

A COPY OF ORIGINAL

Compañía Explotadora del Baker  
c/o Braun & Blanchard  
Punta Arenas

Bajo Pisagua  
August 16th 1906.

Dear Uncle Henry,

I arrived here on the Baker land on the 15th of May with 2,250 head of cattle that I bought in the Río Tecka valley, just south of the "16 de Octubre" Colony. Fine, well grown, criollo cattle they are, but as wild as deer. They had never been off their own rodeo, never been trooped or handled in any way, except "la parada de rodeo" a few times a year, to mark calves, a few at a time. I received 2,314 but paid for 2,249, got 65 for dead [at] \$20 "al barrer".

At first I could not get enough men, so after waiting a few days and rondando twice on their own rodeo, I made up my mind to march with 8 men and myself, as they told me I was sure to pick up more men as we passed through the valley of Genna. You may guess we had a real picnic: only 7 men with the cattle and one with the horses for 10 days. Luckily, the capataz (a mendocino) [whom] I had got hold of turned out a real brick and as tough as nails. He took one gang and I the other.

On the 10th day, I got 3 more men and on the 12th managed to get a good count on the march. I had tried two or three times before but they were still too wild, & found I was only 22 animals short of the total count: 11 of these I knew of, and 5 very small calves that we had killed, so we had not lost many. Most of the 11 I hope to get, as they are sure to mix with the Cochamo Co's cattle, on whose camp the cattle were, and the man in charge there is an old "Curumalán" pal who promised to look after them for me. For the next 20 days we got along fine, as I had plenty of men and the cattle had settled down. I had no need to do any night work.

When we had been just a month on the march, we got to the Río Mayo, where the last inhabitants live going south (mostly Indians). South of the Mayo & in front of our pass through the Cordilleras nobody lives, as the land is very high and very cold. The day we got to the Mayo, the men struck and wouldn't go any further south. They had been getting \$6 per day. I offered them \$10 per day if they would go for 10 days more, but still they wouldn't come any further: they had had enough of it, and it

was getting colder and colder every day.

Ten men left me on the same day and we remained 7 men, all told, to look after the troops and the horses and pack horses. That day we did not march and I got a kind of half-promise from 2 or 3 Indians that they would go with me. It was no use standing still, so next day we moved slowly along, following the Río Chaliá, as we daren't cut across the pampas so short-handed. On the third [day] of this picnic, I came across a Chileno that was living amongst some Indians, and he promised to come for 10 days at \$10 per day with 6 or 7 Indians. We went on marching for 3 days more, when he overtook us with 6 more men. I stopped with them a couple of days, then pushed on ahead to get to "La Colonia", our headquarters, to get men to go and meet the troop and help them through the Cordillera.

I arrived at "La Colonia" on the 15th of May having left the Río Negro on the 14th of February. I reckon it is about 1,000 miles. I left again on the morning of the 17th with 8 men. We hadn't started above 3 hours when it started to rain and went on all night -- next day it was still at it, but as we got higher into the Cordillera it changed to snow, and went on snowing off and on for 15 days. On the 4th day we met the troop. They had been snowed up for two days: as they were guiding themselves by following my tracks, they had to stop. As soon as I joined them, the Indians went back home and we came on, in spite of the snow. We got through, and got the cattle to their camp with a total loss of 53 animals, between skinned and left behind, and the greater part of these died after the snow started. Very good work on the whole.

You will be wondering why I ran such a great risk in bringing cattle in so late in the season. It was a great risk, because I might not have been able to get the cattle through the Cordilleras, and the camp on the Argentine side in front of here is very bad camp and very cold. The reason I was so keen on getting them in, was because I knew they were without meat here, with 200 men cutting timber and making bridges and roads. When I got here they had been nearly three months without meat, except deer and guanaco and anything else they could shoot. You may be sure they were glad to see me, especially as the cattle arrived in good condition. I never saw a fatter rodeo of its size of "hacienda al corte", than when I received them: they were all "de grasa".

Before I got to "Maquinchao", the Southern Land Co's headquarters, I saw it was impossible to get the Bs. As. cattle here that season. So, as Preston offered me good winter camp for them for \$1,000 m/m until December, I decided to stop there instead of pushing along for about another month and perhaps finding poor camp to invernar on, with less time for the cattle to get used to it before the winter came on. As soon

as I fixed them off, I cleared off south to see the other lot, that I had bought "previa vista a \$20", received them and came along as I have already told you.

I am now writing at the Port "Bajo Pisagua" at the mouth of the Baker River, waiting for a steamer to take the men away for the winter. They ought to have gone from here by the 15th of June at the latest, but the Board of Directors and the Gerente, Florencio Tornero, who promised to see to it during my absence have made an awful mess of it and the steamer is not here yet. Tornero was here when I arrived from outside with the cattle -- like a fool, he didn't arrange with a steamer to come here and fetch the men before he left civilization. He got here early in April, thinking he would have plenty of time to have a look round and get away again in time to send a steamer. He only left here on the 12th of June for the island where I waited twice for a steamer. He had bad luck and had to wait 3 weeks before a steamer passed. The boat that took him to the island then returned here, and we have been expecting the steamer ever since.

The waiting would be nothing if the men were well, but they are nearly all sick; at the present moment there are over 70 men in bed, and have been for the last two months, At one time we had over 90 in bed and the ones on their feet are more than half bad with rheumatism. It is hard work to get the food cooked and handed round for the sick men. They first started with rheumatism, then what I thought was bad influenza, started with endless complications, after we had buried 8, I found out they were nearly all rotten with worms. They are most ignorant people and the dirtiest that I have ever had anything to do with. To get them to purge themselves was a work of art; a good many did so & they are getting better; and a good many more wouldn't do so and have gone on dying.

Today the 27th of August we have buried 28 and we have not finished yet -- three died this morning. When we started there was plenty of medicine, but 20 months with always over 70 sick has finished most of it -- there are only a few things left, and of course [they are] the least useful. Then I am the only doctor: you may be sure I have had, and am having, a parrot's time of it, at it all day long and [getting] called up at all hours of the night; but I am well, just as well as I ever was in my life. To make things worse, the flour has given out: we sound men have not had any for 10 days and we are at the last sack for the sick.

It takes 12 days to send a boat up the river to where the cattle are, to fetch meat; and for the last three weeks nobody will go, they [say] they are not well enough and are afraid of missing the steamer. I have sent out a party to shoot deer; once they came back without, but twice with

six. Yesterday the last lot returned, so we have meat again for about 5 to 6 days. On the 1st of August I sent the man I brought from Bs. As. [on] the first trip (and who has been in charge here all the time I have been away) to the island, to get outside and see why the steamer didn't come, and hurry them up. He had a little better luck and got a steamer on 13th going north, so it can't possibly be long now before the steamer arrives. What will happen if she doesn't arrive for another fortnight is hard to guess, but it will mean at least 10 more deaths. What Tornero can have been doing all this time I can't imagine! When he left he knew things were likely to get serious, but of course nothing like as bad as they have got. I had got 10 more men that had promised to stop with me to take me up the river again to "La Colonia" and [to] where the cattle are, but now they are all in such a funk [that] they say they won't stop. At the last moment, I hope to get enough to man the boat (7 are needed); if not, I shall have to go outside with the steamer. The last news I received from up the river everything was doing well there, both men and cattle -- only 11 animals had died in six weeks after their arrival.

I will write you a few lines when the steamer does turn up, to let you know how things end up. It's the very devil!

\*27th\* At last the steamer has arrived from Punta Arenas with the news that the S.S. "Valdivia" that ought to have taken us off in June, went to the bottom after leaving P. Arenas. She had on board all our correspondence that had been collecting in P.A. for about 8 months, also encomiendas, and some cargo: everything went to the bottom except the crew -- 3 of them were drowned. After the "Valdivia" went down, Tornero got the government to promise to send a transport to take the men away. She was to leave Talcahuano on the 18th August; then the earthquake smashed up everything in Valparaíso on the 16th, so they could not let her come south, but had to use her to carry provisions to Valparaíso for the 75,000 people that were living in the streets and the plazas. We did not feel the earthquake.

[Octo]ber 15th, Dalcahue, [Island of] Chiloé

We buried 57 men and two died on-board on the way here; and what do you think of? -- worms and scurvy -- just like the men get on-board sailing vessels on long trips, for want of fresh meat and vegetable. For 2 months I ate nothing but beans and rice and drank tea and coffee. The sugar gave out on the 15th Sept. and the grease only just reached. We should have been in a real bad fix without grease, but I suppose we should have got along somehow.

Two or three times the sound men got a regular panic and wanted to clear

out in the 7 boats we have and leave the sickly ones to die; and they would have done so if there had not happened to be someone near them strong enough to hold them. How I managed it, I don't know. I was all by myself really. There were two Englishmen with me, one a youngster of 21, not much use, and the bookkeeper, a perfect fool: in fact, I think he would have died if I had not made him wear the "wet bandage" around his waist. He was getting very sick when I made him put it on and also pumped a little spirit into him. He started to pick up at once, and in 10 days was quite well; and he says himself he is now in better health than he has been for 2 or 3 years. Scurvy is a terrible thing to die from. It would take a book to tell half what we went through, so I won't try but wait until we meet.

Thank goodness, I was able to hold the brutes from clearing out, or the number of deaths would have been double. 12 have died since they arrived here at their own homes. Of course, at the last, nobody would stop to go up the river, so we left the port quite deserted and all came away in the steamer. I have now got our own little steamer that I ordered in Valdivia last year, before leaving for Bs. As., and I am going back in her with some more men. The steamer will run between Puerto Baker and Punta Arenas at least every two months, so in future we will have communication with the world. Also another small steam launch has been ordered to run up the river; & we are expecting another from England of about 800 tons to carry the lumber. At the present moment there are 40,000 pieces -- fencing posts, sleepers, telegraph posts etc. at the port, ready to ship. I have just closed a bargain for 20,000 sheep at 8s/6d each with Wilfred Waldron, "Estancia Cóndor", north of Punta Arenas. They have the best sheep in the south, mostly Romney Marsh -- just what I wanted. As soon as I get the men started at Baker, I am off to P.A. in the steamer to arrange about the receiving of them, and to find a good man to take them across the continent and to stop with me as head sheepman. The sheep will take exactly the same route as I did on the first trip from [Puerto] Santa Cruz, up the Río Chico. I don't go with them, but return in the steamer to Baker. The steamer that brought us away from Baker brought me a few letters that had arrived after the "Valdivia" left P.A., amongst them a letter from Aunt. I was glad to hear you were all well and had had a good trip home. I also got a letter from Mother -- all good news. No time for more, so "Adios", best love to you all. I will write you again from P.A. some time in December, I expect. I hope to get away from here in about 4 or 5 days.

Yours sincerely  
(signed) William Norris