

## *When Camels Came to America*

The steer's bellow was a wilderness alarm. The herd fanned out in a frenzy of running. Small trees were knocked down. A horse was gored. Trail equipment was scattered in what is still called the worst stampede in Texas history. The madness of 3,000 head of cattle in 1857 was caused by a man called Hadj Ali.

He rode through the middle of the panic quite calmly. His mounts, too, refused to be distracted by the bellowing and running of the steers, which lasted two days and spread the animals through four counties.

The morning of the third day, the trail boss, Alec P. Granger, huddled with what remained of his crew. Five or six of the men swore that a train of camels had set off the stampede. "So help me," one swore, "I seen a man settin' on top of a camel's hump—ridin' along like the pitcher of the Wise Men in ma's Bible back home."

That was the dramatic introduction of camels into the United States by Jefferson Davis when he was secretary of war. The army was having trouble with the Indians out west and always a major problem was the transporting of arms and supplies. The idea of camels had real brilliance, on paper. And soon after, Hadj Ali and 53 "ships of the desert" landed at Indianola, Tex., and set off to New Mexico. For almost 65 years, the camels were to leave their imprint on the west although they were a complete failure as transportation.



*Camels in America, shown carrying army supplies across the Nevada flats in 1857. From an engraving in the Bettman archive.*

At the Bar-X-Bar ranch in New Mexico, Hadj Ali paused to rest. He put his camels in a rented pasture. That evening, the animals stepped over a fence and ambled into a barn after fresh hay. Ali had rented pasture from a woman, because the men of the ranch were away. But at midnight, they returned from town well "likkered up." The first man went into the

barn to throw down feed. He promptly backed outside. He was speechless. Drawing six-shooters, the others crept around to windows and doors. Then they raced in a body for their horses and galloped back to town.

They didn't return until the sun was high next day, and by then Hadj Ali reported to an army outpost in New Mexico. His name was soon translated by the friendly westerners as "Hi Jolly." He was friendly, honest and popular. Not so his camels. The war department continued to receive adverse reports on the adaptability of the camels. No American could get along with them. Another trouble was that the southwestern desert region is generally covered with rocks which cut the soft padded hoofs of the camels, adapted to the fine sand of the Arabian deserts. The experiment was soon termed a failure. But the camels were there and so was Hi Jolly.

"I have done what I contracted to do," Hi announced. "Now I like this country and I shall make it my home." He lived on in his adopted land until 1902. He is buried near Quartzite, Ariz., under a stone pyramid topped by a camel in coper silhouette.

The camels drifted over the wild lands and one by one were shot by hunters or pulled down by coyotes or cougars. One was captured and put in the zoo at Los Angeles. It died a few years ago after 70 years of wondering at the strangeness of America.

Its ashes were buried with those of Hadj Ali, under the pyramid monument that stands on an Arizona desert.

—Oren Arnold in Pathfinder Magazine.

---

## Agricultural Information's Ally, Motorized R. F. D., had Humble Start

"Neither rain, nor snow nor icy blast shall halt this carrier on his way."

Such is the slogan of the U. S. mail carrier, a knight without armor.

It is the responsibility of the Post Office department to distribute information material issued by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Experiment Stations and Extension Services attached to the State Colleges of Agriculture. The rural mail carrier shares in this responsibility, as it is he who must ultimately deliver all USDA, state Experiment Station and Extension information mailed to the farmers even in the remotest sections of the country.

The first automobile mail line in the United States was started by an ingenious fellow by the name of Jim Stockard, a pioneer settler of Roswell, New Mexico. The line started operating in January, 1906, carrying mail and passengers from Roswell to Torrance, N.M., a small town on the Rock Island railroad about 100 miles northwest of Roswell.

"Yellow Devil" was the distinctive name given the first mail car used. It was constructed in a Roswell blacksmith shop from discarded parts of old Buick automobiles. The paint job, a brilliant yellow, gave it the colorful name. Travel was rough and slow. The mail route traveled was not over any highway or road at all. A heavy wooden drag was hauled over the route, marking a dim trail for the mail cars.

Upon arriving at Torrance, passengers headed for Santa Fe spent the night at a local hotel, continuing their journey the next day by a Rock Island morning train. A bridge was especially constructed for crossing the Macho, 25 miles north of Roswell. This river was usually nothing but a