

William Walker — Filibuster in the 1850s

...Webster's dictionary defines filibuster as a military adventurer in quest of plunder

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Recent events — the battles of Mexicali, Tia Juana and San Vicente, and the outrages of the Alamo and the destruction of much property over some 300 miles of the Distrito Territorio del Norte de la Baja California — lend new interest to those historical events, surrounding earlier invasions of this same almost unknown land of Lower California, both by American troops and American filibusters.

In the spring of 1853, William Walker, a fiery young Kentuckian, wandered through California into Sonora, across the Colorado and through the desert wastes and mountains into the verdant valley Santo Tomas. Here he evolved the scheme of seizing the territory of Sonora and Lower California from the then weak Mexican government and forming an independent state which would later be annexed to these United States as new slave territory.

In July of the same year, a recruiting office was opened in San Francisco and bonds of the prospective "Republic of Sonora and Lower California" were issued and eagerly seized upon by not over-cautious investors.

By October 15, 1853, sufficient funds had been realized to finance the undertaking and with 46 sturdy Kentucky and Tennessee mountaineers, Walker sailed from San Francisco in the brig *Caroline*, southward bound.

No attempt was made to stop the organization or sailing of this expedition against a friendly nation, and in fact to a certain extent it had the official consent of our government in as much as Gen. Hitchcock, at that time Commandant of the Fort of San Francisco, had been relieved of his command for having seized Walker's sloop, the *Arrow*, some two weeks previous.

Some three months later, Walker's little band attacked and captured La Paz, then as now the capital of the southern half of the territory. Here he issued his first of many proclamations guaranteeing protection and religious freedom to the people and declaring the Louisiana code to be then in effect and establishing the institution of slavery throughout the entire peninsula.

A flag of two stars and three bars was planted over the government buildings and Walker was declared president; John M. Jerrigan, secretary of war; Howard H. Snow, secretary of navy; and William P. Mann, admiral.



William Walker
1824-1860

After sacking out public buildings and destroying all public and church records, they set sail for the north, touching at and capturing San Jose del Cabo and Magdalena and landing in Ensenada, about December 1, establishing Fort McGibbon. From this point he easily captured and held the surrounding country until some months later.

About this time, December 15, 1853, there was enacted in San Francisco a scene unparalleled in modern history. The great double doors of the barracks were thrown open and from them marched some 230 armed men under the leadership of Walker. Down Market Street to the waterfront with much military display this force, organized and equipped in the principal city of Western America, set sail on the schooner *Anita* with the publicly announced intention of completing the conquest of our nearest national neighbor.

After the arrival of these reinforcements, Walker quickly completed the conquest of the peninsula — the battles of La Gruella, Santo Tomas and San Vicente where he completed the destruction of the magnificent old mission and governmental buildings which had been erected and withstood the ravages of time and weather since 1781.

From this time, records of Walker's movements may be had only from the older of the mountain Indians, but here they tell us that entering the country of the Pais Indians by Callanturo Arroyo he swung to the northwest of gray old San Pedro Martir mountain and established himself in Valle, Trinidad. Here by various feats of horsemanship and daring — by the display of much provision and many promises of loot — he allied with himself the Indians of the Pais, Kaluva, Catarina, Yumas and Cocopah tribes, some 2,000 in number. Led by the trailers of these tribes, he commenced his march on the state of Sonora and, by secret and almost impassable trails, made his way through to the Arroyo Grande and down Hardy River to the mouth of the Colorado. About February 1, 1854, he attempted the crossing of the stream but, being unacquainted with the great tidal bore which rushes up from the Gulf of Cortez, he was caught in the lowlands and lost many men, his cattle and provisions.

Starvation rations were the result and — harassed on all sides by his Indian allies who had now become his most implacable enemies and under the incessant hammering of the

Mexican troops under Captain Melendez — he made a perilous retreat across the high Sierra and surrendered to Captain Burton, U.S.A., at Tia Juana, the scene of the last battle of the late Socialist invasion.

Of the forces left to hold Rosario and San Quentin, not one man escaped. Later Walker was tried in the federal courts in San Francisco and charged with violation of neutrality laws, but was acquitted without argument. So, we look at the facts over almost a century, through the Mexican War of 1847, Walker's invasion of 1853, our attempt to obtain Lower California from Benito Juarez in 1859, when after almost 20 years of warfare the Mexican government was bankrupt and helpless to resist any demands we might make on through the last, the revolution of 1911, when American renegades slaughtered and destroyed. Do you wonder the Mexican feeling against the Gringo has not lessened as the years rolled by?

When you halt, after your hard day's ride, at the home of the poor ranchero — and over his meager supper of tortillas and abalone he tells you how the American revolvers killed his chickens, dogs, hogs and cattle, and in one great pile with his scanty household goods burned what they could not use — does your national pride grow any? When you hear from the mouths of your own people of the outrages committed on the women and girls of the Real and learn that the American revolter was the culprit, can you censure the Mexican for his attitude toward the Gringo?

Yet, today the American man or woman of good character and morals who goes to Mexico with the intention of building for himself a legitimate business and lending his hand toward the development of the country's latent resources will find no more courteous people or a more hearty welcome than in this same Mexico which we have so often wronged.

Road to San Felipe Station is silent today

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ranch, in the Vallecito Valley west of Highway S-2, is now state park property as is the former Mason Ranch over the ridge in Mason Valley.

At the north end of the Vallecito Valley, east of Highway S-2, just before the Campbell Grade, is a small piece of the state park. A marker stands beside the Mormon Trail. A pathway, wide enough to accommodate a stagecoach, leads to the foot of Campbell Grade where the trail becomes faint. Walk the pathway and imagine how shoeless soldiers got through the cactus with their bawling sheep and cattle.

This area is home to numerous examples of Anza-Borrego's tallest and smallest cacti. The tallest is known as Mason Valley Cholla, Hoffman's Cholla or Pink Teddy-Bear Cholla. The smallest is Fish-Hook Cactus.

After struggling to get their livestock and wagons over the top of the Campbell Grade, the Mormon Battalion followed a wash up the Mason Valley to Box Canyon.

BOX CANYON TO FOOT AND WALKER PASS

Today at Box Canyon, the California Riding and Hiking Trail, descending from the Cuyamaca Mountains (partly along the route of the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line, the so-called Jackass Mail) joins the Mormon route.

On a weekday morning, the canyon can be quiet. The sounds of highway vehicles have replaced the sounds of the hoofbeats and snorting of horses and the squeaking of wheels as wagons were tugged northward.

While the barriers the soldiers faced are still present, they may not seem as formidable. Thanks to erosion and the hammering of the soldiers and the Butterfield Mail route

builders, the canyon today is wider. The 30-foot waterfall is still there. The bypass road is an easy hike.

The Riding and Hiking Trail crosses Blair Valley to Foot and Walker Pass, the lowest point on the ridge to the north. The trail at the pass is somewhat steep. It's an easier climb from the north, off the Little Blair Valley road.

WALKING UP EARTHQUAKE VALLEY

Earthquake Valley stretches northwest from the ridge at Foot and Walker Pass. It meets the San Felipe Valley near Scissors Crossing. The exact route of the early travelers is unknown. It seems possible there were more routes than one. Anyone with livestock probably would have chosen a route away from the cactus and creosote, down in the low ground by Highway S-2.

After a rainstorm, wagons and stagecoaches would probably have traveled a slightly higher route with better drainage and less mud. Hikers and horseback riders today can follow the California Riding and Hiking Trail in the high ground parallel to the likely pioneer routes, at a distance from Highway S-2 and traffic noise.

Trail scenery includes Granite Mountain on the west side of the valley on the Elsinore Fault, the Volcan Mountains to the northwest, and the North Pinyon Mountains straight ahead, where shrubs like Mohave Yucca, Desert Agave and California Juniper come into view.

Once I reach the mountains I find myself drawn toward Plum Canyon to the northeast, away from the route to San Felipe, down the hill to the northwest. There are wide trails, which perhaps were once roads for wagons and early automobiles, to Sentenac Cienega at Scissors Crossing.

San Felipe Station is no more. It stood under Fremont Cottonwood trees beside San Felipe Creek a short distance north of Highway 78 at Scissors Crossing.