Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

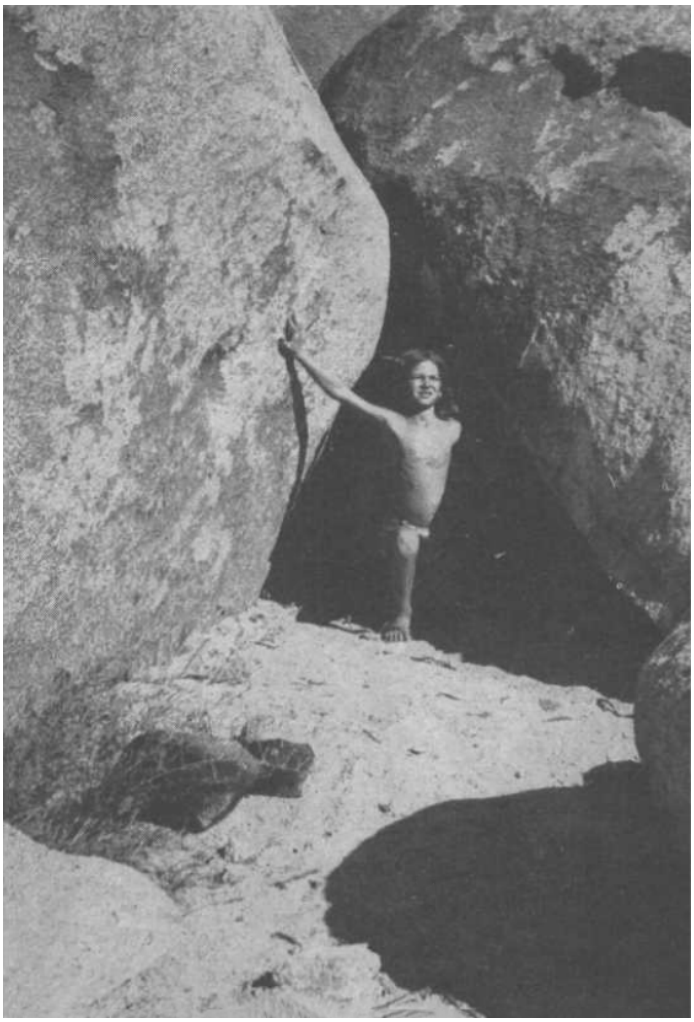
Desert Magazine – January 1942

When winter comes to the remote desert home of Marshal South and his family on Ghost mountain the chill air brings new problems, and new compensations. This month Marshal tells of the plans for Christmas at Yaquitepec, including the task of securing a Christmas tree in a land where there are neither pine nor fir trees.

THE earth – and the desert – wings on towards the turn of the year. Cold days of storm mixed with days when the sunshine sparkles over ghost mountain as warmly as in late spring.

There is this great charm to the desert: every season seems to be, of itself, perfect. In the summer when the heat drenches mountain and lowland and weaves fantasies of mirage across the swimming distance we assure ourselves solemnly that now the desert really is at its best. Then come fall and winter. And the storms beat and the house fires roar. And there is crisp joy in the tangy air. And the southern-drifted sun comes up each morning in sunrises that are the most beautiful to be found in all the world-heaving up from a vast couch of mysterious blue velvet and wading knee-deep through all the gold and pearls and rubies and flashing diamonds of ten thousand overturned treasure chests to light the fires of day. Beauty in prodigal measure. And, reveling in it all, we forget. And we declare with equal assurance that undoubtedly fall and winter are the desert's best seasons.

But it is the same old talc in spring. When all the facts are assembled, we have to admit we have been hasty. There are no "best" seasons on the desert; or rather, they are all "best." At least so they seem to us. Which is perhaps to be taken as a confession of a satisfied frame of mind. But then that is the sort of peace and contentment that the desert gives, if only one will live close to its heart.



In one of the hills adjacent to Ghost mountain, Rider South found a cave where prehistoric Indian dwellers left pictographs on the walls.

Last night, misled by sky indications, Rider and Rudyard put out pans of water, in the gloating hope that it would freeze. Ice somehow holds a fascination for them. And the winter storms that sometimes mantle Ghost mountain in snow are hailed as supreme holidays. But this time it was a false alarm and the patter of eager bare feet and the clack of the wide-flung door which roused the chill house in the early dawn, gave advance notice only to murmurs of disappointment.

"Huh! Just *water*! Why *didn't* it freeze?"

Then a sudden yell: "Daddy! Mother! Quick! Quick! Get up! Come and look at the sea!"

It took several yells – and much frantic urging. For only the enthusiasm of youth finds attraction in leaping from a warm bed to dash forth into a chilly desert dawn. However, protesting excuses and violent threats were alike ineffective. And sleep, with a couple of excited young savages clamoring at the bedside, was out of the question. We got up finally and with Victoria, blanket wrapped and voicing no uncertain protests, tramped out into the cold.

And stood suddenly still, ashamed of our unwillingness. The sight that greeted our sleepy eyes was almost terrifying in its weird magnificence. Grey fog filled the great desert valley below us. High above it we looked out over its tumbled upper surface as over the surface of a stormy sea. This was by no means the first time that we had beheld the mist phantom of the old ocean that long ago rolled in this now dry sea bed. But it was the first time we had seen it in such terrible reality. Ghosts! – you talk of ghosts! Well, here in grim actuality was the ghost of a great sea. And in a sullen, angry mood. Above it, here and there in the cold morning light, the hard, barren summits of desert mountains projected as the lonely islands they had once been. And against them dashed the spume of grey waves. You could see the smoky spray drifting to leeward, tossing in the wind. Great grey rollers came plunging in and broke upon the rocks; leagues and leagues of heaving water that lunged in silent thunder against the very foot of Ghost mountain.

Down below, at our very feet, was a rocky beach and a weird black blot of shadow that lifted and rolled in the foam in uncanny semblance of the wreck of an ancient ship. Strange shaped. An old thing. The wind was coming out of the east and it was cold. There was a sense of fear in it. One had an uneasy sensation of looking at something that was long dead; of something so far out of the forgotten past that it was frightening. For in spite of all our reasoning, it is sometimes frightening to be brought abruptly face to face with truth. With stark proof of the deathlessness of that substance out of which we and our whole universe are fashioned; proof of the thing which we call immortality. A fad of the universe; so fundamental, so plainly displayed. Yet men go mad, seeking frantically in musty books for the thing that is ever before their eyes.

The naked savage of the deserts and the mountains is closer to the truth than his civilized brother. The savage knows that nothing ever really dies or completely disappears. He knows these things without need of reasoning because he is still close to the source of his being; his feet have not travelled so far along the dubious road of "progress." The savage shows his implicit faith in immortality by such actions as putting out dishes of food for the spirits of the dead to eat.... And for this demonstration of a supreme faith in something we prate about glibly – and mostly *do not* believe in – we dub the savage as depraved and superstitious. And we send missionaries to him – to make him like ourselves.

The sun rose presently and the ghostly sea began to break up. We went inside and started a fire for breakfast. We were all quite silent and thoughtful. Including the youngsters.

Tanya made the Christmas puddings today. They are made early and put away to mellow. Once, tied in the stout cloths in which they were boiled, we used to hang them from a ceiling beam in old fashioned style. Until one year, going blithely to unhook the New Year's day pudding, to make it hot for dinner, we found only a shell. The suspending string was there, and the pudding cloth, and the sturdy shape and semblance of a hearty pudding. But all of the inside was gone. There was a neat round hole in the top of the cloth, near where the

string was tied. Some industrious little squirrel had also liked the pudding. Busily, with many trips, while we slept, he had hollowed out the pudding and carried all of it away.

Now we cook our puddings in tin cans, boiling them in a big iron kettle which swings by a chain over a fire of juniper chunks and ancient weather-hardened mescal roots. And we store them away on a shelf in a tightly screened cupboard. Not yet is the whole house rodent-tight. And bright-eyed friendly little marauders come along the beams at night, or perch on the high top of the fireplace, daintily nibbling at crumbs.

Pudding making is an event. Attended by much cheerful chatter, and frequent shrieks of delight. Everyone has to have a stir at the pudding for sentiment's sake. Even Victoria had her turn. Braced firmly on sturdy little legs she clutched the spoon with both hands and lunged determinedly at the batter in the mixing bowl which Tanya held down to her. She wrinkled up her mouth and laughed and got batter on the tip of her nose. "Such funny customs my family have" Victoria seemed to be reflecting. But she relinquished her batter spoon unwillingly – and only after a bribe of raisins in a cup. Tanya has to watch the raisins. Else there would be none of them in the pudding. The hovering sprites who circle the mixing bowl are nimble fingered and very fond of raisins and citron.

But this event of pudding making serves to bring home to us the fact that another year at Yaquitepec is almost over. Overl! – and it seems only yesterday that we were beginning it. So fast the years go! It has been a happy year for us on our desert mountain. So many new friends and so many cheery contacts with old ones. Almost all of these contacts, old and new, have been through the far stretching net of the postal system. But these good friends whom we have never seen are as real to us as though we had wrung their hands and looked into their eyes. The thin lines of the winging letters are very real and very strong bonds of friendship.

If there be a shadow to cloud the bright retrospect of the year it is that many of these good friends have had often to wait long for answers to their letters. But this is something which we cannot help. Our days are crowded with tasks. Sometimes there is scant time for writing. The spirit is more than willing, but the physical flesh is limited as to accomplishment. But perhaps our worry is needless. Friends – especially desert friends – need little explanation or apology. They understand.

Soon now Rider and I will go out across the flanks of Ghost mountain on our annual Christmas tree hunt. Usually it is a long trip, for the Christmas tree is selected with care. It is a tiny one always – a mere branch of desert mountain juniper, in truth. But it must be a symmetrical branch, one that looks like a real little tree. And its cutting must inflict no great injury upon the tree from which it is taken. These Ghost mountain junipers are of slow growth and most of them are very old. A count of the rings on dead ones leaves one a little awed. Not wantonly, even for Christmas, must one of these sturdy living things – fellow sharers with ourselves of the all pervading life of the Great Spirit – be injured.

Rudyard has just called me out to inspect his "mine of pwecious stones." It proves to be a shallow hole which he has dug in the lee of an ancient granite boulder. He has filled the depression carefully with a miscellaneous collection of granite chips, bits of limestone, and lumps of dry clay. "See," he says, swelling with all the pride of the proprietor, "I c'lected them all myself. Pwecious stones! -jus· as good as silver an' diamonds. See, daddy!"

So I complimented him on his industry and left him happily fingering his hoard while I came back to the typewriter.

"Precious stones!" –bits of clay and scraps of granite – "Just as good as silver and diamonds. See, daddy."

And I have seen. And I am thoughtful. Not without cause wrote the ancient writer, in the ancient Book, so long ago:

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings ye shall obtain wisdom."

THE PROSPECTOR

His hard old face is sour and bleak,
The face of one who's had to seek,
'Mid frowning rock with prying steel,
His substance and his daily weal.
He shrugs at rain or stormy weather,
His days – his years – merge all together
Into one common goal alone,
As he holds up – a bit of stone.

His burro waits not far away,
Nibbling a bit of grass or hay,
His old pack shifts; he paces on,
Intent with eyes far-sighted grown,
In eager search – for bits of stone.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – February 1942

For the information of many hundreds of new readers who are receiving Desert Magazine this year, Marshal South and Tanya, his wife, closed their home in one of the California coastal cities 10 years ago, packed their belongings in an old car, and went out into an isolated sector of the desert to experiment in the art of primitive living. A little-used trail led them to the foot of Ghost mountain. There they left their car, climbed to the summit and amid the rocks and agave and junipers selected the site for their new home. It was many miles to the nearest water, they had no shelter except a tarpaulin. But there they have remained, and through the years have been able to collect enough rainwater to build a modest 'dobe cottage. Three children have been born since they went to Ghost mountain. There are more comforts now than in the early days. But except for an occasional trip to town for a few necessities for their children, they follow closely the pattern of life of the Indians who were roaming the desert when the white men came. Marshal South has been writing their experiences for Desert Magazine readers the past two years, and will continue with his monthly letter from Yaquitepec indefinitely.

In their adobe home at Yaquitepec on Ghost mountain the Souths had a Christmas tree – a branch of juniper brought from a nearby mountain slope. There are no electric lights on Ghost mountain, but a generous supply of candles make up for the deficiency.

SO CHRISTMAS is over and another New Year is well launched upon its flight. We took down the tree today, stripping it of its finery and carrying it up beyond the garden terrace amidst the boulders to the little open air storage space to which all Yaquitepec Christmas trees proceed after their reign is over.

A melancholy business this, consigning a friend of gladness to oblivion. At one time, when he was younger, Rider invariably wept at this "burial" of the tree. Now, though he no longer sheds tears, he is always silent, as are all of us. We always put off the doleful task as long as possible. And this time, due to Rudyard's entreaties, we did not dismantle it until well after the New Year was established. The tree is a symbol. And as we lay it away we always recall "The Fir Tree" – Hans Andersen's charming little fairy story on the subject.

But it was a grand and memorable Christmas – and we are still picking up from the most unlikely places scraps and tatters of colored rubber, remnants of gay balloons. Rudyard is crazy about balloons. Which would be all right if he were not also possessed of a gift – amounting to positive genius – for bursting them. Always unintentionally. Santa never fails to bring him balloons. And always Christmas day, with its detonations, sounds as though Ghost mountain were the center of an air raid.

Yes, the youngsters had a wonderful Christmas. Especially Victoria. Last year she met the season with the mild tolerance of infancy; this time, with all the vigor of a most precocious young lady of 15 months, she welcomed it with hilarity. Victoria has lots of strength and vivacity. She fought stoutly all proffered offers of assistance and sailed into the job of unlimbering her well stuffed stocking with zest. Soon she was entirely hidden in a violently agitated mound of crumpled tissue paper and tie ribbons. Every once in a while, like a seal, she would come up for air; then, shrieking in excited joy, would disappear again beneath the litter. Shamelessly she stole all the show. Rider and Rudyard, grubbing in hastily opened boxes and wrestling with the knots of packages, didn't get a look in. Which bothered Rider not at all. But Rudyard, still with memories of the time when he was the youngest, must have felt a bit jealous. For he observed loftily, between philosophic helpings to a box of candy, "You have jus' *got* to ex-cuse her, Mother. She is weaily only a *very* little girl yet."

A grand holiday season. Not only did Santa leave a generous portion of his sleigh load to delight the hearts of our three little "desert Indians," but there were many other packages and cards. Gifts and cheery greeting cards from friends everywhere. A lot of these packages and cards, due to the hit or miss system of our widely spaced trips to the post office, did not arrive for Christmas day. But we got them before New Year. And the Yaquitepec observance of Christmas takes in the whole week anyhow, so it was just the same. It gives us a warm, crinkly feeling around the heart, these remembrances from folks whom we have never met. There will be many happy letters to write in answer. They will go out as fast as we can manage it. Till then, however, to all, these words arc a partial, happy acknowledgment.

The weather today is beautiful; one could believe it was mid-spring. On the window sill of the little one room house, set off by itself among the rocks, where I usually do my writing, a tiny lizard basks and cocks a watchful eye for flies. He is a writing-house pet. He has dwelt here a long time and has assumed a different coloring from the lizards that play on the outer rocks. My little friend lacks their flashing colors; his body is darker – almost black. A result of getting less sunlight I suppose, for he seldom goes outside. Also he is more stunted in build. A lively little lizard. Pert and active and very friendly. But these differences of size and coloring that mark him off from the general run of wild lizards are very noticeable. Here is another of Nature's sermons without words. Sunlight and freedom are life. Confinement and even a slight deprivation of light and air mean degeneration.

Not that my little "civilized" lizard isn't some lizard in his own eyes. He acts as though he were very proud of the education which he has doubtless absorbed from the many books over which he scrambles in mad pursuit of flies. Sometimes, with a prodigious leap he lands on the moving carriage of my typewriter and has to be carefully chased off to save him from being jammed in the mechanism. An industrious hunter. The amount of insects that one of these little fly lizards can consume is tremendous. The daring ones get away with bees – though how they avoid stings is something which I have never solved. I have seen them gulp and look a little surprised after the capture and swallowing of a big black bee. But a few moments later they are invariably back on the job again. Possibly a lizard is immune to bee stings.

A lot of rain drenched Ghost mountain this fall. Upon some of our new walls it was disastrous; they had not had time to acquire the toughness which comes with age and long drying. If one can protect the summits well it helps immeasurably. And even a good healthy coat of simple whitewash on the face of them is a weather resistant much more potent than it sounds. Summer is really the only time for adobe work. But, unfortunately, we generally have to be sparing in our use of water in the summer.

The scheme that works best for us is to run up a temporary wall of poles, plastered or covered with tar paper. Then, when the roof is on, at our leisure, we build the main mud wall against and behind the temporary

one. This is easy, since most of our walls are built up by adding the adobe directly to the wall and not by using individual sun-dried bricks. At one time 1 had the haunting worry that a wall built in this fashion, indoors, so to speak, would be less strong than one raised in the open air. This doubt bothered me until just lately, when it became necessary to demolish a small section built in this wall, that had been standing for several years. After completing the downright toil required to remove this bit of rock-hard adobe I had no further fears on the subject.

To our notion wails built up of mud rather than by bricks have certain advantages. Not the least of these is that if one feels affluent enough to afford it (not a condition which many Yaquitepec walls have enjoyed) one can work a generous amount of barbed wire into the wall. This reinforcement laid back and forth along the wall every few courses, to be buried in the added mud, is a capital insurance against earthquake damage. And in any case it gives one a warranted sense of confidence in the wall's stability.

Bees are drifting lazily about among the ramarillo bushes, seeking chance remaining blossoms. And across the top of the rocks and junipers, faint splashings and much laughter serve to remind me that the Yaquitepec boating season is already in full swing. Oh, yes, to its other attractions Ghost mountain now adds canoeing. Thanks to the rains, the little cistern-to-be lake is brimming and our two ingenious young braves now spend much of their time voyaging on the romantic waters – using my cement mixing trough for a boat and wielding a toy shovel for a paddle. These canoe trips are a great success. But though much game, in the form of amazed chipmunks and startled squirrels can be observed on the shore, the voyagers report dolefully that there are, as yet, no fish in the lake. Well, that will come later. I recall now, with some misgivings, that long ago, I assured a too-curious acquaintance the reason we had selected Ghost mountain as our homesite was because it was an ideal spot for the raising of goldfish. Which proves that it is never safe to depart from the noble example set by George Washington. Dangerous! Setting out maliciously to mislead I may have uttered the sober truth.

We have had cause enough already to congratulate ourselves on the new fireplace. Even to date it has more than repaid the labor of its building by the good times it has provided during storms. And the amount of mescal butts it has consumed so far is amazing. Queer fuel, these straw-yellow, bristling, dry agaves. One has to be super-cautious in handling them. But long practice develops a sort of subconscious dexterity. We seldom get "stuck" these days, unless by down right carelessness or by unusual accident. Strange fuel! There is savagery in its flaming. The butts do not last long. A furious heat, then they die down. But in death they are weirdly beautiful. Fire roses – flowers of glowing ember, perfect in every leaf. Then slowly crumbling to grey ash.

We had one thing to do in connection with the fireplace building that we had not counted on. We had to build the chimney higher to get an increase in draught. Casting about for a quick way to do this we had the inspiration to use three empty five gallon honey cans. Tops and bottoms cut out, the can, fastened into a long flue, formed just the core we needed. With the outside loosely wrapped in some old chicken wire this improvised tin pipe, set upon the summit of our slender chimney, solved the extension problem to perfection. Now we are plastering the outside of the square tin core with cement – a job made easy by the chicken wire wrapping. Not yet has all the cement casing been put on. But it will be when the cement bin has been replenished. Which is the usual way with Yaquitepec improvements. Rarely is a job completed in one run. Usually there are several sessions, with long waits between. And a half dozen jobs that are running simultaneously. It is this, somehow, that gives life its spice.

And so in confidence – the confidence that one draws from the good earth and the stars and the healing strength of the desert silence – we take our course out along the new trail across Nineteen Hundred and Forty-two. What will the year bring? *Quien sabe*! Why should one speculate. It will bring what it will bring. And I am not of the melancholy frame of mind of so many of my old Mexican friends down on the border who, years ago, when mulling over the havoc and upheavals of politics and revolution which had forced them to flee from their beloved "patria" would declare dolefully: "*No bay garantias, señor. No bay garantias*!"

No, it is true that there are no guarantees. Less perhaps now than ever. But it is well to reflect also that perhaps there never have really been any "*garantias*." Life is a stormy passage at the best. And of necessity it must be passed dangerously. Not all the perils that threaten it lie in war or in unleashed evil. Stagnation and greed and false values will wreck the body and spirit as surely as will violence. And, as for money or possessions, over which so many tremble, fearing the loss, these are less than a puff of dust on a desert trail. The thing that makes or mars a man or a nation is the thing that cannot be seen – the intangible *quality* of the Spirit that dwells within. That is the only thing that really matters.

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – March 1942

Little things that you and I take for granted have tremendous importance in the lives of Tanya and Marshal South and their children. This is true because in their remote desert home on the top of Ghost mountain where they carry on a glorious experiment in primitive living, they cannot run down to the store and buy the little luxuries and necessities of life. They have to improvise and make things for themselves. You will have a better understanding of what primitive living really means when you read Marshal's story this month.

In a sunny nook in the shelter of Yaquitepec's adobe walls Rudyard proudly shows Rider a little clay olla he has helped make.

THE lizards are coming out again on Ghost mountain. For quite a period – all through the severe weather – they have been holed up in snug crevices and in deep runways beneath boulders. Now, tempted by increasing warm days, they are returning to their regular beats. A cheerful note. We have a happy, busy lizard population around Yaquitepec. Their jewelled scales as they scurry to and fro seem to give an added glitter to the sunlight. Each year their brief winter absence gives us a sense of real loss.

But the lizards have no taste for snow. And Ghost mountain has had its share of the white, driving flakes this season. Even Rider and Rudyard – that pair of enthusiastic wishers for "ice" – got almost enough of chill blasts and frozen cistern surfaces. But they had a grand time snowballing each other; wild, hilarious romps outside, spaced by breathless dashes indoors to warm their bare feet.

Snow does not last long on Ghost mountain. Usually a few brief hours and it is gone. But while it is here the grim rocks and the cactus tangled ridges are a breathtaking fairyland of glittering beauty.

Victoria, I think, got the greatest thrill from the storms. To her it was a first experience and a tremendously puzzling thing. She could not keep away from the window, running to peer out, then trotting back to tug at us with insistent fingers until we too should come to look. Over and over again. "Snow" we told her. And she stared at us, a deep wonderment in her blue eyes. "No," she repeated softly, "No." She reached her little hand towards the flakes, whirling like a cloud of fluttering white moths just outside the window pane. "No." This miracle held her in awed silence; even her big Christmas dolly was forgotten for a while. How fresh and wonderful is the world when one is young. Which reflection leads one to remember sorrowfully that it is not the world or the everlasting miracles of life which change their freshness. It is only that with the years we grow ca'loused. We burrow deep under a self-made shell of trivialities and falsity and inhibitions.

But spells of cold weather are ideal for dipping candles. There is something about a candle, the soft friendly glow that makes night shadows assume their real character of cheerfulness. Shadows are temperamental things. They were never intended to be grim. The harsh glare of civilized electric light has made hatchet-faced villains of them; sinister, merciless, soulless things that haunt the dark corners of a mechanical age. But the shadows of firelight and candlelight are man's friends. The candlelight shadows that weave joyous tapestries and chase each other in and out of archways and across the whitewashed walls of Yaquitepec are a happy breed. They play pranks with the roving white-footed mice; luring them on with promise of concealment, then impishly whisking aside to reveal the startled, bright-eyed explorer in the very midst of his cautious investigation of cake box or flour bin. Inquisitive shadows. They perch in rows along the roof beams watching us like attentive little gnomes, very still and well behaved. Then, suddenly, as the desert wind chuckles through a crack, they are gone, tumbling over each other in a frantic rush for safety.

It is impossible to regard our candlelight desert shadows as anything else than friends. Victoria tries to catch them, toddling determinedly through the darker reaches beyond the long table and snatching with eager fingers. She has had no luck so far. But she comes back each time with a whimsical, screwed-up grin and a determined hunch of her little shoulders that says as plainly as words, "Never you mind. You just wait."

Candles, in their aristocracy, should be made of beeswax. There is nothing so dearly glowing and so vital as a beeswax candle. But not always is our supply of beeswax equal to the demand. Then we substitute paraffin, with a moderate mixture of tallow, which does well enough. Candles are a cold weather item anyway. With the approach of summer all the Yaquitepec candles are hustled into the cellar. Any that are forgotten are not long-lived as candles; they wilt into pools of grease.

Dipping candles is a job that takes patience. But it is lots of fun and well spiced with a flavor of old-time romance. Perched in the window seat the other day, plowing through his school reader, Rider was wildly excited by the picture and story of candle dipping in early Colonial days. Exactly the same method that we ourselves use. The orderly rows of cotton wicks hung on little wooden rods; the kettle of hot wax. Each rod of wicks dipped quickly down into the hot wax and withdrawn, to be set aside on a rack or across chair backs for the hanging dips to cool while the next rod of wicks is dipped. Then, when all rods have been dipped, back again to the first. And so on, over and over, till the candles are thick enough. For gay effect, after all the dips are done and are hanging plump and firm and white, we generally dip them once or twice more in another kettle of wax that has been colored red or blue or green. A colored candle doesn't bum any better, but it looks festive. Life is the better for cheery little touches of color.

A little while back we made ourselves a new chandelier – a word which today, with its modern version of a glittering cluster of electric bulbs, it is hard sometimes to remember simply means "candle holder." Ours, however, hold no commission from modernity. We simply took a hefty limb of desert mesquite and hewed it with an axe until the top side was flat, and the log, everywhere, was cut away so as to show the warm, rich, brown and yellow tints of the inner wood. Then, in the flat side we bored five holes, candle diameter, and about an inch and a quarter deep, at equal distances along its length; cutting around each, with a chisel, a shallow trough to catch the wax gutterings. With a short length of old iron chain attached to each end of the log, by which to swing it from the ceiling beams, and with a hasty coat of oil to bring out the fine, rich grain of the mesquite wood, our chandelier was complete. Not a large one. But the ceilings of Yaquitepec are low, anyhow; and the room is not wide. When the curtains are drawn against the gathering desert evening shadows our mesquite log chandelier with its five wavering-flamed candles, standing steadfast like a line of George Washington's soldiers, gives light and cheer enough.

Candles! There is a romance to candles. And there is something else to their soft, mellow light that is worth remembering. Candle light, like old fashioned lamplight, is a *natural* light, the same as firelight. Some of these days when you have been listening to the enthusiastic remarks of some of our proponents of modern lighting you might do well to go out and stand on a street corner and count the passers by – old men to mere infants – who are wearing glasses. Then, you may like to remember that the desert Indians – all primitive American Indians – had marvelous eyesight. And it may give you food for thought to reflect on the fact that the only artificial light these primitives knew was the light of torch and of campfire.

Many of our Ghost mountain juniper trees these days are rusty brown and yellow with clustering myriads of flower cones; tiny things about the size of an extra plump grain of wheat. And when one brushes past the trees the bloom-dust whirls out in stifling clouds. These little cones, though, have other uses. For a long while Rider and I, trampinng over the rocky slopes on fuel gathering expeditions, were puzzled by the neat little collections of green juniper bouquets we would come across in the most unexpected places. Sometimes these little tufts of twigs and leaves, surprisingly regular in size and all clipped in orderly manner from the trees, were piled beneath squaw-tea bushes, sometimes in the shelter of chollas, sometimes in clefts between boulders.

We knew that it was the work of pack rats, because the old patriarch, who for years has made his home in the box back of our discarded car, had covered the whole floor of his quarters with the green bunches. But the reason for it all was a mystery. Rider's joking explanation that all the pack rats were putting up Christmas decorations soon failed to satisfy. For the accumulation of piles of greenery persisted long after even the most ignorant rat must have known that Santa Claus had gone back to his home at the North Pole.

Then, by accident, we discovered the truth. The busy pack rats were eating the juniper flower-cones. Nimbly they would climb the branches and nip off a cone-laden tuft, just as we would pick a bunch of grapes. Then they would race to a place of safety and leisurely proceed to nibble off every cone, abandoning the stripped bunch and returning for another. Thus the little heaps of plucked branch tufts grew. We had known, of course, of the fondness of desert animals for the mature juniper berries – relished by many besides the antelope squirrels and the coyotes – but this was our first introduction to flower-cone harvesting.

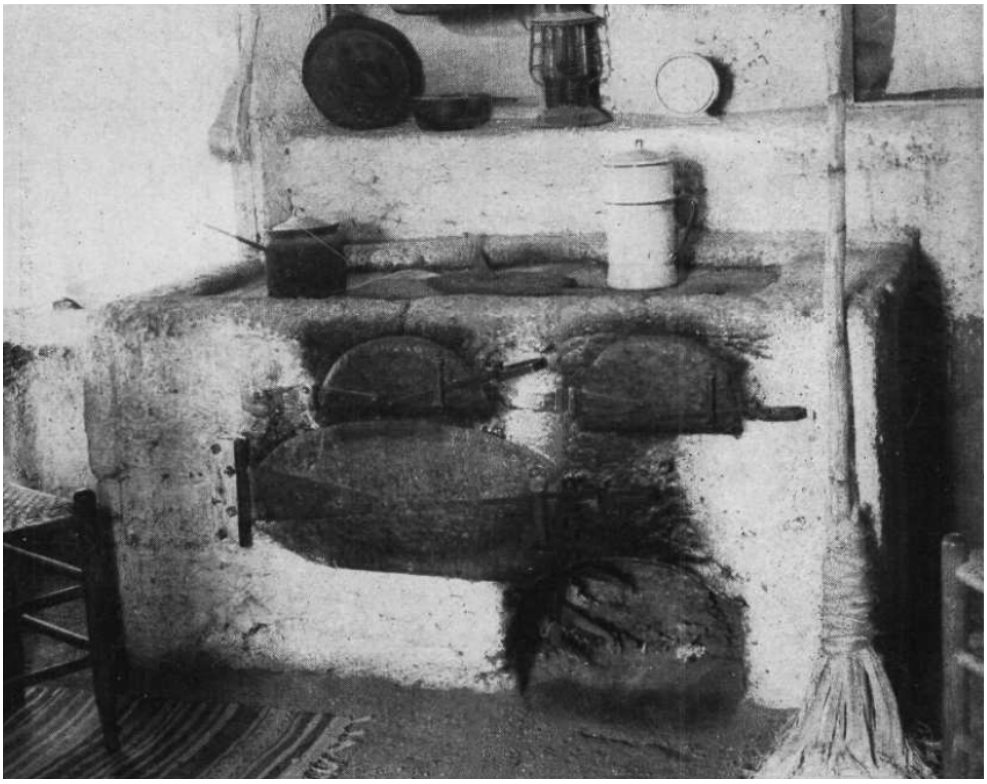
The tiny cones are not bad eating, if one can forgive a distinct turpentine flavor. Their chief human disadvantage is that it takes a huge quantity of them to make a man-sized meal – in which bulk the turpentine might produce unpleasant results. The little rodents that feast upon them, however, have the benefit of more equal proportion. For its animal children the desert is, in many respects, a land of plenty; even if it is also a region of eternal strife, where life depends for its existence, on unceasing vigilance.

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – April 1942

The desert mescals are in bud, and this is the time of the year when roast mescal becomes an important item of food for Marshal South and his family on Ghost mountain. This year the Souths have a new tool for the digging of mescal pits – or rather an ancient tool newly discovered. They have learned that prehistoric Indians fashioned from hard wood a fairly good imitation of the modern spade. No doubt the archaeologists have known about these Indian spades for a long time – but this year the Souths will make their first practical use of the aboriginal tool.



Adobe cooking range in the South home at Yaquitepec. The iron doors were cut and hammered from the tops cut from iron drums. The broom at the right was made from mescal stalk and blades.

THIS morning, when I sat down to the typewriter, it would not work. The keys tangled and jammed, even the carriage had locked itself immovable. The machine is of the "noiseless" variety and hard to peer into. The family was called in consultation. We gathered round the mechanism as surgeons about the bedside of a patient desperately ill. Rider fetched his Christmas flashlight. By its beam we peered deep into mysterious mechanical caverns. Heavens! – the whole interior of the machine was carefully crammed full of wheat!

Desert mice! – the mystery was solved. But where, we asked ourselves when we had recovered from our astonishment, had they gotten the wheat. Then, suddenly, we remembered. A few days previous, Rudyard, running with a can of grain to feed the chukka partridge, had tripped and dropped his burden. Wheat had been scattered widely over the gravel floor. We had retrieved all that we could. But night was shutting down and in the gloom we necessarily made a very poor job of it. "Well, anyway, our little mice will enjoy it," we had said. The floor was clean in the morning, so we knew they had found the wheat.

They had stored it all. The typewriter, standing on a high shelf, had been unused for several days. What prompted the little desert workers to carry the grain into this extremely difficult-of-access hiding place is a mystery of mouse psychology. It must have been quite a job. Noiseless typewriters have intricate mechanisms. It took us an hour of shaking, and key-jiggling, and poking with fine wires, to dislodge the wheat and get the machine working again.

However our Yaquitepec animal friends are remarkably well behaved. White footed mice, pocket mice and packrats have all alike accepted us as part of their world and give us very little trouble. Once in a while, in moving some box or basket that has stood in a quiet corner for a long span, we disturb a terrified mother mouse who, with her half-naked brood of clinging babies, has to be carefully transferred, nest and all, to some safe place on the outdoors. And more than once we have come upon weird collections of sticks and cholla joints and mescal pods wedged in the spaces behind our storage barrels; proof that an industrious packrat has found, somewhere, an entrance hole to the porch – usually one that takes us a long time to locate and block. These occurrences however are no more than friendly contacts with our neighbors and serve to remind us that we are all one big family – all of us with busy lives and loves and family problems. Man is so blundering and blind. One wonders sometimes on what grounds he demands mercy from his Creator when he himself gives so little to the wild creatures among whom he lives.

Last night was warm and at midnight J went out to open up another shutter of our screened sleeping porch. The gravelly earth was hard and chill to bare feet and in the ghostly moon-light the grey rocks and shadowy junipers and mescals bad an eerie look, as though one wandered homeless through the dim landscape of some deserted planet. High overhead the moon, just past its first quarter, rode coldly gleaming through the thin grey murk of a cloud-filmed sky. The ghostly reflection of it was wan silver in the dark waters of our little pool. Silence! Not even the whisper of a wind. The silence and mystery of the desert.

Everyone in the house was asleep. Through the unshuttcred screens its interior was a dim cavern of hushed shadow and half glimpsed form, through which the low-turned flame of the old ship's lantern gleamed as a soft star of peace. What a strange thing is sleep. And how symbolic. The comforting, protecting arm of the Great Spirit drawn tenderly about tired children at the close of the day.

I did not at once go back into the house. Instead I sat down on the upper of the two rock steps that lead past the cisterns to where the woodpile is. Upon my bare body the chill of the night air struck with a tingling, electric glow that was almost warmth. Far off, through a mist-rift above the shadowy ridges, the North Star gleamed. Almost I seemed to hear the deep, measured breathing of the earth.

I must have sat there a long time, hunched knees to chin, staring out into the silence and the stretching dimness of tumbled rocks. Just how long I do not know, for one does not keep record of such musings. The night air was like a garment of peace, and the overhead arch of the desert stars, appearing an disappearing through rifts in the canopy of haze, was as a glorious procession of the Heavenly Hosts, streaming forward triumphantly across the fields of Paradise.

Peace! Assurance! Joy! A triumphant upwelling of the heart which no temporary storms of disaster and mortality can shadow or destroy. One gets very close to the heart of things, sometimes, in the desert silence. Close to the mysteries which the old Chaldean astrologers traced in the night skies; close to the joy of the desert shepherds who saw the gleaming of the strange Star in the East. Not often, amidst the glare of man's garish lights or the turmoil of man's boasting, can such things be sensed. But always – even through the blatant din that is called "progress" – it brings soothing peace to know that, eternally, beyond the passing tumult, these things ARE.

Mescal roast time is approaching. Several plants close to the house are already sending up their plump shoots. The crop will not be as generous as last season. That is the way with most desert growths. Everything proceeds in cycles; a high crest is followed by lean years. If one could devote several lifetimes of careful study

to this maze of intertwined cycles – varying with each plant and organism – many of the mysteries of Nature might be unlocked.

But this season, in the matter of mescal roasting, we approach the task with one more new scrap of knowledge. Our desert Indian predecessors did not always use their hands or a convenient flat stone, as we had supposed, when digging or uncovering their mescal pits. They sometimes used shovels – wooden shovels.

An interesting discovery. Not so much from the actual fact of the implement itself as for its demonstration of the ordered path of invention and evolution. We had known of the ancient "digging-sticks" for a long time, having unearthed several specimens of these time-weathered ironwood relics from hiding places near long forgotten roasting hearths. But we had never found a shovel. And, until recently, when one was brought to our attention by another desert dweller, we were unaware of their existence.

Comparatively rare, these shovels, apparently. But nevertheless some were in use in ancient times. About 28 inches long, from the end of its stumpy handle to the tip of its flat, square blade, the specimen shown us had been discovered hidden away in a crevice under a huge granite boulder not far from Ghost mountain. Carefully hewn from a single piece of wood – and that, seemingly, the rounded slab split from the outside of a large tree – this age-grey relic bore evidence of skillful workmanship, and of much use. How old? Who can say. Long antedating the white man, evidently. The dry air of the desert is kind to wood if it is at all sheltered. What ancient tales of fire-flame and mystery might this grey piece of man-hewn tree trunk reveal if it could speak. Somehow it raised odd, wistful sensations in our hearts as we examined and handled it.

Wood! There is something about wood – man-shaped wood – and also about ancient, man-chipped stone, which stirs the imagination.

The Age of Wood. The Age of Stone. The Age of Bronze. The Age of Iron. Today the Age of Steel. Stages of the trail – the trail of man's progress.

Dawn to Dark. The old, old trail. A long trail. It is good that upon it there are sections where one finds chipped flints and wooden tools. And it is good, sometimes, even in an age of “efficiency” to stand naked and free upon a high rock in the chill dawn and watch as did primitive man the sun flame up in glory across an untamed wilderness. Thus, and thus simply, may man discover the Great Spirit in his own soul. When sham and hypocrisy and artificiality ace shed assurance is born in a steady burning flame of faith and beauty that needs no progress or logic for its adorning. Did you ever pause to muse upon that mysterious Stone Age race, called sometimes the Cro-Magnons, whose trace is preserved in the dim grottos of Europe? There are things about them worth musing over. Some of their art work, still to be found in deep caverns, is remarkably skillful and fine.

Bees droning in the desert sunshine. And out along the terrace wall in front of the house a couple of speculative butterflies hovering over the new beads of the chia sage. In the kitchen, before the adobe stove, Tanya is expertly flipping whole-wheat tortillas onto and off a sheet of tin, flattened from a five gallon honey can. The tin is smoking hot. Beneath it are flames of juniper sticks and mescal leaves. Primitive? Yes.

Flick! – and the thin, round wafer of dough drops upon the hot surface. A momentary toasting. Then over, on the reverse side. Then as swiftly off onto the waiting plate. Or into an eager, outstretched band. For she is ringed with an attentive, appreciative audience. There is nothing quite so primitively toothsome as a new-made tortilla, fresh from the fire. Even little Victoria dances and shouts, stretching eager baby fingers and

munching with a satisfaction that leaves no doubt as to its wholesomeness. She has nothing to be ashamed of in her appetite, which matches that of her two brothers. When the three of them decide to sit in on a tortilla bake Tanya is lucky if she has anything besides an empty plate to show at the conclusion of her labors.

TWILIGHT

The sun sinks low,
A million echoes rise,
To cheer the foe,
So darkened are men's eyes.
We see but steel,
And iron-tools of prey,
Oh help us feel
God ever guides the way.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – May 1942

Two of the South's tiny garden terraces, laboriously constructed by pushing aside the massed granite boulders that cover Ghost mountain. A lust crop of radishes is seen in the garden at the left.

If readers of Desert Magazine imagine that life on Ghost mountain where Marshal South and his family are carrying on their adventure in primitive living is all just a glorious picnic, they are mistaken. In their world, where every task from the making of kitchen utensils to the gathering of food and firewood must be done with their own hands – and the day ends when darkness comes – there are few hours left for play. And yet they do have their recreation – and if you are interested to know what constitutes recreation at Yaquitepec, Marshal tells the story this month.

RUDYARD and I were under the shade of the ramada. It was a warm, drowsy afternoon and the sleepy little breeze that came stirring through the junipers carried with it the faint incense of desert flowers. Everything was very quiet and still. All around us the rock-tumbled summit of Ghost mountain lay glowing in the sun. Lizards basked on the warm boulders and the sharp, dark shadows of the junipers were like patterns cut from black paper.

In the house Tanya was hushing Victoria to her afternoon nap; and at the table Rider was wrestling with his daily arithmetic lesson. Occasionally, according to the manner in which the problems proceeded, he emitted soft, underbreath sighs or growls or chuckles. The faint, intermittent sounds seemed to accentuate the silence.

Last week we went upon a spring picnic. It was Rider's idea – a suggestion which, in the beginning, encountered a rather chilly welcome from "the Powers," for the work budget was over full. We might as well have spared ourselves the trouble of argument however. Once the magic word "picnic" had been uttered the day was utterly lost.

We surrendered gracefully. I filled a canteen with water and Tanya packed a lunch. And after we had gently, but firmly, dissuaded Rudyard from attempting to lug along about 15 pounds of old stones and other treasures, we set out.

I suppose we at Yaquitepec are abnormally primitive frank rebels, if you will, against the straight jacket and all-too-often hollow mockery of the thing called civilization which perches like a strangling "Old Man of the Sea" upon the shoulders of most of the world. Yet I think we can claim no different urge from that which stirs the heart of almost everyone, no matter how "custom tailored," over this matter of picnics. A good sign! A cheering sign – and with hope in it! See how the most jaded of tired eyes will light; how the most wearied of "finance" saturated bodies will tense and the most rabid addicts of "System" and "Progress" will forget for a moment their jangling tin gods of telephone and machine at the mention of a picnic. Deep down, the seed – the seed of freedom and simplicity which the Great Spirit implanted in every breathing thing – still sleeps. It is not dead. In good time, when man has battered himself weary and bleeding into the dust, it will waken again to save him and to set his fret anew upon the trail.

Thus, we reflected as we tramped happily away across the mountain crest, picking our way along the narrow path that wound among mescals and bisnagas. The morning was perfect; the sort of perfection which seems to exist nowhere else but in the desert at springtime. Rider carried the lunch and Tanya the canteen. I carried little Victoria in a blanket. Rudyard, thwarted in his original plan to tote along "pwecious rocks" and other ballast, carried a scratch pad and a pencil with which to "Dwaw sketches an' wite pomes." Down the trail ahead of us a friendly roadrunner scooted for a few moments, then turned aside and vanished over the rocks with a flirt of his long tail. Far off the dimness of early morning haze still lingered among the buttes and washes of the lowland desert.

At the edge of the ridge, where our steep foot-trail dips downward over the precipitous edge of Ghost mountain, we stopped and took off our sandals. Bare feet are infinitely safer on these slopes; especially when one carries a precious burden. The loose litter of rocky fragments dicked and gritted underfoot as we made our way carefully downward, and the mica flakes in the stones sparkled in the sunlight as though the trail had been strewn with powdered gold. On the topmost twig of a wind-gnarled juniper a canyon wren watched us, pert-eyed, as we passed and poured forth a sweet trill of song. A grand morning-especially for a picnic.

We were headed for a tiny valley among the rocky buttes that clustered the foot of Ghost mountain to the north. A microscopic thing, scarce larger than a giant's pocket handkerchief, but we had never been there. And it was not too far off. What better combination than a picnic mixed with exploration?

From the foot of Ghost mountain we struck off across a space of lowland desert, threading our way between the creosotes and the yuccas and with a wary eye for bristling chollas that grew here and there, half

concealed, among the clumped galleta grass. Bees hummed. And presently, in the blackened hollow trunk of an ancient, dead yucca that stood beside the white sands of a little wash, we came upon a big colony of them – a stream of busy workers passing back and forth through a round gnawed hole that probably, in the beginning, had been made by some rat or chipmunk. Peaceable enough, these desert bees – if left alone. Molested they are likely to reveal tempers as ferocious as that of an angered desert Indian. A mixed breed. Most of them are blacks.

We reached the foot of the butte presently and started to climb. The tiny valley that was our objective lay high up, rimmed in a skirt of rocks. The going was tough, but as we clambered upward we came all at once to the trace of an ancient Indian trail. The "old people" had been here before us. Clumps of later-grown cactus and mescals blotted the old path in places and its dim trace, in sections, was deeply trenched and rutted by long years of storm. But it was an infinitely easier route than straight climbing. Slipping and stumbling, following its dim, zig-zag windings, we passed at length over the top of the ridge and down into the little depression that was our goal.

It had been a stiff, breathless climb. But here was reward enough. The tiny valley was a creosote and yucca studded bowl, rimmed by stony ridges. And, used though we were to the beauty of the desert, it looked like a little bit of sunlit fairyland. It was a patterned carpet of gold. Myriads of little yellow flowers grew everywhere between the bushes, so thickly that the foot trod down dozens with every step. The clean white gravel between the plants sparkled in the sunshine like crushed marble. In the deep shade beneath the wide-branching creosotes crowded a luxuriance of sheltered grass, green and tall, its massed verdure lit by the glint of unnumbered blue blossoms which the children promptly christened "corn flowers." Above, the bayonet-fringed beads of the drowsing yuccas lifted great fountain plumes of white, wax-like flowers, round and about which hummingbirds whirred – darting and poising in flashing sparks of color. There was a breeze too. It seemed to belong to the valley, for we had not noticed it before. It stirred softly among the yucca plumes and swayed the long slender branches of the creosotes and fanned a bewildering breath of fairy perfume down the sunlit aisles between the bushes as it went about softly on noiseless feet. It seemed something more than a breeze. Perhaps, as Rider suggested thoughtfully, it was the Spirit of the Flowers.

We ate our lunch in the narrow shade of a clump of yuccas which reared brown-skirted, palm-like trunks above our heads. Out in the warm, still beat of the sun, torch cacti spread great blooms of scarlet, and tiny, gay mimulus blossoms did sentry duty amidst the crowding ranks of yellow daisies. From brush thickets to yucca clumps orioles winged. The heady incense of millions of flowers rose in the warm sunshine and the fan of the breeze stirred rippling waves in the thick masses of the tall grass clumps. The glint of gold from the flowers was dazzling to the eyes. Our spread of blanket was a tiny island in the midst of a gorgeous rug of yellow and white, green, blue and pink.

We finished our simple lunch and then lay and sunned ourselves in the warm drowsy peace, letting our bodies drink deep of the healing strength of the earth. Overhead a couple of desert ravens passed, flapping heavily across the sky and commenting on our presence with a long-spaced, philosophic "chowks." Rudyard wrote a "pome," scribbling industriously weird pencil marks of alleged writing upon his scratch pad. Victoria went to sleep, a tiny fragment of uneaten tortilla in one hand and a bunch of yellow flowers in the other. After a while Rider and Rudyard wandered out to a small clear patch of glinting white gravel and began to build fairy houses. Fashioning them with walls and roofs of carefully collected little flat colored stones, doors and windows and paths and gardens, all complete. It is a favorite play job.

If ever, when wandering through untrodden sections of the wasteland silence, you should come suddenly upon a tiny clearing, wherein cluster a group of little Pueblo Indian houses, shaded by tiny twig trees and with proportionately sized bordering corn patches, all carefully planted with bits of leaf and grass and cactus spines, you may know that you are somewhere in the vicinity of Ghost mountain and that you have stumbled upon one of Rider's and Rudyard's fairy villages. They build them and go away and leave them, with wistfulness and love and good wishes, in the silence of the desert. They are for the fairies to come and live in. And mayhap the fairies do just that. Why not? Are we all so old and crusted and "scientific" that we do not believe in fairies any more? Of course not! Of course there are fairies! We of Yaquitepec believe in them anyway.

It was almost sunset when we got home. The great ball of day-fire was slipping to its western rest in a flaming glory of crimson and of gold. The long shadows of mountains were marching across the lowland desert. The children were tired as we came up over the last section of the trail and the little home-house, low crouched among the mescals and giant boulders looked wonderfully welcoming and friendly. A quartet of desert quail whirred away from the lower of our tiny garden terraces as we came up the path. They too had been having a picnic – amongst our radishes. But they had not done much damage.

SPRING

Young shoots are straining upward to the light.
The smell of Spring is everywhere. Though white
The distant hills and cold the icy gust
That from their hoary, ancient snow-caps thrust,
Young shoots are struggling up to life renewed,
The long, cold winter past. New hope imbued.
Oh soul take courage. Brighter days will bring
More life renewed. For there is always Spring.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – June 1942

In firing pottery, the supreme moment comes when the cooled vessels are examined for cracks or flaws. Rider South finds that this group of bowls came through the fire in perfect condition.

The art of pottery making among southwestern Indians is handed down from generation to generation. Lacking this background of experience and tradition, members of the South family on Ghost mountain have had to learn their pottery craft in the hard school of trial and error. But they have persevered-and in his story this month Marshal tells in detail the methods by which they now produce a very substantial grade of earthenware. This is another chapter in the highly successful experiment in primitive living which the Souths are carrying on in their remote desert home at Yaquitepec.

RIDER and I got up very early this morning, just as soon as the cool desert dawn brought light enough to see. There were fresh seeds to plant in the garden frame and we wanted to get the job done before breakfast. Our tiny garden at Yaquitepec would be less than a joke to anyone accustomed to the broad sweep of lush, fertile acres. But it is surprising the amount of vegetables its microscopic expanse will yield. Here in North America we have not yet begun even to scratch the possibilities of our land. The average Chinese farm is about an acre and a quarter in area. And we have a long, long way to go yet before necessity brings our limit to anything near that.

A long while ago Bolton Hall wrote a book entitled "Three Acres and Liberty" and another "The Garden Yard." Old books, now. But they still should be obtainable in most libraries. They are more than worthwhile reading. The truths they set out have a deeper meaning today than ever before. For in that direction – and in that direction only – lies salvation for an industrially maddened world. The Earth! – individual contact with the earth. It is a kind Mother. The Chinese are a nation of small, individual farmers. They have existed for 4,000 years or more; and are probably good for at least another 4000 – if they have the good sense not to go entirely

"modern."' It is a fundamental truth that a nation whose roots are deep-struck into the good earth cannot be destroyed.

So Rider and I dug and weeded in the dear, white dawn. Burying all the tiny waste leaves and grass stems deep in the soil for fertilizer and sowing our seeds – Black Seeded Thompson lettuce this time – in the little vacant spaces between the rows of other growing stuff. The main thing with a garden frame is that you have to keep it busy; as soon as one row is harvested new seed must be planted promptly in the vacant space. And never waste a dead leaf or the tiniest scrap of humus producing material. Dig it all back into the earth. Thus the little plot grows richer and richer – the best and only safe bank in the world. Only too well we remember when our soil was so poor that it would not grow anything. Now it is all hand made and does fairly well, though some of the fertilizer was gathered, and carried home in sacks, over a radius of five miles.

The sun came up as we worked. Somehow we have never yet gotten to the point where a desert sunrise is commonplace. We still invariably exclaim over it, as over some daily recurring miracle that is never twice the same. This morning, as we ceased our labors a few moments, watching the first point of blinding fire among the rocks of the eastern ridge grow and grow as the mighty circle of the sun heaved up behind the shadow lace of juniper branches and tall mescal poles, it seemed to us – as it always does – to be the most beautiful desert sunrise we bad ever beheld. The air was clear and quiet and summery.

Carpenter bees droned and bumbled, and in the long sun-rays that came striking through the glistening patches of bunch grass among the granite rocks the whole summit of Ghost mountain seemed to take fire in waves of dazzling metallic sheen. A bumming bird whirred in and lit, delicate as a tuft of thistledown, upon the tip of a gently swaying wand of ocotillo; pausing a moment to peek, with cocked head, at its glinting reflection in the tiny rock pool which Rider keeps filled with water for his wild bird pets. Somewhere up the hill a quail called, and a couple of purple finches winged low across the house roof. From the chimney a pale skein of smoke lifted as Tanya lit the breakfast fire. And against the faint clatter of pots and dishes rose laughter and shrill squeals of delight as Rudyard and Victoria romped on the bed in their regular morning pillow fight. Yes, just another sunrise.

Another day. New life. New hope. New joy. Somewhere there are cannon booming. Steadily, hate maddened, their voices draw closer. With truth was it said, a long time ago: "My house is a house of prayer, and ye have made it a den of thieves!"

These have been busy days, lately. "Cement days" – for we are striving to enlarge the Yaquitepec water reserve. As we grow here in numbers – five now, where in the beginning there were but two – our consumption of water increases alarmingly. Also our gardening increases, and our livestock. The well has not yet been located. Therefore the only answer, so far, is cement. Cement and more cement!

For long we have had a standard joke that when there is sufficient water with which to mix cement there is no cement. And when we have cement, then there is no water to enable us to use it. This time, amazingly, however, we bad both – several sacks of the precious stuff and ample water remaining in the outdoor pool to turn it into concrete. So we dug and plastered merrily – establishing before all our supplies were gone – three new potential reservoirs. One on the slope south of the house; one in a deep excavation among the rocks north of the garden; and another in a depression beside the hollow-topped granite boulder which, when rain full, is known as "Lake Yaquitepec."

No, these new catch basins are not finished – only well started. But we take abundant hope and satisfaction from them, and from the sight of their still thirsty-looking concrete glaring white beneath the turquoise sky. Someday, in those thirsty depths, there will be cool, gleaming water – water for more garden; for livestock; for every purpose. Life is good. "If you could only see the fine cabbages which I raise with my own hands," wrote that old ex-emperor of Rome proudly, when urged to return to the capital, and to power, "you would not wish me anything so unkind as that I should again assume the hollow pomp of office."

And lately there has been pottery to fire, too. Always a nerve wracking job. For apprehension, like a gloomy owl, perches always upon the shoulders of the potter until his wares come safely from the fire. It was ever thus. The old Greek potters made pilgrimages to the temples and sought, by gifts. to bribe the favor of the gods. For the day is temperamental, and the finest of pots, wrought with loving care and bearing every promise of sturdiness, will crack and shatter in the flame – like so many promising humans who wilt and crumble under the test of adversity. The old-time Indians-and the modern ones too – knew the same troubles. "If the dirt don' like you it crack right away" a dusky skinned potter advised me once, with glum philosophy. And it is true. The clay, seemingly, has likes and dislikes and whims and notions. Ah, how many gay pots and bottles and jugs and bowls go blithely to the fire – as to the testing furnace of war – and come forth only in the bitterness of ruin.

Mayhap the potter de luxe has better luck. Dimly it is our notion that, beyond our horizon, there exist vainglorious kilns, fat with magnificence, in whose polished interiors haughty pots are "fired" by gas-flame and by electricity. We have read of such things and, shudderingly, at times we have even peeked, for just a flash. at the king's-ransom prices at which such super-civilized kilns sell. But that is as far as our knowledge – or our envy-goes. Yaquitepec pottery has need of no such frills. In the blaze of the open fire-hearth, as was the way of the ancient dwellers of the desert, it must take its trial. "Old ways are best" says the contented proverb. Well, at least they are often the healthiest and happiest.

Primitive man evolved all sorts of plans and notions for the outdoor firing of pottery. The two main essentials are, however, a dry spot of ground and an abundance of fuel. The first is comparatively easy to find; the second not always so simple – especially in the desert.

There are two types of fuel that are our chief reliance for pottery firing. One is the dry, dead mescal butts of last season's blooming. The other is ancient yucca trunks. The latter is the best, but there is more of the former. Mescals come, in greater or less quantity, every year. But the yucca is of slow growth. The supply of ancient, dead trunks is strictly limited.

For this last firing, however, we were in Fortune's path. By accident Rider and I had discovered, in a secluded little spot on the lower desert, a veritable treasure of yucca fuel – enough for a generous firing, and to spare. Since it was easier to take the pots to the fuel than the fuel to the pots, we packed our sun-dried clay ware in back baskets and, one bright morning, tramped away down the mountain. Rudyard came too. Our Rudyard is growing and his feet are easier now to keep shod with sandals. Baby feet are too small to handle sandals successfully; and for a long while this was the main reason for leaving him at home. Now, to his great delight, this difficulty is passing, and more and more he plods along on our excursions. Usually well armed with his bow and arrows for protection against “savitg cweatures” – for which he always scans the desert attentively.

A load of fragile, unfired pottery is not the least worrisome burden that one would choose to pack down a precipitous mountain trail. We picked our steps carefully. But about half way down a wild yell and a cascade

of loose stones brought me to a sudden face about to discover that Rider's feet had slid from under him on a treacherous ridge of shale and, clutching frantically at his burden, he sat down heavily.

"Ow! Ow! All the potteree is bwoken! All the potteree is bwoken! yelled Rudyard, dancing with excitement and brandishing bows and arrows as he peered into the basket. "All bwoken! Every bit! Daddy, can I have *all* the pieces."

"It's not broken. Not any of it!" Rider scrambled to his feet. "I just managed to save the basket from hitting the ground." He was a bit breathless.

"But isn't anything hurted?" Rudyard demanded. There was distinct disappointment in his tone.

"Yes," Rider said briefly, as he resumed his way down the trail. "Those stones. I sat on were hard.'"

"Oh, is *that* all," said the mighty hunter of "savitg" creatures. "I am sowwy." With which ambiguous remark he dismissed the matter. His arrow whizzed across the mescals and another ferocious "rhynosterous" fell dead.

We reached the bottom without further mishap. In spite of our early start the sun was well up and it was getting hot. By the time we had trekked through the creosotes and over the little intervening rise to our destination we were glad to ease down our burdens in the shade of a friendly juniper.

There is an asserted thrill to treading where no man has ever trodden before – though so ancient and well trodden is our old earth that I believe it is safe to say that no man has ever experienced it, no matter what seeming evidence to the contrary. A greater thrill, I think, comes from the continual proof that, no matter where we may happen to be, fellow human beings have, at some time, preceded us. At any rate it was so here. For, on the brown, glowing earth, not 10 yards from our tree, a roughly circular scatter of big, flattish stones told of an old time mescal hearth. And, stirring the deep mulch of fallen juniper leaves with the point of his arrow, Rudyard found beneath our shade tree the fragments of a small, broken olla. One large section had been part of the neck. In it there was a neat hole – evidently one of a pair of holes through which a string of fiber or rawhide had once been passed for carrying purposes.

We piled the ancient hearthstones together and made a little paved floor. On this, carefully arranging the pieces so that all should get as even a beat as possible, we set our clay ollas and bottles. Some of the nearer dead yucca trunks we brought and laid around our pile of earthenware somewhat after the fashion of a fence. But not too close – the beat must come gradually at the first. Then we dragged in all the dead tinder-like trunks we could find. It is astonishing – and heartbreaking – what a vast amount of fuel a single firing of pottery will consume. We worked until we had a small mountain of dead wood at hand.

Then a carefully arranged priming of dry mescal leaves m a strategic corner of the pottery corral. Rudyard struck the match. Smoke lifted and the red forks of flames ran right and left. With long mescal poles Rider and I poked and shifted the yucca trunks, shoving some closer, others farther away. Too great a heat at the start will crack the pottery. It must be warmed gradually. Sometimes it is necessary to protect fragile pieces with leaned barricades of old, broken ware.

We had forgotten our temporary weariness now as we became engrossed in the job of tending the fire. While Rudyard ranged the immediate district, slaying "fewocious beasts" with well aimed arrows, Rider and I

poked and watched the burning trunks, laying on new ones here and there; gradually working the flame-ring closer and closer to the pots as they became more heated. Finally we decided that they were safe enough for the main fire. Warily, for the heat was intense, we began to roof them completely over with dry fuel; piling dead crooks over and across until the pots were the center of a hollow, blazing mass. Dead yuccas can develop a tremendous heat. Through the crevices between the logs we could glimpse, here and there, our pots glowing a fierce, cherry red.

For half an hour we kept the fire going at full heat, tilling in burned-out gaps with new fuel. Then we dropped our fire poles and sat in the shade of the juniper to rest.

We went home in the early afternoon, leaving our pottery standing, like the grim survivors of a battlefield, in the midst of a ring of smoking ashes. It was still fiercely hot – too hot to get near. It is best for fired pots to cool slowly and it would be a long while yet before the fire completely died. The coyotes and the brown ghosts would not harm our wares and the desert starlight harbored no vandals. We left them alone in the silence.

They were cold enough next day, standing cheerful and ash-flecked in the midst of a fire ruin that was as chill as they. Eagerly – for this is the supreme moment – we thrust hands among the soft, grey-white ash banks and drew the pots forth one by one, examining them critically; tapping them with appraising fingernails while we listened for the clear, metallic ring that indicates a perfect piece. The day was warm and glowing: the silence was like wine. Against the brown earth the fire-ash was a tumble of snow. Piece by piece, with mounting excitement, we tested our pots.

Yes, the "dirt" had "liked us." Nothing was cracked. By some miracle it had been a hundred percent perfect firing.

THE SIMPLE WAY

It is the simple things that count,
The little things that urge and sway
And gradually mount and mount
To mold the life we live today.
It is not hard to choose the right,
Each act is like a guiding hand.
Remember that the mountain height,
Consists of tiny grains of sand.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – July 1942

The population at Yaquitepec, the desert home of Marshal South and his family on Ghost mountain, is growing. Growing youngsters need milk – and Marshal has solved the problem by acquiring a couple of goats. They thrive on the sparse vegetation of this remote desert outpost. This month Marshal gives some new side-lights on the art of primitive living in the land of mescal and juniper.

VIVID yellow plumes of the tall, blossoming mescals against the morning sun. The silence is lazy with the faint drone of a myriad bees. And before the open windows of Yaquitepec little shoals of tiny insects hand suspended on vibrating wings. In their poised watchfulness and darting movements their likeness to microscopic fish in some clear tropical lagoon, is startling. And why not? We all dwell at the bottom of a mighty air ocean; exactly the same, except for density, as that in which the marine creatures live. How close together the Great Spirit has placed the different planes of Life! And how little we know about even the most obvious of them. The world of the ocean adjoins our own. And what do we really know of its secrets and life conditions? Yet we pretend, many times, an arrogant knowledge of realms much more mysterious.

Tanya and Rider are up the slope gathering mescal fuel. Their voices drift down to me through the still air. And with them the faint, musical clank of goat bells. For Conchita and Juanita, our two four-footed friends, have rambled off with them, following at their heels like pet dogs, cropping a bite here and a mouthful there. Skipping from rock to rock and butting each other playfully.

Rider South (standing) with Rudyard and Victoria enjoyed refreshments in the shade of a Ghost mountain juniper.

Have I chronicled Conchita and Juanita before? Perhaps not, for it is only recently that they became members of our Ghost mountain population. Already, though, they are a firm part of the picture and their drowsily tinkling bells have brought to Yaquitepec an added flavor of Old Mexico and the colorful lands of sunshine.

Small, active little goats – a Nubian Toggenberg mixture – their brown coats and graceful antelope outlines fit perfectly into our desert landscape. They are popular with our young Yaquitepecos, for more reasons than one. Rider, Rudyard and Victoria now hold milk drinking contests.

I pause a moment to watch the primitive picture which my fuel gatherers and their four-footed attendants make as they come down the rocky face of the northeast ridge. Rider glints lithe and sun-bronzed against the sky. On his shoulders he balances skillfully two dead mescal plants of last season's vintage. With their long poles and attached butts of yellow, bristling dry leaves they seem to completely overshadow their eight-year-old carrier as he steps carefully from foothold to foothold on a trail that is marked – Indian fashion – by occasional guide stones.

Tanya's filled basket is poised high upon her shoulder, steadied with one arm. Her unbound hair waves free in the sunlight as she picks her way through the pattern of purple-grey rocks and blooming buckwheat, pushing aside the emerald green wands of scarlet tipped ocotillos.

And before her, or behind, or on either side, as she moves, range the goats. A pair of little brown antelope, skipping from boulder to boulder. The musical *clink-tonk-link* of their bells swells louder as they draw nearer the house. Primitive, fundamental life in a primitive, fundamental setting! Only the desert, it seems, holds such scenes now. Scenes of a simple life, in a changing tapestry of color, that are both a joy and a despair. One longs to paint them – to catch their color and appeal upon canvas. But the longing is vain. The desert defies you. Even as you reach for a pencil or snatch for your colors the pattern has changed; dissolved and rearranged and re-blended as the patterns of the drifting clouds and the elusive shadows that fleck the wasteland distances. Well, perhaps it is better thus. This is the stuff of which dreams are woven. And one cannot freeze dreams upon canvas or imprison them in glass containers. For then, instantly, they cease to be dreams.

Fuel gathering these warm days is a minor chore. Something to be done in odd moments; not the imperative "has to be" that drove us during the winter. But nevertheless we often look back regretfully on our roaring winter fires. Not alone from the primitive bond that an evening fire has upon the human heart but also from the cooking angle.

Big fires mean abundant banks of glowing coals. And a plentitude of hot coals helps a lot in cookery. Almost every evening, during the cold months, Tanya would take a great iron pot with a close-fitting lid and, having filled it with some sort of varied stew ingredients – jerkey meat and potatoes and onions, or beans and chili and com, or what not, all generously seasoned with garlic or wild sage – she would rake out the glowing coals of the big fireplace, clear down to the hot, baked-clay paving, and setting the huge pot in the hollow, would cover it completely with coals and banked ashes. In the morning we would rake away the grey, still warm ash banks and lift the iron lid from a cauldron of delectably cooked food; all the component ingredients tender and spicily fragrant with a fragrance which only cookery by wood heat can give.

We have never found a substitute method for this primitive way of cooking – a substitute, that is, which gives anything like the same results. It is only a variation, of course, of the pit oven of the savage or the buried bean pots of our ancestors. But it has a "something" to it. Different ways, and different heat mediums – especially this latter – affect strikingly the flavor of food. And its healthfulness. As he has followed the siren song of his shiny modern gadgets of food preparation up the ladder of ease man has lost something. Perhaps much more than he would believe possible.

Humming birds whirr in the sun. And all over Ghost mountain the strawberry cacti are beginning to yield their harvest of cool, delicious fruit. Rider and Rudyard are busy, most of their spare time, in scouting for them. Their healthy young appetites, plus Victoria's, make heavy inroads on the supply. There never is quite enough to satisfy the demand – which is perhaps why the delicious morsels never lose their popularity.

Pink in color and protected by spines, the fruits, when freed from their savage overcoats, are tempting snow-white or pink-tinted balls of coolness, plentifully speckled with tiny, shiny black seeds. Other residents of Ghost mountain like them too; including the chipmunks and pack rats. Sometimes we wish the pack rats, in particular, were not so crazy about the delicacies. Not that we envy them their just portion of the fruit. But we do object to their thrifty habit of saving every thorn-cluster in the rind and placing it at strategic points either in the vicinity of their own homes – or ours. Very often ours. There are few things more exasperating to step on, with bare feet, than these very efficient little thorn bunches. At the moment one is apt to lose sight of the intelligence the pack rat displays in using this perfectly natural defense against enemies.

Pack rats are remarkable little desert dwellers. They provide a never ending source of diversion as well as an unfailing field for study. We have one old fellow who has chosen to live in a big rough outdoor cupboard in which we store miscellaneous odds and ends. His nest, a big affair, is composed mostly of the cotton padding which he industriously stole from an old automobile cushion. This is his home. But all the aisles and open spaces among the cupboard's contents constitute the "grounds" of his estate.

Periodically – according to the season of the year – he decorates this pleasure park either with tufts of green from juniper branches or with an artistic litter of cholla joints and chewed yucca leaf scraps. In one corner of the cupboard stands an old quart jar without a lid. This is his crystal treasure chest. He is always filling it and emptying it. The costly loot that it contains is composed of everything that strikes his fancy – bits of sun-dried orange peel, small clusters of cholla thorns, sections of chewed yucca leaves, dry juniper berries, bits of sun-whitened bone, bleached twigs, scraps of paper, dried ocotillo blossoms. There seems no end to the variety of hoarded trinkets. When the jar is full he starts, methodically, to unload it. And when it is empty fills it again. Over and over. A serious business; one to which he has evidently dedicated his life.

Undoubtedly he is an "eminent personage" of some sort. Perhaps a Rajah or a Baron. Or an Antiquarian of note. And if you are going to smile at his antics and his "stupidity" it might be well to remember what some humans do. Even to the hoarding of diamonds and rubies – and other bits of glorified glass.

Not all pack rats however have a "purpose" in life, or take it so seriously. In direct contrast to our collector friend is the one who lives on our roof. He is a gay soul. One who believes, evidently, that life was meant to be tossed away in careless gaiety. A short life and a merry one. He is a cynic. Collect property? Not he! His home is a careless affair of unhandsome sticks tossed together in a sheltered nook where our main roof overhangs that of a small outhouse. He has no pride in it. It is merely a place in which to sleep when he comes reeling home from wild parties. And he is out on a wild party almost every night. He is quite regular and has developed a technique all his own.

When coming home he first climbs to the top of our rock built water cistern. From thence to a jutting beam. From this vantage point, as a springboard, he takes off in a wild leap, landing with a resounding crash in the midst of our sheet iron roof. Sometimes, in tipsy jollity, he is lugging a juniper stick bigger than himself. This adds an artistic note to the "sound effect." Perhaps you think a desert pack rat too small to make much noise. But if you could be jerked from sleep at two o'clock in the morning by the sound of our hilarious friend landing on the roof you would think you were listening to the explosion of a demolition bomb. Almost nightly

we swear dire vengeance upon our gay roof tenant. And, as regularly, when the desert morning breaks in peace, we forgive him. After all he is "one of the family." It takes all kinds to make up a world – in the desert as elsewhere.

Warm days and sun. Far, far away the dim, phantom leagues of the lowland desert lie wrapped in a smoke-blue shimmering haze. Upon the horizon bulk the distant outlines of sleeping mountains. The whiptail lizards scoot across the white gravel before the house, nosing, in search of prey, from bush clump to bush clump.

We appreciate the cool water in the drinking olla these days. Also the shade. The children have discovered a way to combine the two. They spread a blanket near some friendly juniper and bring forth from the house an earthern jar of cold water a little flavored with honey or – if it is to be had – a little lemon juice. Then they sit around, Indian fashion, and sip cool drinks from small home made pottery cups, stirring the brew every once in a while with a big wooden spoon. Victoria plays hostess. And very well – if she can be prevented from upsetting the water jar.

Quite ceremonious the youngsters make these tribal drink-fests. Sometimes, watching them, we wonder just what the friendly spirits who lurk in the tree shadows must think of all this – here on their ancient ranging grounds. Ghosts? Oh yes. There are ghosts on Ghost mountain. But that, as Kipling would have said, is another story.

SINCERITY

Better a rag and a meager bone,
And a drink from some running stream,
If you can catch an overtone
From the distant shores of your dream.

For what is fare of a prince's choice,
Or a money bag or two,
If you must hush your still small voice
And live in ways untrue.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – August 1942

Paul Wilhelm (left) and Marshal South at Thousand Palm oasis. Photo by Florence Silver taken just before Marshal started the 120-mile trek to Ghost mountain with Rhett and Scarlett.

The Marshal South clan at Yaquitepec is growing. After packing hundreds of tons of water, building materials and other essentials up the steep Ghost mountain trail during the past 10 years, the Souths have acquired two burros. The arrival of the animals was a big event for the youngsters at Yaquitepec. And if you are wondering where and why and how Marshal obtained the beasts, here is the story.

WHEN, some time ago, Tanya and I decided that the increasing family needs called for an improved transportation system up the trail of Ghost mountain we turned naturally to the Desert Magazine to solve our problem. Somewhere, we felt sure, among the vast army of desert dwellers and friends, we could find the owner of a couple of good burros who would be willing to part with them.

And we were not disappointed. You can get most everything from the desert if you ask for it in the right quarter. To our modest advertisement came not one but many replies. But the one that intrigued us most was from our fellow wilderness dweller – whom we knew well but had never met – Paul Wilhelm of Thousand Palms oasis. Paul wrote that be had a couple of gentle burros he would be glad for us to have. The matter was settled.

And settled too, almost as speedily, was the problem of get-ting them to Yaquitepec. Randall Henderson of Desert Magazine offered to drive to Ghost mountain and transport me to Thousand Palms oasis in his car. "You can then," wrote Randall, cheerfully, "return with the burros at your own sweet leisure."

Thus it was arranged. And thus it came about that on a late Sunday afternoon, when the wind was snoring through the lofty palm summits of Paul's little desert Eden, I beaded through the low mesquites of the wash with two new – though somewhat reluctant – friends in tow. Rhett and Scarlett. Dust swirls scudded underfoot. In a bright flash of feathers a scarlet tanager winged through the bushes. The grim, jagged mountains beyond the oasis stood sharp against the sky like the painted backdrop of a stage scene. We had over 120 miles of trail ahead of us. There was a spice of adventure in the air. It was good to be afoot – and footloose. I found myself adapting and humming half forgotten fragments of an old ballad of the Pony Express ... "Shake along, little burros; shake along ... A hundred and twenty miles to go . . Remember that the mail must go through."

I had brought along a couple of blankets for the trip. And these with a gay orange colored bag – once the container of a hundred pounds of dog biscuit and now pressed into service as a packsack were roped upon Rhett. He was a wise old campaigner of the trails and sniffed a bit contemptuously at the lightness of his load. Scarlett I had planned to ride on occasion. She was a good saddle burro, Paul said. Her ears were longer than Rhett's and her expression a trifle more sophisticated.

We left the fringe of mesquites behind, turning from the trail to make a short cut across the bleak wastelands along the flanks of the desolate hills. The wind tore down and scurried the dust; the far, grim summits of the Santa Rosas towered against the sky. Ahead, the town of Indio was a distant, dim blue cloud. I climbed aboard Scarlett presently; having decided that by now she should have gotten over the first pangs of home-parting. With Rhett in tow – for I dared not turn him loose so close to his old home – we jogged on.

We reached the highway in the lowering dusk. Trucks thundered past and cars came charging at us glaring eyed. A concrete highway is no place for peace loving burros. But we could not help it. Civilization has robbed life of many another bit of peace and freedom. We hugged the far shoulder of the road and made the best of it.

We spent the night at John Hilton's – after being first halted in the dim darkness of a lone stretch of road by a patrol car of Uncle Sam's immigration service. But, as we knew most of the local force, the inspectors waved us cheerily on our way. But there was drama in the encounter. Somehow it made us feel like a "*Contrabandista*" guiding his pack train of stealthy, heavy laden mules along mysterious trails. We regretted bitterly that we bad no black *mustachios*, or a sinister dagger, or a sable, scarlet-lined cloak. We determined to have at least the cloak next time.

Perhaps to say that we spent the night at John Hilton's is scarcely the truth. There was not much of it to spend. John had arranged in advance to leave a light burning. But by the time I had unpacked and hitched the burros to a telegraph pole and tiptoed into the bedroom the morning star and a worn moon were hanging high in the east against a glow of dawn. I suppose I slept all of 15 minutes before John summoned me to breakfast.

John Hilton needs no introduction to Desert Magazine readers, and it was hard to get away upon the trail. again. By art and subtlety he and his wife Eunice convinced me – no hard task – that I must stay to lunch also. There is so much to see at John's – his cactus gardens, his gorgeous paintings, his fascinating collections of desert gems and minerals. I finally got away about two-thirty in the afternoon, bearing, among a varied assortment of other souvenirs sent to the family at Yaquitepec, a special treasure. A priceless bottle of genuine

Mexican hot sauce which John had brought from Sonora. It was positively guaranteed to possess a potency capable of burning a hole through a copper pot in five seconds flat. And the bottle would, John assured confidently, last me "almost indefinitely" – one had to use such a minute quantity in order to transform one's "innards" into a raging conflagration.

It really *was* a good sauce. Compounded, I believe from sulphuric add, *chillis pepinos*, T.N.T. and dynamite. I blush to say that I consumed most of the bottle that night for supper. But thoughtfully saved a small sample so that Tanya and the children could judge the flavor.

From John Hilton's the burros and I trailed contentedly on. A grand day of desert sunshine with distant mountains wire-edged against the turquoise sky. Scarlett and Rhett were resigned now. They munched at bushes and weed patches with an air of stoic endurance. Most of the time I walked. We all enjoyed ourselves better that way. Foot-pace burro travel may be slow. But one gains by it something which cannot even be sensed when one goes charging across country in a soulless gas-burning machine.

Inspector Smith and his brother officer whirled their patrol car out of the darkness again that night and stopped to inquire after the good health of the pilgrimage. They rendered the cheerful information that they hadn't seen many sidewinders on the highway at night so far this year. Which was consoling – for we had been thinking about sidewinders, for whom we have a great respect. After the big car had purred away into the mystery of the night we went on beneath the starglow in a cheery frame of mind. Not alone because of the reported scarcity of sidewinders. It always gives one a warm feeling to rub shoulders with Efficiency, especially in wartime. And this was the second time on the trek that we had evidence that the border patrol is very much on the job.

We finally camped for the night at Coolidge Springs, in a ghostly dark with the wind sighing through the tall lines of shadowy athel trees.

I watered and packed the burros and we were off on the road again before anyone was astir. "DANGER. ARTILLERY FIRING," said a big red-lettered sign in the wash, marking the edge of a military reserve. But there was no evidence of artillery nor any sound of firing. Only, in the distance, the grim waterline of the old vanished sea, whose waves had beaten against these now dry scorched desert buttes far back in the mists of Time, stretched like a black, ruled line. Somehow there was in that old bleached sea-stain something that carried a note of ironic laughter regarding Man and his "works" ... his wars and his achievements. Dust! Yesterday the ocean. Today the puny voices of the guns. Tomorrow the old sea-line and the very mountains upon which it is graved will be gone.

A glorious desert morning, with the stretch of the Salton sea glinting like the blue steel blade of a giant's sword beyond the stretch of the sandy desert to our left. Early in the forenoon Rhett and Scarlett discovered a luscious pile of dusty hay beside the roadway. Evidently a hay truck had come to grief. We paused right there. And while I loafed in the warm sunlight they industriously made a clean sweep of the precious provender. A burro's life, I reflected, as I munched one of my own dry sandwiches, has certain advantages.

And so, through desert silence and sunshine and the shimmer of desert mirage, the burro Pony Express moved on, slowly but surely eating up the miles. A hundred and twenty miles is nothing to an automobile. But to the leisurely jog of burro travel it is a respectable distance. As we ambled along, however, across thirsty stretches where mesquite-grown dunes shimmered in the sunglare, or through the wind whispered star glow of night, we remembered always that" ... the mail must go through."

And through it went. Even a little ahead of calculated time. Three more night camps – the last one only a couple of miles from the rugged base of Ghost mountain – then on a bright morning, as the sun lifted well above the ridges, a couple of weary burros plodded the last stretch up the precipitous Yaquitepec trail. We were met by three excited youngsters who, while dancing for joy over daddy's safe return, still managed to find time to shower their new four-footed friends with an amazing variety of edible tid-bits.

It was a joyful homecoming – with the savory aroma of breakfast and the cheerful clatter of dishes, as Tanya mixed her greetings with the bustle of setting out a meal. The mail had gone through. Scarlett and Rhett bad come to their new home. The trip was over.

Yes, over. But a wealth of memories would long endure. High lights and shadows; mirth and tribulation. For not in a space 10 times as great as this could one compass all the incidents. But they are safe in memory's album for future scanning. Somehow, as I watered and fed Rhett and Scarlett, I could not help recalling one of them – the meeting with another artist friend. Mr. Crocker, whose home is near Julian, California. With his daughter he had come whirring out of the mirage-blinking distance as we had been plodding along with the Superstition mountains on the horizon. We had not seen each other for a long time and, when sight of our cavalcade had jerked his car to an amazed halt, he had dipped back into his own memory of past days.

"You may not know it," he said a bit wistfully, "but once I, myself, ran a pack train. How well I remember ... And how they would scatter ... And run under trees ... And try to rub their packs off ... And ... " He sighed. And we looked at him in a new fellowship. For, with the manners and bearing of Boston's most exclusive set, he is the last person in the world whom you would ever remotely suspect of having run a pack train. "Yes," he said regretfully" ... those were the days ... But cuss! ... Ah, not even yet have I succeeded in breaking myself of the habit."

And when he and his daughter had whirred on, leaving the burro express the richer by a welcome gift of grapefruit and dates, which Rhett, Scarlett and I ate, share and share alike, I had chuckled a little.

I chuckled again now as I turned my two faithful trail companions loose to a long, well-earned rest. " ... But cuss! ..." Yes, he had in truth run a pack train – there can be no secrets among fellow members of the noble fraternity of packmasters.

But it is a good world, nevertheless. And how else, anyway, would one run a pack train – or a couple of burros either?

PERFECTION

Perfection is not marked by outward sig,
It is so different for each one of us.
Each has his own accepted strange design
For what he deems perfection to be won.
It is the most elastic term we know,
As different as the dreams we dreamers find;
One sees perfection watching violets grow,
One sees it as some figment of the mind.

– Tanya South

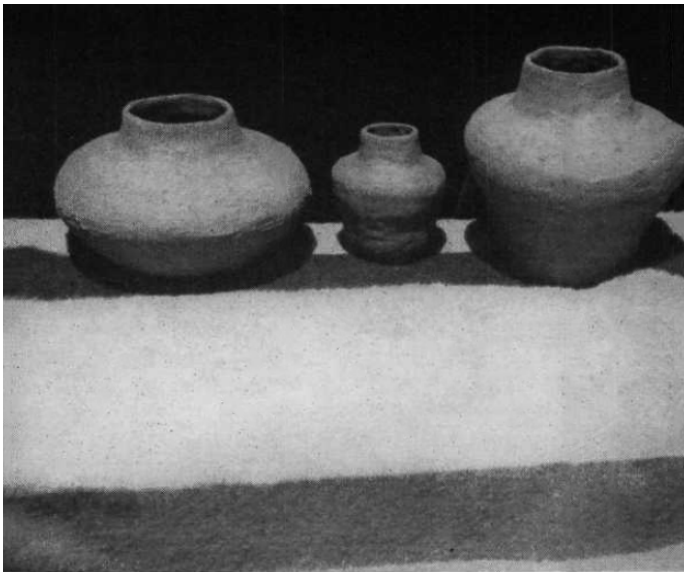
Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – September 1942

Last month Marshal South told of the addition of two burros to his little desert homestead on top of Ghost mountain. The burros he1ped with the work – but they also created a new problem for the South family. The cisterns, filled only by the rainwater that falls at long intervals on the roof of the South cabin, simply do not hold enough water to supply two burros, two goats, and the five members of the South family. And so the animals had to be sent away to distant pastures. This month Marshal tells of some of the advantages and disadvantages of summer heat on the desert.

IT IS hot. As I sit in the shade and tap the keys of the typewriter, our whole desert world, clear to the distant rim of the horizon, is a shimmering glare of sunlight. Something of the same summer blaze that prevails in the Yaqui country of Mexico, and in the lands of the Seris Indians, who range the island of Tiburon and the adjacent mainland. Such light is hard on unaccustomed eyes. Just as the primitive foods of the desert are hard on unaccustomed stomachs.



This is the type of pottery made by the Souths for their own kitchenware. It is made to use, not to sell, and although crude, is very serviceable.

But there is a priceless compensation for every hardship the desert has to offer. The compensation is freedom, and wide range; liberty of body and of mind. And these things are part of the desert dwellers' fiber and bone.

For over 400 years the Yaqui has fought fiercely against his "civilized" aggressors – who have sought to rob him of his freedom. A wild land, a savage land, a land of mountains and rocks is the homeland of the Yaqui. A desert land. Such locations breed fierce love of freedom. It is the people of the mountains who fight on – and survive. The ease-pampered dwellers of the lush lowlands too often bow the neck to the yoke of the conqueror.

Desert heat is a strange thing. Not nearly so fearsome as the story-writers would have us. believe. But one must use the practical commonsense of the desert Indian in dealing with it. It does not take kindly to "high-pressure" exertion and "hustle." One must respect the very real power of the desert sun. Early morning and late evening are the periods for work. For the rest of the day, the shade – and it is surprising how tiny a patch of shade will suffice. "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land," wrote the prophet long, long ago. And there is a peculiar appreciation of the words by all dwellers of the wasteland. The writer of them dwelt in a desert land; he knew whereof he spoke.

And desert heat plays strange pranks sometimes. In the vicinity of Ghost mountain we have come, several times, into areas of those uncanny heat pockets, which, for want of a better term (never having encountered any previous writing concerning them) I call "desert vacuums." These phenomena are not frequent. But when one runs into them they are terrifyingly real. Sometimes you walk into them and sometimes they seem to form, without warning, around you. There is nothing to see; no hint of a change. But of a sudden you are oppressed

by a sense of heaviness and dizziness. Every muscle and fiber of the body seems suddenly changed to lead. Every motion, every movement becomes difficult. The head swims and the solid earth goes round in dizzy circles. You are gripped with a very real fear of fainting. About all you can do is to stagger to the nearest patch of shade – if any bush or rock offers it – and sit down. Usually, after a bit, the air condition passes. Or mayhap you recover enough strength to plod on and pass beyond the area of the "pocket." The whole thing is uncanny. But it is no myth. I have had the same story from several hardened desert dwellers. I have had testimony to the effect that animals – even semi-wild desert cattle – are susceptible to the numbing lethargy which these "pockets" induce.

Explanation? Well, I have not much to offer by way of explanation. My personal theory is that the hot dry air rising from the heated desert is, by the contour of certain sections of the terrain, sucked into funnels, something on the order of the centers of cyclonic storms. And these "vacuum" centers in some way rob the atmosphere of ingredients necessary to life ... possibly oxygen. Hence the feeling of collapse when one walks into them. This theory may be all wrong. But the matter is worthy of study. The several cases on record where old prospectors have been found dead beside full canteens of water, suggests that under certain extreme conditions these mysterious "vacuum" pockets may be deadly.

Air pockets are however so infrequent that thought of them need deter no one from summer trips. Other tricks of the sun are equally unexpected. I recall that once, while packing up a load of supplies along the steep foot trail that leads to the crest of Ghost mountain, I was startled by a very distinct whiff of smoke. I stopped instantly and, after the manner of the savage or the four-footed creatures of the wilds, sniffed the air carefully. One's nose becomes very sensitive to odors in the wilderness and scents carry – tobacco smoke, for instance, can often be detected over long distances, sometimes as far as two miles.

In this instance I was baffled. The smell of smoke was there. But from whence did it come? All points of the compass seemed to give the same reaction. Possibly, I told myself, Tanya, on the summit of the mountain, had tossed an old woolen rag into the stove.

So I went on. But presently to my amazement I not only smelled smoke but actually saw smoke. It was all around me in thin spirals. My pack was afire.

Hastily I backed up to a convenient rock and disentangled myself from the pack straps. Yes, it was afire. A small woolen blanket, used as a back-pad, was smouldering merrily. But there had been no matches in the pack; nothing to start a fire. What could have caused it?

Then, as I worked, smothering out the burning doth, the explanation dawned on me. There was a glass jug full of water among the articles I was carrying up. The summer sun, striking through the curved, water filled glass, had acted as it would have done through a lens. It was only about nine o'clock in the morning. But the sun was hot. It had actually set the pack afire. Glass bottles around Yaquitepec, since that day, have been regarded with suspicion. And we have ceased to scoff at the old story of the prospector who, packing a load of powder on his back, was blown up and killed – just because he had a magnifying glass stuck under one of the straps of his load.

There is abundant charm to desert summer, though. Much more than enough to outweigh any trifling tricks and discomforts that the heat may bring. Colors glow in the far reaches of the wastelands and the glint of mirage is weird on the white sands of every distant wash.

Tarantula hawks – those gay dashing wasps - sail through the warm still air above the junipers and around the crests of the dead mescal stalks. Sinister, romantic fellows. With their orange wings and shining black bodies they always remind us of conventional devils from the operas ... black velvet tights and scarlet cloak complete. They are a tough breed of free-booters and seem to have few enemies.

Once I saw a lizard make a dash and soap an alighted tarantula hawk in his mouth. But before I could reach the spot the big lizard dropped his prey. I had just a glimpse of a shiny black insect and his jaunty cloak scuttling to safety under a low thicket of ramarillo bushes, while the lizard moved away more slowly. Had he been stabbed by some jeweled dagger? Possibly. It must have been a keen dagger. These wasteland lizards are not soft in constitution. Even the small ones think nothing of dining upon savage black bees.

The garden has dried up. A few wisps of dead leaves, scorched now to a crisp brownness beneath the contempt of even our nibbling goats, are all that remain to remind us of the crisp salads which it so lately yielded. The main water cistern is dry. And so far the great white thunderheads which sail the blue vault above Yaquitepec have spilled no fresh rain upon us. Water is too valuable now for gardens. We have moved our two burros to distant pasturage, where they will remain till the rains have filled our cisterns again. Rudyard and Victoria shed a few tears as they took sorrowful leave of them. And even Rider, now right hand man of Yaquitepec, was downcast. But water is water. Until our supply is replenished we do not dare dole out, even the comparatively small amount that the burros require. Even Conchita and Juanita – our two active little goats – are not allowed to waste the precious fluid.

One advantage of our Ghost mountain weather is that it is never constant. Even in summer. And stretches of glowing heat are sandwiched with spells when the sunglow is tempered with the drive of a cool, fragrant wind. Such days are the cream of summer. And on such days Rider, who is eagerly interested in bugs, butterflies, rock specimens and every natural thing, usually persuades me to go on a hike somewhere. "We might find a spring, you know" is his most artfully used argument.

Well, we have never found the spring. But we do find all manner of other things. Last week we found a grim rocky bill where our predecessors, the Indian dwellers of the wasteland, had probably staged more than one sanguinary encounter with their enemies. A humble little "Gibraltar" of the desert. A few piled walls of stones in strategic points. A few caves walled and loopholed, in which defenders could crouch. But in the silence of the desert, as I scrambled about the mute evidences of some Indian "greatest war of history" I reflected that a man could be killed just as dead by an obsidian pointed arrow as by the most expensive weapon of modern science. And that the heartaches and misery of war are neither lessened nor increased by the methods employed.

The ancient slew with an arrow or a club. We in our vaunted civilization hurl death from the skies. But death is death. And grief is grief. It makes no difference what the setting or the period. Or how “barbaric” or “civilized” the actors in the drama. Man is commonly reputed to have come a long way upward out of savagery. Sometimes it gives one pause to wonder if he has not forgotten, in his scramble for culture, the most important ingredient of life. We have electric iceboxes and radios; we have airplanes and marvelous cannon. We can shout the price of soap or the latest quotation of the stock exchange around the world. "But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

ESSENTIALS

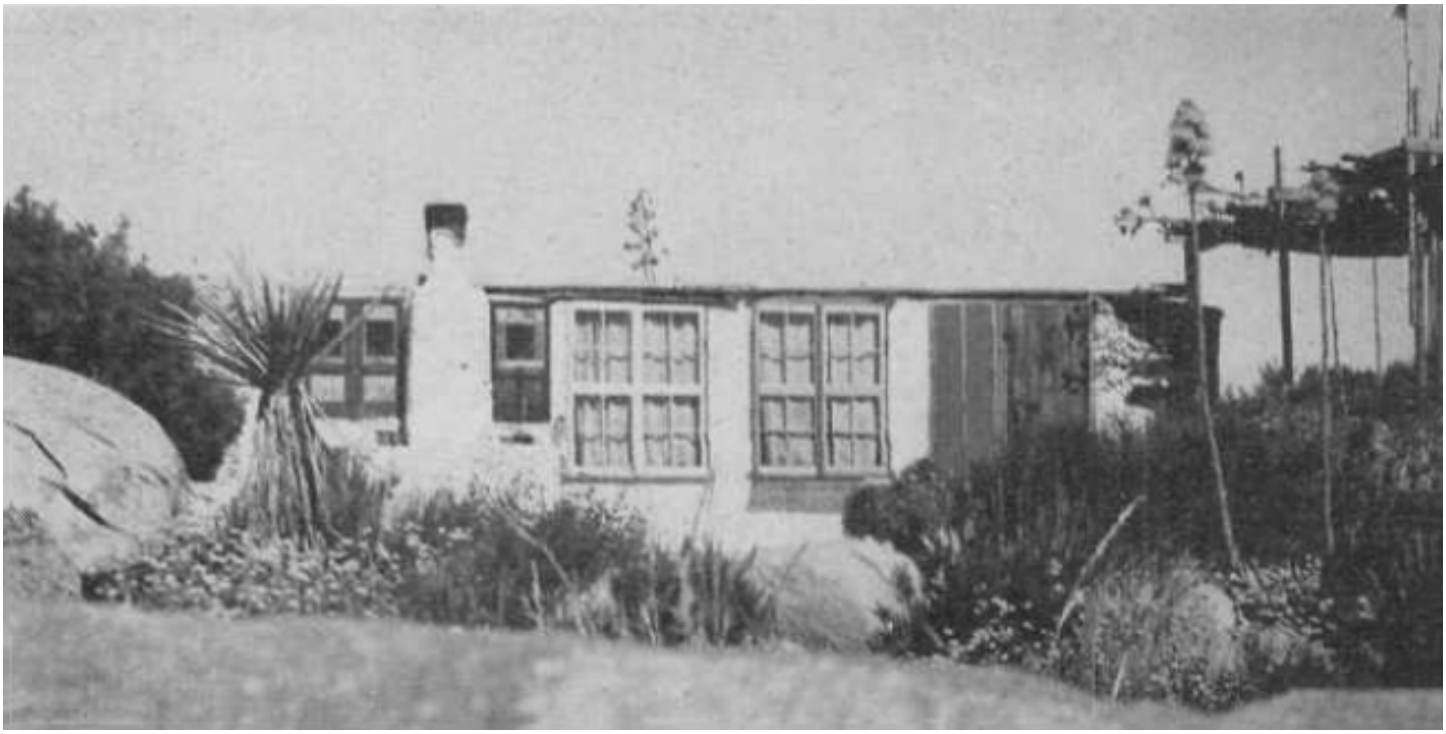
How simple are the needs of man!
A little warmth, a little food,
A little faith in God's good plan,
A tolerance – and brotherhood.
Whate'er the creed, this truth still holds:
God has all dominance of Powers,
And all eternity enfolds
This life of ours.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – October 1942



The Souths have said goodbye to Yaquitepec.

The Marshal Souths spent 10 years building their little adobe home among the junipers and boulders on the top of Ghost mountain. And now they have put a padlock on the door and are following the trail that leads toward the desert horizon – in quest of a new homesite. The reason is water – or rather, shortage of water. The meager cisterns, filled only from the storm water that drained from the roof, proved inadequate for a family of five with two goats and two burros. And so they loaded the goats and the household necessities in a trailer, and took the trail that leads deeper into the Great American desert. Their quest is for a flowing spring where there will be ample water for their needs – and a garden. For the Souths, it is a great Adventure into a new and strange land. Marshal will tell of their progress in future issues of Desert Magazine.

A THIN wisp of desert road, leading on into the dim mystery of vast distance. What is at its end? We do not yet know; but soon we shall. For our feet are upon it; our eyes are towards far horizons.

For this month's chronicle is a chronicle of search – of search for a new location in the great friendly silences of the desert. Already the little house upon the summit of Ghost mountain is far behind us. Its door is shut and the stillness that has closed about it is unbroken save for the hushed footfalls of the wind, wandering lonely around the corners of the white walls and among the scatter of old, abandoned toys beneath the shade of the ramada.

But it is well not to write mud1 of these things or to awaken memories; the ache of them is as yet too close. For it is not easy to wrench oneself from things beloved and from things which long years have tangled so closely with the fibres of one's very soul. Man, it is true, has graduated to a stage in the scale of evolution

which enables him, unlike the plant, to move from place to place. But he is still a creature of the earth, and attached to it. The roots which he strikes deep into the earth are not physical roots, but they are none the less very real roots. And their upwrenching can often cause more than physical pain. A deeper pain. Heartstrings go deep into the soil of HOME. On this and on this alone is Patriotism founded. The love of home – of the bit of earth where one's roots are. It is hard to break such ties.

Nevertheless we have turned our faces to the open road and to the wide mystery of the further desert. Already we are deep in its distance-hazed reaches. New plains surround us, new buttes, new mesquite-grown arroyos and new silences beneath the night stars. The sun this morning rose from behind the fagged, purple peaks of weird, unfamiliar mountains, climbing into a cloud flecked sky that was a glory of gold and pink and purple. "Here sun coming!" cried little Victoria, eagerly, clapping her hands. "We tum to new home today, muvver?"

"Maybe not today, baby," said Rider, gravely, taking it upon himself to answer. "Maybe not today – but very soon. Won't we daddy?"

"Of course," I reassured him, “It’s there, waiting for us; with everything we need. All we have to do is to keep right on and we’ll find it.”

“I wan’ lots, an’ lots an’ LOTS of water!” declared Rudyard emphatically. "I wan' even as much as – as much as – " He struggled for some expression of volume truly colossal. "– I wan' even as much as TWELVE GALLONS."

"And you shall have it, precious," Tanya promised him. "You shall have 12 gallons, for your very own."

And we all laughed. For while the desert sun shines and the creosote bushes glitter and the hills on the horizon are clothed in their witchery of indigo and purple one cannot lose faith. The Great Spirit watches over the wilderness; all the dwellers therein are beneath the protecting shadow of His wing.

But our four-year-old's remark about water puts the whole reason for our move in a nutshell. Water! It has become vital. It is the lure which day by day beckons us deeper into the desert.

Perhaps in normal times our ears would have been more deaf to the call which finally wrenched us from Yaquitepec. We had built our dreams there; we tried hard to convince ourselves that someday we could, by adequate cistern capacity, overcome the water handicap. We did not want to move.

But these are not normal times. Today our beloved nation is engaged in a grim battle for the freedom of the world. It is a battle that will be won largely by the conservation of foodstuffs and natural resources. Every bushel of grain and pound of food that each one of us can produce for ourselves, releases just that much more of national supplies to aid in the winning of the struggle. And even on our mountaintop we felt very definitely that we ought to be producing more. It is true that not a great deal of outside supplies were needed for Yaquitepec. But we did need some – particularly as the demands of our growing family increased. We should, we felt, be able to produce more. Corn, food, larger gardens.

And this was the urge that finally tipped the scale of the long debated water problem. We could not afford to wait years for the development of the necessary water. We must set forth and find it in some new location.

With the decision once made we shut our eyes and ears to all else and fell to packing and preparing. Rider set about dismantling his glass cases of treasured specimens and bugs – packing them carefully for transit. Rudyard – who has a weird collection of old keys, nails, pottery scraps and chunks of stone – rushed and packed all the treasured trash in paper bags and cans. Victoria, having nothing to pack, occupied herself in dashing frantically back and forth between her brothers, snatching treasures from each one's hoard and carrying them to Tanya, shrieking gleefully "Pack this fo' me" ... incurring thereby explosions of wrath from the respective rightful owners of the loot.

Yes packing was a big job. Had we paused to think we might have been staggered at the problem. But we did not pause to think. That is usually the better way, anyhow, when tackling a job of this kind. While Tanya packed I carried, back-load after back-load down the long winding trail of Ghost mountain. The burros were out at pasture, far away. But I did not regret not having them. For packing up the mountain they did nobly. But it was always hard for them to transport loads down. The trail was too steep. A man can do better, as a burden carrier, than an animal, on precipitous trails – as the carriers of mountainous China and of other sections have demonstrated. I used my own shoulders and made sometimes six round trips each day. There was a lot of stuff to move. And an amazing amount of books. The books were the heaviest. For some of the articles that were too large to be carried by back-pack we made a sort of litter, with two long poles. Tanya took one end and I the other, while Rider stayed atop the mountain to look after Rudyard and Victoria. A long, hard job, the carrying. But eventually it was all finished.

Came then the equally staggering job of transportation. How was this carefully selected mass of essential property to be moved? The old car could not begin to hold it. We cast eyes on an old two-wheel trailer which we bad discarded years ago. Yes, perhaps it could be fixed. Its tires had been left on the wheels. For over six years they had been standing flat and bleaching in the desert sun. Dubiously we brought the pump and pumped them up. Astoundingly they seemed to hold. We went over the old trailer with a monkey wrench and tightened up bolts in desert-shrunken timbers. Then we began to load.

There was far too much – even by the most dangerous over-loading of car and trailer – to be transported in one trip. We saw that we would have to make two. But to where? Our destination was unknown – still is. What should we do?

We solved the problem by hauling a first load away to a distant desert point where we stored it; solving also another problem, that of our two pet goats. We could not leave them behind at Yaquitepec, unattended. And we did not want to divide our family by having someone stay behind to look after them – fire hazards this summer having been much worse than usual in our desert mountain region. So we took Conchita and Juanita along, building them a tiny pen on an overhanging extension of the trailer. And, after many days, having stored our load, we brought them back with us. For there was no one at the other end to look after them either.

And when we had come to the foot of Ghost mountain again we had cause for thankfulness that we had not left any of our little family at home. For around our land the desert was an inferno of smoke and flame. Roaring over desert ridges, seemingly barren, an ocean of flame was tossing to the sky. Smoke hung over everything in a terrifying pall. A huge mountain not far from Yaquitepec was a seeming volcano of rolling smoke and soaring flame. For a week it burned. Perhaps the first time within centuries that fire had ravaged it. And when the last coals were dead it was a blackened, lifeless mass. But the flame-furies spared Yaquitepec. By a miracle our goods were safe.

So we loaded the last load – an even more staggering one than the fast had been. And we put Conchita and Juanita back into their tiny pen on the trailer. And we climbed into the old car, with Rudyard sandwiched into a little niche all his own, among the books and boxes, and set out. Slowly, down the rough stretch of home trail, between the creosotes and mescals and yuccas we lurched our laboring outfit and with bated breath turned down the treacherous sandy wash for the last time. On its further edge we paused and looked back. Ghost mountain shimmered in the sunlight. Lonely. And somewhere behind its rim rocks we knew the little house stood. Silent. Lonely too.

Our eyes were misted a little. There was a tight clutch at our hearts and a little sob in our throats as we waved a last farewell. Then we went on, heading down the road, our heavily loaded trailer creaking behind us.

To where? Not yet do we know. But we know as surely as we knew that evening, when the sun sank in a glory of crimson and gold behind the hills and the grey, silent night hawks began to flit above the desert creosotes, that it is to a greater, better location. For Life moves onward. And though the old is behind there is always the new ahead ... new vistas, new experiences, new promise and new hope. Perhaps Rider is right – perhaps it will be very soon that we shall come upon the place that is to be our new desert home. When we come to it we shall know it. But for now we go on through desert dawns and star-light – seeking. Perhaps by next month we may be able to tell you of something found.

NEW DAWNS

Lure of the desert's farther reaches,
Vaster horizons for my goal,
Where glinting sunlight burns and bleaches
And newer vistas lift my soul.

The old axe falls, unused, unwanted,
The hoe leans on – the gateway yawns;
My heart, still hungry, still undaunted,
Has turned again to newer dawns.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

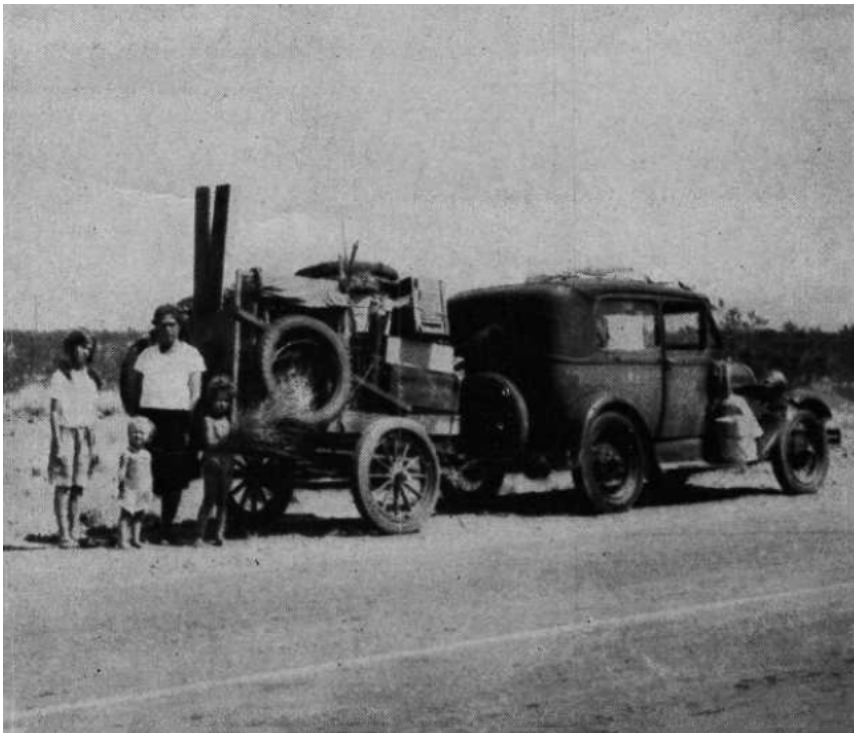
By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – November 1942

Beginning their quest for a new home with more water than their Yaquitepec mountain afforded, the Marshal Souths are following the trail deeper and deeper into the, desert. This month, as their heavily laden little caravan moves across the wasteland of the Mojave, the Souths have an unusual encounter with the men from Mars in their armor-plated monsters. Crossing into Nevada the Souths search in vain for the home-spot they know exists, then continue to Arizona, where a surprising addition is made to their number.

THE SEARCH goes on. Not yet have we topped the rise – which is always just ahead – and seen before us the new home which we set out from Yaquitepec to find. But somewhere behind dim horizons it lies waiting. More and more certain we are of this.

With every mile, as our old car and creaking, heavy laden trailer lurch through the dust of desert ruts, our hopes burn brighter and conviction strengthens. Rider and Rudyard are constantly making plans – plans as real and definite as though they were already well established upon the new location which lies at the end of the rainbow. Victoria plans with them. She is very anxious to be part and parcel of everything and as she cannot quite figure out what it is all about she plays safe by echoing all Rudyard's assertions.



Along the trail that leads to a new desert home – somewhere. Tanya and the three little Souths. The goats are in the trailer.

Rudyard (after much weighty thought) solemnly declared, 'I'm going to plant radishes in the north end of my new garden – near the rocks." Victoria instantly repeated, "An' I'm doin' plan' wadishes in norf end of *my* darden too – near wocks." She is always very definite. And if Rider teases her, as he sometimes does, arguing mischievously that the *south* end of her garden would be by far the better place for the radishes, she wheels on him furiously. "No! No! *Norf* end! Jus' like Wudyard." Often there is hot argument and Tanya has to pour oil upon the troubled waters. For Rider overbubbles with a spirit of teasing fun – and little Victoria has an explosive temper.

And so we move on – seeking; looking eagerly forward to each new day and treasuring to the full each day's new experiences. After all it is the quest that gives joy as well as the finding. Especially have we found this true in our wasteland search. For to no one does the desert open its heart as widely as it does to those who go gypsying through its by-ways and solitudes; to those who, each night, spread their blankets upon its breast, beneath the stars.

Did we think that we, desert dwellers now of many a year, knew all the beauty and mystery and fascination of the unpeopled spaces? Childish illusion! The desert laughed at us – and in mocking laughter spread for us each day new scenes of weird enchantment and fantastic color.

Pictures! Pictures – and, alas, the color tubes and brushes are packed deep in the trailer load and fast tied beneath a score of lashings of rope and wire. And there is no time to tarry and paint pictures, anyhow. Through the creosotes the trail winds on.

California – the wasteland filmed with dust. Through the ocotillos and the ironwoods the dull glint of uncouth steel monsters lunge in awesome lines of battle maneuver down the sandy washes and across the rocky slopes; sun-wink upon the binoculars of grimly intent officers, perched upon turrets and the vantage points of observation stations; the roar of motorcycles; demon-hooded messengers hurtling by into the din and haze-filmed air. Roar and thunder upon the highway; the pavement shaking to the resistless rush of mile upon mile of mighty cannon-leering tanks. Grim raw hills backed against a hard sky like the dead mountains of a dream. A sign, cringing by the roadside, "Watch out for cattle." But there were no cattle. Here is only the gathering might of War.

And over and around it all the metallic sky, the far, hard, thirsty reaches; the inscrutable mystery of the desert.

We had passed far by and out into the emptiness of sunlit space when they hove in sight – a last, isolated detachment of armor-plated monsters. We bad paused to one side of the road to wrestle with a blown-out tire and from the north they came suddenly upon us, an awesome line of grim things that might have been unthinkable giants from another world. As they heaved over the swell of the rise ahead and came charging down the highway one could but know fear. Dust and stones flew in a storm from beneath their clanging tread. The sun was behind them. Wrapped in sun-glared dust as in a cloud of fire, they roared headlong upon us.

And then, suddenly, as our ears deafened and our eyes blurred and we gathered for a leap to safety, the line swerved. Almost upon us the swaying monsters lurched aside and went bucking into the soft earth of the roadside. In the reeling turret of the foremost, a grim helmeted figure waved a sudden arm and in a storm of flying stones the line of thundering steel terrors ground to a shuddering halt. Were we in trouble? inquired a clear-eyed, clean-cut, efficient being from Mars. Did we need any help?

And we told him no – we would be fixed up directly. It was only a tire.

And we thanked him. And he grinned and said you never knew ... maybe he'd need help himself some day. And he waved a signaling arm again to the long line of baited demons and they woke to roaring life. And in a moment were off, lunging and thundering down the highway –a grim nightmare of leering cannon and pounding steel. And they faded away into the dust and were gone.

And soon we were gone, too, chugging along the long road on our mended tire. And we were silent. But it was the silence of hearts that were warm and full. Because, for just a moment back there, we had been permitted, across the savage frown of armor-plate and the ready muzzles of guns, to look deep into the dear eyes of America – the *real* America. And we had seen something there, something far deeper than windy words or hysterical flag waving.

Adios, clear eyed man of Mars, whoever you may be. Drive on – atop thy bucking tons of flame-spewing steel, drive on to Destiny, to Victory and to Safe Return. Good luck go with you. The future is secure. Storms may come and bitter winds must blow. But neither from without nor from within shall the torch be quenched; clear-eyed and resolute the real America moves on to great and greater dawns.

Nevada and a cold wash of sunset, a vast sweep of desert valley. Wind-carved mountains tumbled against a crimson sky. A lone jackrabbit kicking clean heels in flight across the road. Nevada State Line. "A debt free State welcomes you." Grey road winding on and on into the dusk.

"Where shall we camp tonight, daddy?" Rider asked presently. "How about that place ahead? It looks pretty good."

It was good – a wide clear space beside the road, well free of any bushes that might serve as attraction for snakes and other wildlife prowlers of the dark. And when we had pulled in and halted and untangled our cramped limbs from the car we unstrapped the bedding from the car roof and spread our blankets upon the stony earth.

But before we could eat supper and stretch out to rest there were the goats to be fed and attended to. Conchita and Juanita are philosophic about th.is trip. They are resigned, by now, to their tiny pen on the back end of the trailer and they load and unload with something of the skill of trained circus animals. Not always is their lot a happy one. For sometimes there are desert sections whereon it is almost impossible to find anything edible – even for a goat. This first night in Nevada however was a happier camp spot and we were able to gather for them great bunches of sweet, dry desert grass.

Long into the night, after we had crept into our bed and lay gazing up at the stars, we could hear their steady, contented munching. It was a soothing sound. There is, somehow, a peculiar, primitive satisfaction in the close proximity of domestic animals. Something which seems to link one closer with Nature and the Great Spirit of all Life.

Nevada is a grand state; the spirit of a wide freedom seems to dwell in its vast desert spaces and amidst its weirdly beautiful mountains. But we did not find our home-spot there, despite our trekkings into old mining camps and into far canyons. Despite also the whole-hearted efforts of good friends in Las Vegas. Our closest lead came from a lady in a picturesque little mining town who, after considerable pondering, opined that a certain "Horse Thief Canyon" might suit us. But the name seemed to suggest that residents should be gifted with special qualifications; and we doubted if we were eligible. So, regretfully, we turned away.

The children found their first desert tortoise in Nevada. A lively little wanderer detected in the act of plodding across a road and promptly christened "Tiny Tim." A tortoise, however, though it does carry vague associations with water, is most certainly not a spring.

We doctored the weak places in our tires with bandagings of friction tape and wandered down to Lake Mead – there to be delivered, with military pomp and escort and between the ready rifles of watchful sentries, into the arms of Arizona.

And it was in Arizona that Betty joined us. Betty is a true child of the wanderlust and wide open spaces. We had expected her coming . . . but by some unaccountable mistake in calculation, not nearly so soon. So, when we pulled to a camp spot one evening and found her, an innocent-eyed, lop-eared mite in the trailer pen

with Conchita, her mother cooing and cooing over her, we were about the most thunderstruck collection of voyagers that you could have found in all the western desert. About the only really self possessed individual at the

legs moment and was Betty herself. She stood there upon her tiny wobbly legs and blatted at us with all the vigor of her diminutive lungs. Victoria stared in amazement and said “O-ooo! Baby doat!”

That broke the spell. Rudyard shrieked: “Oh mother – daddy! See the little goat! Look there – look at the little goat!” (as if we were not already staring at it with all our eyes). “Oh! Oh! That’s my goat!” He danced around.

Spoke up Rider, the official goat expert and field manager of the family. His words were very deliberate and final. “Oh yes?” he said. "Well that's my goat! Who do you think looks after them, anyway? And I’m going to call her Betty. I’ve always wanted to call something Betty!”

So that was that! And after we had bedded down Conchita and her new daughter with fresh grass and had hustled Juanita out of the pen to spend the night in grumbling protest hitched to the trailer wheel we went to bed and to sleep. And in the morning went on our way happily. Betty is still with us. She is a lively and pert little rascal by now. And Rider has secret dreams of some time getting to be a "Goat Baron" – or something.

Cactus and the wind. A roadrunner scudding down a lonely road. Yuccas lifting savage bayonets against the sky; black shadows lurking in the clefts of sunshine-blazed buttes. White sand glaring in dry washes – and in the shady dimness of mesquite thickets the eternal whisper of wandering breezes that seem to sing the romance of long forgotten things. Arizona!

And Arizona brought to us our first real spring. It was deep in the heart of a grim butte. Mighty boulders – monstrous as the far away boulders of Yaquitepec – towered in a titan pile. It was as though, in the sparkling yucca-staked desert, some careless giant had dumped a wheelbarrow load and had wandered on. Bees hummed round the footslopes and silence and the sleepy sunlight brooded amidst the rocks. And when you had gone in through the gap in an old fence of ocotillo and had passed under the whispering shade of an ancient pomegranate tree and tangle of grape vines – a fence erected and trees planted by the hands of someone long since gone away into the silence – you came to the spring, hid deep under the overhang of a huge rock. A dark, tiny pool of cool soft water, grateful as nectar of the god in to a thirsty wayfarer.

There were caverns back in the boulders and we found bits of pottery. The Indians had been there in the long ago. Long, long even before the white man who had built the fence and planted the pomegranate tree and the grapevines. But they, like he, also had been gathered to the silence. The old fence cast shadows and the pomegranate tree rustled its leaves in dreams. Somehow the stillness was very hushed and heavy.

And the voices in our hearts cried "No. No! This is not the place. You must go on." So we turned away into the open desert.

The old tires still limp out the miles and the song of the sunlit winds croon a far call.

Yes, we must go on.

STAR TRAIL

Oh Life, what riddles have you wrought!
With all our striving
With every ounce of work and thought
And hard contriving,
We still find conquests to be won
Beyond our gaining,
And pause amazed with effort gone,
Still unattaining.
With humbleness so deeply part,
With grief for storage,
Let us not wholly lose our heart –
Oh Life, breathe courage.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – December 1942

Farther and farther the Souths penetrate into the desert as they search for a new home to take the place of their abandoned Yaquitepec. Their search for a new site with adequate water led them this month to a new adventure. When they camped at a white towered deserted service station – in a remote spot on Highway 66 – they unexpectedly assumed a new role. They began to administer to the needs of other wayfarers – and Marshal tells how 66 ceased to be a highway – and became for them an artery of life.

Rider with the two burros, Rhett and Scarlett, on the last day he saw them, when he helped lead them away through the desert canyons to pasture.

WE CAME upon the deserted station by chance. When one wanders nomad-like through the wasteland reaches lured ever onward in a search for distant springs, many things happen by "chance" – of which, of course, there is no such thing.

We saw it from a great way off, glinting white in the vast stretch of the desert like a tiny pearl dropped upon the rough weave of a grey-green carpet. As we drew closer we saw that it had a tower. A white tower with windows. Lifted there in the silence, above the endless tangle of sun-glinted creosote bushes, the lonely building might have been an old Spanish mission.

But it wasn't. It was just a deserted filling station. "Texaco," proclaimed a swaying sun-blistered sign. As we came to a halt, a loose sheet of roofing iron, stirred by a puff of passing breeze, banged mournfully.

"It looks haunted," Rider said, sniffing hopefully as he climbed out of his seat. "Do you suppose there would be any really truly ghosts here, daddy?"

"Ufff! Ghostesses!" Rudyard wrinkled his pudgy nose. "Too hot for ghostesses! I wanna dwink."

"Give ... me ... one . . . dhost." Suddenly alert under the impression that eatables were under discussion Victoria shrilled, "Give – me – one – two – three – dhosts." Expectantly, pronouncing each word in the painstakingly "correct" way that she has, she held out her hands.

'Tm afraid they don't come quite in that way, precious," Tanya told her. “Not good to eat. Cold. Clammy. You wouldn't like them.”

"Oah," Victoria said. She looked quite disappointed. The loose roof iron banged again and somewhere in the house a door creaked on rusty hinges.

We pulled open the unlatched screen door and went inside. The five revolving chairs of the deserted lunch counter, tilted drunkenly upon their pivots, seemed to leer at us. Torn signs and ragged remnants of old Christmas decorations hung from empty shelves. Across the floor lay a long heavy ladder. From an open doored adjoining room another ladder led upward through a trap door to the floor of the tower. A dead bird lay there in the dust. From the staring windows the eye ranged out over a shimmer of yucca-studded distance that merged into the lift of dry, tumbled mountains. A vast land of empty silence. And across it, glinting in the sun like a taut stretched wire, lay the thin hard line of 66 – coming out of the far nowhere, vanishing into the heat-blurred loneliness ahead. Nothing stirred upon it. At that moment there was not a car in sight.

Presently from Rudyard, scouting afoot in the eagerness of exploration, came an excited yell. He came headlong on twinkling feet. "A spwing!" he gasped. "I found a spwing. I found a whole lakeful of spwings! Quick! Quick!"

It *was* water. But it wasn’t quite either a spring or a lake. When we had hurried to the spot, goaded on by frenzied urgings, we found a big, muddy puddle, bordered with cattle tracks. A thin ramble of bermuda grass trailed on the soggy margin and in one corner clear water bubbled up out of the earth. "See!" Rudyard shrieked triumphantly, pointing. "A spwing! A flowing spwing! An' I found it."

Rider, whose pet hobby it is to shatter illusions, narrowed his eyes in a desert squint. He squatted by the bubbling fountain and grubbed with his fingers in the mud. "Flowing spring, nothing!" he announced loftily. "This is just a break in a pipe line."

"It isn't not! It's a spwing! My spwing! I found ... "

"It's a pipe line."

"It's not!"

"It is!"

Battle and loud tumult, in the midst of which Victoria, shouting " 'Ping! 'Ping!" and more intent on waving her arms than on her footing, tripped in a cow track and fell with a plop into the muddiest part of the puddle. Her lusty yells put an end to the argument. And when she had been rescued and dried off and peace once more had been restored, we investigated the mysterious pipe line further. It came from away off somewhere in the jagged mountains. Here and there, scarring the distant slopes, the line of its route was visible. Evidently the water it carried came from a real spring and had been the station's source of supply. And it was good water. Poking and exploring about the buildings presently we found the shut-off valve-and faucets that previously had yielded only gasps of air came to life with silver trickles. No there wasn't much force. The break in the line diverted most of the flow into the cattle pool. But there was enough.

We camped at the lone white-walled station for several days, fixing worn tires, tightening bolts – doing many little overhaul and refitting jobs in preparation for another stretch of the trail ahead. We tethered the goats on the scanty patches of bermuda grass and other little pockets of available forage. Tanya built an outdoor fireplace of stones, unloaded from the trailer the big iron kettle that we had hauled from Yaquitepec, and busied herself with the concocting of many a savory "hunter's stew."

The children played in the wavering light-flecked shade of the several trees that had been planted about the building, amusing themselves by filling and refilling with water the long dry earth basins about the roots. They watered too the fragrant cluster of mint which surprisingly still thrived in the hard soil beneath one of the front windows. Cattle came down to the muddy pool at regular intervals to drink and to regard us curiously. Doves cut the morning air with whistling wings on their way to water. And at night coyotes, which were very bold, yammered at us angrily.

When the desert thunder showers drove down upon us, which they did more than once, we would snatch up everything spoilable and bolt to the shelter of the big front room. Here in security, while the desert wind roared and the thunder boomed and the loose iron sheets slam-banged upon the roof, we would sit and watch through the many-paned windows the rolling wall of dust, and the blinding whip-flicks of the lightning come charging across the desert like the mad rush of an assaulting army. There is a thrill to the hard sound of savage desert rain upon a metal roof. But in these headlong storms, brief as they were, we were glad to be under shelter.

Full days. Days of new experiences. For automatically, by the very fact of our being there, fate had cast about our shoulders the double mantle of property guardians and service station operators. It was inescapable. For it was seldom that 66 was as deserted as it had been on the occasion of our arrival. Usually it shuttled with life. Cars and trucks came whirring dustily out of the north and out of the south and quite a percentage of them stopped. The gas pumps of the station long ago had been removed. Its main sign had been blown down by the wind. Old car cushions and the litter from camps of many wayfarers strewed the approaches and the space beneath the wide porch roof. It would have seemed that anyone with half an eye would have realized 10 blocks away that the place was closed to business. But still the callers came, swerving their cars in to come to an expectant halt beside the wrecked cement base where once the gas pumps bad stood.

Some came for gas and honked loudly at the gaping emptiness for service. Some came for lunches and betook themselves haughtily off when we came hastening to tell them that they had made a mistake.

But most came for water. There was an old tub under the front porch, and a cracked enamel saucepan and a bent water pipe from which the faucet had been removed. The pipe yawned dry and thirsty when we first came. But after we had discovered the secret of the control valve at the back of the building we found that it could be made to spill forth water. After that we kept the tub full and the saucepan beside it for a dipper.

Rider appointed himself Chief of the Waterworks and after a short time we all became so adept that we usually could tell 200 yards away which cars were going to swerve in and stop. Then one or other of us would call, "Water, Rider." And, away behind the building, he would turn his precious valve. As the car slowed to a stop a thin silver stream would begin mysteriously to fountain from the pipe and splash into the tub. When the canteens or the radiator had been filled we, going about our own duties in the rear of the house where we had parked our car, would give Rider the high sign and just as mysteriously the water fountain out front would stop. Often it would shut off its splashing before the departing callers had climbed back into their car. Since none of us went out front to talk to them unless they really wanted information this sudden magical appearance and

disappearance of the water ought to have been a bit puzzling to our visitors. But most of them accepted it as a matter of course. Or perhaps they concluded it was some automatic labor saving device, installed especially for their benefit. Which, after all, perhaps it was.

But not all travelers were unobservant, or heedless or scornful. Our few days' pause in that desert "house by the side of the road" where for a space we tried in a small way to "be a friend to man" was an experience never to be forgotten. For 66 soon ceased to be a highway; it became an artery of life. A throbbing artery in the body of a nation through which pulsed the very life blood of America. Comedy, tragedy, gladness and tear's, joy and despair. Day after day, hour after hour came the cars and the faces. Whirling out of nowhere, vanishing into emptiness. Old faces, young faces. Hard faces, simple faces. The faces of sinner and saint, of gangster and priest. Faces as different as the cars which bore them. Cars whose glittering lines and unworn tires seemed to shriek a heartless scorn at the misery of less fortunate humanity; cars whose tires, and the very rims upon which those tires had been mounted, had long since gone, so that they floundered by at a snail's pace, thudding their way onward on battered, revolving hunks of metal-spokeless, angular – any shape but round.

Voices in the night of children; voices to awaken you as you drowse in your blankets beneath the stars. Weary voices, sleepy voices – “Do we stop here tonight, daddy?" The dark loom of a halted truck, the whimpering complaint of a pet dog. The hoarse anxious voice of a man speaking in low tones to reassure a couple of sleepy half-scared kids. They had limped to a halt and the battery was dead. They couldn't start the heavy loaded truck again. Headed for California. But they got off in the morning. All of us strained and pushed. And levered with a length of old pipe. The ground sloped a bit and the truck rolled and caught from the generator. They chugged away into the morning sunlight. The pup whimpered and wagged his tail and the two little boys waved. Out into the distance – down 66.

We left our deserted desert station at last and chugged onward ourselves. We were both glad and sorrowful to go. It had been so vital a spot – such a window upon life. But there was yet a spring to be discovered, a homespot that would fill the requirements we had set out to find. There were springs back in the mountains, it is true. But none of them were for us. We loaded car and trailer again and jumped the goats once more into their tiny pen. Once more on the open road for the desert ahead.

And we said good-bye to the roadrunner. The afternoon of our last day the children gave him a farewell party, tossing him bits of bread and desert-made cake, which be accepted gravely, cocking his head, bright eyed, and swallowing with a queer gobbling gulp. He was in many respects a remarkable roadrunner. Suspicious, the first day that he came trotting in from the desert to investigate us, he soon gained confidence and would come ambling up, carrying his long tail in that odd, wind blown fashion that roadrunners sometimes affect. He liked the shade of the car. And tidbits from the cook pot.

The last night of our stay at the old station we sat around the flickering light of a mesquite-wood fire. And Rider got the sudden notion to dig out from amidst the car load where it lay bandy, the old photo album filled with pictures of the little, now far away, home at Yaquitepec. He thumbed through it slowly, and more slowly. Presently he stopped and sat gazing wistfully a long while.

"Daddy," he said suddenly, "couldn't you please send this picture to be published sometime?"

"Why?" I asked, bending closer in the dim dance of the fire flames to see the print at which he was pointing. "What's particular about that one. It's one of the old ones. What do you want that one for?"

"Because ... Well, just because I – I like it," he said huskily.

It was a picture of Rhett and Scarlett taken on the last day he had seen them – the day he had helped lead them away through the desert canyons to pasture.

FATE

She looks so deep within our core,
There is no fleeing!
What'er of good or bad we store,
She is all-seeing.
What'er we've earned she justly metes;
And our advance,
With arms outstretched and smile she greets.
There is no "chance."

– Tanya South