

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Santa Lucia Mountains**

Peter and Paul and Paul and Virginia Michael did some research on their own for their Christmas cards of 1964 and 1965 with the result of a very interesting and comprehensive history and description of the Santa Lucia mountains and the Salinas river. I suspect that the good doctor did a great deal of the work greatly assisted by Virginia and the two boys but maybe not.

“Not old in a geomorphologic sense compared with the Canadian Laurentians or mighty in stature as the Sierra Nevada, the Santa Lucia mountains nevertheless have the distinction of being one of the oldest named ranges in the North American continent,” the authors write as they begin their greeting to their friends.

“The mountains roll straight to the sea and the combination with the mighty Pacific gives this scene a natural beauty and grandeur unsurpassed anywhere in the United States. The range encompasses such well known areas as Mission San Carlos Borromeo, now the Carmel Basilica, Carmel, Carmel Valley, the Carmel River, Point Lobos and the famous Big Sur region.”

“The Santa Lucias have a legendary history of romance dating back to 1542 — but fifty years after Columbus discovered America. The Portuguese Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed his toy ships, flying the flag of Spain, into the bay — known today as Monterey Bay. It being San Martin's day, he named the mountains south of the area as San Martins and the harbor Bahia de los Pinos.

Its southern point was covered with a forest of pine trees which he named Punta de Pinos — Point Pinos as it is known today. Cabrillo did not land on the shores, but Sebastian Vizcaino in 1602 first set foot on the Monterey Peninsula. On December 13, the fleet charted the San Martin mountains as Sierra de Santa Lucia in honor of Santa Lucia's day. Thus, on December 17, 1602 — eighteen years before our Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock — Monterey had received its baptismal name. . . This is certainly one of the few unspoiled regions of the state — for man has been kind to nature here and preserved its rugged and natural splendor.”

For the Mitchell's 1965 greetings they choose to write about the Salinas River, often times known as the “Up Side Down River” for the reason that in many places it

becomes completely submerged and flows underground and flows northward.

“Its importance, however, lies in its romantic and colorful history during California's early days, and at present, because it waters one of the richest agricultural areas in the world” writes Dr. Mitchell.

“The Salinas River originates in the hills near San Luis Obispo and flows north to its mouth in Monterey Bay, one hundred and fifty miles away. The principal tributaries are the Estrella, Nacimiento and San Antonio Rivers. The latter two originate in the Santa Lucias and southeast parallel to each other for thirty miles, emptying in the Salinas north of Mission San Miguel. The area is bounded on the west by the Santa Lucias and on the east by the Gabilans. In between these two ranges lies the great and fertile Salinas Valley. The river was first named Santa Delfina, later to be called Rio Monterey — but because of the heavy salt deposits at the mouth it acquired its present day name Salinas, or saltlike.

“Many of the newcomers to the area were a shrewd lot and managed to gain control of most of the valuable land in the valley. The dreamy life of the Dons gradually came to an end and the days of the fiestas became only memories. The last of the matanzas saw one of the most colorful customs die in Alta California.

“Today the Salinas serenely flows on to the ocean as before, flanked by lush fields of lettuce, sugar beets, strawberries, tomatoes, onions and beans. The towns of Paso Robles, San Miguel, San Ardo, San Lucas, King City, Greenfield, Soledad, Gonzales and, Chualar are settlements located on vast land grants. The old Salinas City is now a real city and is the center of this great agricultural valley.”