

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Big Sur Buffalo Roundup

"Monterey Buffalo Were Ornery Beasts."

This was the heading for a story which appeared in The Herald in April 1940. A few months ago, we received a letter from another amateur historian who wished to know if there had once been a herd of buffalo on a ranch near Monterey. We could find no trace of such an animal ever occupying a bit of territory in Monterey County, although we made many enquiries. Finally, we came upon this bit of past history in our own Herald.

The story began: "One of the most colorful episodes in the history of Monterey Peninsula and the coast country south of Carmel concerns the raising of buffalo, both as a pure blood strain and crossed with ordinary beef cattle.

According to the late Frank Post, a pioneer resident of the coast, down below Big Sur, "It was sometime in 1892 when Mr. Molera brought the first buffalo on the Molera property." The animal had a reputation for having killed "one or two men" already. The buffalo never proved much of a success because of their cantankerous dispositions, either pure strain or crossed with domestic cattle. Finally, their culture was abandoned.

The first buffalo on the ranch died according to Mr. Post's story, but soon after Molera had another bull and several buffalo cows sent down the coast. How they behaved is best told in the words of Frank Post.

"One morning Lizzie, Joe's wife, drove the cows in from across the Rio for milking. From the hill the buffalo saw the cows and down he comes, tore through everything - caught the bottom of the corral gate with his horns and threw the gate high in the air over his back - marches in and cleared everybody out of the corral.

"Manuel Amesquita and Sylvester Gilkey, who were giving a hand in milking, cleared a seven foot board wall. This was the side of the barn which formed one side of the cow corral. The hay was even with the top of this board siding.

"Vester (Sylvester) as we called him, got the hay fork jabbed several tithes into the buffalo's nose. This however did not better the situation.

The beast with all his weight and bulk, made a lunge and leaped clean over this seven foot barrier and on top of the hay. Manuel and Vester shinnied up on the uprights of the barn and took refuge on the cross-trees.

"The buffalo seeing that he had them all well treed, lunges off the hay to the ground with the cows, then tore off the end of the corral big enough to admit a freight engine. Of course, he was then in the lot by the dwelling house.

"The women folks, who were cooped up in the house didn't dare to open a door and step out. The buffalo was strutting around emitting that peculiar but familiar grunt common among the bulls of this species. All day and night the cows were not milked.

"Next day Joe, my brother goes down to see Cooper's foreman, Juan Artellan, for help and to see what could be done. Juan says: This is just what I've been waiting for. I'm just itching for a round with that buffalo."

"He calls on the men on the ranch, Abalardo Cooper, John Pate, Solomon Orantes, and Juanito Artellan. Up they came riding the best saddle horses on the ranch.

"When they arrived on the scene Juan says 'onde esta'. The bull all this time was on the farther end of the lot herding the cows, Juan says 'Ahora beras.' Then he takes his riata, but by the time he got near the bull who had been watching him all the time, the bull left the cows and just flew over the ground and after Juan or Juan's horse, the bull was not particular.

"Let me tell you Juan soon found out that a lot or two or three acres is not big enough ground for to tackle a bull buffalo. At every thrust of the horn the bull would comb the hair of Juan's horse's tail."

(To Be Continued)