

Drought was not DeLuz's problem

ESCAPE FROM DELUZ
By AUGUST FREDY

In 1938, 52 years ago, we were still in the middle of the Great Depression and things were really tough. Living in the small community of DeLuz was really exciting.

To the new arrivals in the Fallbrook area, DeLuz is located 12 miles northwest of Fallbrook and was in those days surrounded by two giant Spanish ranchos, the Rancho Santa Margarita (approximately 100,000 acres) and the Rancho Santa Rosa or Vail Ranch (approximately 89,000 acres) and to the north was the Cleveland National Forest.

Today everyone knows the old Rancho Santa Margarita as Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, the Marine Corps Training Base, and the huge Vail Ranch is now known as Rancho California.

In 1938, all roads were dirt and rough; there was no electricity or telephones, except for

the forestry telephone line that ran from Red Mountain through DeLuz to the Santa Margarita Look-out Station, which was out most of the winter. Small storms would close the roads for days at a time.

In March of 1938 the rain started falling and we thought that it would never stop. According to records we had approximately 40 inches of rain and all roads out were blocked. The Santa Margarita River was running bank to bank and impossible to cross. The small creeks had turned into rampaging torrents, cutting huge ditches wherever they crossed the county roads. DeLuz was considered a disaster area. Several cars were lost in the DeLuz Creek and were never seen again.

In those days there wasn't any help from the outside and people got together and did what they had to, to survive.

As the rain slacked off and the sun came out, the DeLuz

residents started gathering at the DeLuz Grammar School. Several tried to make it out to Fallbrook or Murrieta, but were turned back by huge wash-outs and trees across the roads.

A meeting was finally called and several residents of the valley met at the DeLuz School. Felix Garnsey, Ned Brode, and George Nuthall were chosen to head the group — they were to make the decision on how to get out of the besieged canyon. It was finally decided that everyone interested in joining the party was to meet at the DeLuz Grammar School the next morning at 8.

Eight a.m. arrived and found the tiny one-room schoolhouse packed with people ready to make the trip. Garnsey and Nuthall had to make a decision who could go. About 10 or 15 men were picked, and yours truly was one of them.

Those of us who met at the school for the event were as

follows: Ned Brode (DeLuz School janitor); Felix Garnsey (farmer); Charles Javes (mailman and citrus farmer); George Nuthall (county road foreman); Bill Ekhart (student); yours truly (student); John Kuhn (farmer); Jack Gullaher (school bus driver); Mr. Pyett (retired); Mr. Barth (retired); and four or five other DeLuz residents that I couldn't remember their names. (Sorry.)

As requested by the three trail bosses, everyone brought a shovel or ax, and additional tools. Timber saws, barley sacks, and several two by 12 timbers at least 12 feet long were brought. Felix Garnsey showed up with a John Deere tractor, George Nuthall came with his old pickup and a dirt fresno for the tractor. Brodes came along in their Model T Ford, Javes came along in his 1931 Model A Ford. Several

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other cars joined the event. The lunch for the day was venison sandwiches and hot coffee.

With Felix Garnsey leading the group, we encountered our first task of crossing a creek just north of the DeLuz School. Felix soon took care of this. By using his tractor, he drug several loads of rock into the creek making it passable; as we moved east on the road, rocks and dirt slides were shoved off the road just to make it passable.

As we got to the upper part of Sandia Canyon, we found the road completely blocked by huge fallen oak trees and a destroyed road. Detours were hurriedly constructed around the bad spots by cutting the oak trees that had fallen, and filling in the ditches. As we advanced through the Sandia Canyon area we were amazed at the hundreds of wild pigeons that inhabited the huge oak trees. Also several deer were spotted.

Charlie Javes, scouting ahead to check out the road conditions, had spotted a large mountain lion high in one of the oak trees, and as we worked forward on the road, everyone was anxious to see the big cat. Sure enough, as we we got within a few hundred feet, there it was high in the tree, and with one mighty leap it disappeared into the heavy brush.

As we got to the Saxman Grade on the Murrieta Road, we encountered more obstacles. Huge slides had come down off the banks into the road.

From there on the way to Murrieta was easy going, except for the river. The water was fairly high, but the sand was well packed in the river bottom allowing us to cross with the help of the tractor.

We arrived in Murrieta about 5 p.m. and our arrival was quite an event. People

could not believe what they were seeing — this had to be one for the books: Garnsey on his tractor leading a bunch of wild farmers in several cars with their shovels held high in the air.

Supplies were hurriedly bought and packed in the cars and pickups; also supplies had to be bought for those left in DeLuz. Charlie Javes drove on to Fallbrook to the Post Office and picked up the backlog of mail.

With the supplies bought and the road cleared, we made our way back to DeLuz, arriving very late that night. Several canyon residents that were totally out of food were sure happy to see us.

One thing about the trip, there were no injuries.

This is one trip I shall never forget. It was the trip of a lifetime. I regret to say there weren't any photos taken.

There still are a few of us left that made the trip.