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The Owens River Valley.

(by Fred Eaton)

(Article courtesy of Hal Eaton)

Fred Eaton of Los Angeles has just returned from an extended trip through Owens Valley, and in an interview is the Express says: "It seems strange to me that this vast and productive section, so important to the future of Los Angeles, is so little known to our people. Inyo county lies north of Kern and San Bernardino counties, and extends for over 150 miles north upon the east slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains. It comprises three great valleys – the Owens, Rose Springs, and Indian Wells valleys – which lie between the Sierra Nevadas on the west and the Inyo mountains on the east. For grandour of scenery the Owens valley cannot be surpassed. On the west side the snow-capped Sierras rise precipitately within a distance of twenty miles to the height of 12,000 feet, with Mount Whitney, 15,000 feet high, towering in the distance. On the east the Inyo mountains rise to the height of 8000 feet. Those mountains are streaked with all colors of the rainbow and their bleak and somber appearance is lost sight of when one reflects that these colors indicate vast deposits of mineral wealth as yet undeveloped.

In the centre of the valley the great Owens river, fed by the melting snow of the Sierras, winds its course and empties into Owens lake. This lake, which covers an area of 70,000 acres and lies in the southern part of Owens Valley, has no outlet and contains a deposit of 10 percent of soda in solution. It is estimated by experts that \$200,000,000 worth of soda can be taken from this lake. Six miles south of the lake the mountains close in, forming the narrow Haiwee Pass, leaving a rich basin of 12,000 acres of magnificent level land yet to be acquired bordering on the lake. This land is, by all odds, the most desirable in Owens Valley.

It is rich and commands a strategic point for a large town, as all railroad communication from Los Angeles must come through Haiwee Pass, and in going north on either side of the lake, will pass directly through this land. This point is now only twelve miles south of the present terminus of the Carson and Colorado railroad, which connects Owens Valley with Carson. South of Haiwee Pass the mountains again recede, thus forming Rose Springs Valley, which comprises about 16,000 acres of level land. This valley is connected on the south with Indian Wells Valley by a narrow pass called the Nine Mile Canon. The Indian Wells Valley is an immense basin of rich level bottom land, surrounded by mountains, and seems at one time to have been the bottom of a great lake. This valley is about thirty miles long by twenty-five miles wide, and contains over 250,000 acres. These valleys, together with the upper Owens Valley, make an area of 5000,000 acres of watered land tributary to Los Angeles. The immense water resources of Owens Valley commanded my attention at once.



L/R: Joseph B. Lippincott, Fred Eaton, William Mulholland

I saw more water going to waste in the Owens river than is contained in all the streams and rivers of San Bernardino, San Diego and Los Angeles counties combined. Besides this, there are many large creeks flowing into Owens lake, one of which I estimated had more water in it than the Los Angeles river, and all going to waste. These great resources must be developed in the near future. The cost of diverting the Owens river and conduction its waters upon the lands south of Owens lake will be trifling when it is considered that more than 250,000 acres of magnificent land will be opened up to settlement under the Desert Act. I found no engineering difficulties, and I propose to devote all of my energies to this great enterprise. The trade from this section and the upper Owens valleys must come to Los Angeles, for it has no other outlet. It is on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains and cannot go to San Francisco except by a circuitous route through Nevada. Transportation to Los Angeles can be easily attained by building not to exceed 100 miles of railroad, and all of the land to be watered is within 200 miles of this city.

The mineral resources of the Inyo mountains is unbounded, and \$16,000,000 was taken from the Cerro Gordo mine alone, and large quantities of ore from the mines are shipped to San Francisco. With transportation to Los Angeles at \$5 a ton, the output of these mines would increase ten fold, and this item alone would support a railroad. All of the soda now produced by the soda works on Owens Lake should come here for distribution. The Soda Company is now shipping large quantities of soda to San Francisco, and propose soon to double their output. If transportation to Los Angeles were made easy this industry would increase to enormous proportions, as it is estimated that there is a profit of \$15 for each man employed. The marble industry is destined to be one

of the great resources of Owens Valley. It is now struggling against high freights and a market limited to San Francisco. With cheap transportation to Los Angeles, this marble would find its way to a distributing point for Eastern markets and the output of the quarries greatly increased.

I found the soil of these valleys to be a decomposed granite, similar to the soil of the Cahuenga foothills. The appearance of the country reminds me very much of the belt thorough Pomona, Ontario and Cucamonga before it was settled and is susceptible of as high a state of cultivation and development, with the exception, perhaps, that oranges and lemons will not grow in all parts of the valley. There is, however, an orange orchard doing well in the lower valley, and tomatoes ripen through the winter. I found all of the varieties of deciduous fruits, berries and grapes there that are grown here. Cherries are also successfully grown. Apples, raisins, prunes and almonds excel, and I ate peaches of unusually fine flavor. I obtained samples of sun-dried fruit that compare favorably with our own production. The people there have not yet learned, as we have, the importance of cultivation. I found the orchards that were not overgrown with weed cultivated to alfalfa or corn, and still the yield is large and the quality of the fruit good. The method of irrigation now employed is very primitive and not calculated to give the best results of the soil.