

SACRAMENTO SPRINGS

By Arda M. Haenszel



This statue of Father Garcés and the Indians stands at Yuma, Arizona.

that was as much as 20 miles wide, all heading for the mouth of Afton Canyon, for from there the trail naturally followed the Mojave River. If you were an Indian traveling on foot, you would usually want to use the most direct route, and if you were starting from the Mojave villages near the present Needles, you would take off up Piute Wash to where it skirts the south end of the Dead Mountains. Here, just around the bend, was the group of springs now called Sacramento Springs, and it was a good place to rest or to camp the first night.

Father Francisco Garcés, the first white man to cross the Mojave Desert, did just that. He had been visiting the Mojaves at a place he called Santa Isabel and that we call Needles. On foot, with his Indian guides, he trudged up Piute Wash and camped with them on the night of March 4, 1776 at the springs, which he named Pozos de San Casimiro. From here his guides took him along their almost direct route westward to the Mojave River, which he followed to its source, then continued over the San Bernardino Mountains and on to San Gabriel Mission. From there he made an exploratory trip up into San Joaquin Valley, seeking a shorter, inland route to the northern missions by cutting across the curve of the California coastline and, what was just as important to him, meeting the Indians and preparing them for mission contacts. Forced to turn back, he returned to the Mojave River, following it to its sink. From there he took a more northern, roundabout route at the invitations of the Indians to visit their rancherias, but by May 29 he was back at the Pozos de San Casimiro, and the next day rejoined the Mojaves on the Colorado.

In 1854 Lt. Amiel W. Whipple and his U. S. government party, exploring for a possible railroad route to California from the East, found themselves at the Mojave villages Garcés had called Santa Isabel. Having come up the Colorado like the Rev. Father, he had found the Mojaves friendly, and he had engaged two of them, Chiefs Iretaba and Cairook, as guides for the survey along the 35th parallel.

(See Page 28)



Whipple's guides, Mojave Chiefs Iretaba (left) and Cairook, sketched by Mollhausen, artist of the expedition.