congress on December 5,1848, in which the President confirmed the richness of the strikes. The United States Mint evaluated the gold brought by Beale as equal to the standard used in gold coins and placed it on display. Suddenly, the spell of California gold mesmerized the country. Historian Ralph Bieber best summarized the excitement:

> A gold mania now gripped the nation. Thousands of men in all parts of the country and in all stations of life made preparations to hasten to the golden West. Farmers left their plows, merchants closed their shops, journalists foresook their profession, mechanics quit their trades, physicians and lawyers took down their shingles, men deserted their wives, and many clergymen abandoned their holy calling to seek worldly treasures. This "yellow fever," as it was called, was, indeed, a contagious disease, which spread rapidly from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi Valley, producing such excitement as the country had never witnessed.[2]

They came by all conceivable routes. By sea, across the Isthmus of Panama and Mexico, or around Cape Horn, gold rush vessels crowded San Francisco Bay with a forest of masts. Most overland forty-niners took the northern route—known in various segments as the Platte River Road, the Oregon Trail, and the California Trail, which crossed the Sierra Nevada directly to the gold fields. For those who reached the Salt Lake Valley too late in the season when Sierra passes were snowblocked, a variation was the Salt Lake-Los Angeles Trail, to Los Angeles, then north to the mines. The southern route, which soon became known as the Southern Emigrant Trail, had several variations from New Mexico and Texas to the Gila River in southern Arizona, then funneled down the Gila to the Colorado, forded the river, and generally followed Cooke's Wagon Road across the Colorado Desert to Warner's Ranch and on to Los Angeles—the subject of our interest here. A few emigrants crossed northern Mexico and trekked the dreaded *El Camino del Diablo* (The Devil's Highway) through the northwestern Sonora panhandle to the Gila-Colorado junction.

Mexicans, mostly from the state of Sonora but including large bands from Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango, were the first overlanders from outside California to reach the mines. Many of these "Sonorans," as all of the migrating Mexican prospectors were called, were experienced miners. From Tubac, in modern-day Arizona, and towns in northern Sonora, they traveled the old Anza Trail to the Yuma Crossing of the Colorado, and then followed either the Southern Emigrant Trail through the Carrizo-Vallecito Corridor or the more direct, arid route through San Gorgonio Pass, to Los Angeles. From here, most of the Sonorans turned north, crossing San Fernando Pass and one of the two Tejon passes, to the gold regions.[3]

Sometimes known as *gambucinos*, Sonorans had prospected and mined in California well before

the gold rush. Many of these experienced Mexican miners had participated in the 1842 "mini-gold rush" in Placerita Canyon, north of San Fernando Mission, so traveling the overland route was not new to them. Early Los Angeles historian J. M. Guinn wrote:

> They travelled in squads [sic] of from fifty to one hundred, their meager belongings packed on mules and burros. They came in the early spring and returned to their native country in autumn. From this fact came the term, the Sonoran Migration. Some of them brought their women and children with them. Although they came early they were not welcomed to the Land of Gold. The Americans disliked them and the native Californians treated them with contempt. The men wore cotton shirts, white pantaloons, sandals and sombreros... The native Californians nick-named them *Calzonaires blancos* [white-breeches], and imposed on them whenever an opportunity offered.[4]

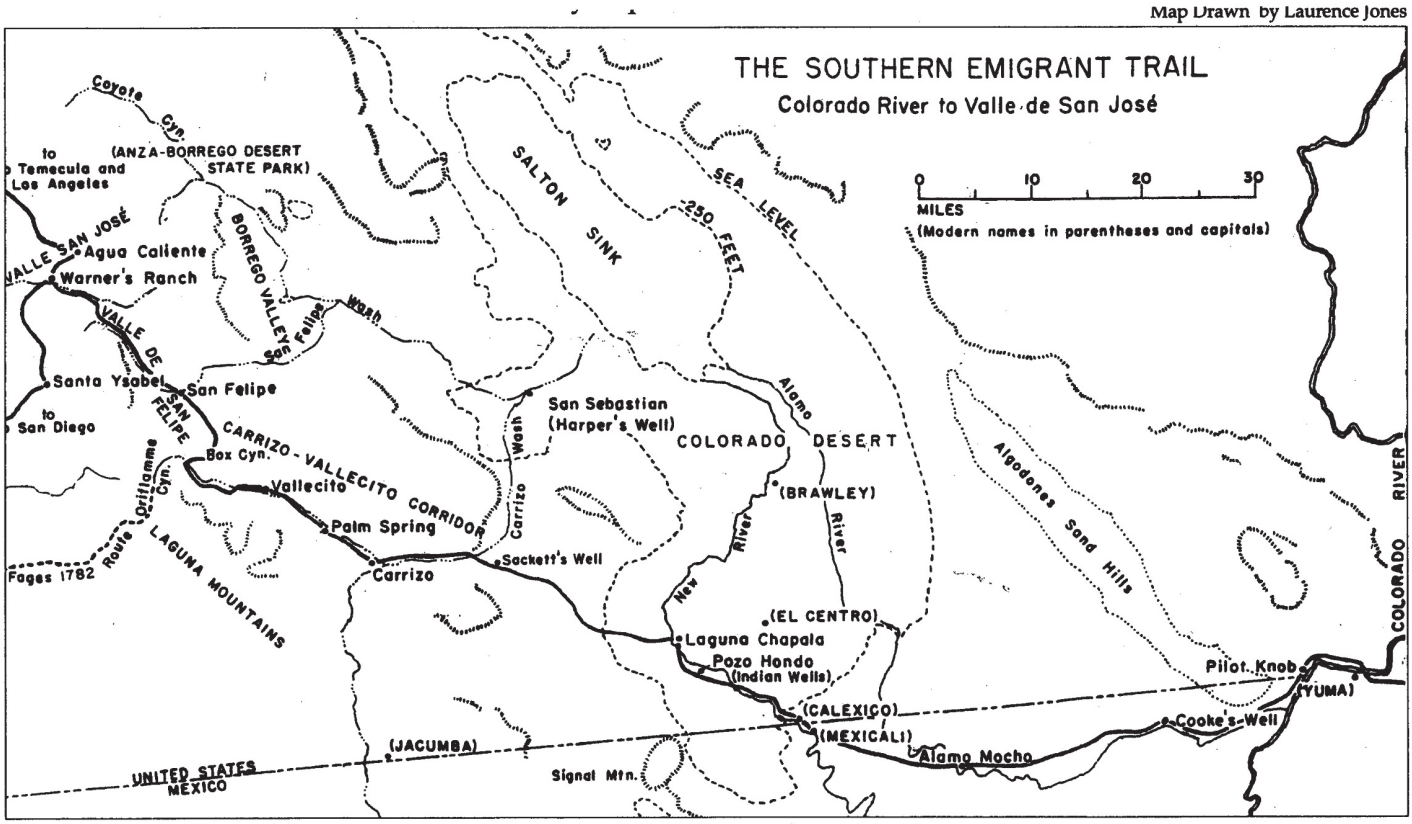
No diary or reminiscence written by any of these Sonoran miners has come to light. It appears, from the reports of Lieutenant Cave Johnson Couts of the 1st U.S. Dragoons, who followed the southern route to California in the fall of 1848, and other Anglo goldseekers, that the vast majority of the Sonorans traveled to and from the California mines via *El Camino del Diablo*, the Yuma Crossing of the Colorado, and the western end of what soon was to become known as the Southern Emigrant Trail. Writing from Vallecito, an oasis on the southern trail, in December 1848, Lieutenant Couts exclaimed, "Mexicans from Sonora are passing us daily, on their way to the *abundancia*, the gold mines! This is all we hear, the mines!,.. The whole state of Sonora is on the move, are passing us in gangs daily."[5] Two weeks later, from Isaac Williams' Chino Ranch, Couts reported, "The Sonorans pass this ranch daily on their to and fro, going and returning from the gold regions. They take his horses and eat his bullocks without ever paying a dime. Williams has sustained a loss of $50,000 since last spring [July] by these men."[6]

No precise record of the number of Sonorans who came to California during the gold rush period exists. A petition sent to Congress in 1850 asking for the establishment of a Customs House in San Pedro stated, "At least ten thousand Sonorans pass through Los Angeles on their way to the mines each spring, generally returning to Mexico in the autumn."[7]

This annual migration, begun in 1848, reached a peak in the years 1849 and 1850, then gradually decreased until it virtually ended by 1854.[8] Using the Customs House petition figure of 10,000 Sonorans annually, this would place the total number over the six-year period from 1848 to 1854 at anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000—assuming the 10,000 per year applied only to the peak years of 1849 and 1850, with considerable lesser numbers in 1848 and 1851-54. This figure may be too high. Recent historians of the southern routes to the gold fields place the number of Sonoran forty-niners at 8,000 to 10,000. This is for the year 1849 only; they give no estimate for the other gold rush years.[9] A goodly number of the Sonorans—perhaps a thousand or more—remained in California. The section of Los Angeles north of La Plaza, where many of them settled, became known as "Sonoratown."

The Sonoran migration was soon followed by a trickle, then a stream, and finally a flood of Anglo-American gold seekers. They came via all the cross-country routes, and by sea across Panama or around Cape Horn.

How many gold seekers rushed to California in 1849, and how many of them came via the southern overland route? California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft estimated the total number of forty-niners entering the future "Golden State" at 81,000. The current leading historian of the California Gold Rush, J.S. Holliday, places the figure at 89,000.[10] Of these, according to Holliday, 41,000 came by sea and 48,000 (including 6,000 Sonorans) by land. Most of the overlanders used the northern route, known variously as the Platte River Road, the Oregon Trail, and the California Trail; estimates run from 25,000 to 30,000. The popular perception, fostered by most historians of the western migration and the publishing of numerous diaries and reminiscences is that the northern route was by far the most important and that the southwestern trails were insignificant and were followed by only a few scattered parties of forty-niners. Fortunately, the recent research of historians of the southern overland routes, most notably George Ellis and Patricia Etter, has put this canard to rest. Ellis states that, "Southern routes, followed by 8,000-9,000 American and 9,000 Mexican emigrants, accounted for at least forty percent of the



total overland immigration that entered California by the dose of 1849."[11]

Etter uses even a higher figure: "In 1849, about 15,000 emigrants followed a route across New Mexico and Arizona to reach the crossing of the Colorado River near Yuma. In addition, between 8,000 and 10,000 hopeful miners came up from Mexico to use the crossing."[12] Using these figures of 17,000 to 25,000 emigrants, both Anglo and Mexican, who traveled the southern overland route, we get numbers that compare favorably with the 25,000 to 30,000 who used the northern route to California.

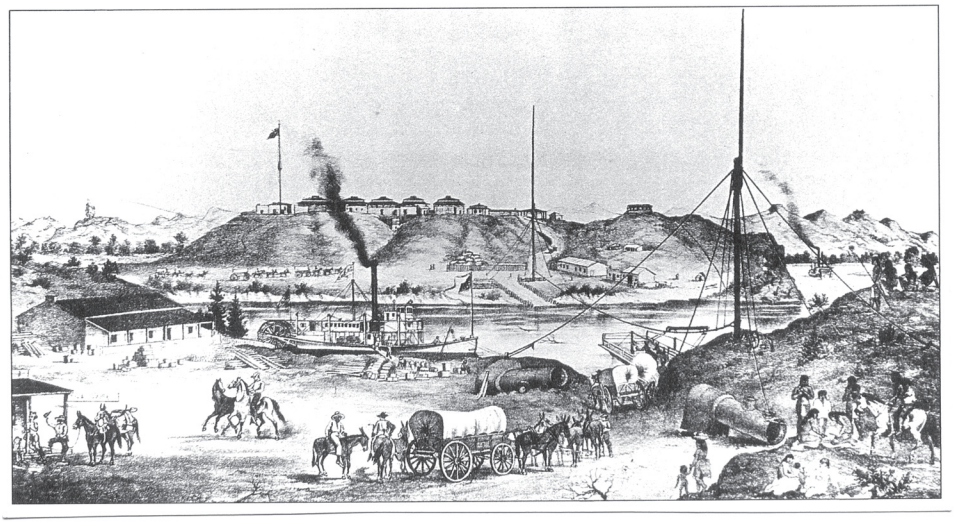
As previously stated, the Southern Emigrant Trail, as it came to be known, was not a single pathway leading from New Mexico to Southern California. There were three distinct branches, along with a number of minor variations, from the Rio Grande Valley to the Pima villages on the Gila River. And a fourth route—*El Camino del Diablo*—traversed northwestern Mexico to join the main emigrant trail near the Gila's junction with the Colorado. (It should be noted that, before the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, all of these routes traversed Mexican territory.) And there were three separate crossings of the Colorado used by the emigrants of 1849. Only the western portion of the trail, from the Colorado River to Warner's Ranch, followed a singular route.

Many, perhaps most, of the forty-niners used published accounts to guide them to California. While gold seekers and emigrants on the northern overland trails relied largely on the reports of John C. Frémont and Lansford Hastings, those following the southern route used William H. Emory's *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance, from Fort Leavenworth, in Missouri, to San Diego, California*, along with accounts in Missouri and Texas newspapers. Also, there occurred much verbal discussion of the trails at the staging areas in Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. Although this advance knowledge was certainly helpful, most emigrants embarking on their long overland journey little realized the trials and tribulations that lay ahead.[13]

Beginning on the Rio Grande, the Southern Emigrant Trail, as previously stated, followed three separate routes over mountain and desert to the Gila River

in south-central Arizona. The southern branch led southwest from near present-day Garfield, New Mexico, to Rancho San Bernardino in Sonora, then west to the Santa Cruz River, and finally northwest, through Tubac and Tucson to the Gila at the Pima Villages. The central branch of the trail also left the Rio Grande near Garfield but headed westerly, crossing Apache Pass to Tucson, where it joined the southern route. The main northern branch left the Rio Grande farther north, near present day Truth or Consequences, traveled west-southwest to the Santa Rita copper mines, and then west to the upper Gila, following the latter down to the Pima Villages. A few gold seekers negotiated the difficult Zuni Trail from Albuquerque west to Zuni, then southwest to the Salt River and down the latter to the Gila.

H.M.T. Powell, an English-born shopkeeper traveling from Illinois to San Diego took the southern route to California in the fall of 1849. He aptly described the monotony: "The combination of plain and mountain being such, I think, as no other country could show but this. From the vast plain spring isolated mountain, mountain ranges, mounds, hills, ridges, etc,, etc., in endless variety."[4] Besides, much of this was Apache country, requiring emigrants to be constantly on guard. As the forty-niners followed the Gila toward its confluence with the Colorado, described by one emigrant as "like a bed of dried ashes.. .the dust intolerable," they passed the residue of previous travelers. Powell continued, "The way was strewn with parts of wagons, spare axles, tongues, wheels, stretcher chains, boxes...etc., ox shoes, mule and horse shoes… The emigrants have thrown away anything and everything to lighten their loadings."[15]



Yuma Crossing of the Colorado, with Fort Yuma on the hill, Jaeger's ferry on the right, and the Colorado stern-wheeler on the left. Circa 1855.
Courtesy Arizona Pioneer Historical Society

This eastern half of the Southern Emigrant Trail, through today's New Mexico and Arizona, has been detailed in magnificent manner by Arizona historian and bibliographer Patricia Etter.[16] Our main interest is in the western section of the trail, from the Colorado River across the most barren desert in North America to Warner's Ranch and on to Los Angeles and San Diego, which will be described in greater detail.

Upon reaching the confluence of the Gila and the Colorado, the emigrants faced what to many of them was the most difficult and frustrating task of the entire journey—crossing the great river of the West with their remaining animals and possessions intact. A description of the Colorado at this point is in order. Upon reaching the junction of the two rivers, the forty-niners saw the Colorado, coming down from the north, make a sharp turn directly west. Cliffs on both sides compressed the river channel to some 150-250 yards. After flowing west for seven miles toward a promontory on the California side known as Pilot Knot, the river again turned south and widened. There were three separate crossings used by emigrants. Just below the confluence of the Gila with the Colorado where the channel narrowed, was Upper Crossing, also known as Yuma Crossing because of its proximity to the five main Yuman, or Quechan, villages. Seven miles downriver to the west was Middle Crossing, also called Emigrant, or Pilot Knob Crossing. Three to four miles farther south, where the river was wide and slower moving, was Lower Crossing.[17]

At all three crossings, the river was too deep to ford. The emigrants were obliged to build rafts out of logs that had been washed down river (there were no tall trees on the lower Colorado), fashion barges out of caulked wagon bodies, build make-shift "canoes," or hire young Quechan males, excellent swimmers, to tow animals and possessions across. Many, perhaps most, of the forty-niners used the Quechan swimmer to get their livestock across the river.

The emigrants were ambivalent in their attitude toward the Quechans. They admired the obvious strength and swimming skills of the young males who they depended upon to get their horses and mules across. However, they distrusted the Indians for their widespread thievery. The Quechans apparently developed a vociferous appetite for horse and mule flesh. Animals were allowed to drown and float down river, afterwards to be retrieved by hungry Indians and devoured on the spot. A forty-niner named L. N. Weed wrote, "The Humas or Yuma Indians...drowned several mules purposely and soon as drowned, would push them to the shore and eat them without fire or seasoning before the natural warmth was gone."[18] Forty-niner John Durivage called the Yumas "bold, warlike, and savage people" and added that, "Horses and mules to them are what turkeys and canvasback ducks are to us, apparently as they devour them with evident relish."[19] F. J. Thibault called the Yuma Indians "pests of the Colorado" who showed "cool audacity and cunning' as they figured ways to relieve forty-niners of livestock and possessions.[20] However, all was not one-sided. The Quechans had their own legitimate complaints. An estimated forty percent of their food supply was grown on the flood plain along the river, mainly maize, melons, beans, pumpkins, and gourds. The hordes of forty-niners arriving at the Gila-Colorado junction trampled their fields and destroyed the crops. Quechan resentment toward these sudden intruders threatened to develop into open warfare.[21]

Fortunately, before resentment on both sides flared into violence, the United States Boundary Commission, led by Lieutenant Amiel W. Whipple, arrived from San Diego. Lieutenant Cave J. Couts commanded the military escort. Whipple and Couts did not like each other. Whipple set up his camp, a survey observatory, on what he called "Military Hill," on the promontory just opposite the junction of the Gila and the Colorado. Couts established what he called "Camp Calhoun' below, close to the Upper Crossing. While Whipple set to work on his survey, Couts and men cut brush away from the river bank and built what became known as the "New Emigrant Road" between Middle Crossing and Lower Crossing. ("Old Emigrant Road" traveled southwest from Middle Crossing, with a difficult stretch through sandy terrain; now emigrants could take the new road south before turning west, avoiding the sand dunes.) Couts' greatest service to the forty-niners was in establishing a rope ferry across the Colorado at Upper Crossing in early October 1849. As long as the rope ferry was in operation, almost all emigrant parties used it. The soldiers operating the ferry charged a nominal fee for the service. After the U.S. Boundary Commission and its military escort left on December 1, members of the Mexican Boundary Commission and escort took over the operation until they left on January 21,1850.[22]

Once across the Colorado, the forty-niners faced a daunting trek across a nearly featureless desert. William Chamberlin, who journeyed over the arid trail in August 18, wrote,

> Nothing but a high and apparently desolate waste, bounded the horizon….A hazy atmosphere hung over the scene, on fire, as it were, by the intense heat of the sun, the rays of which are reflected upward by this immense mirror of sand, all combined to form a picture at once grand, gloomy, and foreboding.[23]

Reluctantly leaving behind the cottonwood, willow and mesquite greenery of the river bottomland, emigrants headed west-southwest "through the dreariest road imaginable," wrote forty-niner Johi Durivage.

> By ten o'clock in the morning the rays of the sun poured down... with the utmost intensity. The animals faltered and staggered in their tracks,... The scorching, seething sun provoked the most intolerable thirst, and none had that with which to allay it... On every side the eye encountered objects attesting the distresses and misfortunes of parties who had preceded us. Every few yards on each side of the road, marking the track plainly, were dead mules by scores, saddles, bridles, blankets, broken trunks, bags, pantaloons, packs, cantinas (hide panniers), and all sorts of articles.[24]

The Colorado desert segment of the Gila Trail.
From Fred W. Lander, *Report on a Reconnaisance of a Railroad Route...*,
H.R. Executive Document, 1856.

Nothing had prepared the vast majority of the American forty-niners for the crossing of the Colorado Desert, wrote historian George M. Ellis:

> The cumulative effect of dry, forced marches of fifteen to a final crushing twenty-eight mile *jornado* across a burning and desolate landscape by inexperienced desert travelers was an experience never forgotten, as witnessed in numerous journals, diaries, letters, and reminiscences.[25]

Fifteen miles from the Colorado, the emigrants reached Cooke's Wells, also known as "First Wells," three holes that had been dug by previous parties, located in a cleft at the base of a thirty-foot cliff. The largest of the seepages was protected by boards from an abandoned wagon body, and supplied barely enough water to ease the thirst of men and animals. Dead animals often had to be dragged from the waterholes. "The hot air was laden with the fetid smell of dead mules and horses, and on all sides misery and death seemed to prevail...," wrote Durivage.[26]

Twenty-two miles farther west, across a featureless sandy plain, the emigrants reached *Alamo Mocho*, known also as "Second Wells," located at the base of a thirty-foot-high clay bank in the dry bed of the Alamo River. As at Cooke's Wells, dead animals frequently had to be dragged out, and surrounding the wells were all manner of abandoned wagons and equipment. Forty-niner A. B. Clarke left a vivid description of obtaining water here:

> Going down the steep bank, we encountered a horrid stench arising from dead animals which lay around;... I soon found one of these holes, which was twelve to fourteen feet deep. Letting myself down by a stick which lay across the top, I found a little muddy water at the bottom, which I dipped up with my tin cup. Never did water taste more sweet. I then filled two gourds, which I carried up and stirred *penole* into it, and drank about two quarts, until I was satisfied. Some of the company declared they drank a gallon... We then proceeded to water our animals. We dipped with a tin cup into a pail, and emptied into an Indian rubber keeler [shallow tub], out of which the animals drank. There is danger of the sand caving in; four of us labored until ten o'clock at night, and I rose before light that I might have an opportunity to fill my vessels.[27]

Before June 1849, emigrants faced a grueling twenty-four-mile trek northwest, the latter half of the journey along the dry, mesquite-laden bed of New River to the scant, barely drinkable water at Pozo Hondo. Then, sometime in late June of that year, occurred what has been called "The Miracle of '49." The usually dry trough of the New River was abruptly filled with intermittent ponds, or *lagunas*, of fresh water, the result of overflow from the cone of the Colorado delta, where the New River originated, and heavy local rains. William Chamberlin vividly described his joy at finding this unexpected water source. About thirteen miles northwest of Alamo Mocho (just north of the present international border), he noticed a "small trail" leading left toward a grove of mesquite.

> Our joy can scarcely be imagined when, after traveling a short distance, we came upon a pond or stream of water [New River]... We could not account for this large body of fresh water at this place, having never read or heard of its existence... But for this God-send, hundreds of emigrants must have perished, many of whom, like ourselves, were very poorly supplied with suitable water vessels.[28]

Two small temporary relief camps sprang up along the New River close to the spot where the emigrant trail first reached the watercourse. Camp Salvation, also

known as Soldiers Camp, was set up by Lieutenant Cave Couts to provide aid to passing forty-niners. Approximately two miles northwest, in a grove of mesquite trees, was another resting place known as Emigrant Camp. About ten miles northwest of Emigrant Camp, near where the course of the New River turns from northwest to northeast on its route to the Salton Sink, was the largest of the ponds, known to the forty-niners as "Big Laguna." This sprawling, shallow lakelet, along with all the other ponds and currentless streams along the New River, were not unique phenomena. At irregular intervals, from two to twenty years apart, water would appear, sometimes in overflowing quantities, in the desert watercourse. The Californios knew the big lagoon as *Laguna Chapala* when they built a small adobe fort here in 1826.

From Big Laguna, the last water on the New-River, to the next water in Carrizo Creek, the forty-niners faced a bleak, totally desolate journey of twenty-eight miles, undoubtedly the most brutal segment of the entire Southern Emigrant Trail. On this stretch the desert took its greatest toll of men and animals, particularly the latter. Some accounts state that the trail could be followed easily at night just by the stench of dead mules and oxen. "Rare was the emigrant party that was prepared with the proper gear to carry sufficient water, and few were desert-wise enough to gather enough fodder at New River to feed their animals."[29]

John Durivage, who struggled over this desolate plain in June 1849, scribbled a vivid account of his party's tribulation: "Many of our little party seemed to be rapidly giving out, and as they tailed off behind, grew desperate from thirst and fatigue. There was many a quailing and sinking heart in that little party, and many a fervent, silent prayer offered up to the Throne of Grace."[30]
Fortunately, Durivage's party, and most of the other emigrant groups, made it across the awful stretch without loss of human life, although many of their thirsty animals were not so fortunate.

The welcome water of Carrizo Creek, which emitted from Carrizo Spring and flowed in a small rivulet, three to nine inches wide, about a half mile before disappearing in the sand, was described by Chamberlin as "clear as crystal, [but] has a peculiar and unpleasant taste." John S. Robb, gold rush correspondent for a St. Louis newspaper, wrote that the croaking of frogs alerted him that he was approaching Carrizo Creek:

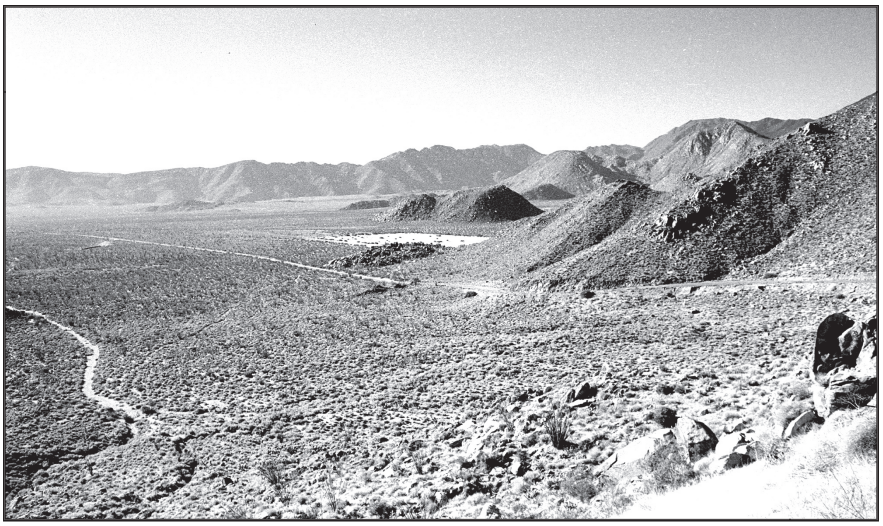
> Their voices were like the sweetest music to our ears, and lent fresh vigor to our famishing bodies. We knew we were reaching the creek—presently we came in sight of the stream rippling along in the dear moonlight, and the mules and ourselves ran a race for the grateful beverage, and bent ourselves together in its flood. It took many draughts to satisfy our thirst.[31]

Most parties rested a day or more near Carrizo Spring, replenishing animals fed on the sparse grasses and salty cane. This appeared to be a favorite camping spot for Sonorans returning home from the mines; Chamberlin noticed large numbers of them, with several hundred fine horses. They showed him pouches full of gold dust and gave glowing accounts of the gold diggings.[32]

From Carrizo Spring, the emigrant trail went three miles up the broad, sandy Carrizo Wash, and then turned northwest up Vallecito Wash. Three miles up the latter brought the forty-niners to Palm Springs, a small oasis shaded by twenty or thirty tall palm trees. (The palms soon disappeared, probably cut for firewood by later emigrants.) Chamberlin was unimpressed with the place: "There are several springs, but the water was very bad, besides being polluted by the dead horses and mules that lay in and about them."[33]

Seven miles farther up sandy VallecitoWash brought the emigrants to the large, welcome oasis of Vallecito. The trail was so bad that one forty-niner complained that the thirteen mile stretch from Carrizo Creek to Vallecito was, "...the worst part of the road across the desert, deep sand the entire distance—this stretch severely tried the mettle of our animals—but— they nobly stood the test and with heads erect— and nostrils free, they shook from their feet the last sand of the dreaded Jornada.[14]

Vallecito, with its abundant grass and water, marked the end of the desert crossing. Most emigrants camped here for a day or two, although wood for camping



Looking down from La Puerta (Campbell's) Grade towards Vallecito, 1995. The old southern emigrant trail can be seen on the left. *Photo by Phil Brigandi*

fires was lacking. Chamberlin described it as "...a fine green spot of grass containing a few acres. The earth is spouty—an abundance of water, but not very good. Here we unpacked, and our animals set about satisfying their appetites with a great deal of avidity. There are two or three Indian families living here who say they belong to the San Felipe tribe."[35] Chamberlin noticed the remains of sod houses— remnants of Major Graham's camp here the previous year.

Refreshed, with the animals watered and fed, the forty-niners continued up Vallecito Wash another four miles and climbed, via a switchback trail, over the steep ridge of *El Puerto*—"The Doorway," later known as the Campbell Grade—into the flat expanse of Mason Valley. Near the northern edge of the valley, the main Southern Emigrant Trail made a sharp turn northeast into the narrow passage later known as Box Canyon, where Cooke's Mormon Battalion had carved a rudimentary wagon road in 1847. Once through the defile, the road climbed a short grade and traversed a flat, dry former lake bed, now known as Blair Valley. At the north end of the valley, the trail ascended a short but difficult rise, later known as "Foot and Walker Grade" and dropped into Earthquake Valley (now known as Shelter Valley). Turning again northwest, the route crossed the sage-spotted plain to the Indian village of San Felipe. The distance from Vallecito through Mason Valley, Box Canyon, Blair Valley, and Earthquake Valley to San Felipe was eighteen trail miles, a good day's journey for most of the forty-niners. The historic Indian village of San Felipe, near today's Scissors Crossing, was the seasonal home of Southern Diegueño and Kamia peoples (today usually referred to as Mountain and Desert Kumeyaay). Agriculture was the mainstay, and there was abundant water and grass for grazing. Chamberlin described the Indian settlement:

> The village of San Felippe consists of a few miserable looking huts, built of reeds. The inhabitants cultivate a little corn, a few melons, etc... They also live upon mezquite beans, prickly pears, etc. We had hoped to procure some provisions, but they had none; we made them every kind of offer but in vain. During the day we saw them butcher a poor mule, which had been left behind by some travelers. They knocked it down, and then each fellow jumped upon it and cut out a piece to suit his dressing, or anything else. Had it been jerked, or even decently dressed we should have come in for a share; but as it was, we could not stomach it.[36]

From San Felipe, the road angled northwest up the gently-inclined, grassy San Felipe Valley to the mountain divide, separating waters that flowed down to disappear in the desert from those that drained toward the Pacific. As the forty-niners ascended the long valley, their spirits brightened considerably.

> Started early, without breakfast, and traveled through a long, narrow valley, covered for some distance with a luxuriant growth of grass and several clumps ofcottonwood trees. There is some pine timber upon the mountains, and grass, giving the country afresh and pleasing appearance to eyes so long accustomed to sterile mountains and barren wastes. The atmosphere is cool and comfortable. This entire change in nature has sensibly affected our spirits.[37]

From the mountain divide, the trail made a gradual descent into the well-watered, verdant *Valle de San José*, site of Warner's Ranch, the hot springs of *Agua Caliente*, and, near the springs, the Cupeño Indian village. For the first time, the weary forty-niners could relax, refresh their animals, enjoy good beef and sundries purchased at Warner's Ranch house and at his store in the Cupeno village, and if they so desired, refresh themselves in the warm waters of *Agua Caliente*.

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21. Ellis, p. 21.
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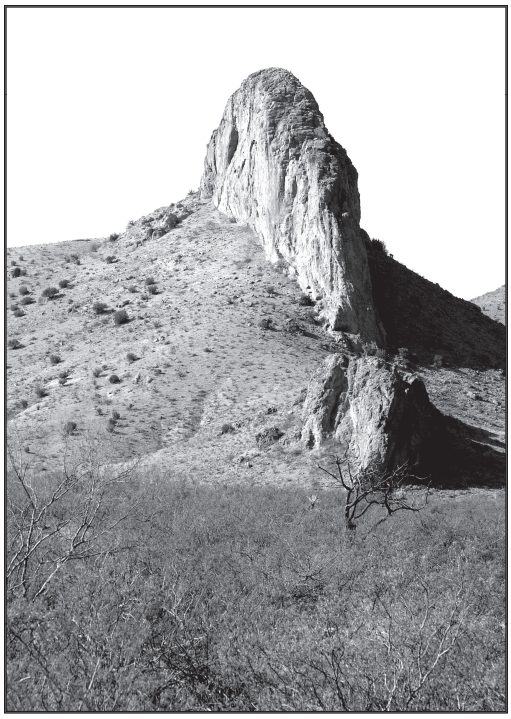
Fourty-niners cross the desert. (Artist unknown)
courtesy John Robinson

This article was initially published in *Dogtown Territorial Quarterly*,No. 45, Spring 2001. Part 2 will be presented in the next issue of *Desert Tracks*.



Rooster Comb, the trail landmark at the south end of Doubtful Canyon. *photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*

DISCOVERIES

The Wild Girl: The Notebooks of Ned Giles, 1932
by Jim Fergus
New York: Hyperion, 2005. ISBN: 1401300535
Hardcover, 368 pages.

The Wild Girl is a historical adventure set in the American Southwest and the Mexican borderlands during the early 20th century. A freelance journalist, Jim Fergus bases *The Wild Girl* on an incident he heard about in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. There is a three-page bibliography at the conclusion of the novel, documenting his research.

In the fall of 1999, Ned Giles, an impoverished old photographer, sells his last print of *La Niña Bronca*, the wild Apache Indian girl whom he stumbled on lying on the floor of a Mexican jail when he was 17. The buyer's curiosity about the picture's provenance sparks Giles' memories, and the narrative begins to unfold in a series of flashbacks, told through Ned's detailed diary entries.

In 1932, the 17-year-old Ned signs on to be part of the Great Apache Expedition, supposedly organized in Arizona to rescue the son of a wealthy Mexican landowner who was kidnapped by the Apaches. In actuality, it is an attempt by the town leaders of Douglas, Arizona, to promote the area to rich investors. The "rescuers" will use the wild Apache girl as their ransom. Ned is the expedition's photographer. As he and the expedition make their way through the rugged Sierra Madre Mountains, he and some of the members of the group are kidnapped by the Native Americans, led by a white man, a famous kidnap victim himself. This man is none other than Charlie McComas, the young boy who was kidnapped near Silver City, New Mexico. (See *Desert Tracks*, December 2005).

The Wild Girl is Fergus's second novel. In his earlier work, *One Thousand White Women* (1998), he fictionalized the 1875 agreement between Ulysses S. Grant and Cheyenne chief Little Wolf to assimilate Cheyenne warriors by providing them with American wives.

SWOCTAns are sure to enjoy *The Wild Girl*, a southwestern cross-culture adventure story.

Yuma Crossing Oatman Celebration

by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

We arrived in Yuma on Friday evening, February 24. We were there to attend the Yuma Crossing State Park and the Arizona Historical Society's joint celebration of the 150th anniversary of the ransom of Olive Oatman. There were two days of events.

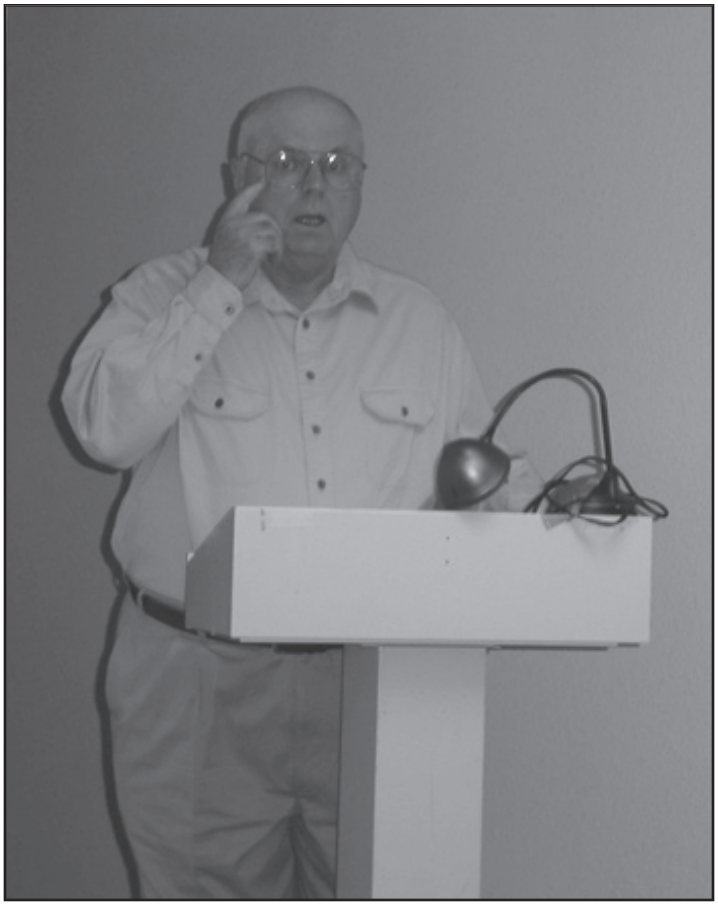
Early the next morning we met at the Yuma Crossing State Park, located at 210 North 4th Ave. Authorized by Congress in 1865, the Quartermaster Depot served the Southwest as a material transfer and distribution point for troops stationed in Arizona Territory. The Park features the original Depot. Dan Talbot was signing copies of his recently reprinted book, *A Historical Guide to the Mormon Battalion and Butterfield Trail* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1992), which is now available in bookstores. Talbot is currently working on getting a set of GPS readings to go with the book.

Gerald Emmert introduced the weekend's commemorative events. He announced the plans of the Yuma Crossing State Park to hold a series of talks and book signings by authors. If the February event is indicative of the quality of the series, we certainly would like to attend others.

The featured speaker was Brian McGinty, the author of *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). McGinty retold the story of the massacre and captivity.[1] Traveling from Illinois by covered wagon, the Oatman family was California-bound. They were attacked by Yavapai near Gila Bend in 1851. Six of the nine Oatmans were killed. The fourteen-year-old son, Lorenzo, was clubbed by the Indians and left for dead. He survived and managed to walk to safety. Two daughters, Mary Ann, eight, and Olive, 13, were taken captive. After living for one year with the Yavapai, they were sold to the Mohave for beads, blankets, and two horses. Although Mary Ann died during a drought, Olive survived and was ransomed in 1856. Arriving at Fort Yuma, she was reunited with her brother Lorenzo.

McGinty mentioned new research that is currently being done on the later history of James Colin Brewster that should be of interest to students of the Oatman tragedy. According to McGinty, there are also new archeological investigations on the network of Indian trails in the vicinity of the Oatman site.[2] To our surprise, an Oatman descendant from Portland, Oregon, was in the audience. He claimed to have a box of Oatman material in his garage.

While McGinty and Talbot continued signing books, Ranger Emmert led a small group across the Colorado River for a tour of Fort Yuma, which is located on the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation. Olive Oatman was taken here after being ransomed from the Mohave. Established in 1849 to protect early settlers from the Indians, the post was called Camp Calhoun. Later it was renamed Camp Yuma and then Fort Yuma. It remained an active army installation until 1883. In 1884, it was deeded to the Quechan (pronounced



Brian McGinty speaks on the Oatman Massacre at the Yuma Crossing Museum. *photo by Jon Lawrence*

Kwuh-tsan) Indians. The Quechan tribe's reservation borders Arizona, California, Baja California, and Mexico. After Emmert's informative talk on the history of Yuma, we explored the fort and visited the Fort Yuma Quechan Museum, which displays artifacts and photographs of the history of the tribe. Nearby, St. Thomas Mission is built on the grounds of the original mission founded by Father Garcés in 1780. It is a replica of the earlier mission that was destroyed during an Indian uprising in 1855.

Later in the day, we toured the Arizona Historical Society Museum. The museum is situated in the Sanguinetti House, which was constructed in the 1870's. It contains exhibits that detail the history of the lower Colorado River region from the 1540s to the present. The gardens surrounding the house include aviaries with exotic birds.

The next day, February 26, the Arizona Historical Society at Yuma led a tour to the Oatman massacre and grave site, 80 miles east of Yuma. Doris Clark, an Oatman descendant and the author of *The Oatman Story*, was on the tour. At 9 A.M. we arrived at the parking lot in an outlying area of Yuma. We were surprised and somewhat dismayed to find fifty to seventy people milling about, waiting to register for the trip. After signing up and paying our fourteen dollars, we were given a pink ribbon to attach to our antenna. We then drove eighty miles to Sentinel, our next rendezvous point.

Arizona Historic Society at the Oatman Site
photo by Jon Lawrence

With pink ribbons fluttering in the breeze, the caravan of twenty to thirty vehicles turned off the highway. We drove slowly down Oatman Road, leaving clouds of dust in our wake. After everyone had arrived at the massacre site, the great-grand daughter of William Fourr talked about her ancestor who ran the stagecoach station on Oatman Flat. She was followed by Doris Clark who gave a brief but impassioned recounting of the journey of the Oatmans from Tucson to the massacre site.

The rest of the party went down the hill to the burial site, but we returned to Orange County. While we had enjoyed being at the site and listening to the informative talks, we were left contemplating the damage to the ecology and the destruction of ground cover that our invading caravan had made to the wilderness area around the site. In that desert climate, our car tracks will not soon disappear.

End Notes

1. We plan to transcribe McGinty's lecture and present it in a future issue of *Desert Tracks*.
2. The leader of the dissident Brewsterite movement, James Colin Brewster claimed that the prophecies of Esdras revealed that Bashan was located at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado Rivers, not at Salt Lake City.

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Upcoming Conferences

OCTA 24th Annual Convention
August 6-12, 2006
St. Joseph, Missouri
www.octa-trails.org

Santa Fe Trail Association Rendezvous
October 27-29, 2006
Larned, Kansas
www.santafetrail.org

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