

VALLEY LIVING

Dan Cooper, Borax Miner, Who 'Digs' Valley Need for Water

Water, that precious natural commodity necessary for life anywhere on Earth, has become an important part of the life of Dan Cooper, a quiet-spoken individual who has lived most of his 46 years in the Boron area of the Antelope Valley.

Dan has been a member of the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency board of directors for nine years and knows of the critical need for additional water in the valley in the next several decades.

He has traveled thousands of miles locally and to Sacramento to help work out legislative details on a \$40 million bond issue facing valley-wide voters Feb. 16.

Resting on the bond issue is the fate of a far-reaching project to bring in water from the nearby California Aqueduct now under construction. The AVEK project would feed water purchased from the state into existing water districts from Pearblossom to Boron to supplement dwindling underground sources.

Thousands of citizens around the valley are urging passage of the AVEK bond issue. They are saying it is a necessity for the area's economic survival, but none are saying it as loudly as Dan Cooper.

He has seen the valley flourish into one of the most promising spots in the nation and knows that its fu-

ture now hinges on the continued availability of water.

When Dan moved here from his native Los Angeles in June 1937, there were still artesian wells in some areas. Elsewhere, pumps had to lift water only 20 feet to the surface.

Today, some of these same pumps have to lift water from as deep as 600 feet. Throughout the valley, water is being used faster than it can be replaced by nature.

With the projected development of the valley, including the Palmdale Intercontinental Airport, engineers say that the future survival of the valley will be dependent upon supplemental water.

Dan Cooper's position at the forefront of this civic project appears natural for those who know him. In his 33 years on the Mojave Desert, Dan has known that it has a promising future and would one day blossom fully, not only a greener vegetation but economically.

"We have a mild climate, the space, power sources and transportation facilities," Dan noted, "so progress here was as natural as life itself."

"The airport will certainly accelerate the growth, because of the support elements that will be established, but growth would have come anyway. And places like Boron here will benefit just as much, because its

growth will be linked to the rest of the valley."

In fact, Dan is extremely optimistic about Boron, the town where his two sons and a daughter were raised and where he has worked steadily for the U.S. Borax and Chemical Company refinery for over 20 years, and is now safety superintendent.

He feels its proximity to future freeways in that area, along with the railroad, will contribute significantly to its growth in conjunction with the natural northerly development of the valley.

Dan arrived in the Boron area with his parents when he was a seventh grader and went to junior high school in Muroc when it was still called Corum. Those were the days when the present site of Edwards Air Force Base was vacant.

Dan's final school years here were spent at Antelope Valley High School in Lancaster and he made the trip each day by bus. He lettered four years in track and swimming and three years in basketball.

"I never had much slack time," Dan commented, and admitted that part of it was taken up courting a student by the name of Dolores Luglan, who had been living up at Big Pines since she was a tot.

"My parents moved out

here from Iowa and dad worked for the U.S. Forest Service," Dolores explained. "In fact he helped build the first roads in the Big Pines areas. He now lives in Green Valley."

She also said her grandfather was the first to begin fruit ranching in the Little Rock area and her uncle, Henry Sweet, is still a valley resident.

Dan also has a sister, Evelyn Love, living in Boron and his mother was a Boron resident until her death several years ago.

Following his school graduation, Dan spent three of the war years in the Navy as a radioman flying air patrols on PBM Mariner flying boats in the Atlantic and Caribbean.

"I had it made in the shade then and didn't know it," Dan reflected, "and would love to go back now and visit the Caribbean area."

On July 6, 1945, Dan and Dolores were married and following his release from the Navy in early 1946, they returned to Boron where Dan worked as a laborer at the borax mine, then owned by the Pacific Coast Borax Company. It was just an interim job though, as he had already decided on a career as a mining engineer and entered the Colorado School of Mines the following September.

Five years later, the Coopers, with infant sons Bruce, now 24, and Gary, 22, returned to Boron where Dan began his successful career at what is now an \$80 million borate ore refinery.

From it comes the basic substance for the famous 20-Mule Team soap products. Other derivatives include countless industrial compounds used to make porcelain, fiberglass, glass and chinaware and fire-fighting solutions.

Dan's years at the refinery have seen him climb from a junior mining engineer to a foreman, to a senior mining engineer, and to superintendent of the huge open pit borate ore mine, the world's largest.

His current position as refinery safety superintendent came in November and he

once again there were the family "rap" sessions covering all subjects.

Bruce, the oldest, is a former marine who served in South Vietnam and is now using his GI Bill to study law at Santa Barbara where he is in his second year.

His childhood background as a piano, trumpet and flute player placed him in Marine Corps bands in San Diego and in Vietnam. During his overseas tour in 1967 Bruce traveled throughout Vietnam's northernmost provinces taking part in hundreds of civic action projects aiding the people.

Gary, with plans to become a physician, is in his final year at Occidental College in Los Angeles and hopes to establish his practice in the Bishop area once out of medical school.

Both young men worked at the borax refinery during the holiday period to aid in school expenses.

Young Kathy, who had been attending Santa Barbara City College, will be enrolling at Antelope Valley College this semester. She is still trying to decide whether it will be more practical to live near the campus or attempt to commute from Boron. Her goal has not been set yet and the former Miss Boron runner-up of 1967 admits she is "trying to find herself" still.

All three young Coopers are musically inclined, and with Gary also playing guitar and Kathy singing, it is not uncommon to hear all types of music drifting from the home any evening they are together.

Looking back at their younger years in Boron, all three are thankful they were raised in the valley. "We all learned to develop family interests and appreciate our surroundings," said Gary. "We were extremely close then, but naturally, now that we've left home, we're even closer now."

The Coopers also use these now-infrequent reunions to recall the countless family outings they used to go on throughout the Western United States.

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THE GREEN THUMB—Landscaping in the front yard of the Cooper home on Cherryhill Drive in Boron is highlighted

by many varieties of cacti brought in by Dolores, who likes to experiment with vegetation native to other regions.



FAMILIAR SCENE—The world's largest open pit borate ore mine looms behind Dan Cooper. He was recently appointed safety superintendent at the U.S.

Borax and Chemical Company plant at Boron. Open pit mining operations began in 1957.

—valley press photo

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His current position as refinery safety superintendent came in November and he calls it an extremely challenging assignment. His first major project has been compiling a comprehensive document establishing refinery-wide safety policies and the procedures with which to carry them out.

Dan and Dolores now complain that their pale green home on Cherryhill Drive in Boron is as "quiet as a mausoleum".

Daughter Kathy, 20, and the only one of the three young Coopers to have been born in California, and her two older brothers are in college now. However all were home for the holidays and

are together.

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If the Coopers were not off into the mountains on a camping or skiing trip, they were over on the coast or exploring desert mining areas or ghost towns.

All five enjoyed both winter and summer sports and Dolores was such an advanced amateur ice skater at Big Pines as a youngster she was once offered a professional position but declined.

For her though, two brushes with death have curtailed what was once an active outdoor life for the former physical education major at UCLA. Out of the near tragedies has come, however, a new avocation and a more meaningful outlook on life for both her and Dan.

Ten years ago she was stricken with heart trouble brought on by damage to one of the organ's valves. Her first closed-heart surgery was followed by a second four years later.

"We feel our lives have been enhanced by it," Dolores said, as she explained that due to her confinement in bed and initial activity she began oil painting.

What began then as a hobby is now more than a casual pastime and she is presently teaching art at her home twice a week in a studio that once had been their garage. Her own instructors over the past years have been some of the southland's best, including Ralph Love, John Wilcox and Charles Le-monk.

She couldn't guess at how many paintings she has completed, but said it was well over 200, and they have been exhibited at many places throughout the valley.

The travels of Dan and Dolores now are made with ease and motels have replaced the camp stove and tents and a good portion of their trips now find them both taking color slides that can

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Miner, Who for Water



A BREAK WITH THE 'BOSS' — Bruce, left, and Gary, right, chat with their father during a lunch break at the borate refinery in Boron where Dan is safety superintendent after a 20-year career that began as a junior mining

engineer shortly after graduation from the Colorado School of Mines. The two younger Coopers worked at the refinery during their holiday breaks from college.

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be used for the basis of paintings.

"Dan was happy and proud I used his slide for that painting," she remarked, pointing to a large oil of a rocky spire by Monument Valley in Arizona that she calls her favorite. "More than anything, we have learned to relax and not worry too much about tomorrow," commented Dan. "Our family now is closer than it ever was, but now we enjoy music, her art, and reading more."

"And Dan foots the bill," Dolores tossed out, humorously. "When you've faced death twice," Dolores continued, "you suddenly realize that what once would have been a big problem, isn't so big anymore. We've also

learned not to put off until tomorrow what we can do today. If someone says 'let's go,' we're ready."

Between classes and her own painting sessions, Dolores still finds time to remain active in the Boron Garden Club and experiment at growing plants native to the lower desert.

Sparetime away from work at the refinery that Dan once had is now mostly taken up by his frequent travels throughout the valley explaining and promoting the AVEK water project.

Over the years it has meant an average of at least two nights each week away from home for meetings, dinner speeches, or

club presentations, plus trips to the state capitol as a member of the agency's legislative committee. It has been all this, plus many hours of study and work at home.

Dan has four more years at his job as an AVEK director, and it's obvious that he is looking forward to it with as much enthusiasm as he has displayed in the past nine years.

As a near-native of the Antelope Valley, Dan Cooper sees his position as a way of helping to improve and develop his homeland.

"We all came into life enjoying the benefits of someone else's contributions. I look at this as my contribution."

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Story and Photos

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