

Descriptive History of San Jacinto Mountain Area

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Now that dreams of many old-time settlers of Riverside county have been realized in the creation of the San Jacinto mountain state park, more recent settlers of the county have become interested in the history of the area which is now set aside for development as a public playground. County Agricultural Commissioner Bottel, the most ardent worker for forming the state park and secretary of the San Jacinto mountain state park association, has furnished the Riverside *Enterprise* with a descriptive history of the territory surrounding the present mountain resort at Idyllwild. The recollections of early days in the San Jacinto mountains as written a number of years ago by George Law refer frequently to George B. Hannahs, now and for many years past postmaster at Idyllwild. The article follows:

When George B. Hannahs trailed the story of Ramona to haunts on Mt. San Jacinto, put Idyllwild on the map and entered upon a free range-career of gentlemanly mountaineering, the deer leaped through the buckthorn and Old Tahquitz rumbled to more varied and melodramatic version of life than now. There were campers, to be sure; big hunters, plant specialists, map makers, rest-seeking journalists, and the gay and destructive band of predatory vacationists. But there were also numbers of unbedizined folk, the care-free sauntering sort, about whose past and family connections and present business it was not policy to display curiosity.

The Eighties were exploitation years on the forested slopes and in the pleasant mile-high valleys of San Jacinto mountains. Attracted to the lumbering camps, the pines and cattle ranches, came a whole' nervous horde of disputations customers. The name of Marshall was locally celebrated by a member of the family called "Charley," by the cutting of a deputy sheriff notch on the handle of his talkative six-shooter. A man named M. S. Hall secured the backing of a Los Angeles bank in an enterprise for supplying the Southern Pacific railway with tie timber. Thus the first road from the wide pass to the north was built up into Hurley Flat and extended 15 miles across the west slope of the mountain to Fuller's Mill at the head of the present Dark canyon. But the venture resulted in the breaking of the bank. When Mr. Hannahs, now the oldest settler left on the mountains, purchased a vast tract of timber land in 1887, M. S. Hall had retired to the edge of the desert near Cabazon to plant the first fruit trees, while Jim Farrer [sic] of "Ramona," alias Sam Temple, had settled down near by with his wife, his wild exploits concluding in a game of monkey and cat.

Villain of Ramona

"Sam Temple, whose overt devilishness won him the place of chief villain in the most popular of California romances, drifted into the San Jacinto lumber camps from Montana, a rough and ready mountain freighter of the desperado type. Cherokee and negro collided with English in a ferocious make-up, absolutely conscience-less, devoid of feeling, irredeemably brutal. Yet he was a good fellow when not crossed, a happy-go-lucky sort whose meaningless oaths are imbedded in every rock of the mountain side. It is true that he shot Juan Diego, the half-witted prototype of Ramona's lover, in cold blood, for taking, perhaps accidentally, one of Temples horses. The shooting occurred on the night of March 23, 1883.

"Personally appeared before me Samuel Temple and makes the following statement namely: That he has this day committed justifiable homicide upon an Indian supposed to be one Juan Diego

and under the following circumstances, viz.: That he the said Temple, followed the tracks of a horse stolen from him last night from the corral of Hewitt & Jordan in San Jacinto and that the tracks led to the house of the said Juan Diego and that there he saw his horse and upon inquiring whose horse it is, Juan Diego approached him with a knife and replied it is mine. And further Temple asked where did you get the horse. I got him in San Jacinto. All the time approaching in a threatening manner, whereup Temple alleges that he ordered him to stop, and the Indian did not heed the order; whereupon [sic] Temple says I shot him with the shotgun which I carried and as the Indian did not yet stop coming I shot again and I had to use the butt end of my gun before he fell; and I took my horse and returned to San Jacinto."

The prisoner was allowed his liberty under the recognizance of the court; six subpoenas were issued for witnesses; at the trial a week later a discharge was asked for on the grounds of justifiable homicide, as no one appeared to prosecute the prisoner, the discharge was granted, "as it appears that no offense under the law has been committed." In those days the killing of an Indian was not a matter of great moment.

To Play Havoc

The preemption law permitted the white frontiersman to play havoc with the lives and property of the Indians. Formerly the red people had camps and rancherias in all parts of the San Jacinto mountain. Not being fighters and knowing nothing of their right under treaty stipulations, they meekly gave way before the advance of aggressive intruders and permitted their immemorial lands to be invaded and overrun by white man's cattle. Their only method of retaliation was by burning the slabs of bacon rationed to them by the government, a magic rite by which they expected to shoo away the intruders. The mountain valleys afforded rendezvous for this ceremony, as well as providing them with a natural, greatly appreciated food supply to take the place of the contaminated bacon.

Walking with Mr. Hannahs a few hundred feet from his door, we come to a wide flat granite slab deeply indented with regularly formed holes. We counted 13, spaced about a foot apart. As he talks on in an even-toned gentle voice—fostered, we may imagine, by years of listening to the soft sighing of the wind in the pines—a curious scene unfolds in our fancy. Rotund squaws and long-haired Indian maidens are seated around and upon the rock, each busily plying an oblong stoe pestle in one of the mortar cones. Others are shelling dried acorns into attractively designed baskets. Handfuls of the kernels are placed in the holes. The pestles pound and rub; brown and yellow meal is soon produced, somewhat mixed, we suspect, with particles of granite. The industrious hum of the work is accompanied by a blended hubbub of crooning, chatter and laughter; taciturnity, supposedly, characterizes the red race; but in this instance the sex is stronger than the race. Some scoop the meal from the mortars into baskets and bear it away to the creek. Following them there, by means of our interesting narrator, we see the baskets partially filled with water, while dark hands and arms churn the mixture until a milky ooze creeps out through the tight weave. The corn bitterness is thus leached away, and the meal is ready to be eaten, raw, cooked into mush, or made into hard cakes. Such food is relished above all other. Even today the old Indians hanker for acorn atole. It is a nourishing and fattening food. But these days in the gay vacation vales of Idyllwild mortar rocks are deserted. The holes are filled up with earth and pine needles, while the acorns are gathered only by squirrels and woodpeckers, or fatten wandering herds of swine.

Painted Rocks

Then there are painted rocks to be explained. But Mr. Hannahs does not pretend to know the significance of those circles and zigzags in faded but still durable red. One story relates that the padres buried gold and jewels somewhere in the mountains, leaving these signs in imitations of Indian pictograph to hold the secret of the locations until they or their successors should return. Another tale connects the symbols with the demonology of Tahquitz, the arch fiend of local Indian lore, whose ominous rumblings are still at times to be heard. Nor does our gentleman mountaineer venture far into this subject, more than to add his evidence to that of the Indians and many settlers roundabout that the rumblings do actually occur and have never been satisfactorily explained. According to the Indians Tahquitz is an immortal spirit of evil heart who feeds upon the flesh of human beings. He is supposed to have carried off an Indian maiden or two whom he keeps barricaded in a cave, occasionally grumbling at them for their lack of adaptation to his own diet and ways. Occasionally he appears like a meteor in the night sky; then the Indians know that one of their number is dying, and Tahquitz has come to steal the body. Later if they hear the rumbling, it is mournful intelligence to them that he has succeeded in his dire purpose and is breaking their poor comrade to pieces on the floor of his lofty cave.

When I first met Mr. Hannahs some years ago he was running a little combination store and postoffice at a bend of the road taking out from Idyllwild toward Banning. Quiet, hospitable, methodical, unassuming, he was a sort of natural part of the congenial wilderness, playing in a beneficent and satisfied role in the dispensing of necessaries to recreation seekers and mountaineers at remarkably low prices.

His quaint signs decorated the little rustic cabin and called out welcomingly all up and down the grades: "Free Camping Grounds at Postoffice, Campers Welcome," and other kindly assurances that for venturing 20 miles into the mountains one was not going to be mercilessly robbed. The Hannahs store was consequently the objective point for outers, ranchers, cowboys, lumbermen, and everyone else attracted to the mountain by either business or pleasure. Here was a chance to restock the kyaks at no greater cost than that charged in the stores below; here was refuge from a raw night if one was overtaken without a tent or minus the price of a bed at the resorts; and above all, here was the best of company for the long evening beside the fire while the wind howled through the ravines and the rain or snow swirled down.