**Archaeology & History in Your Backyard**

**Emily Post’s 1915 Cross Country Trip**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Backyard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place, right here in your own backyard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on Emily Post’s first cross country automobile trip in 1915.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

Traveling by motorcar has become the accepted means of transportation. Most families have multiple vehicles and think nothing of driving across the country or just down to the market. But, in the early years of the 20th Century, horses and wagons were still the more common means of traveling from one location to another. The first motorcars caused quite a stir, frightening animals and people, but this did not stop their popularity or appeal.

The first roads were merely bladed with no grass or asphalt and difficult to travel especially when muddy. It was next to impossible to traverse these early roads without chains and even then many vehicles ended up in the ditch and had to be pulled out with horses and mules. There were few mechanics along these early routes or reliable locations to lodge for the evening.

In April of 1915, Emily Post, her son Ned and their cousin Alice decided to drive from New York to California on a twenty-seven day cross country trip. Ned drove while the two women studied maps and decided on the best routes to take. The roads and accommodations were a lot more primitive than those currently found along the route. Most speed limits were twenty miles an hour and in some cases it took two months to drive from one end of the country to the other. The open air vehicles of the era also made it next to impossible to keep dust and mud off those riding inside, and they were often unrecognizable when they stopped for a much needed bath at the end of the day.

Emily Post published a delightful book titled: *By Motor to the Golden Gate* recounting her experiences on a cross country road trip. Most of her friends were worried about her heading out in this manner, but she had a great time and left behind an enthralling account of her experiences on the road. Motor travel was all the rage in 1915.

During this era in cross country travel, the motorcar was publicized as the cheapest and most scenic way to see the country. One advertisement stated, “Travel luxuriously in your own car from your own front door over the world’s greatest highway to the Pacific Shore.”

Traveling America’s first highways was much different than current times, as there were fewer gas stations and it was next to impossible to locate parts when they were needed most. Another item they failed to purchase were chains for their vehicle, as it was difficult to travel the muddy roads without them. Thirty-six miles out of Chicago they encountered their first seriously muddy road and soon realized how handy a set of chains would have been.

After traveling across New Mexico’s rough roads, they decided to take a well-deserved break in Santa Fe at the La Fonda Harvey House. Post wrote about the appearance of Santa Fe, “Was there ever any place less like a railroad center than Santa Fe? The main line of the railroad which has taken its name does not even go there. A little branch line runs to the terminal city from a junction called Lamy, where, by the way, there is a Harvey House, which means, of course a good one.”

The washed out road between Las Vegas and Santa Fe was one of the worst the group encountered during their travels. “The best commentary on the road between Santa Fe and Albuquerque is that it took less than three hours to make the sixty-five miles, whereas the seventy-three from Las Vegas to Santa Fe took us nearly six,” Post pointed out.

In order to recover from the rough road and descending La Bajada Hill through its hair-pin curves, the group decided to spend a couple days in Albuquerque at the Alvardo Harvey House and Hotel before continuing their journey. The Harvey House had a central courtyard where tourists sat on benches and watched performances by Native American tribes.

“The third Harvey House is frankly a vaudeville performance of Indian dancing and singing. The stage of the adobe floor of the exhibit room, the walls of which are hung to the ceiling with blankets, beadwork, clay gods, and leather costumes—everything conceivable in the way of Indian crafts,” Post wrote. They ended the enchanted evening by sitting in the rocking chairs on the Alvardo verandah and enjoying the scenery and desert atmosphere.

After exploring the Grand Canyon, the group shipped their motorcar the remainder of the way to the west coast and traveled by train. The California sunshine and beautiful beaches were a welcome sight for the trio after their cross country adventure. During the last leg of the journey, they explored California beach towns and orange groves making up the landscape the magical state.

When Post and her traveling companions returned to New York, they were beseeched with questions by others wanting to make the same trip. She included information at the end of her book on problems to look for along the route plus items travelers should take along for pleasure and in case of an emergency.

Post felt it was best to not travel on a strict schedule as the speed limits differed from state to state and not all roads were consistent in their development and upkeep. She also said to be sure to drive an American made car as it was easier to get parts. She suggested carrying an extra set of tires and purchasing a good set of chains. She suggested carrying food and snacks in a tin box and several gallons of extra gas as the distance between gas stations was not always reliable.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Backyard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through September. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Backyard Tuesday at 7 PM, Thursday at 12:15 PM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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