

Ed Fletcher: Palomar Mountain Memoir

Peter Brueggeman, 2005

Source: **Memoirs of Ed Fletcher.** Colonel Ed Fletcher. San Diego: Pioneer Printers, 1952.



Beginning his San Diego career as a produce merchant, Ed Fletcher branched out into water and land development. Born in 1872, Fletcher worked as a young man for the produce firm of Nason and Smith in San Diego. After a year of employment, an eighteen year old Fletcher started business trips into the San Diego back country on a motor bike, buying produce, grain, eggs, chickens, etc, and selling flour, sugar, canned goods, etc. One time, he went up the east side of Palomar on his motor bicycle,

purchasing the Cook Brother's apple crop, and then carrying his bicycle on his shoulder, went down a trail to the La Jolla Indian reservation, and on to Escondido.

In August 1903, Fletcher was visiting Frank Salmons, the groceryman at Pala, living in the Mission building where the store was located. During quail hunting on the Pauma Ranch land grant of 13,000 acres owned by the Catholic Church, Fletcher saw Pauma Creek flowing, asking Salmons about its source. Salmons answered that it came from springs from Doane Valley on Palomar Mountain, and was the usual flow at that time of year. Fletcher realized possibilities of water development for power and irrigation, because he had been in contact with farming and irrigation in San Diego County in his business. Fletcher and Salmons got an option on the Ranch for six months for \$75,000. Fletcher sought either a purchaser of the Ranch at a profit, or someone who would give them a working interest in its development for the option.

Fletcher realized the need to construct a dam somewhere on Palomar Mountain for storage of flood water in winter to be using on Pauma Ranch during the irrigating season. Salmons and Fletcher climbed Palomar Mountain with a team of horses and identified a natural damsite in lower Doane Valley on property owned by J.W. Asher. Fletcher called on various prominent San Diegans, and they weren't interested in financing his

proposition. Fletcher unsuccessfully sought an interview three times with Henry Edwards Huntington of Los Angeles, a railroad magnate and owner of various power companies. Fletcher then sought an interview with his nephew, Howard E. Huntington, who directed him to William G. Kerckhoff, president of Huntington's Pacific Light and Power Company. Fletcher's pitch to Kerckhoff urged that an engineer be sent to investigate, Fletcher would meet him in Oceanside and show him around, with Fletcher reimbursing their expenses if things were not as Fletcher represented.

Fletcher met the engineer, W.S Post, and, with Fletcher's brother-in-law E.C. Batchelder, they embarked on a trip to examine Pauma Ranch. Following that they went by team of horses up the fourteen mile grade to Palomar Mountain, taking six hours. They inspected Doane Valley, and stayed a night at Bailey's, whom Fletcher reports as "splendid people." With surveying instruments, Post cross-sectioned the damsite, producing a plane table survey of the reservoir site to determine capacity. Post instructed Fletcher to file "on the waters of Pauma Creek, at a point a mile and a half west of the Doane Ranch, on government land, for the purpose of developing water for power, irrigation and domestic purposes. This filing was made September 11, 1903, in Book 3, Page 400 of Water Claims."

After eating lunch, Post took a nap, and a gust of wind blew his portfolio papers about. Fletcher picked them up and put them away before Post awoke, but he noticed a map of Warner Ranch and the San Luis Rey Valley below, with a red-marked section of government land a mile below the current location of Henshaw Dam. Fletcher deduced that the Pacific Light and Power Company had additional interests than simply Pauma Ranch and Doane Valley. Post finished up his surveying with Fletcher and Batchelder, telling them to go on home, since he had other matters to investigate in the section, and he would make his own arrangements to get to Oceanside, in order to return to Los Angeles. Fletcher saw through the ruse and was curious about their interest, protesting that he would not desert Post, and was in no hurry to go home. Fletcher wanted to find out more, and Post accepted Fletcher's offer to continue the trip with him.

The next day, Post and Fletcher rode horses down the trail to the La Jolla Indian Reservation. Batchelder had left separately, taking along a young man to bring their horses back to Palomar Mountain, planning to meet up with Post and Fletcher at the current location of Henshaw Dam. Fletcher says "the climb down the mountain was tough on us both and there was no

trail up the San Luis Rey Valley, which meant breaking brush, crossing canyons and crawling on our hands and knees at times.” Post and Fletcher were delayed but finally reached the red-marked section of government land, on which Post made a water filing. At 9:30pm they made it to Batchelder at Warner Ranch with nothing to eat, and a cold night on the ground under wet saddle blankets. Fletcher reports “It was the coldest night I ever experienced.” They went on to San Diego, and separated. Fletcher received a letter two weeks later stating that the Pacific Light and Power Company wasn’t interested in his Pauma-Doane Valley project. A few days later, Fletcher learned from Post that Post had made a recommendation to purchase Pauma Ranch and Doane Valley damsite, and wasn’t aware of the rejection. Fletcher went on to involvement with various San Luis Rey Valley projects.

Ed Fletcher writes of taking San Diego backcountry trips with his 1906 two cylinder Maxwell, including Palomar Mountain with George W. Marston, G. Aubrey Davidson, M.T. Gilmore and William B. Gross. Fletcher writes “With a 30% grade down the east side we had to hitch a pine tree behind dragging as a brake for several miles. ... Why we were not all killed those days I don’t know, traveling in those first cars, but the Lord was with us and they were happy days.”