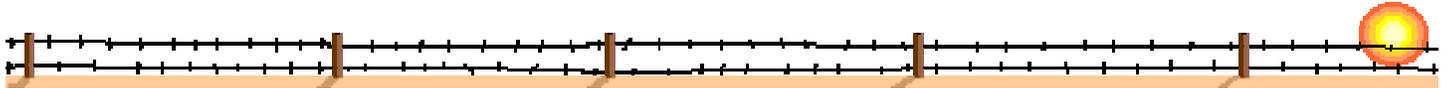


Neither Water Nor Grass -- Nothing

[excerpts]
By W. Storrs Lee

Anza had already plotted the most feasible route across the treacherous California deserts and given it a trial run before he took on the assignment of leading the first colony from Mexico to form a settlement at San Francisco. The band of settlers numbered 136. To accompany them was a contingent of just over 100 soldiers, muleteers, vaqueros, priests, servants, interpreters-and Lieutenant Don Jose Moraga, destined to become one of the most distinguished names of the Bay region. They assembled at Tubac, the northern outpost of Spanish civilization in present-day southern Arizona, on Sunday October 22, 1775.



Anza led the first and last organized Mexican colony across California desert, and he was one of its most notable explorers, but others had been investigating the lay of the barrens for many years before him. From time immemorial, tribes of Indians had known routes into the desert, routes extending from east of the Great Basin all the way to the Pacific, and as poorly paid scouts, they showed many a groping white man the way.

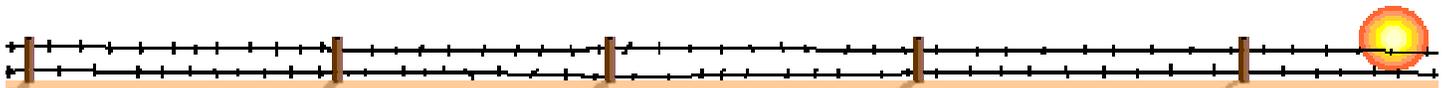
Hernando de Alarcon, commander of the fleet that was supposed to support Coronado's land expedition, was probably the first European to catch a glimpse of the desert, when he sailed up the Colorado River in 1540. His was a close race with Melchior Diaz, who crossed Arizona that same year, forded the Colorado, and presumably pushed for some distance west.

But after Alarcon and Diaz, the desert was left alone by white men for more than a century and a half. Contenders for land in the Americas were kept busy with more strategic engagements. Spain, meantime, established New Spain, with Mexico City as its capital. Slowly, through the efforts of its military and missionary arms, it reached out north, south, east and west.

To assist with the frontier expansion in the north, a distinguished mathematician and astronomer, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, arrived in New Spain in 1681. He was shortly appointed royal cosmographer to accompany a colonial expedition into Lower California, but Father Kino was more interested in the souls of Indians than in cosmography, and there were a larger number of souls to save on Sonora and Arizona than in Baja California-which he insisted on thinking of disrespectfully as "the largest island of the world."



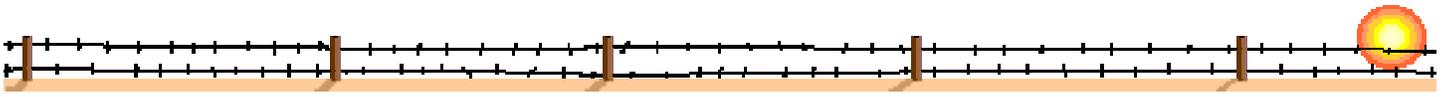
Kino wandered north to more challenging vineyards. In his billowing Jesuit robe he traipsed up, down and across the Sonora, the Colorado and Mojave deserts, and by 1699 was convinced that California was not an island after all. En route he preached and prayed among the Indians, created a network of missions extending across southern Arizona and northern Mexico. Husbandry and economics interested him too. Sold on the idea that the Indians stood a better chance of promotion to eternal life if they could raise the standard of their earthly life, he started building ranches and more ranches-always within hearing of the clanging mission bell. Before he was through he had a string of nineteen enormous ranches covering hundreds of thousands of acres and was the cattle king of America.



There was philosopher Miguel Jose Serra, for example, born on the Mediterranean island of Majorca, Doctor of Sacred Theology, and for fifteen years a professor of philosophy in the college at Palma. When he took the cloak he changed his name to Junipero, and in 1749 accepted assignment to Mexico City. From there he went north to found a line of missions along the Pacific Coast and become "the patron saint of California."

There were contemporaries like Father Francisco Palou, who in 1773 set up the cross in the desert to mark the boundary between Baja and Alta California, and later helped to organize the mission at San Francisco; Father Font, the critical friend and companion of Anza; Father Fermin Francisco de Lasuen who succeeded Serra; and tireless Father Francisco Garces native of Aragon, who also accompanied Anza on many of his expeditions.

Garces became the Christian exemplar and Galahad for the whole southwestern desert region and the white pathfinder in the Mojave. He kept alive the Kino tradition and carried it further, giving up all the civilized amenities for the Indian way of life, in order that his converts might more readily accept his gospel.



The Spaniards, both lay and cleric, were the real pioneers of the California deserts. The names of towns, mountains and canyons they left on the map accent that fact. Their successors, the Yankees, followed the trails with zeal and long-suffering, but they lacked the unworldly devotion and selfless purpose of the padres and the Anzas.

Excerpt taken from *The Great California Deserts*

Illustrations by Edward Sanborn
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