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Southern California Mountain Man
by
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For me, really "doin' it" and really "bein' there" are important and necessary to authenticate my mountain man pursuits. It helps if I can look around and actually see what the first mountain men saw. In my early days I figured living in Southern California was somewhat of a disadvantage; after all, the real action took place in the Rockies, right? Well, rump down on that apishamore there ol' hoss cuz I got a story to tell ya.

Just to the east of my home on Palomar Mountain, across the wide Valle de San José, is a hot springs resort called Warner Springs Ranch. It was named after Jonathan Trumbull Warner who first rode through this valley in the waning autumn days of 1831 while serving as a hired man for David E. Jackson, mountain man extraordinaire and former partner of Jedediah Smith and William Sublette. Warner's

story really starts October 5th, 1830 when he left his home in Lyme, Connecticut and headed west to Missouri in search of a milder climate to improve his health. He reached St. Louis in November where folks were still talking about the arrival of the Smith, Jackson and Sublette wagon train loaded with 170 packs of furs valued, before expenses, at \$84,499.14! At age 23, caught up in the excitement and romance of becoming a "mountaineer", and still looking for a more healthful climate, Warner applied to Jedediah Smith for a job on the Smith, Jackson and Sublette caravan heading for Santa Fe in the Spring of 1831. He was hired on as one of Smith's clerks and, with the three traders and their friend Thomas Fitzpatrick, pulled out from their jump off camp on the Little Blue River May 4th. Fitzpatrick had decided to purchase trade goods from S.J & S in Santa Fe for the 1831 Rocky Mountain Fur Company rendezvous. Fifteen days later, while out hunting antelope, Warner and two companions were attacked by Pawnees. Warner's young friend, a Mr. Minter (or Merton), clerk for Jackson and Sublette, was killed. A terrible vengeance was plotted by the whites, who sent a horse with smallpox infected clothing tied to its saddle in the direction of the Pawnee camp. Later, after crossing the Arkansas River to take the shorter but waterless "Cimarron Cutoff", Smith was killed, reportedly by Comanches, while out locating water for the thirsty caravan. It is interesting to note that in Warner's own description of Smith's death he recalls that Jed's "rifle and pistols were percussion locks with which the Indians had not any acquaintance and

they, therefore, sold them to the New Mexican traders."

Warner reached Santa Fe with the wagon train on July 4th, 1831 and hired on as a driver with Dave Jackson who planned a mule buying expedition to California with his new partner Ewing Young. Some of the other notable mountain men with whom Warner shared a campfire at this time were Kit Carson's older half brother Moses, Antoine Leroux, and Job F. Dye. The Party split into separate outfits. Young stayed in Santa Fe until October, then headed west to the Zuni villages and trapped his way to Los Angeles. Warner traveled with Jackson who left Santa Fe August 25th and pointed south down the Rio Grande. There were eleven men mounted on mules, and seven pack mules, five of them with panniers carrying Mexican silver dollars. Using a combination of topographical common sense, previous explorer's routes, and Warner's own journal entries, historian Carl D.W. Hays has traced the party's course. Jackson's string followed the old Spanish trail down the Rio Grande to just south of present-day Truth or Consequences, then turned west crossing the Mimbres Mountains to the Santa Rita copper mines. The trail led southwest to Cow Springs, then veered west roughly following today's Interstate 10 to Apache Pass in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains. Then it followed Dragoon Wash and met the San Pedro River just north of present-day St. David. Continuing due west, they stopped next at San Xavier del Bac Mission. Turning north they passed through Tucson following the Santa Cruz River to the ancient Indian ruins at Casa Grande and the nearby Pima village. Bearing

along the Gila River to its junction with the Rio Colorado, the company forded the river at its lower crossing and pioneered a new trail through the sand hills and the Yuma desert roughly following present-day Route 98 past Calexico. The thirsty men and mules bore northwest at today's town of Ocotillo and up Carrizo Creek along present route S2. Having driven this road myself in autumn I offer the following observations. During October, the time Jackson's party probably was there, the temperature in these desert canyons is high. The Laguna Mountains rise steeply on the west topped by visible stands of Coulter and Ponderosa pines and Live Oaks. Even today a pretty good stream of water is available in Canebrake Wash and in some pools at Palm Spring along the trail. Once past Vallecito the next water supply is San Felipe Creek, whose banks the trail follows up into the foothills and through Teofulio Pass. From this pass the trail drops into the eastern arm of the Valle de San José at an elevation of about 3000 feet. Continuing westerly the route follows Buena Vista Creek and then breaks out into the wide valley floor. From here the trail swings north into a side canyon to the hot springs, site of present-day Warner Springs Ranch.

There are two different versions of the route Jackson's party followed from the hot springs to Mission San Luis Rey. Morrison's map shows the route following the San Luis Rey River, while Hill suggests the later Overland Mail route to Temecula. Either way the mountain men turned south at the mission and headed to San Diego which they reached in early November. Then backtracking (I would suppose on the El Camino

Real) they turned north and hit Los Angeles on December 5th, 1831. Here Warner and one other man remained while Jackson's party went mule buying, shopping as far north as Mission Santa Clara on the southern shore of San Francisco Bay.

By early April of 1832 Jackson was back in Los Angeles with 600 mules and 100 horses. Meanwhile Ewing Young and his outfit had reached L.A. and the whole group now pushed the caballada from Sierra Rancho on the Santa Ana River back to the Colorado River presumably following Jackson's west-bound trail. Reaching the swollen river in June it took twelve days to cross the livestock with some losses.

As Dave Jackson and the mules headed east Ewing Young and five others, including Warner, returned to the Los Angeles area to begin some fur hunting. This time Young was after sea otters. The mountain men turned carpenters for the rest of June and July and built two sea worthy canoes. They hunted around Point Conception, the Channel Islands of San Miguel, Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz and ended the expedition in September at San Pedro. That seems like alot of sailing for canoes but Warner mentions they had a yawl (two masted sailing vessel) to tow their canoes across the Santa Barbara and San Pedro Channels. Young, who didn't care much for ocean hunting, had returned to Los Angeles meanwhile and organized a beaver trapping brigade including Moses Carson. In early October 1832 Warner joined this company and they struck north through Tejon Pass to the Kings and San Joaquin Rivers around present Fresno where they made their fall hunt.

They noticed a dearth of beaver and sure signs that