

PASTORES OF THE VALLES CALDERA

Documenting a Vanishing Way of Life

By Dan Scurlock

THE VALLES CALDERA, a 12-mile-wide volcanic depression in the heart of the Jemez Mountains, is one of the richest livestock grazing areas in New Mexico—and one of the most spectacular scenic locales. Towering above and interspersed among the various valleys that constitute the Valles Caldera are several mountain peaks, Redondo being the highest at 11,254 feet. From Highway 4 on the south rim of the Valles, hundreds of fat cattle can be seen grazing in summer on the tall lush grasses and forbs of the well-watered valleys. Only a few decades ago, this same scene was dominated by flocks of sheep, sometimes numbering in the thousands, herded by *pastores* (Spanish shepherders).

Since 1860, the five major valles—*Valle Grande*, *Valle Santa Rosa*, *Valle San Antonio*, *Valle Seco*, and *Valle Toledo*—have been part of the Baca Location No. 1. This 100,000-acre land grant was given to the heirs of Don Luis Maria Baca as partial settlement for their disputed claim to the Las Vegas land grant.¹ Before that, in the late Spanish Colonial period, these 8,600-foot high valles were grazed by sheep from surrounding Spanish villages such as Cañon de San Diego, Santa Cruz de la Cañada, Peña

Blanca, and Bernalillo. By the late eighteenth century, the demand for wool and mutton in the mining boom towns of northern Chihuahua had led to a rapid growth in sheep raising. Wealthy ranchers, called *ricos* or *patróns*, controlled vast herds and employed many *pastores*.

Developing at this time was the socioeconomic *al partido* system that was directly related to the grazing of huge flocks of sheep on the large land grants held by the patrons. Deprived of much of their formerly free grazing lands, the poorer *pastores* became dependent either on the lands of the patrons for the grazing of their sheep or on employment as herders for the owners of large herds. The *partido* (tenant-herding) system involved the patron providing for a herder, or *partidario*, a small flock of sheep on a shares basis. The *partido* contract required the *partidario* to return a percentage of the annual increase in the sheep herd and also a percentage of the sheared wool. Additionally, the herder had to compensate the owner for all losses. At the end of a stipulated period of time, the patron was to be repaid, in equal quantity and quality, the sheep originally provided to the *partidario*.

The first Hispanic owner of the Baca Location, Don Tomás Cabeza de Baca of Peña Blanca, and later owners, Fredrico and Mariano Otero and Frank Bond, employed both the *partido* and the grazing fee systems. Don Tomás Cabeza de Baca presumably operated two ranches, which were located in the Valle Toledo and recorded on an 1883 survey of the grant conducted by the U.S. Surveyor-General's Office in Santa Fe.² The Oteros established their Baca Ranch headquarters on Jaramillo Creek at the turn of the century, and this location has been the site of the Baca grant headquarters since then.

Below: The tents of sheep camps, similar to this one in San Miguel County, were common sights during the sheepherding days in the early decades of this century.

Preceding page: photograph circa 1935. (All photographs courtesy Photo Archive, History Bureau, Museum of New Mexico.)



CLYDE SMITH, born in 1899 on a homestead at Battleship Rock in Jemez Canyon (also known as Cañon de San Diego), worked for the Oteros in 1917 and 1918. In several taped interviews given in the fall of 1979 and early 1980, Smith gave extensive data on herders and their flocks. He estimated that over 100,000 sheep, or one animal per acre, were on the Baca pastures during the summers of 1917 and 1918.³ One of his duties then was to collect fees of twenty-five cents per head from *pastores* who brought their sheep to the Baca Location in May for lambing, shearing and summer grazing. During this period he spent a good deal of time in the sheep camps and visiting with the *pastores*, *camperos* (camp tenders) and *caporals* (camp suppliers).

Herd sizes ranged from 1,000 to 1,500 head and came from winter pastures and ranches at or near towns such as Peña Blanca, Bernalillo, Cuba, Jemez Springs, Española, Santa Fe, Algodones, and Cordova. The pastores and camperos, on foot or mounted on saddle horses, herded their sheep with the aid of dogs that, according to Smith, usually were collies. (Border collies were less common.) Burros and mules carried the camp equipment and supplies in wooden boxes and water in five-gallon wooden kegs.

Camps were moved on the average of once a week following depletion of available grass for the flocks. Herders often would burn off pasture to promote rapid new growth of grasses and forbs.

Camps were set up in areas protected from predominant winds but away from solitary trees or small groves of trees that sometimes were struck by lightning during frequent afternoon thunderstorms. The sites were picked for proximity to good pasture and water for the stock. Tents were erected on a slight grade for drainage of runoff during rains. A ridgepole tent was used to store supplies of food and equipment, and a single, center-pole, tepee tent, about seven by seven feet, served as sleeping quarters for two men. Eight wooden stakes secured the bottom of the canvas tents. Shallow trenches, dug with shovels around each tent, prevented flooding of the interior.

The doors of the tents were oriented either to the east or west, and a firepit for cooking meals was dug about two meters from the door of the sleeping tent. The firepit was about a foot deep, rectangular in shape (two by three feet) with dirt mounded along one side as a windbreak. Rocks were sometimes placed around the interior of the pit on which the coffee pot, skillet or dutch oven rested during cooking. The pack burros, mules and saddle horses were tethered or hobbled close by. Scattered around the *majada* (bedding ground for the sheep) near the camp were *canoas* (troughs) of salt. These *canoas* were handmade from aspen logs; the salt was brought from natural deposits in the Estancia Valley or, in later years, from Bond's store at Española.

THE CAMPEROS generally took care of the camps, and their work included tending to the stock and preparing meals. Food was stored in wooden pack boxes in the supply tent. Basic foodstuffs included beans, canned tomatoes, potatoes, onions, rice, oatmeal, coffee (Arbuckle's was a favorite), canned condensed milk, flour, salt, pepper, lard, baking powder, and sugar. Potatoes were sometimes buried under the bedding in the herder's tent to prevent their freezing in the early spring and fall.

Fresh beef, when available, was used in stews or cut into small chunks with gravy poured over it. Meat was preserved by jerking—cutting into long strips and drying in the sun. Mutton, trout caught from the numerous streams in the Valles region, mule deer, elk, and rabbit supplemented the pastores' diet. Smith named several native plants gathered for food: *cebollita del campo* (onions), *cota* (Indian tea) used to make a tea, and *verduras* (greens) used in salads.



T. Harmon Parkhurst

The self-reliant pastores spent the daylight hours herding their flocks and many evenings handcrafting their own teguas (moccasins), reatas (lassos), and hondas (slingshots). Harmonica music and storytelling helped lighten the daily tedium.



Lambing season in the Valles region was from May to early June. This lambing tent was erected in the Elk Mountain vicinity. (Courtesy U.S. Forest Service.)

Beans were cooked in a small bucket with holes in the lid to emit steam as they baked slowly in coals. These "bean pots" could be purchased, but they were also easily made by punching holes with a nail in the lid of a ten-pound lard pail. Two basic types of bread were made: a large loaf known as shepherd's bread, which was baked in dutch ovens, and *gordas*, thick, round cakes cooked in lard in a small pan.

Other cooking equipment in the pastores' camps included a cast iron skillet, sheet iron skillet, metal coffee pot (sometimes graniteware or enamelware), and a small bread pan. Items used in food preparation included a butcher knife, metal spatula, cooking fork, stirring spoon, and coffee mill. Metal eating utensils, plates and cups completed the culinary array. Wooden matches for starting the fire were kept in a glass jar with a screw lid. Empty tin cans along with other trash were buried near the camp.

A water bucket, axe, extra handles, claw hammer, pliers, and sheepmarking stamps completed the inventory of camp equipment. The latter item was the owner's brand, carved from wood, which was dipped into a dark paint and then pressed against the flank or back of the sheep after it was sheared. The caporals from each home ranch traveled on horseback from camp to camp once or twice a week to bring needed supplies on pack mules or horses and to count the sheep in each flock.

The inventory of items at one of Frank Bond's summer camps in 1918, reproduced below from his original ledger book, reveals the names of his employees, number of sheep, and inventoried equipment.⁴ This was one of eighteen camps maintained by Bond on the Baca Location that summer under lease agreement with Mariano S. Otero.

Bond/Sargent Camp #1 Inventory

1004 ewes and 338 lambs		14# salt	.30
3 burros @ \$10	\$30.00	18# beans	1.80
3 saddles @ \$3	9.00	baking powder	.90
2 barrels @ \$1	2.00	matches	.05
1 axe	1.00	1 pr. sheep shears	1.00
1 shovel	.75	1 coffee pot	.40
3 ropes @ .25	.75	1 oven	1.25
1 35# sheep salt	1.35	5 plates	.50
1 tent	5.00	5 cups	.50
122# flour @ 5.25	6.40	2 bread pans	.25
3# onions	.25	1 kettle	2.00
5# rice	.65	1 skillet	.25
2# sugar	.25	1 coffee	.25
11# coffee	2.20	1 can paint	2.25
			\$72.80



The shepherd in the upper left hand corner of this photograph (taken near Las Vegas in 1904) is carrying a rifle, as was customary to protect flocks from predators and for hunting.

THE PASTORES hunted with .44 caliber rifles and pistols, popular weapons of that time; .32-.20 caliber pistols also were used but were less preferred. These weapons also provided protection of the sheep from coyotes, bears and gray wolves; the latter were exterminated in the Jemez Mountains by 1928.⁵ Other personal items usually carried by the pastores or camperos or kept at camp included a canteen, clasp (pocket) knife, walking stick, *reata* (a rope for pulling sheep out of flock), *honda* (a sling-shot for turning leaders of the flock or driving stragglers back to it), cigarette tobacco (Prince Albert was the most popular) and papers, and chewing tobacco (usually Star brand). Most herders carried a small bag containing scissors, needle and thread, toothbrush, and salt or soda for cleaning teeth. The *viejos* (old ones) had a *chispa* (strike-a-light), flint and a cloth saturated with black powder used to catch sparks and start the fire.

For evening recreation, guitars, harmonicas and a deck of cards were necessities. Story and joke telling also frequently provided amusement around the campfires. The men slept on sheep skins placed on the canvas floor of their tent, and quilts made of patches of cloth sewn together or wool blankets provided warmth on the cold nights at the high altitude.

The pastores devoted leisure hours to various crafts: braiding horsehair or leather reatas and headstalls, making rawhide moccasins called *teguas* (although store-bought work shoes or boots eventually replaced this traditional footwear), and carving on the bark of aspen trees. Names, dates, place of residence, *refranes* (sayings), and portraits of horses, dogs, female figures, cattle, deer, and religious crosses were commonly carved subjects.⁶



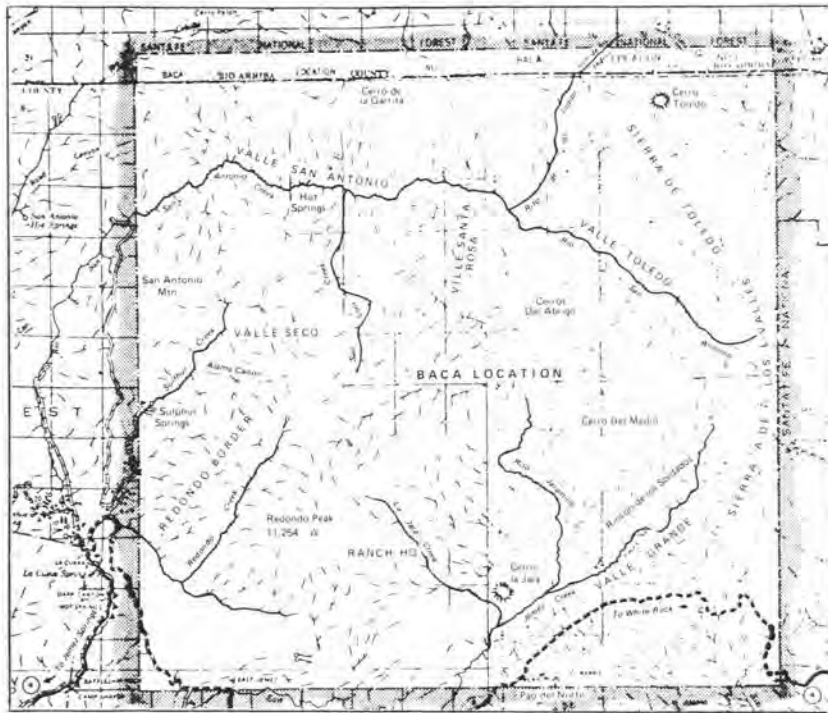
T. Harmon Parkhurst

Pack animals like these were a necessity for most pastores, who constantly moved food, supplies, and tents to new camp sites. Photograph circa 1935.

THE LAMBING season in the Valles was from May to early June. In the early twentieth century, several sites on the Baca Location were used for lambing camps, which were located near a permanent water supply. Corrals were constructed from aspen or conifer logs in the early part of this period, while milled lumber was more commonly used after 1920. Sheds with tin roofs were built within the corrals to protect the ewes and lambs from inclement weather. Whole logs, or sometimes logs split in half, were laid with ends overlapping between two upright vertical posts to form corrals five to six feet high. The corral designs were round or rectangular.

Lambing camps were located on Redondo Creek and on Jaramillo Creek, at the San Antonio hot springs, at El Cajete, at the Rincon de los Soldados on the northwest side of the Valle Grande, and at Paso del Norte on the south boundary of the Baca grant near the present main entrance to the Baca Land and Cattle Company headquarters. The Paso del Norte camp was established by Frank Bond in 1935, the year the road (now Highway 4) connecting Los Alamos to Cuba was completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

After lambing, the ewes were sheared at these same camps by *trasquiladores* (shearers) who came from various villages in northern New Mexico. These men could shear 50 to 100 animals a day and were paid twenty-five cents a head for their work.



The Valles Caldera, with its five lush valleys and thrusting mountain peaks, is the largest volcanic caldera in the world. Its geologic age is relatively young—one million years. Below: Pastores' carvings on aspen trees are the last vestiges of their disappearing way of life. (Courtesy Office of Contract Archaeology, University of New Mexico.)

The sheared wool was stuffed into large burlap bags and hung from a wooden support. Ten to twelve full bags, each weighing approximately 500 pounds, were loaded into a freight wagon drawn by four mules or horses and hauled to Española, Bernalillo or Albuquerque.

The sheared animals were stamped with the owner's brand or marked with ear notches. To prevent scabies and eliminate ticks, the sheep were dipped in concrete vats or in pits dug in the ground and filled with such mixtures as Blackleaf 40 combined with sulphur and water. The main dipping camp was located at Sulphur Springs on the west edge of the Baca Location.

MUCH of the information obtained from Clyde Smith and presented in the preceding pages is corroborated by data recorded by Lorin W. Brown, who worked for the New Mexico Federal Writers' Project from late 1936 to 1941.⁷ Sometime during that period, Brown visited a pastor, Basilio Garduño, who was camping in early summer with his sheep flock near Redondo Peak on the Baca Location. As a boy, Garduño and his father both worked for Don Mariano Otero, and at the time of Brown's visit, Garduño's patron, although unidentified by name, probably was Frank Bond.

Garduño wore denim bib overalls, jacket, felt hat, and hand-made teguas. He had no campero, only three "nondescript dogs" and several burros. The pastor prepared an evening meal of beans, gordas, meat, and goat's milk for Brown. Later in the evening, he slaughtered a lamb, placed the head of the animal in a hole and covered it with a piece of tin. Hot coals and ashes were heaped over the tin so that the hole was filled to ground level. After baking all night, meat from the head, along with shepherd's bread, lamb's liver, and coffee were breakfast fare. Brown left the pastor as Garduño moved his flock toward San Antonio Creek, where he would find water for his animals.



Just before the feast day of Santo Domingo, August 4, the pastor moved his sheep to the shelter of a north slope of El Rito de los Indios for lambing. This stream is a tributary of San Antonio Creek on the northeastern part of the Baca Location. Brown returned for a visit on August 3 and found Garduño and three helpers camped. They had built a corral and a number of *chiceros* (small brush pens), which were used to hold several new born lambs separate from the grazing flock.⁸

On a third encounter with the pastor later in the summer, Brown found him moving his herd eastward from the lambing camp to a shearing camp operated by his patron. The exact location of this camp was not given, although it was probably near the east boundary of the Baca Grant. While visiting the shearing camp, Brown recorded some native herbs used by pastores. Included were: *plumajillo* (yarrow), *altamisa* (wormwood), *chimaja* (this name was given to several plants in the area), *poléo* (mint), *yerba buena* (spearmint), *amole* (yucca), and *hediondilla* (creosote bush).⁹ All of these species occur in the Jemez Mountains except *hediondilla*, which is found south of Albuquerque at the northern edge of the Chihuahuan Desert.

Before leaving, Brown learned that Garduño would stay near this camp until the first of November, at which time he would move his flock to the "chamiso-covered flats between here and the Rio Grande" where they would spend the winter.¹⁰

INTERVIEWS recorded with such oldtimers as Clyde Smith and Garduño are links with a sheepherding tradition that is rapidly

Migrating each week to a new camp, continually searching for pastures and water for the flocks, the pastores developed a life style notable for its efficiency and simplicity. Photo circa 1935.



T. Harmon Parkhurst



After lambing, the ewes were sheared and their wool was hauled in burlap bags, often weighing as much as 500 pounds, on freight wagons. The wool was often sold to the large mercantile houses in New Mexico, such as the Charles Ilfeld Company, and Bonds.

fading. Only a small number of sheep are now grazed in northern New Mexico, and the pastores and their unique lifestyle have passed. The only physical evidence of their sheep camps on the Baca Location today is the aspen art, which will disappear before the end of this century.

Notes

1. Van Court and Company, "Baca Location No. 1" (Denver, n.d.), unpublished manuscript prepared for the Baca Land and Cattle Co., Abilene, Texas; U.S. House of Representatives, "New Mexico Private Land Claims," in 36th Congress, 1st Session, 1859-1860, House Executive Document 14 (Washington, D.C., 1860).

2. U.S. Surveyor-General's Office, "Map of the Baca Location No. 1 Grant," copy on file at U.S. Forest Service Southwest Regional Office, Federal Building, Albuquerque.

3. Clyde Smith, taped interviews and notes from September and October 1979, at Jemez Springs; interview data on file with the author. Smith's father, Jim, came from the Midwest and homesteaded at Battleship Rock in the late 1800s, although no homestead application or patent could be found in the Public Land Records, Bureau of Land Management, Santa Fe. The elder Smith married Catherine Archuleta of Jemez Springs. He operated a sawmill at Battleship Rock until 1912, when the boundaries of the Cañon de San Diego land grant were resurveyed and his homestead was judged to be just inside the east boundary of the grant. The Smiths subsequently moved to Jemez Springs.

4. "Baca Location Ledger" (Española, 1918), Frank Bond Collection, Special Collections Department, General Library, University of New Mexico.

5. Homer C. Pickens, *Tracks Across New Mexico* (Bishop Publishing Co., Portales, 1980), pp. 10-11. In the late 1920s, Pickens was employed as a trapper in northern New Mexico by the U.S. Biological Survey (now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

6. James B. DeKorne, *Aspen Art in the New Mexico Highlands* (Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, 1970), pp. 11-12. Pastores names, dates, places of residence, human figures, and other carvings found on aspen trees were recorded within the area to be impacted by development of the Baca Geothermal Plant on Redondo Creek in the southwest corner of the Baca Location grant. See also Dan Scurlock, "Euro-American History of the Study Area," in *High Altitude Adaptions Along Redondo Creek*, Craig Baker and Joseph C. Winter (Office of Contract Archaeology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1982).

7. Lorin W. Brown, "Basilico Garduño, New Mexico Sheepheder," in *Hispano Folklife of New Mexico: The Lorin W. Brown Federal Writers' Project Manuscripts* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1978), pp. 158-173.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 167-169.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 170. Scientific nomenclature on file with the author.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 173.