

THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ORDER OF

E CLAMPUS VITUS

BILLY HOLCOMB CHAPTER 1069

PRESENTS ITS FALL CLAMPOUT

LAS FLORES RANCH PLAQUES

OCTOBER 7, 8, AND 9 2022

Or, in the year of our Order,

The Six Thousand and Twenty Seventh

Held under the aegis of Mikey Moore

Noble Grand Humbug

Article written by Paul Renner, P

The Plaques at Las Flores Ranch

Our campsite is nestled at the foot of the northern flank of the San Bernardino Mountains, mountains that once, eons ago, formed one flank of a much broader range that included the San Gabriels. Split by the San Andreas Fault, the latter moved to the northwest, while the San Bernardinos headed southeast. The gap between the two later became known as Cajon Pass, although it isn't really a pass in the truest sense of the term. A little more than half way up the Cajon Pass California Highway 138 rolls east to Summit Valley and on to Lake Silverwood. Summit Valley marks the boundary between the Mojave Desert and the forests of the San Bernardinos; the valley has been witness to Native American settlements, an active trade route between the Colorado River and the Pacific Ocean, Spanish priests, early American settlers, and, of course, the birth of the greatest chapter of E Clampus Vitus.

Also located here is Las Flores Ranch, a ranch that, through many owners, has been operating since at least the latter part of the 1850's. Several historical markers and plaques in the area tell the story of this valley. Some are still located where they were placed, but four were moved in 1972 with the construction of Cedar Springs Dam and Lake Silverwood. Fortunately, these plaques were "rescued" by the then-owners of Las Flores Ranch, re-engraved in granite, and placed on a monument in front of the ranch headquarters. Each of the plaques describes aspects of the history of Summit Valley, the Las Flores Ranch, and the Vanyume people who once occupied this area. We'll transcribe the plaque wording here, and tell the story of each one.



Las Flores Ranch Bell and Monument. Photo by Brother Michael Kindig, ECV

But Let's Start at the Beginning...

The first plaque commemorates the Vanyume Indian village of Guapiabit, which is very near to our clampsite:

At or near this place was once located a Vanyume Indian village called Guapibit where, in 1808, the Franciscan Fray Zalvidea baptized two old men and three aged women. The devoted father, soon to assume the administration of the Mission San Gabriel, had traveled from Santa Barbara as official diarist of an expedition sent out in quest of suitable sites for inland missions.

For many decades it was thought that the natives that occupied Summit Valley (and the whole Victor Valley as well) were a separate tribe from the Serrano people who lived in the mountains to the immediate south, although they seemed to be linked linguistically. Even Alfred Kroeber, who many consider the final word on California tribes (it was Kroeber who befriended Ishi, the last of the Yahi Indians), designated the Serrano and Vanyume as two separate tribes. (Lyman 2010) It wasn't until much more recently that the research of John Peabody Harrington resurfaced. Harrington interviewed many Native Americans who lived on the Mojave Desert as far back as the mid-1800's; from their stories and from the diary of Father

Francisco Garces (the first European to make contact with the Vanyume) Harrington concluded that the Serrano and the Vanyume were of the same tribe. Actually, the term “tribe,” according to Lyman, is an overstatement. The Serrano, whether on the desert or in the mountains, “had no concept of such designations or divisions.” (Lyman 2010) The villages and clans that made up the Serrano were not organized or unified in any sense other than in recognizing a common culture.

The clans that made up the Vanyume people, led by the kika, were organized by territory; there was generally a large village, or rancheria, from which families or individuals might temporarily move to other camps. In this way, the rancheria worked as a sort of base camp. The kika would most likely be found in residence here in a ceremonial house constructed of tule mats spread over a wood frame. The kika not only led his clan in hunting and gathering activities, but also in such ceremonials as were observed by the clan. These included naming, mourning, and curing ceremonies, as well as festivals. Two other important positions within the clan were the paha, who notified the members of the clan of upcoming ceremonies, and the tcaka, whose responsibilities included knowing the creation stories and the songs associated with the clan. This weekend, we are camped very close to the Vanyume village of Guapiabit. All of the activities of the local clan would have been centered here: hunting and gathering expeditions led by the kika, ceremonies at the “big house,” naming ceremonies for infants; essentially this was the center of the clan’s cultural life. This was an ideal location for the village due to its proximity to water (the headwaters of the Mojave River’s west fork), plentiful game here and in the mountains to the south, mild temperatures, and access to the groves of oak trees (for acorns) in the mountains. In 1806 Father Jose Maria Zalvidea, while

investigating inland California for sites for a second string of missions, came across the village of Atongai, near Hesperia Lake about 10 miles northeast of our campsite. Here Father Zalvidea baptized five elderly Vanyume (two men and three women). Moving southwest to Guapiabit, Father Zalvidea baptized two more Vanyume Indians before heading over the mountains to the San Gabriel Mission, where he was to take on the role of administrator. It is this event that is commemorated by the plaque transcribed above.

Other Vanyume rancherias extended down the Mojave river to the north. These included Atongai, mentioned above, and Topiavit, a few hundred yards south of Lane's Crossing of the Mojave River (just to the north of Oro Grande, and site of a Billy Holcomb plaque). Although some observers have noted these natives to be quite poor, this does not seem to be the case. Father Garces, who made first European contact with these people in 1776, was literally showered with beads by his Vanyume hosts. With the proximity of water (the Mojave River) and the San Bernardino Mountains, the Vanyume had learned to live well on the desert. Jedediah Smith "noted that Indians at least as far away as Barstow had supplies of the easily stored acorns" (Lyman 2010) with which the Vanyume made many staple foods.



Serrano dwelling. Vanyume probably similar.

The Mojave Indian Trail

The second plaque recognizes the Mojave Trail:

This secluded valley once bore a primitive traffic and knew the lithe tread of native feet. The ancient Indian trail from the Colorado River to the coast led up the Mojave River into the mountains and climbed Sawpit Canyon to the summit of the range. The Piute Indians, using this trail, left a pathway which guided explorer, priest and pioneer across the desert waste and over the mountain barrier. When the Mormons came in 1851, immigrant wagons had already worn a well marked road through Cajon Pass. Thereafter the old Mojave Trail was little used.

One reason the Vanyume were a prosperous people was their proximity to an ancient trade route between the Colorado River and the Pacific Ocean. It would also prove, in some ways, to contribute to their undoing. For centuries Native Americans used a route that linked the Colorado River Indians to tribes living along the California coast. The Eastern Mojave Desert is a forbidding place—extreme temperatures (sub-freezing temperatures in the winter and scorching temperatures in the summer), lack of game, and especially lack of water would prevent any rational person from wandering there, let alone attempting to cross it. But somewhere in forgotten years a path was found that linked the river with the sea. Providence or chance provided water at intervals of about a day's walk between the Mohave Villages at the Colorado River (near present day Laughlin, Nevada) and the Mojave River.

Beginning at the Mohave Villages, it is about a day's march west toward the Paiute Mountains to Paiute Springs—a year-round water source that flows as much as 100,000 gallons of the precious liquid per day. Hidden in a canyon on the east side of the Paiute Mountains, the spring offers shade, small game, and a respite from the desert heat. It also provided grass, which would be important to travelers later in its history. From Paiute Springs it is another day's march to Rock Springs, another reliable source of water, though not as plentiful as Paiute Springs. From Rock Springs, a third day's travel west leads to Marl Springs. More exposed than Rock Springs, Marl Springs still provides a year-round water supply. And a good thing too, as it

is about 35 miles from Marl Springs to the next water at Soda Springs. From there the traveler continues west to the entrance of Afton Canyon, and thence finds the eastern end of the Mojave River. This provides an adequate (although sometimes inconsistent) water supply all the way to the San Bernardino Mountains. In fact, all the way to Summit Valley and Las Flores Ranch, where we are camped. Although later travelers continued over the Cajon Pass into the San Bernardino Valley and then west to the ocean, the original native sojourners followed the west branch of the Mojave River up Sawpit Canyon (just to the south of present-day Lake Silverwood) and over the mountains that way. This is the path, from the Colorado to the Pacific, that the Mohave followed for centuries as they engaged in trade with the coastal Indians as well as the Indians along the route (including the Vanyume). Later, this route would become the Mojave Road that joined Fort Mojave (established in 1859) with Drum Barracks in Wilmington. But that story has been told elsewhere.

It is quite possible that the original Indian trail between the Colorado River and the Pacific took a somewhat different route. Father Garces' diary of his journey along the trail, guided by Mohave Indians, seems to indicate that he travelled to the southwest after leaving Paiute Springs. He describes an area that matched the terrain found around Foshay Pass, which is to the south of what is considered the Mojave Road. But be that as it may, the important fact is that trade along this route was conducted for several centuries, and the route made its way through Summit Valley and Las Flores Ranch.

While the Vanyume undoubtedly benefitted from their location on the Mojave Trail, it would appear that the Mohave Indians, who were rather war-like, from time to time subjugated the river residents. According to Lyman, there is some evidence that Vanyume women and children

were, at one time or another, taken as captives by the Mohave. Whether the Vanyume resisted or simply put up with these incursions by the Mohave “as the price of doing business” is not known, but it can be concluded, based on evidence of a great wealth of shell beads possessed by the Vanyume, that the latter did indeed do quite well from the River-Coast trade.

Spanish Missionaries

As every fourth grader in California knows, the first organized Spanish expedition into Alta California came in 1769 with Gaspar de Portola and Saint Junipero Serra. That expedition sought to claim California for Spain and to bring the Native Californians into the Catholic Faith. However, the difficulty of resupplying the missions by ship motivated the Spanish viceroy of New Spain to seek an overland route from Mexico to the missions. This task was laid upon Juan Bautista de Anza (de Anza actually proposed the expedition), who, with a contingent of Spanish soldiers and Franciscan friars, established a route through the desert of southern California to the San Gabriel Mission in 1774—this story is told in more detail in the history keepsake for the January 2014 Vituscan Missionary trip to Borrego Springs. Accompanying de Anza was Father Francisco Garces, who had already explored much of the southern part of present-day Arizona. Upon reaching the San Gabriel Mission, de Anza moved on to Monterey, while Garces headed back to Yuma on the Colorado River.

Garces was singular in his vocation of bringing the Gospel to the Natives of the southwest. His confrere, Father Pedro Font, seemed to have had a less than reverent view of Father Garces. Garces, he wrote, was:

“...phlegmatic in everything...oblivious to everything else, talking with them (the Indians) with much serenity and deliberation...Although the foods of the Indians are as nasty and dirty as those outlandish people themselves, the father (sic) eats them with great gusto and says they are good for the stomach and very fine.” (Font/Bolton 1933)

Father Font concluded that God had created Garces “Solely for the purpose of seeking out these unhappy, ignorant, and rustic people.” (Lyman 2010)

De Anza mounted a second expedition in 1775 along the same route as the first, this time for the purpose of bringing colonists to Alta California along the trail he opened in 1774. Father Garces again accompanied him, but this time only as far as Yuma. Here Garces turned north and travelled up the Colorado River to the Mohave Villages. At the Mohave Villages, Garces made known his intention to travel west to the San Gabriel Mission, and the Mohave knew the way. With two Mohave guides, Garces became the first European to traverse the East Mojave Desert (along the Mojave Trail). His diary describes the journey in detail. On March 9 he described the entrance to Afton Canyon (which he called Sierra Pinta because of the multi-colored canyon walls) and named the river within the canyon the Rio de los Martires (River of the Martyrs). This was the Mojave River, and Garces was the first European to see it.

Garces’ diary continues to describe his journey along the Mojave River. At first the people he encountered were very poor. The weather was very cold and the people (Beneme, or Vanyume) were having a tough time finding enough food—Graces describes them as having only tule roots to eat, and he tells of their distress at not having anything with which to go hunting to provide him with food. However, as he continued upstream, the people with whom Garces came in contact were doing much better than those downstream. He describes the chief of one rancheria, in the vicinity of present-day Helendale, as presenting him with a sea shell necklace:

He presented me with a string of about two vara of white sea-shells; and his wife sprinkled me with acorns and tossed the basket, which is a sign among these people of great obeisance. In a

little while after that she brought sea-shells in a small gourd, and sprinkled me with them in a way which is done when flowers are thrown. (Elliot 2016)

As we stated before, the abundance of sea shells indicates that the Vanyume of at least some of the rancherias were quite wealthy, benefiting from the trade between the Colorado River and the Coast. Garces also commented on the gentility of the Vanyume:

(I) marveled to see that among these people so rustic are found demonstrations proper to the most cultivated, and a particular prodigality in scattering their greatest treasures, which are sea shells. (Elliot 2016)

Garces continued up the Mojave River toward the San Bernardino Mountains. Early accounts have him proceeding to and descending what is now Cajon Pass. However, it is more likely that he followed the Mojave to its headwaters, and crossed the mountains at what is now Sawpit Canyon. Descending the south face of the San Bernardinos, Father Garces made his way to the San Gabriel Mission. His further adventures are fascinating, and very much worth studying. But that is a story for another time.



Father Francisco Garces

Trouble at Las Flores Ranch

It was at Las Flores Ranch, in October of 1969, that the Billy Holcomb Chapter held its Charter Doin's, placing a plaque commemorating the killing of three cowboys from Las Flores Ranch in 1866. That plaque was placed near the community of Cedar Springs, just to the south of our campsite and now submerged beneath the waters of Silverwood Lake. Although the whereabouts of the original plaque are unknown, the text of the plaque appears on the monument in front of the Las Flores Ranch headquarters. It reads:

Near this spot on March 25, 1866, Edwin Parrish, Nephi Bemis, and Pratt Whiteside, young cowboys employed on this ranch, were ambushed, killed and mutilated by Piute Indians who then burned several ranch buildings and fled down the Mojave River to the rocky narrows below Victorville.

While the plaque bares neither the Billy Holcomb name nor the date, it has been identified as the plaque dedicated at the Charter Doin's. But here's the rest of the story (the following is a summation of the account of Edwin Parrish, Nephi Bemis, and Pratt Whiteside from Edward Leo Lyman's History of Victor Valley):

By 1866 the brothers-in-law Ed Parrish and E.K. Dunlap had been ranching in the area now occupied by Las Flores Ranch for at least six years. They had built a ranch headquarters (possibly the adobe-covered-by-stucco building just to the north of the big barn at the current Las Flores Ranch), some corrals, two houses, and had laid in a good supply of hay. During the spring of 1866 Parrish, Dunlap, and several other southland ranchers contracted to have a substantial combined herd of their cattle driven to western Montana for sale. By mid-March a round-up of their Summit Valley cattle had been organized by Parrish and Dunlap, and included some local cowhands: J.W. Gillette, Nephi Bemis, Pratt Whiteside, a discharged soldier named Porter, a Hispanic vaquero named Antonio, a boy named Reeves and an old cook named

Strickland. While searching toward the Forks of the Mojave, Gillette and Antonio noticed the tracks of about a dozen Indians, which Antonio deduced to be Chemehuevi. That evening around the campfire, after hearing the story, Parrish suggested that if the Indians appeared, he would kill a beef and give them (the Indians) all they could eat or carry. He did not anticipate any trouble.

The next morning some of the cowhands stayed at the ranch headquarters with those animals that had already been rounded up. Others, including Gillette, Bemis, and Parrish, went out to gather the cattle that had wandered into the thick chaparral. At mid-day Gillette came into the headquarters with some of the cattle, and exchanged places with Whiteside, who joined Bemis and Parrish. A little later Antonio rode his horse around the herd to report that he and another cowboy heard what they believed to be a shot too loud to be Whiteside's pistol. Just then they saw a riderless horse running toward the ranch house, and shortly thereafter another broke through the trees. The cowboys went after these horses, and discovered blood on the horse's saddles. One horse had been wounded by a rifle bullet.

The cowboys rushed to the ranch house and reported the events to Dunlap, who was sick in bed. The cowboys then gathered what firearms they could, and on horseback and wagon they moved out to where they thought the victims would be. The victims were found, each stripped of his clothing and shot through the neck—apparently they were both coming up the same ravine and fired upon at the same time, as each shot seemed to come from the same direction. Bemis and Parrish held on to their saddles briefly, but then fell dead. Whiteside was knocked off his horse but was able to climb the hill to make a fight. He managed to shoot one assailant in the groin (this was deduced by the blood on the ground and the way the wounded man

dragged his leg through the other footprints on the ground). The Indians then crushed Whiteside's face with a large stone, killing him.

The cowboys returned to the ranch house with the bodies of their compadres, where they expected to be attacked at any time. The next day they made the sad trip back to San Bernardino, where Parrish had a wife and several children and Bemis had a wife, and possibly a child. Whiteside was engaged to be married. After the cowboys left, the ranch buildings were burned to the ground. A funeral was held the day after the decedents were brought to San Bernardino. This included a 104-wagon procession said by John Brown to have been the largest in the county up to that time. A few citizens pursued the Indians, but there was, according to John Brown, no attempts at immediate retaliation. (Lyman 2010)

Roads

A smaller plaque adorns the fourth side of the monument:

Until 1924, this fenced lane was used as a part of the county road down Summit Valley from Cajon Pass. From here, a branch road once led across the West Fork, just below the present bridge, and followed up the stream to connect with old lumber roads in the mountains.

This plaque may be commemorating the precursor to California Highway 173, the western end of which is about two miles west of the Las Flores Ranch headquarters at California Highway 138. Highway 173 once traced its route around the west, south, and east sides of Las Flores Ranch, then headed into the San Bernardino Mountains just to the south of the Forks of the Mojave River. It then wound its way up the south side of Deep Creek and continued east until hitting its high point, where it turned south to Lake Arrowhead. 173 parallels Lake Arrowhead before merging with Highway 18. When it was fully opened, California Highway 173 had the distinction of being the only California state highway with an unpaved section. This

was the section between the east end of Summit Valley, northwest of Blue Jay. The dirt section was only one lane, and really only suitable for Jeeps and other four-wheel-drives. However, this section has been closed since March of 2011. This is the result of damage to the surrounding area caused by the Willow Fire of 2003. Erosion and storm damage has made the road impractical to maintain, so it was gated off about a half mile east of its intersection with Lake Arrowhead Road on the east end of Summit Valley.



California Highway 173 in 2007 (dirt segment before the 2011 closure).

Conclusion

Las Flores Ranch and Summit Valley has seen their share of history: Vanyume Indians, Spanish Friars, an ancient Native American trading corridor, cowboys, and ranchers have passed through this out-of-the-way, beautiful valley. It is indeed a valley of transition: from the harsh, magnificent desolation of the Mojave Desert to the cool, shaded San Bernardino Mountains. And of course it was here that a small group of men held the first of many Billy Holcomb doin's and erected the first Holcomb plaque—a plaque that would be followed by over 150 more in the ensuing fifty-three years. It is to those men, and to all the Holcomb members that followed, that this history is dedicated. What sayeth the Brethren?

S A T I S F A C T O R Y

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