

*This prime piece of property at
Whitewater Ranch is perfectly
placed and poised for development.*

BY JUNE ALLAN CORRIGAN

A River *Runs to It*



LEFT: A cattle roundup near Whitewater Ranch, 1908. Mr. William P. Howe (employed by William Farr) driving his herd from Banning to Palm Springs. OPPOSITE: A man plows the land at Whitewater Ranch in the 1930s (looking toward Snow Creek).

Although that early mail route through the Pass didn't pan out, it set the stage for what occurred roughly five years later. In 1862, gold was discovered in La Paz County in western Arizona, and once word spread to Los Angeles, a gold rush ensued. The favored and quickest way to get to La Paz included traversing through the San Geronio Pass as part of a route known as Bradshaw's Road (later referred to as the Bradshaw Trail). Stagecoach lines soon began operating to convey people from Los Angeles to La Paz before the advent of the railroad in 1875.

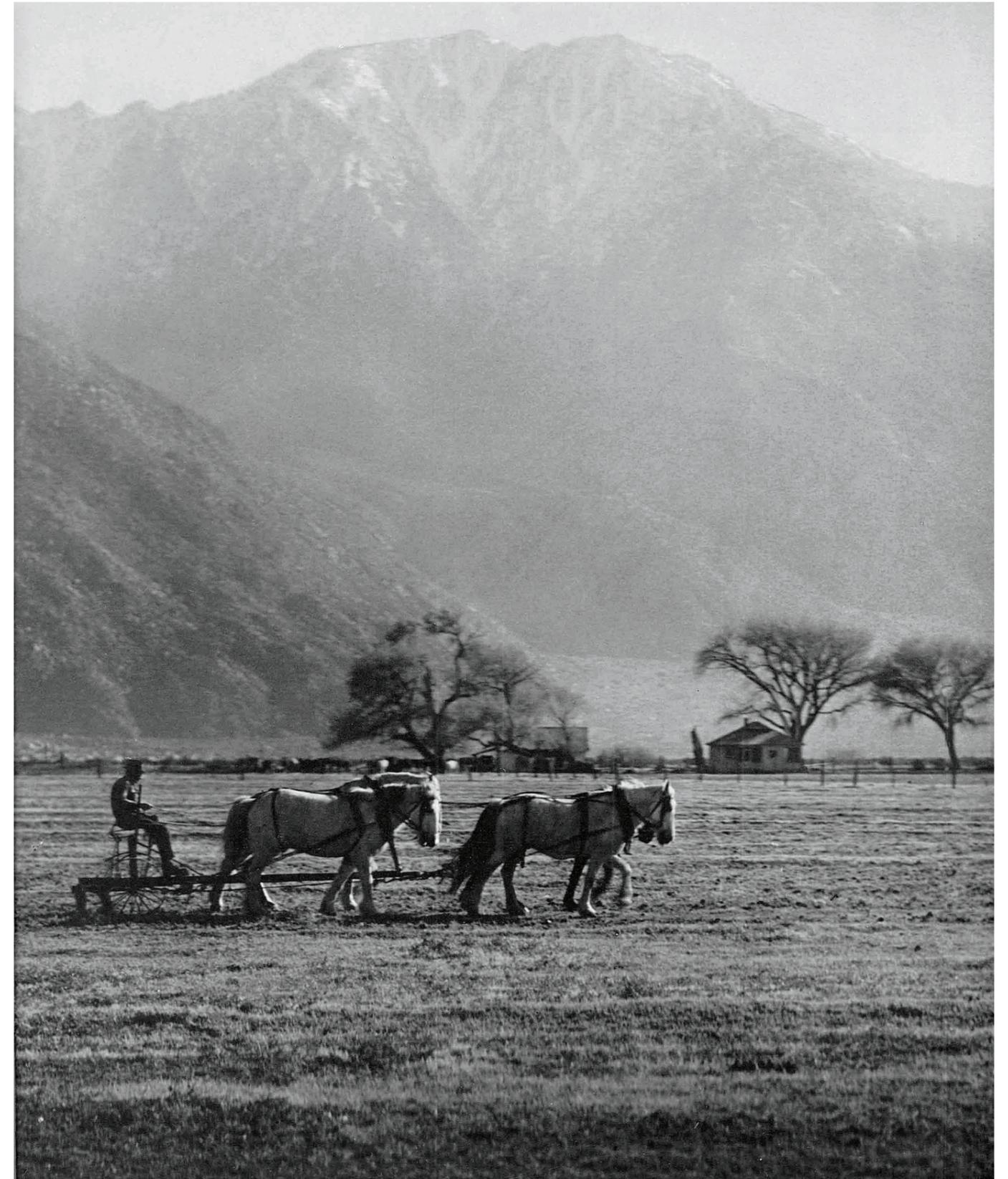
Sometime before 1860, Frank Smith, son of Dr. Isaac Smith, took over the family's ranch on the Whitewater River. On Whitewater Ranch, as it was known at the time, Smith built a small adobe structure that served as both his home as well as a rest and water stop for people traveling along the Bradshaw Road. Using today's landmarks, the Whitewater Ranch would be roughly where the public rest area sits on the south side of the I-10 Freeway. The ranch house lay a few hundred feet south of what now serves as the rest area's parking lot. The water from Whitewater River runs to it.

MORE THAN PASSING THROUGH

When the Southern Pacific Railroad began laying down tracks through the San Geronio Pass in 1875, the area's status as a travel corridor intensified. Many Cahuilla Indians actually worked on the construction project. Simultaneously, the railroad was shaping the future of the Tribe for another reason. While odd-numbered sections of land for 10 miles on each side of the tracks became the private property of the Southern Pacific, the even-numbered sections of land were later allocated to the Cahuilla Indians, creating the checkerboard pattern of growth still evident in the Palm Springs area today.

The juncture where Interstate 10 and Highway 111 meet has a long history as a travel corridor. Spanish explorers first passed through the area in the mid-1700s, venturing from San Diego. Although they found the desert terrain rather inhospitable, many groups of Native Americans, including the Cahuilla, Luiseño, Serrano, and Gabrielino tribes, had long thrived in the area that would later become the Coachella Valley and Riverside County.

When California became a state a century later in 1850, serious consideration was given to establishing a U.S. mail route that would run through the Coachella Valley and the San Geronio Pass. Of course water stops were essential, so Dr. Isaac Smith, one of the area's early non-Indian settlers, led an expedition to drill wells and establish stations along the potential mail route. Two stations were established — one at Whitewater River and another at the Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring in downtown Palm Springs — before the proposed route was abandoned in favor of another.



PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY (ALL)



A railroad stop known as Whitewater Station existed for a time approximately a mile west of the current Tipton Road intersection with Highway 111. Heading into the 1900s, the Whitewater Station experienced a series of consecutive name changes, being called at various times Seven Palms, Pierce, Gray, Noria, and Garnet. The station also migrated slightly east closer to what is now North Indian Canyon Drive. Yet regardless of its name or location, everyone who had ever visited the station agreed on one thing: It was definitely a windy stop! Sand bore down with fierce intensity upon early travelers, and it is still just as gusty today. In fact, the San Geronio Pass is one of the windiest places in Southern California, which makes

it a natural setting for the major wind farms that currently reside there. The Venturi effect created by the San Bernardino Mountains to the north and the San Jacinto Mountains to the south is responsible for the nearly constant, strong winds.

Meanwhile, the 1900s wore on, and it wasn't long before motorcars began making their presence known. This necessitated the need for proper roads. By 1926, U.S. Route 99 was serving as a forerunner to Interstate 10 through the Pass. Route 99 was followed in the early 1930s by State Highway 111. It seems that despite early Spanish explorers' misgivings about the Pass due to its inhospitable nature, its value as a transportation corridor and more recently as a source for renewable

energy has been proven and continues to be upheld time and time again.

DRIVING THE FUTURE

Today, the point at which Highway 111 and Interstate 10 meet and run parallel for a time sees a steady stream of traffic on a daily basis. Yet the land lying in the immediate vicinity of these well-traversed roads remains essentially undeveloped. Over the years, various non-Indian people — people like the aforementioned Smiths — came to own different sized parcels of the land despite it being the aboriginal territory of the Agua Caliente. The good news is a land exchange between one owner and the City of Palm Springs approximately 30 years ago prompted a series of events that resulted



in the Tribe ultimately acquiring a total of 216 acres of its original territory. The Tribe refers to the acreage as Whitewater Ranch to acknowledge the water source that drew people to the area in the first place and previous patterns of settlement.

Based on its unique relationship with the U.S., and as a result of various federal court rulings, the Tribe retains sovereign land use authority. "We try to stay flexible as we look at future development opportunities for the land," says Tom Davis, Chief Planning and Development Officer for the Tribe. "It has renewable energy opportunities, both solar and wind. It also has the potential to be a good transportation logistics center as development along the I-10 corridor increases." The property's benefits are

obvious: it borders Highway 111 as well as Interstate 10, which links to Highway 86 and Interstate 15; a railroad passes through it, as does the Whitewater River; and there are some underground utilities serving the Los Angeles Basin already in place. The idea of the acreage becoming a logistics or high-tech distribution warehouse center, something akin to Amazon, for example, and involving the transfer of goods along the interstate corridor is very feasible.

The future of the land that early explorers were set to dismiss certainly changed once water was discovered. There's every reason to believe the assembled acreage now known as Whitewater Ranch will continue to enhance the Coachella Valley's economic landscape. ●

ABOVE: Whitewater Ranch as it exists today. OPPOSITE: Land near Whitewater Ranch, circa 1920, with the San Jacinto Mountains in the background.