



The San Jacintos: The Mountain Country from Banning to Borrego Valley

John W. Robinson and Bruce D. Risher

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The San Jacinto Mountains, along with the neighboring Santa Rosas, form an imposing barrier between the coastal valleys and the desert country to the east. Created by tectonic forces deep within the earth's crust, these forested ranges have a rich human heritage.

Cahuilla Indians were here first, a culturally-rich native people who found sustenance in the varied flora and fauna.

Juan Bautista de Anza led the most famous inland expeditions in California history through the mountains in 1774 and again a year later. Rancho San Jacinto, an outlying cattle ranch of Mission San Luis Rey, was founded sometime after 1816 and gave its name to the mountains. Rancho San Jacinto Viejo was granted by the Mexican government to José Antonio Estudillo in 1842. Estudillo and his Mexican and Indian vaqueros tended huge herds of cattle in the valley and took water that emitted from the high country.

Following the American occupation of California, cattlemen rode into the mountains and used the high meadows for grazing their herds. Charles Thomas and his family were first, settling in what is now the Garner Valley in the 1860s. The Thomases were soon joined by other cattle raising families the Hamiltons, the Tripps, the Reeds, the Arnaizes and the Wellmans. The largest cattle operation has long been the Garner Ranch, bought by Robert Garner in 1905 and still run by the Garner family.

Lumbermen sought fortune by extensively cutting the rich mountain forests of the west and south slopes from the mid-1870s until well after century's turn. Colonel M.S. Hall was first, cutting ties for the Southern Pacific as it built its railroad through the San Gorgonio Pass. Anton Scherman, Amasa Saunders and George Hannahs felled much of the forest in and around Strawberry Valley.

Gold was sought but very little of it was found in the mountains. The largest mining camp was Kenworthy, on the edge of the Garner Valley, scene of the biggest fraud in Southern California mining history.

Mountain water was put to use irrigating the vast San Jacinto Valley with the building of Hemet Dam in 1892-95.

To modern mankind, the San Jacintos provide mountain homes, recreation and solitude. Strawberry Valley was first to lure vacationers, and by the 1890s was a thriving mountain resort. George Hannahs' Camp Idyllwilde and John and Mary Keen's Keen House catered to hundreds of summer visitors. The first hotel was Idyllwild Sanatorium, built in 1901, destroyed by fire in 1904. The Idyllwild Inn was constructed in 1905 and was long the center of social activities in Strawberry Valley. The subdivision craze hit Idyllwild in the 1920s, and the mountain community steadily grew. Idyllwild became a cultural center after World War II with the founding of the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts (ISOMATA) and Elliott's Desert Sun School.

All this and much more is told within the pages of this definitive mountain history. Learn the "real" Ramona story, legends of the mysterious Santa Rosas, efforts to preserve the mountains, the building of the spectacular Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Here is a valuable record of the past, as well as a challenge to the

future.

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