

Old Roads and Trails in South Texas Recalled by W. G. Sutherland in Reply To Request for Information

copy of letter in vol 26

A statement relative to the old roads and trails of this district has been written by W. G. Sutherland of Bluntzer, to C. W. Gibson of this city, in response to his inquiry. Mr. Sutherland not only is an old-timer in this district but he has studied the subject deeply, and, before the storm of last September, was reputed to have the most complete library of old Spanish histories and maps in the county, or in this part of the state. The greater part of this library was lost in the storm and Mr. Sutherland is compelled to write from memory rather than authoritative record.

His letter follows:
In answer to your communication of the 19th inst., I am sorry to say that my information on the subject is very limited. And unfortunately all my old Spanish maps, charts, Mss. and old histories were destroyed by the flood last September. All that I certainly know about old roads in Texas is that

in 1689 De Leon whilst searching for the few remaining followers of La Salle opened the old La Bahia or Goliad road. This road crossed the Nueces at what is still known as De Leon's crossing near the village of the Lipans about 3 miles above San Patricio—passed the Guadalupe at Mission Valley, the Colorado at La Grange, the Brazos at Washington and the Trinity at Robinson's Crossing.

Anthony Crozat received a grant of Louisiana from Louis the fourteenth of France and he attempted to open up a trade with Mexico and St. Denis laid off a road through Texas to the Rio Grande. St. Denis' road entered Texas at Gaines' Ferry, passed Nacoches, Mound Prairie, Robinson's Crossing, the Brazos near Tenortician "Furleson Co." the Colorado at Bastrop and through San Antonio to El Presidio on the Rio Grande.

In 1805 Gov. Cordero and Gen. O'Herrera opened the Atasco Sito road. This road crossed the Colorado at Columbus, the Brazos at San Felipe and the Trinity at Liberty.

The old road used by the missions near the coast started at the Mission Valley, passed La Bahia "Goliad" crossed the Nueces at Lapanatlan thence to El Charco Predondo Baluarte and Las Animas to the Pao Grande. At each of these places there was a fort with a company of soldiers for the protection of travellers.

Long before the advent of the white men the Indians had many trails from different parts to The Sacred lake of El Sal del Rey or great Salt Lake of the King. This is one of the most wonderful salt lakes in the U. S. The salt forms in layers "like ground ice" at the bottom of the lake and when removed is completely replaced in about 28 days. No living organism exists in its waters. The lake is of an oval form and covers an area of about 700 acres of land. During the Civil War thousands of tons of salt from this lake was carried to the Southern States.

The Matamoras road from San Patricio to Matamoras was established about 1831.

The old roads as originally laid out were never straight and mere trails where convenient and safe crossings could be had at creeks and rivers and where a never failing supply of water could be had at rivers, lakes or creeks every 10-15 miles. Only in time of danger or drouth was the exact trail followed. When there was plenty of water and no danger of an Indian attack by night, travellers took short cuts across the country.

In 1875 I travelled four different roads from Corpus Christi to San Diego. One road went through the

Oso, entered the Rabb Pasture at the Chocolate Mott passed the Petronilla Creek, The Trinidad and la Guajillo. Another road followed very nearly the line of the Texas-Mexican Ry. Another passed Nuecestown and N. of Banquette near the ranch of Mr. C. C. Wright, La Puerta, Preceños and the Lara to San Diego. Another followed the present up river road to the Matamoras road from thence to the Adami crossing on the Agua Dulce about three miles S. of Orange Grove passed the Tecolote ranch, Amargosa and Muertecito to San Diego.

It depended on the weather, the abundance of grass and water and the kind of team a man was using which road he selected. If a man was on horseback he selected the most direct route. If he was driving horses or mules he made choice of the road where grass was most abundant. If he had oxen he took the road where prickly pear was plentiful. With the possible exception of the Sta Fe trail that passed through a part of Texas no wheeled vehicles of any kind were used on the first roads. Everything was carried on pack animals. Few if any of the animals would eat corn or oats. I think I am safe in positively asserting that 45 years ago not one horse in five hundred would eat either corn or oats and it was often difficult matter to teach them to eat grain of any kind.

It seems strange nowadays to speak of laying off a road to pass permanent watering places within a reasonable distance of each other, as all the permanent running streams and never failing lakes have gone dry. Many people "recent arrivals in the state" say we never had permanent lakes and streams, that we only remember that the lakes and streams had plenty of water when we had plenty of rain.

But there were hundreds of permanent lakes and a score of running streams in this country 50 years ago. The new comer asks "Well, did they go dry?" The principal if not the only reason is that the springs have been choked up by the trampling of tens of thousands of cattle, horses, sheep and goats. In dry weather when the grass is scant and the ground bare hundreds of animals lie around lakes and streams for hours every day, drink once or twice and every time they enter the water carry some earth into the lake until in the course of time the lake is filled up and the springs choked but our new comer is not satisfied with this explanation and says "well according to history there were millions of buffalo and thousands of deer and antelope in this country before there were either cattle or horses, why didn't they fill up the lakes and choke the springs?"

Buffalo, deer and antelope never stayed in a part of the country where there was no grass, consequently carried less earth into the lake than they carried out and instead of filling up they deepened the lakes.

I suppose by this time you have had enough of roads, lakes and as you will have to winnow a bushel of chaff to get a grain of wheat. I am sorry I cannot furnish you with any information of real value but I am certain all the statements made are true and can be proved.

With respect I remain,
Yours truly,
W. G. SUTHERLAND.

4 Trails
Corpus to San Diego

animals would not eat corn or oats

De Leon Crossing of Nueces near San Patricio

St. Denis' rd

La Bahia Southward

great salt lake of the King - Indian trails to it.

no defined trails