

# Owens Valley Winds

## *Sage and Tumbleweed*

February 9, 1935

by \*Inyokel

I chuckled as I watched the huge airplane propellers, mounted on trucks creating a synthetic

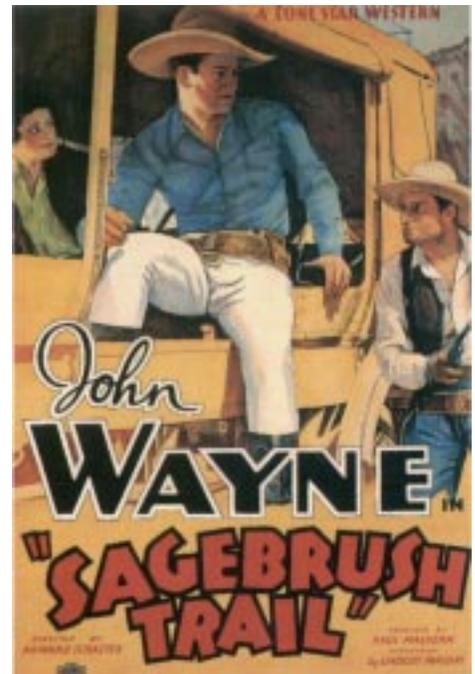


sandstorm. If the Lord had not been kind enough to send them perfect days, and one of our south winds had broken loose, trucks and propellers would have been thoroughly sanded, perhaps barricaded, by flying particles of Owens Lake bottom. Our winds have never been dignified with distinctive titles, such as monsoons, simoons, and typhoons, but we have nothing to be ashamed of in our facilities for moving large bodies of air from one place to another in a hurry. While a little cramped as to directions, Mojave being the only spot where the wind

blows from all points of the compass at once, our winds do not scatter their energies, but, gathering every stray gale from the Gulf of California to Canada, course up and down the valley for days at a time.

I have heard some of my partners claim that the wind blows from the south till it reaches the North Pole, then turns around, races down through the gap again, laden with chilblains and frostbite. Whatever the cause, I know that the newspapers enjoy a greater circulation hereabouts than in much more densely settled areas. Today you may find your favorite daily or weekly anchored beneath a sagebrush at Little Lake, tomorrow it may rest against a fence in Big Pine. It may be a month before the copy reaches Keeler, but reach there it does. And I have seen empty gasoline cans gliding in one of these zephyrs, hitting the ground every 30 feet or so for a fresh takeoff, while cars struggled in low gear against the current of air.

But the wind we fear in this country comes not from the north or the south, which w' rids are common because of the way the valley lies. But when from some Aeolian cave in the fastness of the Sierra a gale roars down the eastward canyons, we hie for the cellar. For we have not forgotten the night of the big wind in the twenties. Then, in an hour, great pines crashed all the way from Bishop to Mono; houses near Aberdeen were folded up like cookie boxes and spread over the valley floor. The Alabamas sheltered Lone Pine from the direct breath of the blast, but in Independence



auto fenders rolled up like shavings from a plane. Windows collapsed in the new court house, wire lath partitions cracked, and books from the judge's desk were driven, wedge-fashion, into the cracks. Telegraph poles were polished like billiard balls by the flying sand. Barbed wire was ripped from fences and carried across the highway. Auto Club enamel signs, on two-inch pipe standards, were bent to the ground, tulips in the breeze. Not a life was lost, but many a homeless one literally clung to his native soil that terrible night, for naught else was stable, and much of that was in motion. In an Independence garage a group had gathered for mutual solace and safety. The westward-facing doors began to bulge inward under the tremendous pressure. Then every car in the building was driven, either against the door, or to support cars that held the front line. All were placed in low gear. When the frightened watchers beheld that mass of steel being pushed back, inch by inch, one piteous cry broke out. "Hey, do any of you fellows know a prayer? For God's sake, say it now!" Westwinds in Inyo, we class as unusual weather. One night in Mojave I saw a passenger step off a train, to be caught by a hurrying gust and slammed back against the car. As soon as he could battle his way to the lee of the waiting-room door (all entrances in well-constructed buildings in Mojave have doors facing in two directions, the Catholic church having three such) he gasped to the nonchalant brakeman, "Does it always blow like this here?" "No, sir. Sometimes it's worse!"



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### *Sage and Tumbleweed*

April 11, 1937

by \*Inyokel

The March winds and this free and open land are most hospitable to them, direct the tumbleweeds in a merry dance. Every fence and sheltered ditch is piled high with the airy spheres, which have been uprooted by the gales and roll aimlessly on till they meet an obstruction. Six and seven feet high they gather along the highways, and scatter in a moment when the wind veers. I have seen them roll from east to west a few yards ahead of my path, and at the same moment a quarter of a mile away tumble from west to east as a gust swept out of a canyon. There is something droll and almost human about their progress, seeming for an instant as if about to settle down on their haunches, then suddenly off with a bounce again to pastures new. Except for the fact that they seldom drag trailers behind them, their behavior is quite American. I wonder if I could initiate a movement to have the tumbleweed made our national flower?

\*Inyokel – Fr. Crowley's pen name.