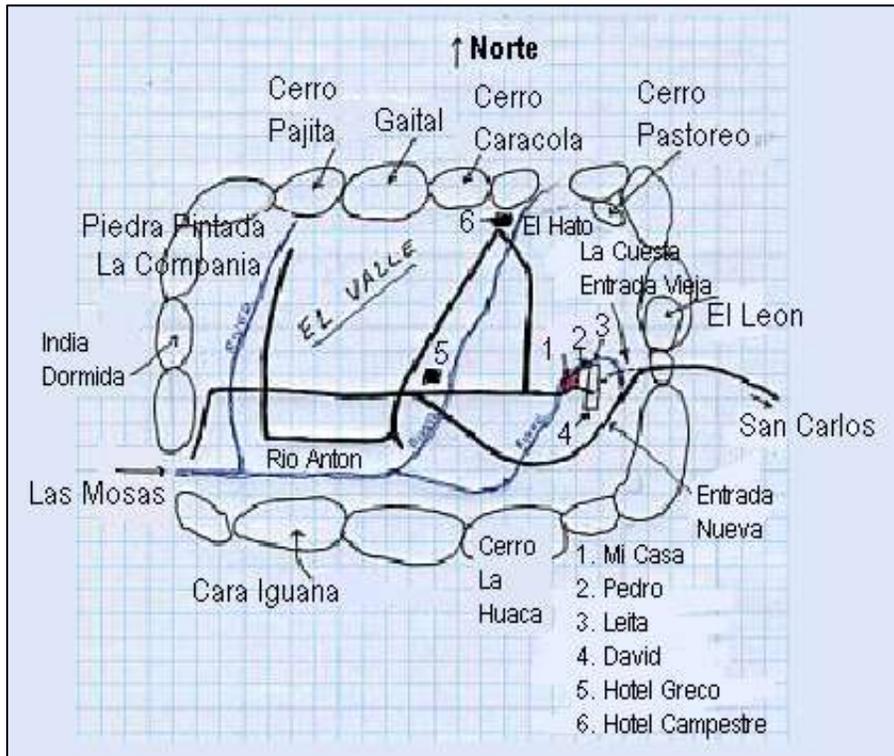


## How We Came To Know El Valle

### Maps Of El Valle



This is an overall map of the whole valley. On the Right, where it says San Carlos, is the entrance to the valley. From San Carlos, one leaves the Interamerican Highway and starts climbing to the ridge of the valley to a point about 2500 feet above sea level. Then one descends about 500 feet into the valley, which is about 2000 feet above sea level. On the top of the map is the Gaital Mountain reaching almost 3000 feet in altitude. On the left is the India Dormida (Sleeping Indian Girl) Mountain. Below that is Las Mosas (The Maidens) Falls. This is a gap in the mountains by which all the rivers in the valley escape to the ocean in the form of the Anton River. Where you see the numbers 1 through 4 is the area where my parents had a house (#1) and also my relatives as noted on the Key.

The map below is a detail of this area covered by the numbers 1 through 6. The terms are in Spanish and here is the translation for this detail area map:

- a. Carretera = Road
- b. Caminito = Trail
- c. Rio Anton = Anton River
- d. Pastoreo = Name of a small grassy hill
- e. El Hato = Name of the area
- f. Quebrada = Creek
- g. La Cuesta = Name of the old steep road up from the valley to the top of the crest
- h. Chorrillo = Small creek waterfall

There is also a **KEY** below for the points of interest of this detail map.



**KEY:**

- A. Louis and Blanca Celerier house - "Los Nances"
- B. Pedro and Nimia Gonzalez house
- C. Floyd and Leita Baldwin house
- D. Fred and Ester Humbert lot
- E. David and Ada Azcarraga house
- F. Julio y Vicenta Coronado house
- H. Javier y Juana Hidalgo house and compound
- J. Carrillo family house
- K. Abandoned truck skeleton
- L. American's houses
- M. Hotel de Greco
- N. Juana's bakery
- P. Hotel Lum (Campestre)
- R. French Consul's house
- S. Conte family house
- T. Vallarino family house
- U. Rancho de la Nina Lola
- V. Square trees

**My Parents Discover El Valle**

My father and mother discovered El Valle in March 1928. Someone where my mother worked mentioned this place, made it sound great and offered to help rent a small house he/she knew about. My father was a teacher and in Panama vacations are taken in January through March. So that March,

in 1928, they made all the arrangements to spend a whole month there. They had married in February 1927 and this would be their first great adventure.

It was recommended that they take most of their money in small change, as they were told that the locals did not have the means to make change as they would have to buy most of their food locally.



*My mother Blanca and my father Louis at El Valle in March 1928, one year and one month after their wedding. You can see the Gaital mountain in the background to the North. This is a "Caminito", or trail.*

Off they went with a lot of enthusiasm and bravery for El Valle was several hours away from the city on roads that were mostly gravel trails. Actually, the road ended about 7 miles from the valley they were seeking.

This valley, El Valle, is almost 2000 feet high in its center, but one has to go up about 2500 before coming down into it. And the road had not been finished forcing them to take horses to finish the trip. Arriving late that evening, they found the little house to be not much more than a hut with straw roof and hardly any walls. They had to sleep on a floor some feet off the ground under the roof. The place was in disrepair and dirty. Thus, the first couple of days were spent making the place livable.

Soon, it was necessary to purchase food and they soon found out that the natives would not trade for money. Finally, my mother had the idea of bartering with some of the soap, kerosene and other necessities they had brought and this they found was what the natives needed. They had no use for money. Fortunately, there was a telegraph office in the area and they immediately sent home for more goods to use for bartering.

I don't know where this hut was, but I suspect it was in the area called La Compania because in that area lived a family of natives with whom my parents maintained friendship for many years until the old man, named Encarnacion, and his wife passed away.

While my parents were vacationing at El Valle, my aunt Ester and my uncle Lucho came to visit for a few days. One of my father's high school students also showed up and they put him up in a smaller hut nearby. He only stayed a couple of days because he was scared to death of the frogs, lizards and bugs, of which there was an abundance. I am including some photos from that trip.



*Left, L-R: My mother, my father, Lucho, unknown, Ester and the student. Right, L-R: Ester, Lucho, my mother and my father. by their "house".*



*Horse riding at El Valle. L-R: Unknown, Lucho, Unknown, Blanca, Unknown, Ester. March 19, 1928. L-R: My mother and Ester on a typical bridge at El Valle, 1928*



*Left: My mother at Las Mozas, 1928. This is the place where all the rivers and creeks in El Valle meet and leave the valley through a pass in the mountains. Right: My mother and Ester at Las Mozas, 1928*

## Journey To Los Cerritos



*Left, L-R:: Sisters Ester and Blanca (my mother) climbing the La Cruz Hill on the trail to the town of Los Cerritos (The Little Hills). Right, L-R: My mother Blanca and Ester closer to the top of the La Cruz (The Cross Hill). This hill was named because at the top of the trail, the natives had erected a wooden cross where they would stop and rest before proceeding on their journey.*

Finding themselves short of food, my father Louis, my mother Blanca and aunt Ester decided to follow the recommendations of the local inhabitants of El Valle and travel to the little town of Los Cerritos over the Southwestern ridge of the mountains surrounding the valley. They were told that in said town they would find abundant provisions and natives willing to trade.

So, "Where are Los Cerritos?", they asked. "Just on the other side of the La Cruz hill, just around the bend", they replied. With that information they departed early the next morning with not much more than walking sticks and a couple of woven tote bags. Canteens were unheard of, besides they counted on finding water streams along the way. After all, they were plentiful in El Valle. Big mistake!

Hiking from their hut to the base of the mountain ridge, they soon found that the climb would not be an easy one. Reaching the top, while resting, they met some natives coming from the opposite direction and asked how far to Los Cerritos. "Just around the bend", was the reply.

Much later, and after hearing the same reply, they realized that this was a standard reply which had nothing to do with distance. Additionally, they had found out that the trail up and down hills led through some arid countryside and that water was not available. At last, they arrived at their destination around noon, some five hours after leaving their hut, and totally exhausted and very thirsty.

After some good cool water from the tinajas of the locals in Los Cerritos, they bought some cooked food and rested before starting to barter for the food they had come for. Much to their disappointment, there was not much to barter for and, also, realizing the long trip they had to make going back, it was obvious that they would not be able to carry back much anyway. Nevertheless, they purchased two chickens, which Blanca and Ester carried back hanging from a stick and sacks of food, while my father carried the bigger sacks with yuca, names, oatoes and other vegetables they were able to buy and carry. Then the ordeal of the trip back started.



*L-R: My mother Blanca in front carrying a bag of goods and holding one end of the stick on which two live chickens hang while Ester holds the other end of the stick.*

But young as they were, a dip in the river near their hut, upon return, was all that was necessary to restore the energies lost on **The Trip To Los Cerritos**. This story was told to me by my parents and I wish I had paid more attention, not only to this story, but to the many others they told me during their lifetime. I also wish I had asked more questions about what life was like in Panama those early days.

With the duties of parents raising two children, my parents were not to return to El Valle for 8 years. When they did, they did it in earnest and we ended up owning a place which was built up through a period of many years.

Louie Celeier  
Longview, Texas

March 1, 2015