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Droughts in California
1805 and 1817

by
Mariano G. Vallejo - 1879.
(Original in Spanish)

" Señor Eng. W. Hilgard Director of the school of Agriculture of the University of California, having come to me to ask, among other things, if during the time of the missions there was a year so dry that the water in the beds of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers ceased to run, there remaining only pools of ^{stagnant} water which were the only recourse of the Indians and animals in satisfying their thirst. I must say in answer that many times in talking to the pioneers and others who lived in California in 1805 that is to a Father, to the Picos, Mestas, Pacheco and Ortega of Monterey and Sta. Barbara, to the Alvisos, Flores, Bojorques, Amador, Cota and many others, (they say) that in this year of 1805, "year of

✓
Droughts in
California
1805 and 1817

✓
Rainfall
1805 and 1817

"hunger" as they call it, there were
~~the~~ very few or no rains. The
 parchedness of the pastures and
 the custom of the Indians of
 setting fire to the fields with the
 object of hunting deer etc. ^{impaired} ~~improved~~
 the condition of the inhabitants. Consequently the
 livestock of all classes suffered
 terribly and it was necessary to
 search for, in the mountains, the
 places which had escaped the
 fires. In Monterey and Carmel,
 say the old soldiers, the domestic
 cattle were fed on pine branches.
 The river of San Buenaventura
 which flows down from the slopes
 of Santa Lucia (this range is
 situated south of Carmel and
~~west~~ east of the mission of San Antonio)
 dried up almost completely.
 The "Nacimientos" near San Miguel
 also dried up. The "Paso de
 Robles" which runs east of
 said San Miguel Mission was also
 absolutely dry causing the
 consequence or natural result
 that the river of Monterey (now
 called Salinas) stopped flowing,
 stagnant water remaining only in a few

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(Cont.)

places such as in the "Quinados" which is in the Mission of Soledad and in the "Cañon", road of San Miguel.

The rivers of San Benito and Pajaro dried up, there remaining only some leas in the plain of the ranch of San Jsidro or pools of the Brea. (tar pits)

The places where water remained were in the Carmel river, the Tularcitos, which are the marshes where the river emanates, in the same Carmel at the mouth of the river there remained ~~good~~ great leas (settlements, ~~areqs~~) where the people brought their livestock. In the river of Salinas or Monterey - ~~there remained~~, north of Soledad, there remained some leas, also below on the same river at a place called the "zanjones" (the ditches) there remained large pools of stagnant water. In short, in all of the distance from the "zanjones" to that which was later called the "Salinas" (which were the

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(cont.)

pools situated between the dunes of the ocean and the river of Monterey, out of which the salt was taken that was used by the troops and to send to San Blas in the King's ships; there remained no water for the stock except that in the deposits (lees, dregs) between the river and the gold mines called "Moro Cojo" and "Escarpin". These "Salinas" which have been mentioned, when they began to coagulate (dry up) were guarded by the order of the governor because the salt was the property of the King.....

In the year 1817, the soldiers and old inhabitants had made deer hunts and military expeditions to the slopes and watersheds of the Sierra Nevada. There left, during the season, expeditions from Monterey and San José de Guadalupe - those of Monterey went by way of San Miguel to the pools (lakes) of Buenavista

(cont.)

(Kern Lake) approximately to the slopes of the Sierra Nevada. For this, it was necessary to cross the junctions or drains of the great lakes of Buenavista which were named "Zanjon de San José" or las "juntas" and there the river San Joaquin had its source. The lake of Buenavista formed the rivers "Pitcachi," "Yotónoto" (the whites called it "Yotontos") and Porciúncula. Then they crossed the river "Reyes" and the "little" San Joaquin which had their mouths in the San Joaquin which now is known by that name.

The expeditions from San José went to the valley of Tulares ~~by the~~ or what is known now as Livermore Valley.

These expeditions went now with the permission, now by order of the Governor.

Their object was to get deer tallow for the ships who traded with Peru and Chile - a part of this tallow returned

to us in the form of excellent candles of ~~of~~ very good quality. I have made these observations with the object of describing the drought that was experienced this year and so that I may give the account as an eye-witness. Very well then, the rivers Porciuncula, Pitachi and Notontas having dried up, as well as the drains or channel of the lake of Buenavista it had to affect the San Joaquin (the large) up to the crossing of the "Pescadero" which was fordable in all parts of the "Pescadero" below. Consequently the military expeditions and deer hunters were able to give an account of whether the rivers mentioned and the lakes of Buenavista had ceased to have a flow. It was not possible until this period to ~~reach~~ reach Sacramento because of the ~~the~~ numerous Tribes of Indians who were very hostile to the white and to the missions and who ~~populated~~ inhabited the

Tulares,
locationIndians
in Interior

valley of the Tulares. (this valley stretched from the lakes of Buenavista to Sacramento) That part of the valley which was encircled by the Sierra Nevada and (extended) from the river Pitcachi (Wasalia) to Folsom, in the South was called "Tulares" and also the Northern part between the two sides of the Sacramento ~~South~~ ^{East} and West from the Sierra Nevada to the mountains of Sierrita which today are known up to Oregon but which at that time were known only up to the Sacramento as I have said. Later, the expeditions of Capt. Luis Argüello and those of the Fathers Juan Cabot and Blas Arday gave us, in the year 1821, more knowledge.

It is certain that in the year 1817 there was no rain, it was a year extraordinarily lacking in water. ~~There was no~~.

No wheat was sown and on the banks of the river of Monterey, on the part closest to the Caja (?) there was sown by some people.

some corn and beans to supply the needs of the families. The livestock died of hunger and thirst because the rivers of Carmelo, Monterey, Nacimiento, Paso de Robles, the lakes of Buenavista (Kern Lake) the rivers of Porciunculo, Pitcachi, Potomac and Reyes, even a part of the big river San Joaquin as well as the Pajaro and the San Benito all dried up. There remained water only in the same places which I mentioned respecting the drought of 1805.

Another point about which the School of Agriculture asks my opinion is about the augmentation of the waters in the lakes which it is supposed proceeds from a slow increase in the glaciers of the highest peaks of the Sierra Nevada.

This is a question which is very difficult for a layman as these are scientific questions, but having read somewhat and observed much about the ~~clim~~ formation

of the climates and the transformations that my country has experienced in 30 years, more or less in these parts I venture to express the following opinion.

Taking, for example, Monterey - before the American occupation her woods in the vicinity were virgin and thick and there was not known there, the intensity of cold which now is observed because the woods have been stripped of their pines, oaks etc.

Let us go to Sonoma where I lived 43 years. At my arrival there the woods were virgin and in the mountains as well as in the valley, all covered with larch trees, oaks, pines, manzanita etc. What remains of all this now? Comparatively speaking there remains only a few trees, besides there are miles of $\frac{1}{2}$ arid land which absorb all the moisture of the atmosphere and do not allow the water to flow from which has resulted a notable change in temperature.

In the first years of my residence, the climate was serene and benign.

~~This year~~ Today, (and particularly the winter of 1878-9) the climate is harsh and very cold. In this last winter I have seen the thermometer (Fahrenheit) at 25° , the water froze and my orange trees suffered as at no other time in the preceding 25 years. In the Sierra Nevadas, in my first years, there were no trees at the peaks. These were always covered with snow, and if occasionally the snow disappeared, the rocks remained bare, without doubt because the cold had destroyed the vegetation on them. After the discovery of the mines, about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the dales and declines were covered with woods of every type. These woods have disappeared up to a certain point (there remain few trees, comparatively speaking) and the work of the miners on such a large scale has denuded the mountain. Naturally, the snow fields increased with the scarcity of vegetation.

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There was nothing to absorb the water when the snow began to melt and it all flowed in greater volumes ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~lakes~~ than before, to the lakes.

I believe that the waters of the lakes have increased and I attribute this to the causes I have mentioned.

The quantity of water which runs from the mountains through the ditches made by the miners is immense.

