TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE: Doug Baum
INTERVIEWER: David Todd
DATE: March 20, 2023
LOCATION: Valley Mills, Texas
SOURCE MEDIA: MP3 audio file
TRANSCRIPTION: Trint, David Todd
REEL: 4146
FILE: Camel_Baum_Doug_ValleyMillsTX_20March2023_Reel4146.mp3

David Todd [00:00:03] Well, good afternoon. David Todd here. And I have the privilege of being on the line with Doug Baum.

David Todd [00:00:11] And, with his permission, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work, on behalf of a non-profit group called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

David Todd [00:00:39] And, that is our plan for the recording. But Mr. Baum would have all rights to use the recording as he sees fit as well.

David Todd [00:00:48] And, I just wanted to make sure that sounds like a good plan to you.

Doug Baum [00:00:55] How can I say no? Honored to be a part of the project.

David Todd [00:00:59] Great. Okay, well, let's get started.

David Todd [00:01:03] It is Monday, March 20th, 2023. It's about 4:40 Central Time. As I said, my name is David Todd. I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas, and I'm here in Austin. We are conducting a remote audio interview with Doug Baum, who is based in the Valley Mills, Texas, area, which is northwest of Waco.

David Todd [00:01:32] By way of introduction, Mr. Baum is a camel rancher, a tour guide and an educator. He founded and runs a group called Texas Camel Corps. And that group was established to teach the public about the history of camel use in the U.S. during the 19th century. And with his camels, he also leads overnight and longer treks in the Big Bend. And I believe he's also led trips in the Middle East.

David Todd [00:02:05] So, today we'll talk about Mr. Baum's life and career to-date and especially focus on his work with camels and stories about the camel in Texas.

David Todd [00:02:19] So with that little forward, I thought I might ask you to please tell us about your childhood and early years, and if there might have been any people or events in your life at that time that might have influenced your interest in animals in general, and camels in particular?

Doug Baum [00:02:43] Well, I grew up in West Texas, Colorado City. It's about halfway between Dallas and El Paso on I-20. And I was ... that was a rural community. I was not in any way related to agriculture or livestock. Our family was probably about as typical as any city-dwelling family.

Doug Baum [00:03:12] But I would see the old TV show, "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom". And I would see, you know, these incredible stories about conservation and wild animals, certainly those in Africa. The stories in Africa would captivate my imagination, and reading "National Geographic" would captivate my imagination. So I think those were probably the two catalysts that really got my mind turning toward something.

Doug Baum [00:03:49] It certainly wasn't a career option or any grand plan. I ended up going to college and getting a music degree. So it really it doesn't add up on the surface level.

Doug Baum [00:04:02] But ultimately, through a career as a zookeeper, that's really where the nuts and bolts of what I do now was born.

David Todd [00:04:18] I see. So there wasn't somebody in your immediate family, you know, your father, mother, a sibling, or maybe a kid down the street that enjoyed some of these same things, whether it was just watching Mutual of Omaha or reading National Geographic. Was this more of a just a solo kind of trip for you?

Doug Baum [00:04:49] I really think so. You know, living in a rural community in in West Texas, you're going to have classmates who have livestock. I would have played football or been in band with fellows who had horses, or whose families had cattle operations of varying sizes.

Doug Baum [00:05:10] But it was foreign to me. It really wasn't a part of anything that I was involved with - livestock and even wildlife. I didn't hunt as a kid. I didn't have really any adult example in my life who did that.

Doug Baum [00:05:28] So, I would say I was kind of a late bloomer when it came to ultimately having a career predicated on animals.

David Todd [00:05:42] So, I think it's interesting that you enjoyed Mutual of Omaha with Marlin Perkins and Jim, the crocodile-wrestling Jim, and then read National Geographic. Were there other pieces of the culture, you know, movies, TV shows, magazines, books that you might have read that got you encouraged about wildlife.

Doug Baum [00:06:19] I think any form of media (you know, these are the days pre-internet), so it would have been analog. You know, it truly would have been television, books, the occasional documentary you might see on television. These things were likely the only exposure I had to an outside world, something beyond the confines of Mitchell County in West Texas.

Doug Baum [00:06:49] And, it didn't take much to inspire me seeing Jim Fowler wrestling, you know, crocodiles. But really it was the landscapes, it was the the images of wildlife.

Doug Baum [00:07:07] But, there's another piece to all of this that I think always spoke to me. And it would have been the human / animal interactions, whether they were conservation efforts by people, or seeing how people lived with livestock, not just here on our own shores, but abroad, which certainly would have spoken to me as a young, adventurous fellow.

Doug Baum [00:07:37] But, I think that ultimately my connection with livestock, with wildlife, with any kind of animal life, is always going to come down to the relationships that man would have with those animals and in the various contexts.

David Todd [00:08:00] That's interesting. So maybe the relationship of companionship, or a beast of burden, or a source of food - I mean, that it was that kind of connection, not animals in the wild so much but how people can interact with them in some way. Is that where are you going with that?

Doug Baum [00:08:28] Hands down, that's it. And I think that, at the end of the day, I'm not a complex creature. I'm, I think, I'm pretty representative of most fellows out there. And the stories and the topics that are going to resonate with me are going to resonate with me because I'm an average human being.

Doug Baum [00:08:51] And when I would see documentaries or read National Geographic, and I would learn about conservation efforts or just cultures, you know, cultures living with their livestock, it was always the human element that really spoke to me.

Doug Baum [00:09:08] A zebra on its own is a beautiful animal, But how does man interact with that animal? A donkey, a horse, yak, llamas, and of course, my favorite, the camels - these really, they exist in my mind, wholly and inseparably from humans.

David Todd [00:09:37] Okay, That's interesting. And I think that makes a lot of sense. I mean, it's hard to divorce the experience we have with animals from, you know, our interaction with them. You know, we're always, even if we're just observing them, we have some sort of a connection there.

David Todd [00:09:56] We talked about your childhood and then media. Sometimes there are teachers that are influential, you know, and it doesn't need to be a wildlife teacher, you know, possibly a geography teacher or social studies, to just, you know, encourage you to think about the outside world, beyond Mitchell County. Was there anybody like that?

Doug Baum [00:10:28] There really was. You've hit the nail on the head. I think I was probably predisposed to enjoy social studies, but I would also say that I had really fantastic social studies and history teachers growing up, from junior high into high school.

Doug Baum [00:10:46] One who really resonates and I frequently give great credit to is my 10th grade world history teacher, a man named Ronnie Conner. And Ronnie really made history come to life for me. And I know that history can be a tough sell for a 15 or 16 year old kid, but he absolutely brought it to life for me.

Doug Baum [00:11:18] And, those stories, too, are, in my mind, inseparable from the human story. And, as we studied history, of course, the geography captivated me. And I'm wondering what lives must be like for those people today, not just in, you know, the era of Nebuchadnezzar and the early civilizations of Jericho and Mohenjo Daro. But, you know, the human stories through that really were the ones that would have, I guess, captivated my attention.

Doug Baum [00:11:55] And, just being a 16 year old kid, not being able to probably think any farther back then 16 years, I just wondered, you know, what those folks are like today, in those places.

David Todd [00:12:12] Yeah, I guess it's almost like a time machine, some of those courses, and textbooks and teachers. They can take you to a far different time and place.

David Todd [00:12:24] And, did Mr. Conner talk to you about the Middle East, and, you know, the sort of cultures where camels were frequently used and found?

Doug Baum [00:12:39] Without a doubt, we would have studied all of the planet, Jericho being one of the earliest civilizations - about 8000 years ago. He would have used that as a point of reference, and that's pretty much placed squarely right on the modern Israeli or Palestine and Jordanian border. And I think I was fascinated by the fact that you had multiple civilization events happening at the same time, but in different places - from the Indus River Valley to the Jordan River Valley, essentially - that these things were happening, disconnected from one another, but concurrently.

Doug Baum [00:13:25] So, while I don't think there was any spark lit at that time about camels in the Middle East, the idea of man coming together largely as a result of domestication of crops and animal species that really spoke to me.

David Todd [00:13:53] It's funny how these things connect with some kids who, you know, may otherwise be thinking about recess or vacation. But, you know, crops and livestock spoke to you.

David Todd [00:14:13] Well, you told us a bit ago that that you majored in in music, which I guess would been a little bit far afield from what we're talking about today. So, maybe we can skip on and just talk about one of your early jobs, which I understand was as a zookeeper in Nashville. And I was curious how you started there, and then what that position was like.

Doug Baum [00:14:42] Yeah, well, the zookeeper career really started as a volunteer in Waco during college. I was captivated by, you know, the variety of animals in what was then the old Central Texas Zoo, now Cameron Park Zoo, in Waco. And I just offered to volunteer and they couldn't get rid of me. They gave me probably the worst possible volunteer tasks of all, which would just be you're cleaning up after goats in the petting zoo. And I think after three months of that, they saw they weren't going to get rid of me. And so responsibilities increased. And the zoo was a much smaller entity in those days. So, I actually gathered up quite a bit of responsibility and trust in the staff and administration.

Doug Baum [00:15:32] And then, when I moved to Nashville for the music business (that was the intended career), I needed a day job. All of the business of music happens at night. So during the day, I wanted something to fill my time. So, I thought I'd go out to the Nashville Zoo and volunteer like I had in Waco. But they actually had a paying position open and I thought, "Well, why not get paid five and a quarter an hour for what I used to do for free?"

David Todd [00:16:02] And, what did you get assigned to do there?

Doug Baum [00:16:08] When I had gone in to just simply inquire about volunteering, I had a really nice letter of recommendation from the general curator at the old Central Texas Zoo, and the gal conducting the interview recognized that I had some experience and she told me that they actually had this position open in the primate department.

Doug Baum [00:16:31] And, I wouldn't say that I had any appreciable experience with primates, but certainly I was familiar with zoo culture and, you know, the general goings-on of a zoo.

Doug Baum [00:16:44] So, I was hired on the spot to work in the primate department.

David Todd [00:16:54] And these were chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas? What did you see when you arrived there?

Doug Baum [00:17:03] Well, the largest member of the primate department that we had would be the smallest of the apes, which was a siamang, and a siamang is probably a third the size of a chimpanzee. So not a large ape. And they would have gone down from there through the simian family, which are the lemurs. And then down to the smallest of the primates, which would have been tamarins from South America. So something a little bigger than, say, a Twinkie, up to the size of about a three or four year old human and kind of everything in between - capuchins and gibbons and various members of the primate family. That was the, I guess, the makeup of the primate collection there at Nashville.

David Todd [00:18:00] Well, that's interesting. So there were some of our two-legged relatives, bigger tails than we've got. But did you see any camels while you were there?

Doug Baum [00:18:17] You know, it's really interesting. When I started, there were no camels at the Nashville Zoo. But I reckon I'd probably been there about five months, and spring of '93 comes around and the director came to a staff meeting and announced that he was going to lease a couple of camels to give rides and they were going to come with two younger camels that would always be on exhibit. So you'd have two giving rides, two on exhibit. And he was kind of canvassing the staff to see who might want to do that.

Doug Baum [00:18:51] Now, I didn't have any, zero, not one bit, of large animal experience. I'd probably ridden a horse at summer camp one time, but, you know, it took no great equestrian knowledge on my part to do that. So I was coming at that pretty fresh.

Doug Baum [00:19:11] But, I had a very strong reaction. I knew that in the five months I'd been working with primates that I was not in any way given to that work. The very best primate keepers in zoos around the world tend to have psychology degrees and maybe some kind of social study degree. And there were days working in the primate department when I just simply felt outwitted.

Doug Baum [00:19:42] And so, when the zoo director said that he was looking for a volunteer to do camel rides, I shot my hand up in the air. And more than once in my life, I've told the story that had he said that he was going to start doing crocodile milking, I probably would have jumped at that too, just because I knew that I was in over my head with the primates.

David Todd [00:20:08] That's great. Well, it sounds like you had a lot of chutzpah and gung-ho attitude. So what was the experience taking care of these camels - both the ones on exhibit and those that were being used for giving rides?

Doug Baum [00:20:29] Hands down, David, it changed my life. When I was ten years old, I sat down behind a drum set, picked up a pair of drumsticks for the first time in my life, and as I hit the drums, music came out. I played professionally, really, from my teens all the way through a decent career into my thirties. And this is just what I knew I was supposed to do.

Doug Baum [00:20:56] So that first week I started working with camels, it became even more obvious that that was what I was supposed to do, and it made no sense whatsoever. Yet, looking back 30 years on, it all makes perfect sense to me. It wouldn't have at the time, of course, but the camel bug bit me hard and I don't think anybody could dispute that it was a wise career choice. I've done okay with it. And for something to be that evident and that clear that it could pull my attention away from the very thing that I thought defined who I was, told me that, you know, I better go with this. It seems, you know, pretty, pretty clear and pretty evident.

David Todd [00:21:53] That's extraordinary, because it sounds like drumming and music was a very big part of your life and then it was supplanted by this, I guess, entirely different kind of career and interest.

David Todd [00:22:09] What do you think it was about camels that appealed to you?

Doug Baum [00:22:17] I don't think it would be far off the mark to say that I recognized that they were unique and that people seemed to be captivated by them. And I didn't mind showing them off. It wasn't about me. It was about the camel. And I've always, I think, in my life, I've probably been a champion of the underdog or the misunderstood. And if there's any animal that in Western culture is misunderstood, it's most certainly the camel.

Doug Baum [00:22:50] So, through educational opportunities at the zoo, with outreach programs or camps that might have been held on the zoo through our education department, I really saw in the camel a chance to bridge this human / animal relationship that maybe I wasn't aware intrigued me as a young person, but certainly as I got older, I couldn't escape the anthropology of man and animals. And in the camel, I think I just saw the perfect way to put those stories together and share them with people.

Doug Baum [00:23:34] I know certainly the reaction that I saw in zoo visitors when they would get up close to the camel, which is, you know, an activity and an experience that you can't do with a cheetah or a lion or a, you know, with one of the primates in the primate department. So, so here I really, I just saw a lot of things kind of come together.

David Todd [00:23:59] Well, and I think you described the relationship that you had with the camel as, sort of, one of being a champion for an underdog or maybe an interpreter for an animal that's misunderstood, you know, giving you the chance to bridge the gap between people and animals. What sort of, how would you describe how they were seen as underdogs or that they were not well understood. Can you give us some examples of what that means?

Doug Baum [00:24:41] Well, for over 30 years, I've had, I believe, every possible interaction with humans and my camels, or camels in my care as a zookeeper, because I've heard so many responses over and over. And in those rare moments when I kind of get a new and never before heard question, it really sticks out.

Doug Baum [00:25:09] So, most Western folks are going to look at the camel completely unknowingly, but they're going to look at the camel through the lens of a horse. As they look at it, they're trying in their head to make it be a horse. And every question the American or European asks will always be from the point of a horse. And while there are certainly overlaps and similarities, I always like to play devil's advocate in so many things, and I can appreciate

and understand why, you know, somebody from the U.S. would look at the camel and their only point of reference is a horse. I understand and appreciate that.

Doug Baum [00:26:01] But, being able to step outside and look at something from maybe a different perspective is something I enjoy doing because I think it challenges me and helps me to learn more about the given topic, whatever that may be. So yeah, I would always, on my best days, be very patient and listen to the observations or the questions. And I recognize that all the questions would come from a place of curiosity and and intrigue.

Doug Baum [00:26:35] This was in the early '90s, so we weren't far removed from the first Gulf War. And I think that in popular culture, the camel, to most Americans, represented something foreign, something over there, something not familiar.

[00:26:58] The Nashville Zoo was also very close to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which had a large contingent of servicemen who had gone to Kuwait. And it wasn't uncommon to see families of service members at the zoo. And the camel frequently might be a point of reference for those families, but it was never familiar. It was never something that people inherently understood. So there was always something a little foreign about it.

Doug Baum [00:27:28] And I think just, almost naturally as humans, we make kind of an us / them paradigm or a foreign / familiar paradigm, and that almost necessarily then frames or casts the camel as an underdog or, at minimum, something misunderstood.

David Todd [00:27:56] Okay. I can see that - something different, something foreign.

David Todd [00:28:04] Well, so you've introduced us a little bit to your career with camels at the Nashville Zoo. And, I thought maybe you could take us to the subsequent chapter, which is this project you started, called the Texas Camel Corps. And I'm curious how that started, and what some of the goals were and some of the major activities for the Corps.

Doug Baum [00:28:39] I was walking in circles at the Nashville Zoo giving camel rides, and I thought, "This animal does amazing things." I've seen National Geographic and, you know, read and watched documentaries and seen the relationship that camels have with man. By this point, you know, I'm fully invested. I'm team camel, and I'm doing everything I can to learn more about these animals in my care. And as I see the relationships that camels have with man across multiple cultures and certainly across millennia, I just remember walking in circles, giving rides at the Nashville Zoo, thinking, "There's got to be something more. There's got to be another way to share this incredible animal with the public.".

Doug Baum [00:29:30] I would see the reactions that folks had if we would take the camels off site to, say, a civic club or a children's hospital or some public event. I would see the reactions folks had. And I said, "I want to do that."

Doug Baum [00:29:46] So, it was Christmas of '93, that first year I'd been working with camels, and I was given a book. It's called "Noble Brutes". The author is Jolene Boyd, and it was about the Army's, the U.S. Army's, use of camels in America in the 19th century.

Doug Baum [00:30:06] I'm a lifelong Texan. Outside of these four or five years, I was in Tennessee. And I love history. And I don't think that, at 25, I remember having ever heard this story. And the idea that there were camels that had been brought from North Africa in the

Middle East to carry mainly water, but to act as a pack animal for the U.S. Army in the 19th century in Texas, this blew my mind.

Doug Baum [00:30:39] And, David, I sat down. I read that book - 240 pages - with a zeal that I had never read anything in my life. When I finished that book, I remember closing it and thinking, "I've got to move home to Texas and tell this story."

David Todd [00:31:04] Well, maybe this is a good time to introduce us to that 19th century adventure that you just mentioned, the U.S. Army's Camel Corps. You know, maybe you can start back in the 1830s, when I understand that some of the first proposals for importing camels were mentioned.

Doug Baum [00:31:31] That's exactly right. The story really picks up traction in the 1850s, but this was an idea that starts early, really at the time that Texas was a state in Mexico and ultimately would become its own republic. Right? We weren't a part of the U.S. yet. And all eyes in the early to mid 19th century, all eyes were looking west. The majority of the population in North America lived on the East Coast and the West Coast, the population being of European descent. Of course, you had the indigenous folks who had been here for thousands of years. But to kind of contextualize how little we, of European descent, knew about the interior of our continent, maps back in those days would just show everything between the Mississippi and the Colorado River as the "Great American Desert".

Doug Baum [00:32:36] And I love that because that's certainly true of the desert places, but it's not necessarily true of Kansas. And the fact that we weren't sure what was out there, but we knew it was a desert, really did give rise to the idea of importing camels for crossing what we thought were kind of interior arid waste.

Doug Baum [00:33:00] And General George Crosman in 1836 puts a paper out. There were military men and diplomats of the U.S. serving abroad who started making these recommendations. Yeah, you're moving west long before rail is going to extend west. It would be really easy to import livestock. We did it every day with sheep, goat, cattle, horses. Right? All of these animals are not native to North America. They were brought in. And the camel was just another response to that idea to move west.

Doug Baum [00:33:40] But really the idea falls on deaf ears for a couple of decades, and it really coalesces in the form of Jefferson Davis in 1853. Of course, Davis' name is going to be familiar to listeners because of his having cast his lot with the Confederacy and becoming the president of the Confederate States of America.

Doug Baum [00:34:09] But prior to secession, he was a storied war hero from the Mexican-American War. He'd seen the U.S. Southwest and northern Mexico. He had a true eye for the landscape of the U.S. Southwest.

Doug Baum [00:34:27] He becomes a Mississippi senator after the Mexican-American War, and then he rises up to this ultimately cabinet position, the Secretary of War, which now would be our Secretary of Defense, same department, just a slightly different name. And it's really through Davis' position there and a little bit of cronyism legislation that the U.S. government passes my favorite law ever, which is appropriating $30,000 to buy camels.

David Todd [00:35:07] So do you have much insight about the machinations and lobbying that might have gone on to bring this from being an idea of General Crosman or of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to actually get the Congress to appropriate that money.

Doug Baum [00:35:36] David, this is a story that is going to ring familiar with everyone who hears it.

Doug Baum [00:35:42] In '53, Davis goes to Congress and says, "We'd like to budget $30,000 for the purchase of camels." And he truly is laughed off the Senate floor. The American mind set was horse, horse, horse. And so in '54, you got to give it to Davis. He comes back, asks for a $30,000 appropriation. Again, he's again denied. But in '55, and here's where I think this story is just going to really resonate with everybody.

Doug Baum [00:36:17] So, Senator Davis, Secretary of War Davis, decides to buddy up with a pal of his, an Illinois senator named Shields. Shields has got a roads and bridges bill that he's putting in front of Congress. And who's going to say no to roads and bridges? Right? Infrastructure. And if you look at that bill put forth by Senator Shields for roads and bridges in Illinois in 1855, and you look in small print at the bottom of that legislation, you'll also see tacked on there is "$30,000 for camels".

Doug Baum [00:36:55] And, this is how the camels get bought. This is how the whole thing happens, through adding one idea to another and passing it through legislation.

David Todd [00:37:11] Well, and so maybe it just slipped through unnoticed. But was there, do you think there were any kind of arguments that Jefferson Davis and other proponents of the appropriation might have made to say this is a viable idea? I mean, you mentioned this, the kind of vision of the Great American Desert and camels fit in the desert. Or, I've also heard that there was some story of camels in military use by the Russians and the English and that might have given this idea some credence. Is that fair to say?

Doug Baum [00:37:52] Without a doubt. The war in the Crimea was happening exactly at this time, and we were looking abroad for some guidance to look for examples of camels being used in the military. Again, these military men here stateside and diplomats serving abroad were feeding the government, and those interested in the importation of camels, all of this kind of information, this data.

Doug Baum [00:38:25] But, Davis really tried to sell the camel idea as one that would connect the country from east to west. He extolled all the virtues of the camels, not that he had ever seen one himself or worked with one, but he's kind of collating all of these reports from Crossman's report in 1836 to recommendations made by militaries abroad - French and Italian come to mind. And then, of course, the observations of the war in Crimea, the Russian and the British use of camels in that area.

Doug Baum [00:39:02] So, this was, it was not, it was not a frivolous idea. It was most certainly well-researched, well thought out. Davis had all kinds of ideas for how the camels might be used, not only as pack animals, but he said that he envisioned a, oh, a camel corps, which actually never really happened. This is just kind of a name for history. But the idea was that there would be a cavalry, mounted on camels, swift, like racing breeds of camels, out west. He even imagined Postal Service being served by camels out West. So, he worked hard to sell this.

Doug Baum [00:39:50] I really believe, though, that none of those things were the arguments that really convinced Congress. And I really do believe that it was just having been tacked on in fine print in Shields' roads and bridges bill that got the appropriation.

David Todd [00:40:09] So, that carried the day, I guess. So, there's $30,000 in hand to procure some camels. I guess there are none available locally. Please tell us about, I think it was, Major Wayne and Lieutenant Porter who, I guess, went to find camels to bring back to the states with the tack and the drivers that they would need. That sounds like a complicated story. Maybe you can fill us in.

Doug Baum [00:40:49] You've really hit the nail on the head with this.

Doug Baum [00:40:53] Major Wayne, Henry Wayne, Army Major, had really been put in charge of this project and had been doing a lot of research. It's his hard work, ultimately, that I think academically kind of sells the idea, at least within the War Department. And then Lieutenant David Dixon Porter is in charge of the U.S. Supply: that's the Navy ship that's actually going to go and procure the camels. So we've got Army and Navy working together.

Doug Baum [00:41:23] And, we have taken at this point recommendations from some of our diplomats abroad in North Africa and what we would consider the Middle East. And these guys were lobbying for camel sales in the countries that they were serving in. Tunisia would be the first stop. And we purchased a very modest two individual camels and move on from Tunisia to Alexandria, Egypt, just kind of skirting North Africa in the Mediterranean.

Doug Baum [00:41:58] But, the war in Crimea had really put a stop to any exportations. The British had taken a lot of the camels out of Egypt at that point. So the Ottoman governor of Egypt said, "Look, we don't have any camels for sale. We've got to keep our domestic stock held close". And Wayne was savvy, and I think had prepared for just such occasions. And he brought with him some gifts of rifles and offered this Ottoman governor in Egypt a couple of rifles and said, "I think there are probably some camels around, aren't there?"

Doug Baum [00:42:36] And, it turns out there were. Ten were brought up as a gift to the United States. And I don't think at this point, if you could talk to Major Wayne today and ask him, you know, "How were your camel judging skills", he'd probably say, "Oh, they were kind of green at that point".

Doug Baum [00:42:53] But he could tell a healthy camel from a not healthy camel. And he rejected the gift of those ten. And he said they were, they were all in pretty bad shape. He'd seen a couple of them actually at butchers. So he was offended and he kind of played a nice diplomatic game, saying that this was hardly a gift worthy of the president of the United States. And using a bit of local culture to shame the gift-giver, another ten camels were presented and they were of better stock.

Doug Baum [00:43:25] So, as the U.S.S. Supply leaves the coast of North Africa, they've got right at a dozen camels. But ultimately they're going to get the bulk of the herd from what's now modern Turkey. They would go to a town called Izmir on the Turkish coast, on the Mediterranean. It would be essentially due north of Egypt, across the Mediterranean.

Doug Baum [00:43:51] And, this is where this first shipment, and ultimately a second shipment, would really flesh out the body of the herd of camels. There were 41 on the first

shipment, 34 on the second. And really the bulk of them came from Turkey. And that's largely the result of hard work by our own consul general, a gentleman named Edwin de Leon.

Doug Baum [00:44:17] And, Turkey had a good supply of camels, where Egypt was kind of holding their numbers a little more tightly. Turkey had the numbers and had a variety of breeds which really served what Davis wanted in what historians now call the U.S. Army camel experiment.

Doug Baum [00:44:41] It was just the idea that we were going to bring camels in, and try to figure out which breeds were going to be best for the service, and also the breeds that would best acclimate to the voyage and the move to North America.

Doug Baum [00:44:57] There were, early on, a lot of correspondences between Major Wayne and Secretary of War Davis. And Wayne had kind of a long view of things. He thought that maybe setting up a breeding program and getting camels born in North America and acclimated naturally that way would be the best way. And Davis kind of brushed off any ideas of a breeding program saying, if we want more camels, we'll buy more camels.

Doug Baum [00:45:27] But, obviously, ultimately, the Civil War would kind of get in the way of that. And our camel herd of 75 really only grew to 90-something camels, but not without some pretty interesting stories and adventure that, in my mind, kind of upend the mythology of the West.

David Todd [00:45:56] So, not to go too far along because I wanted to just make sure I understood. These camels were bought in Egypt and in Turkey, but then they had to be brought to the United States. And I gather they came to, is it Indianola or Galveston? How did they, can you tell about the story of bringing them to the state?

Doug Baum [00:46:31] David, if nothing else happened in this story beyond, "Camels are loaded on a ship in the Mediterranean and brought to Texas", it would be a riveting tale. There were incredible adventures through the 1850s and 1860s with camels once they arrived. But this voyage of shipping camels, and again, there were two shipments. David Porter had hardly unloaded the camels down on the Gulf Coast of Texas at, yes, Indianola, before he turned around and went back for a second load. And the journals of the U.S.S. Supply, and Porter's own writing about the voyages and the care of the camels aboard ship, makes for fascinating reading.

Doug Baum [00:47:22] On the first voyage, as they leave the Straits of Gibraltar, they had planned to go to the Canary Islands, which at that point would be south southwest, a little bit off the Moroccan coast of Africa. But the seas were really rough. They had hoped to go to the Canary Islands and pick up a few more camels, but the seas were really, really rough. So, with this first shipment of 41 camels, they were aboard ship just below the top deck. Porter had had the U.S.S. Supply modified in a way that the deck had a couple of holes in it so that as the sails would catch wind, that wind would be churned downward and through this, essentially a stable below deck so that there was fresh air being pushed through, you know, essentially a barn aboard ship.

Doug Baum [00:48:19] And, the seas were just rocking for about three weeks. So rough, in fact, that Porter and Wayne determined it would be safest for the camels to be knelt down. And this is a normal position for a camel. They spend a lot of time in this position, ruminating or chewing their cud, fully digesting their food. And this is a natural movement for them, a

natural posture. But of course, as trained animals, these handlers who had been hired from the region to come with the camels, kind of alternately Turk, Greek, Arab, Armenian, in some cases, these guys then were commanded to have the camels kneel down and then the camels were hobbled in that kneeling position and strapped to the deck of the stable below the top deck. What they did, obviously, this was for the camel safety, right? You've got this naval store ship bouncing around in these waves and you've got a camel that's between seven and eight feet tall, long legs. It's ultimately going to be dangerous for the camel in that that state.

Doug Baum [00:49:33] So, the camels were knelt down, hobbled and strapped in that position to the deck. And then Porter says in his journal that they were surrounded by bales of hay to protect them if there was any kind of movement to the left or right.

Doug Baum [00:49:47] And, David, for three solid weeks, the camels were in this position, unable to stand. They were mechanically right, held down for their safety. And as they finally get those rocking seas behind them, the hobbles and the harnesses are removed and the camels stand up and to absolutely no ill effect whatsoever.

Doug Baum [00:50:10] And, here is where we really start to see the actors in this story - Wayne, Porter - really start to cheerlead for the camels. These were guys who knew livestock. Every 19th century gentleman would. You'd have your own horse. You'd have a wagon, maybe with a team. But, virtually every man on the continent would have understood in general terms, livestock. And Major Wayne at a point says that he couldn't have imagined managing a similar number of horses or cattle in in similar circumstances. So he's really starting to see how stoic and just how practical the camel is going to be.

David Todd [00:51:05] That's impressive. Gosh, I don't think of camels and high seas very often in one idea.

David Todd [00:51:17] So, they arrive in Indianola and where are they first based in Texas?

Doug Baum [00:51:27] Well, they spend the summer of 1856, that first shipment, they spend it on the Gulf Coast. They're acclimating. Major Wayne thinks that's going to be best for them. So they're in Indianola. There's not any real work going on. Although the Army had a presence there in Indianola and the quartermaster there had set up a corral, actually of prickly pear, which the camel summarily ate instantly. They had to learn how to manage the camels a little differently than they might have had they been horses or cattle.

Doug Baum [00:52:01] But, Major Wayne starts to hear rumblings of folks scratching their heads. What is the, what's the U.S. government spent their money on? I'm sure the folks were dubious. It's interesting, I don't think the Western American male ego has changed much in 160 years. People look at my camels today like I've read the reminiscences or memories of folks looking at him in Indianola back in 1856.

Doug Baum [00:52:29] But, Wayne thinks that, you know, I've probably got to do something here to win the public over. So, they start some little supply runs, just in the area around Indianola. And at a point he gets the biggest camel they've got, which is actually a crossbred camel between the one-hump and two-hump camel. Now, this is something that's done, and has been done, for centuries in Central Asia. In parts of Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, you would see hybrid camels, the cross of the one hump, the two hump to make a bigger animal, certainly for packing.

Doug Baum [00:53:10] And so, he takes one of these hybrid camels, brings him right in to what would be downtown Indianola, kneels the camel down in front of the public, and starts having some fellows load bales of hay on the camel. Now, to really contextualize the camel in comparison to the packing capabilities of the other animals the Army would have had at their service, the maximum regulation load you'd put on a mule in the 1850s was 350 pounds. And, of course, you're going to load that on a mule as it's standing up and it's going to be hanging from a very particular type of pack saddle.

Doug Baum [00:53:54] So, the first thing people are seeing is that this camel is made to kneel down and then hay bales are started to be placed next to the camel and tied on, in what is a very, very simple pack saddle. And they just keep loading bales and loading bales. And I think probably at this point, the folks on the street of Indianola are taking bets that, you know, this camel can't even stand under the weight.

Doug Baum [00:54:23] And, he ultimately has 1200 pounds of hay loaded on this camel who's kneeling down. And he's going to have to stand under that weight. And I'm sure folks say, "Oh, this is this is never going to happen". But that big crossbred camel stands up like it's another day at the office and walks back down the street of Indianola chewing his cud.

Doug Baum [00:54:46] And, I think that was the day that probably, if not nationally, at least locally, Wayne's starting to see the attitudes turn toward the favor of the camel.

David Todd [00:55:01] Well, that's striking. Gosh, it must have impressed people who, especially in those days, who really understood livestock and beasts of burden and could really understand how extraordinary that was.

David Todd [00:55:16] Well, so, I guess at some point the animals get acclimated to the Texas climate and landscape, and as I understand it, they are taken to a station near Camp Verde. Is that right?

Doug Baum [00:55:32] That's it. Yeah. Camp Verde was a small cavalry post in the Texas Hill Country. Second Cavalry was there. This is 50, and change, miles northwest of San Antonio. And it was among a line of frontier forts that obviously had been placed in Texas to deal with the native population. By the 1850s, in this part of the state, Comanches would be moving through, certainly were not living there permanently, but coming through Texas.

Doug Baum [00:56:15] So, you have this line of forts from essentially San Antonio to El Paso, and there's an Upper San Antonio - El Paso Road and a lower. So, you've got kind of two, well, parallel lines anyway, of forts that kind of run across Texas.

Doug Baum [00:56:31] Camp Verde, though, becomes the home of the camels. And this is after Wayne had done a little bit of survey. He'd looked at Fort Martin Scott, for example, in Fredericksburg, another small post, and determined that the grazing in that area probably wasn't exactly what he needed. So he just, he looked a little farther west there to Camp Verde. Today, Camp Verde is, oh, probably 15 miles south of Kerrville. But at the time, it was situated there on its own, out on the frontier along Verde Creek. So, you have a constant source of live water. And the second Cavalry was there. And that becomes the home of the camels.

Doug Baum [00:57:17] Robert E. Lee had his fingers in Camp Verde. He would have spent some time there. No other real notables in terms of military history in America.

Doug Baum [00:57:31] But, as the camels take up residence there at Camp Verde, they get put to work doing weekly supply runs between Camp Verde and San Antonio. San Antonio was the headquarters for the Department of the Army in Texas. In fact, the shrine, the Alamo itself, was the quartermaster depot. So you would have seen from late summer of '56, all the way up to the beginning of, and through the Civil War, camels on the streets in San Antonio - so utterly common that by the late 1850s, early sixties, the early 1860s, they're no longer mentioned in the headlines.

Doug Baum [00:58:18] Of course, the newspapers of the day in the mid-fifties when the camels arrived would talk about, "The camels have come to town". They'd talk about the the colorful native handlers that have accompanied them from the Middle East.

Doug Baum [00:58:31] And, it became so utterly normal that they stopped writing about it.

Doug Baum [00:58:37] And, this is, I think, significant, because we tend to look at the camel in this period still as an anomaly or something like a novelty. But, they truly were so common on the streets that they stopped being written about, and it would be normal on any given day in a week to see a group of camels in front of the Alamo or in San Antonio supplying and carrying things, goods, back to Camp Verde. I love the fact that at a point it got so normal, nobody even commented on it anymore.

David Todd [00:59:18] And, that's something. It went from being exotic and foreign to being just part of the woodwork, you know, blending in with the landscape there.

David Todd [00:59:29] So, you mentioned that the camels were being used for some of these weekly supply trips. And I gather that they eventually were used for, you know, even longer trips, some that went all the way out to California. Can you talk about some of these larger outings that they were part of, and what the goal was for them?

Doug Baum [01:00:04] David, This is really where the camel hits its stride and really proves its worth. That $30,000 that was appropriated for camels wasn't even fully spent. Wayne ends up coming back, Porter, after the second shipment of camels. They've got money left over. So 75 camels, they didn't even spend the 30,000 bucks. And they really get put to work.

Doug Baum [01:00:34] In 1857, there's an incredible, incredible expedition. Washington, D.C. recognizes that here we are almost ten years on from the Gold Rush, and we really still have no Western network of trails or a wagon road, which obviously predating any rail service, would be the obvious and clear method for moving folks' wagons. And we really had no roads.

Doug Baum [01:01:05] And so, a fellow named Edward Beale, retired Navy lieutenant, he'd been an explorer out West. He actually is the fellow who brought news of the Gold Rush back to D.C. from California. So here's a man who knows the West. He is tapped to survey a wagon road along what's called the 35th Parallel. It's essentially a straight line from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to the Colorado River, modern border between Arizona and California.

Doug Baum [01:01:38] So, Beale gets this news at a dinner party in Chester, Pennsylvania. Chester is a suburb of Philadelphia, and he's retired. But, he's given this opportunity. And I think if you look at Beale's life, you see that he never shrinks from adventure. So, he takes this on. But, before he ever sees his first camel, he's got to get to Texas. So he's going to leave Pennsylvania by river. Right? He's going to get on the Ohio, the Mississippi, then cruise through the Gulf, down to Indianola. And then take a horse inland to San Antonio and

ultimately Camp Verde, where he's going to rendezvous with two dozen camels that he's going to peel off of the herd, which at this point has grown to about 75 with these two shipments.

Doug Baum [01:02:33] So, Beale is given the task of serving a wagon road, and kind of subordinate to that, is to more fully test the camels. They've been working over a 55-mile route between Camp Verde and San Antonio for a year at this point. But a true trial was necessary. And so, Beale probably, dubiously, I think, if you read his journals, he's not necessarily on board with this idea. He takes it on because that's what he's been asked to do. But he doesn't have any experience with camels, doesn't really know how it's going to work out.

Doug Baum [01:03:21] But, he's not a dolt. He had read. He had done some homework. He'd looked at European travel writing from Central Asia that talked about camels. So he comes in, I think at least open-minded.

Doug Baum [01:03:37] Early on, though, as the expedition starts in May of '57, leaving San Antonio, heading along basically what's now modern Highway 90, through Castroville, Uvalde, Fort Clark, Brackettville, Texas. He talks about the camels being slow to come in to camp at night, that the horses and mules will proceed them. And he's not sure, but he does say it probably is owed to the fact that the camels haven't had this kind of hard work in the year that they'd been here. So at that point, just into the early part of summer of 1857, Beale isn't certain.

Doug Baum [01:04:17] Now, once they get up to Albuquerque, and it's important to understand that from San Antonio to Albuquerque in 1857, this was known country. There's no real peril. There's, they're not fraught with, you know, what's going to happen ahead. There was regular mail service along these routes in these days.

Doug Baum [01:04:38] But the tone of Beale's writing really starts to change as he heads west from Albuquerque. He's not sure what they're going to find out there in terms of grazing conditions for his train of animals, which would grow to be about two and a half miles long, with the military escorts that would be picked up along the way from fort to fort - the horses, the mules, the wagons. The camel caravan itself, which was, you know, two dozen strong. And not knowing what lay ahead, Beale had bought a couple of hundred sheep in Albuquerque, so he would be certain to have fresh meat to feed his men as they moved west into truly what he felt was kind of uncharted territory.

Doug Baum [01:05:30] So, he heads west and he hires a local guide in Albuquerque who had been recommended to him, a fellow named Saavedra. And Saavedra had purported to have crossed that part of the country multiple times. And if you've ever driven out of New Mexico toward, through northern Arizona, that's canyonland. Right? The Grand Canyon. And yet in those days, it would be really easy to just truck along with your two and a half mile long train of animals and men and get to the end of a big escarpment, and then be looking down into something that looked like the Grand Canyon.

Doug Baum [01:06:09] And, about a half dozen times this fellow Saavedra takes Beale and the entire two and a half mile long train to edges of canyons like that. And at one point, Beale says, it says in his journal that, "He could eat the man". He's not a fan of Saavedra.

Doug Baum [01:06:27] But, spoiler alert, ultimately, they do make it across northern Arizona. And in doing so, they've created what's called the Beale Wagon Road. It took them from May

to October of 1857. And if folks are listening really closely, they'll recognize that the majority of that expeditions through the summer of 1857 with a two and a half mile long train of animals and soldiers, and Beale gets the camels ultimately just to north of Los Angeles and headquarters them there.

Doug Baum [01:07:06] And, decides in the winter of '57-'58, he wants to try the road in reverse, going from west to east and check the conditions in the wintertime, and uses camels to get him to a point, not all the way back to Albuquerque. But easily by 1858, the Beale Wagon Road, as it's called, is declared a success and really would pave the way for a lot of immigrant traffic that would cross the West.

Doug Baum [01:07:37] And, in doing so, (Beale couldn't have known this) but he actually created what now is Route 66. So Beale and the camel trail there is inextricably tied to the history of our country and Americana at its best.

David Todd [01:08:02] That's really striking. You know, this same parallel, same country, same landscape, but now populated and paved and a very different look to it.

David Todd [01:08:20] So, I'm curious what Mr. Beale's reaction was to the camels that were under his command after this long trip.

Doug Baum [01:08:37] I think that Beale makes a complete turnaround, and that's not conjecture on my part. Beale's words themselves indicate this. If he was dubious in the beginning about the camels' ability to keep up with the speed of the horses and the mules and the wagons, that all changes once they really, really get into the meat and potatoes of this expedition out west. In fact, one of my favorite quotes from this expedition is Beale saying, "My only regret at present is that I have not double the number."

Doug Baum [01:09:12] This is a guy who absolutely is Team Camel. He talks about the camels carrying water in 30-gallon kegs that they never get a drink of. He talks about camels carrying hundreds of pounds of corn and oats for the horses and mules that they never take a bite of.

Doug Baum [01:09:32] So, he sees the economics of this. He sees the practicality of it. The camels are carrying the fodder and the water for all of the other livestock, yet it's not costing the army a penny to feed or manage the camels. They were hobbled and turned loose in the evening when they would arrive in camp and the camels would eat everything imaginable out west. If it's got thorns, if it's high in salt, these are the things that the camels craved and thrived on, in fact.

Doug Baum [01:10:09] And, these points weren't lost on Beale. In Beale's estimation, this was an absolute success and a great idea. It would be his reports and those of others in from expeditions in 1859 and 1860 that centered in the Big Bend region of Texas that Robert E. Lee would take and forward on to the new Secretary of State, or the Secretary of War, rather, who had followed Davis, a fellow named John Floyd.

Doug Baum [01:10:41] So, Floyd receives these glowing reviews in 1860 and actually goes to Congress, kind of a redo of what Davis had done just four or five years earlier. And Floyd goes to Congress and requests the purchase of a thousand camels. This is in 1860.

Doug Baum [01:11:04] And, Congress says, "Hang on, something weird is happening down South." The Civil War starts. And really, this is where we see the momentum of everything that

Beale and Wayne and Porter and the expeditions of 1859 and 1860 in Texas with Lieutenant Hartz and Lieutenant Echols of the Topographical Engineers, all of this momentum really comes to kind of a grinding halt because of the onset of war.

David Todd [01:11:41] So, the camel was a success but got caught up in the violence and politics of the Civil War.

David Todd [01:11:52] And, I think I'd heard, and maybe you can clarify here, that just the attachment of Jefferson Davis' name to the camel idea probably didn't help either.

Doug Baum [01:12:08] David, there are myriad myths about why the camels, air quotes, "failed". People will say, "Oh, their feet couldn't handle the rocks". This is crazy. Only 30% of the world's deserts are sand. I think everybody's perception of deserts is kind of colored by Hollywood, and they just think that it's limitless expanses of sand dunes. 70% of the deserts of the world look like Fort Davis and Big Bend National Park. And our Big Bend of West Texas is very rocky.

Doug Baum [01:12:43] So, I don't buy the theory that, oh, the camels' feet, because they weren't shod, right, like by a horse, like as in a horse, you know, the camel couldn't handle the terrain of west Texas. I don't buy it. And the journals of the men, I think bears that out.

Doug Baum [01:12:59] That's one myth.

Doug Baum [01:13:01] Another myth is that the soldiers and the horses hated the camels. Well, the horses will get over it. Right? Arabian horses live with camels every day. So I don't think that's valid.

Doug Baum [01:13:17] The thing about soldiers hating the camels, that's okay. They can hate the camels, but I'm not sure if you were ever in the military, but soldiers don't get to like what they do. They get to do what they're told. So this is not a, this is not a reality either.

Doug Baum [01:13:30] So really, I think when we look at Davis, the form of Davis in 1855, when he gets really creative with his Illinois senator, Buddy Shields, and tacks the camel appropriation onto that roads and bridges bill, we can lay the success of the camels squarely and fairly at the feet of Jefferson Davis. But absolutely hands down, it is Davis' name that ultimately dooms the camels. Post-war., Davis' name is mud. I think he probably could have put a man on the moon, but through Reconstruction and in the reoccupying, reoccupation of Texas and the Confederacy by the federal government, I believe Davis's name was so inextricably tied to treason and secession that no matter what he had done, good, bad or indifferent, they were going to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Doug Baum [01:14:39] And, the camels are sold just almost immediately post-war and singularly because of that political tie to Davis.

David Todd [01:14:54] So, I'm going to go out on a limb here and ask about one theory that I had read, but of course, I don't know anything about this, but that the camels not only were anchored to Jefferson Davis' reputation, but they were also opposed by the mule skinners' lobby, that there was a, you know, some kind of contingent of folks who bought and sold and trained and used mules who felt that the camels were a threat. Do you think there's anything to that?

Doug Baum [01:15:37] I think there's probably a good bit of truth to that. I don't think that it's enough to have absolutely doomed the camel. I think Davis is the larger part of that. And I say that with some certainty because if we look outside of the U.S. to a parallel story that took place in Australia, at essentially the same time, camels were working in Australia. Camels had been imported to Australia from the Asian subcontinent, countries that are today India, Pakistan, Afghanistan. And where we imported, by government means, 75 camels to the U.S., Australian private enterprise between 1840 and 1900 imported 10,000 camels, true numbers, and set up breeding operations and freight businesses. And these were complementary to the wagon-freighting services that would have been borne by horses or mules.

Doug Baum [01:16:50] Now, nobody ever proposed on our shores here in America that the camel would come, and the idea was to replace the horse. That's, it's nuts. I like to draw the parallel that when you're building a house, you don't use a saw instead of a drill. These are two separate tools. They perform two different functions. And the camel really was a complement to the horse and the mule.

Doug Baum [01:17:21] Now, were there mule freighting operations here in the U.S. that were threatened by the camel? I would imagine so, and rightly so. Right? If you've got a mule who could pack just on its back, 350 pounds, and you've got a camel who's going to pack double, triple or potentially on the greatest end of things, quadruple, I think if I were a mule freighting service, I might be concerned with that too.

Doug Baum [01:17:50] But ultimately, I think if you jump over the war and get to about 1880 as rail truly extends across Texas for sure and ultimately on through the West, I think it was rail that would have put long-distance freighting with mules out of business. Had we imported elephants, they'd have been put out of business too. I think the rail kind of finished off whatever, you know, vestige of whatever's left over after Davis's name and the damage done there was left with.

David Todd [01:18:27] Okay, well, that helps a lot. Thank you.

David Todd [01:18:32] So, the camels are sold, and then they, after they're released from the Army, what happens to them? I mean, I've understood that they were used in lots of different kinds of industries and even for entertainment.

Doug Baum [01:18:54] Yeah. You know, probably the great myth about the U.S. Army camel experiment is that after the war, the camels were just released to fend for themselves, and feral camel herds grew across the U.S., Southwest and Mexico well into the 20th century. I want that story to be true with every fiber of my being. I want there to be feral camels in the deserts of North America. But the reality is, it didn't happen.

Doug Baum [01:19:23] Most importantly, the majority of the camels imported by the army were males. Not a great setup for a propagation of the species.

Doug Baum [01:19:34] And, if you put a gun to my head and said, "Okay, how many got loose?" Well of course you're going to have some get loose here and there. Let's say 12, maybe 20, but certainly not dozens, not enough to create any kind of feral herds of camels.

Doug Baum [01:19:48] So, this is this is one of the great myths.

Doug Baum [01:19:51] And, it doesn't have to be. The truth is even more compelling.

Doug Baum [01:19:56] We know exactly who bought the camels, where they went, what they did with them.

Doug Baum [01:20:01] In 1863, in fact, mid-war, in California, Beale's camels get sold by the federal government. A guy named Samuel McLaughlin buys them and he goes to work with them, carrying salt into the newly discovered silver mines in Nevada. And we know what they were doing. They're carrying salt. We know where they were, who had them. MacLaughlin ends up selling eight here, 12 there to other freighters.

Doug Baum [01:20:29] And, we've got to also appreciate the fact that camels only live to be about 30 years old. And the camels weren't brought here as yearlings. Right? They were already mature and up in age and ready to work. So a good third of their lives were probably behind them by the time they hit U.S. shores. Now that's in 1863. That's that's mid-war.

Doug Baum [01:20:52] Post-war, the remaining camels in Texas get bought by a really, really colorful character. He's a lawyer. A guy named Bethel Coopwood. Coopwood buys the remaining camels in Texas - 66 head. And he gets them really at about an average of $30 a head. And he starts a freight service from Laredo, Texas, to Mexico City. And for three years, he runs a freight operation through northern and central Mexico on camelback. He ultimately says in his own memoirs that he gave up the business due to banditry.

Doug Baum [01:21:30] And, he brings the camels back into Texas headquarters them in Austin, right down at the corner, basically, of Congress Avenue and the Colorado River, starts to sell them - eight here, 12 there. Some of them go into traveling menageries, I think probably solidifying the American perception of the camel as a thing of entertainment or novelty.

Doug Baum [01:21:53] But, if you ask Coopwood, if you ask McLaughlin, if you ask any of the military men we've discussed, yeah, I think that they would say that the camel was an absolute success here in the U.S.

David Todd [01:22:11] So, it sounds like they were largely used for freight work - transporting salt, working the mines, you know, conveying cargo down to Mexico City. And then I think you mentioned that some of them did end up being displayed in some zoos or circuses. Is that right?

Doug Baum [01:22:36] Yeah. Yeah. Traveling menageries of the day, which would kind of predate what we think of as a circus. There are newspaper reports from right at the turn of the century talking about seeing a camel in a traveling show that might have the U.S. brand on its hip.

Doug Baum [01:22:57] And this is going to be a tough one to really, really substantiate, because, if you can appreciate that, again, camels live to be about 30 years, right at the turn of the century, that would mean that the camel had to be born in 1870. And this is, at this point, easily four years after any kind of federal ownership. So were there camels that might have lived beyond 30 years? Certainly possible.

Doug Baum [01:23:31] But there's a there's a parallel story here that a lot of folks don't realize or acknowledge, and that is that after the Army imported 75 camels, private enterprise took notice, and on the heels of those 75, we had easily another 200, almost 300, camels imported into the U.S. through commercial means, not unlike what our friends in Australia

had done. Now we never got it to that point. But there were camel importations that took place in San Francisco, California, Galveston, Texas, and of all places, Mobile, Alabama.

Doug Baum [01:24:13] So, these numbers likely could kind of help support the story about, "Oh, there were feral camels out west, or we saw a camel in 1902 in a traveling show, and it must have been one of those old Army camels."

Doug Baum [01:24:29] So, the Army importation of camels isn't really an isolated and singular event.

Doug Baum [01:24:37] And, this is consistent with a lot of commercial enterprise, even today. Right? Smartphone technology comes from military technological developments. And really where the military leads, private and commercial endeavors will follow. And this happened with camels as well in America.

David Todd [01:25:01] That's fascinating. I think you've made it clear that a lot of the stories about the camel in the United States after the Civil War may be myths, legends or sort of misconstrued as from those private imports.

David Todd [01:25:21] But there are a couple of pretty legendary, in that sort of romantic sense, stories that I had heard that I thought maybe you could maybe fill on a little bit about that. One was about "Old Douglas" and the other was about the "Red Ghost". And I was hoping that you could, you know, tell us what truth there is to this, or maybe just tell us a good yarn.

Doug Baum [01:25:56] Well, you know, in any great legend, there's always going to be a shred of truth, right? The Red Ghost is a camel that appears kind of chock-a-block throughout the southwest, mostly in Arizona. And this is, interestingly, a camel with a human skeleton somehow on its back and it terrorizes miners, and frontier families, and a little lady tending her garden somewhere in Arizona.

Doug Baum [01:26:24] And, is it possible there was a camel in Arizona that scared people? I think it's very possible. The skeleton strapped to its back? I don't think that anybody could ever substantiate this. I think it makes for a great story. And certainly geographically, it's reasonable. There certainly could be camels out west, post-war. And most of these stories take place in the 1870s, 1880s. I'm not willing to say that there were never feral camels. I'm just willing to say there were never any great herds.

Doug Baum [01:27:04] So, the Red Ghost, in my mind, kind of is a Washington Slept Here story. You see it in many places at different times.

Doug Baum [01:27:16] Yeah, but hands down, of course, there was a feral camel or two or a dozen at times throughout the West.

Doug Baum [01:27:22] In fact, General Douglas MacArthur, as an older gentleman, talks about as a youngster at Fort Selden, New Mexico, where his dad was the commanding officer, a young Douglas MacArthur in the 1890s, remembered looking out the gates of Fort Selden and seeing a camel and kind of being intrigued as a kid. It's a camel! You know, probably for, you know, a five or eight year old Douglas MacArthur, the only reference point that he might have had for a camel might have been a mention in the Bible. So seeing a camel outside the gates of Fort Selden and some of the soldiers there saying, "Oh, yeah, it must have been one of

those from the Army." Yeah, I think this is a fairly reputable source. The Red Ghost is, you know, it's a fantastic story.

Doug Baum [01:28:10] But, the other camel you mentioned, Old Douglas, is absolutely rooted in fact. Now, for years and years, it was kind of assumed that this this camel, Old Douglas, who served with the 43rd Mississippi volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, must have been one of those Army camels from Texas. Where else would there have been camels?

Doug Baum [01:28:35] But, as we as we dig deeper, right, into the historical record, we find that there was an importation, a couple of them, in fact, into Mobile, Alabama. And I think this is much more likely where Old Douglas came from. A group of veterans from the 43rd Mississippi in the 1890s are sitting around telling stories and they mention Old Douglas and they called him an African camel. And this is key, because while, I guess, geographically speaking, a good number of the earliest Army purchased camels would have come from Africa, being Tunisia and Egypt, these importations that privately came into Mobile were from the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. And these are camels that had been brought to the Canary Islands from Morocco, which is geographically Africa.

Doug Baum [01:29:33] So, I think these veterans' classification or categorization of Old Douglas as being an African camel really jibes more with the newspaper ads promoting the sale of livestock that was coming into Mobile. Old Douglas doesn't have a really exciting career in the Civil War. There are no camelback charges that the 43rd Mississippi makes. There's not a soldier on camelback with a pistol in one hand and a saber in the other. He's essentially a roadie. He carries the musical instruments for the 43rd Mississippi regimental band. You would have had a regimental band to lift morale. Certainly a simple assemblage of musicians to count off cadence, right, during marching.

Doug Baum [01:30:32] But, that really, that was Old Douglas's story. He hauled musical instruments. We first see him during the War in the fall of 1862 in Iuka and then on to Corinth. And then it's late spring, early summer of 1863, at Vicksburg, where Old Douglas meets his fate. The story goes that there was a Union sharpshooter on a on a high elevation there within what's now the battlefield of Vicksburg. And he takes aim at Old Douglas and shoots him.

Doug Baum [01:31:11] And, this is important to understand that the battle of Vicksburg was a siege. You had the federal forces literally surrounding the town on the north, the east and the south. You had the federal Navy blockading the Mississippi. So Vicksburg was surrounded.

Doug Baum [01:31:31] Now, a really interesting story: David Dixon porter was now admiral and he was in charge of the fleet on the Mississippi. And I don't know that he could have known. But as the federal Navy began shelling Vicksburg up on the hillside above, he was firing at a camel. Now, this wouldn't have likely been one of those that he himself had transported. As we now understand, there were these other commercial importations. But for years and years, this was the line that "Oh, it must have been one of the old Army camels."

Doug Baum [01:32:07] And, I, I think it makes for a good story. But I think if we just look at geography and the mileage from Camp Verde, Texas, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, versus Mobile to Vicksburg, it kind of makes sense: it was probably one of those commercial imported camels.

Doug Baum [01:32:21] But I, I still like to think Porter would have gone easy on the camel.

David Todd [01:32:28] Gotcha. One last camel that I think is somewhat noted and maybe has a confusing story, but perhaps you can fill us in on, and that's Topsy, who I think lived in the 1930s, and again maybe this is not related to the Texas herd, but what can you tell me about Topsy?

Doug Baum [01:32:55] Oh, I want Topsy, desperately want Topsy to be one of the old Army camels. But as she dies in 1934, in Griffith Park Zoo in Los Angeles, for her to have been one of the Army camels when she died, she would have to be in her sixties. And this is just simply unheard of.

Doug Baum [01:33:25] So, again, I think this is a case where people don't realize there were other importations of camels that easily well into the early 20th century. There would have been other importations of camels. But the Army dalliance with camels in the 1850s was not a singular event. Commerce followed, right, as commerce always does. So while I want Topsy to be one of the Army camels, I just don't see it bearing out. She would have been well into her sixties.

Doug Baum [01:33:59] And then, we find Topsy at a point supposedly cremated and her ashes are buried with one of the camel drivers, a notable fellow named Hadji Ali or Hi Jolly, buried and Quartzite, Arizona, and her ashes are put in his tomb. Yet the the bones of Topsy are completely intact. A colleague of mine sent me pictures of Topsy with tags on it just the other day.

Doug Baum [01:34:33] So, was Topsy cremated? Were only portions of Topsy cremated? What are these bones that exist today? So Topsy is, I guess, is just going to have to remain a mystery.

David Todd [01:34:51] Okay, well, you've carried us a long way from, I guess, the 1830s with Mr. Crosman all the way through Topsy, a hundred years later.

David Todd [01:35:08] I was hoping that you could go way back in history to talk about camels at a very different time in Texas. I think that if you go down to Waco, not too far from where you are, there, there's some remains of a western camel from some say 67,000 years ago. And I was intrigued by that. And I thought, you know, can you tell us a little bit about these Pleistocene camels that were once roaming the Americas?

Doug Baum [01:35:52] You know, these prehistoric camels really are what I predicate everything on when I say that the camels are not foreign. The camels are not exotic. The camel originated in North America, as did the horse. Now, certainly by the last ice age, 9 to 12,000 years ago, our North American camels, our North American equids or horses had all died out. Right? A combination of climate change and hunting by paleo man.

Doug Baum [01:36:23] But, yeah, at Waco Mammoth National Monument, among the couple of dozen Columbian mammoths, there, in situ, you've got a prehistoric camel. And these aren't even fossils. They're not old enough. At 67,000 years, these are just bones. So this is really near-history, right? It's prehistoric, of course, but it's near in the grand scheme of things. Because when we look at the origins of camels, we've got to go back, David, 30 million years.

Doug Baum [01:36:54] Right here in North America, you've got a little guy named Protylopus, who's really no taller than a jackrabbit, but he would be the earliest camel. And then, of

course, through the epochs, right, things grow and they shrink. And at one point, there was a fellow named Alticamelus, who was 14 feet tall at the shoulder.

Doug Baum [01:37:18] And, the one thing that we really can't know, there are some, there's some guesses you can make, but we really can't know. Did these camels have humps? And if we recognized the hump as an environmental adaptation to its environment, right? Times that an animal might need fat storage for lean times. We can look at other markers in the environment and see that, oh, this was a fairly verdant time. And certainly as we move back on the historic timeline to our 67,000 year old prehistoric camel there at Waco Mammoth National Monument, this was a fairly verdant time. It was at a point cooler in our ice age, but really we didn't have the glacial activity here that you would have seen well north in North America. So it's unlikely that those camels would have needed humps.

Doug Baum [01:38:18] But, over the epochs, certainly with climate change and as camels evolved, then for sure the hump would have developed and not necessarily, scientists agree today, not necessarily as an adaptation to heat, but rather for cold conditions. You see an arctic camel, essentially, up in Canada that's not too dissimilar from the Bactrian camel today, the two-humped camel. And I think people kind of fixate on the hump of a camel as being something that sustains them in time of need. But there's a second equal but kind of unsung purpose for the hump, and that is for absorbing heat all day long. Even in a modern camel, they'll absorb heat in that fatty tissue in the hump. And then when the temperature drops at night in the desert, that heat dissipates through the body. So the hump is a heater.

Doug Baum [01:39:17] And, when we look at, let's just say, the modern Arabian or dromedary camel with one hump, they live in what is typically a pretty warm climate. But if we look at the Bactrian camel, I think we're really seeing a glimpse at who was actually here in North America in historical terms most recently. This is a camel who's got two humps on his back. And if folks are listening and pay attention, then they're going to recognize that what that really indicates is that the environment and the climate in which a Bactrian camel lives is cold. And that certainly bears out, right, as we look at the Gobi Desert of Mongolia and parts of China, Central Asia. This is a very kind of bipolar climate with hot, hot summers and below freezing winters.

Doug Baum [01:40:09] So in the Bactrian camel, I think we get a glimpse at who the last camel really was in North America as the hump started to evolve.

David Todd [01:40:23] That's so fascinating that it had these, the camel, had these two chapters, maybe more than that, considering all the different sizes and shapes in pre-history.

David Todd [01:40:38] So, I've been intrigued to see that there have been some proposals to reintroduce animals that were once, you know, found in North America to try to rewild, to sort of bring back more of a virgin Pleistocene kind of ecosystem here, and also, just as a practical matter, to manage creosote and fire risks and so on in the Southwest. What do you think about those ideas, as far as camels go?

Doug Baum [01:41:22] Well, of course, I'm going to be a fan of anything that, you know, validates the camel and its place in culture and in conservation. But I think the practical points of any of this concept of rewilding should certainly move slowly, cautiously, deliberately, because really it's kind of Pandora's box, right?

Doug Baum [01:41:52] We have, man, I say, we, have already altered virtually every ecosystem on the planet, maybe arguably Antarctica not, but certainly in North America. I think we have altered these ecosystems, just through human migration and livestock grazing, just the things that man naturally has now done, for about 8000 years.

Doug Baum [01:42:21] So, the idea that we could rewild, I think is, it's a romantic notion, but I think it would be like anything: like, to what period are we rewilding it? Or are we going to take it back to 67,000 years ago? Or are we going to take it back to 30 million years ago? At what point in history are we trying to recreate for a given landscape? And I believe we're just too far past any one of those eras to ever really recreate it.

Doug Baum [01:42:56] Now, on a, on a macro level, as a landowner, could camels or bison be placed on a property to control maybe invasive plants or noxious species? Absolutely. But that comes really at the local level. And I don't think that we could necessarily effectively implement any kind of broad-reaching success stories for ecological management. I think that's a dream and a wonderful idea, but I just can't see it being practical.

David Todd [01:43:44] Okay. So, I think when we started this interview, you were talking about what you've learned about camels, and just animals in general, in the relationship between animals and people. And I was curious if you could just talk about what you've learned from the many camel tours and exhibits and re-enactments that you've been participating in. And what is it that you think people learn from being engaged with them?

Doug Baum [01:44:27] Well, I think personally, as my own business with camels has grown from, you know, walking in circles at the Nashville Zoo, giving a two-minute camel ride to now leading international tours to places like India, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, I see in practical application the role that the camel has. It's no longer an idea in a book or something I see in a nature TV program. But, I truly see how the lives of people, real people I've come to know over the decades of this tour business, their lives are truly affected and improved and made possible by the camel.

Doug Baum [01:45:26] And, in that, even though these families may today have a four wheel drive truck and a cell phone, they've still got a camel, because ultimately it does make their lives easier. And for me personally, in that very specific context, I see the beginnings of the domestication of the camel and why it was relevant and necessary 5000 years ago, and that the camel still today remains relevant and necessary in those lives.

Doug Baum [01:46:02] Now, as I travel with my own camels here stateside to present education programs, science, history, things like this, I really feel like I bring those stories from abroad to life for folks here on our shores and maybe even kind of make a claim that the camel really never left, that it is very much a part of our pre-history, our history and our present condition.

David Todd [01:46:41] Yes, it seems to span decades, centuries, even thousands of years.

David Todd [01:46:52] So, I've heard some say that camels can be sensitive and difficult to handle. I'm curious how you have learned to understand them and to handle them and train them, care for them, etc.

Doug Baum [01:47:11] Well, I think if a judgment is made about a camel being sensitive or hard to handle, then it must mean that there's a basis of comparison. Right? And what do you

reckon, here in the West, let's say Europe and America, what do you reckon that comparison, that basis of comparison would be? Probably a horse. So, here, the camel is unfairly compared to another animal.

David Todd [01:47:41] Now, granted, kind of the basic utilizations are going to be there. I want this animal, be it a horse or a camel, to carry me or my stuff. But really, that's where all comparisons should end.

Doug Baum [01:47:56] Like I alluded to earlier, when you're building a house, you don't use a drill instead of a hammer. You don't use a ladder instead of a saw. These are different tools for different functions. So right off the bat, when people say, well, camels are sensitive, well, they are, but I think it's because they've got a lot more going on upstairs. This is probably going to make some of your listeners bristle. But, there's a reason that we can do what we do with a horse there. They're only so intelligent, right?

Doug Baum [01:48:30] And, all animals have their capabilities - their pros, their cons. But I think if you're looking at animal intelligence on a linear scale, from left to right, a horse, a cow is going to be at one point. And then farther along that line will be the camel. I think they simply are a little more intelligent than a horse. And that means that they, and I can say this with some expertise, having bred and raised and trained camels and worked with them for three decades, they do have intelligence. They'll look at what you're asking them to do. And they may say, I don't think that serves me. There's just I think there's a little more going on up there.

Doug Baum [01:49:16] Now, they're not a dog. They're not a chimp. They're not a a dolphin, not that kind of intelligence.

Doug Baum [01:49:21] But, when you do have an animal with higher intelligence than the animal you're used to working with, then I think it's going to invite judgment. Oh, it's sensitive. It's hard to work with.

Doug Baum [01:49:32] But, I don't think 5000 years of domestication of camels across Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, I don't think it points to this is an animal that's difficult, right? I mean, at some point a nomad got tired of carrying his stuff. He looked around his environment and said, Look, I'd like for the giraffe to carry my stuff, but, well, giraffe, that's not practical. They're too tall. He looked over here and saw the lion. Well, that's, that's a no-go." So, they adopted the camel because it is gentle. Because it is tractable.

Doug Baum [01:50:07] Now, I can appreciate that your listenership may think that I'm utterly and completely biased. So I guess the last bit of evidence I might put forth would be that every Christmas for 30 years, churches across Texas have invited my family and my camels back year after year to tote the Magi into, you know, a bevy of Bethlehems across the Christmas season. And if if my camels, you know, bit the Kings and threw the Magi off their backs, how often would we be invited back? Yet, year after year, we're invited back.

Doug Baum [01:50:45] So, I'm thinking if a guy from Waco with a two-year music degree can do this, the camels must not be that difficult.

David Todd [01:50:55] That sounds very persuasive to me.

David Todd [01:51:00] So, talking about 5000 years of domestication, I think that part of learning to work with camels has been to try to design and build and use saddles. And I know there's a long lore of how to do that - a craft, an art - and I was hoping you could just tell us a little bit about how they are put together.

Doug Baum [01:51:36] Sure. Well, I actually, I, I have an expertise in camel saddles. This has been something that from the very beginning was important to me because the camel, as it stands there is, it's potential energy. Right? But once you saddle it, now it's kinetic energy. You now have an apparatus by which you can harness the labor potential of this animal. And various cultures across the globe over the centuries have had this animal, and they have created a different piece of equipment that goes on the back of this camel.

Doug Baum [01:52:16] For example, the Turkish pack saddle is this huge thing. It's about the size of a love seat and it's big and padded, sits on the back of the camel. Then by contrast, let's look at, say, the Omani riding saddle of the southern Arabian Peninsula. It's this comparatively small, little, little assemblage of a pad and another pad and a little wooden anchor that has a cinch that goes around the belly of the camel. I mean, the whole rig doesn't weigh three pounds, whereas the Turkish packed saddle is going to be over a hundred.

Doug Baum [01:52:52] So, this animal was given to multiple cultures around the planet. And to harness the labor potential of the camel, each had to create some apparatus that goes on its back. So they surveyed not only their needs, but the natural resources around them from which they would make this apparatus.

Doug Baum [01:53:16] So, if you were to line up the dozen-plus saddle styles around the world, and I'm using kind of a conservative number there, because you've got to appreciate that there's a different piece of equipment you'd use on a Bactrian camel with two humps that won't work with the Arabian camel that has only one hump. So you've got two species of animals here, the hybrid camel as well, the cross between one and the two. So you've got over a dozen saddle styles.

Doug Baum [01:53:43] And, if I were to lay them out in front of you, one to the other, next to each of them, you'd look at them and never, ever suppose that this piece of equipment here on the right serves the same purpose as the one over here on the far left. Each looks so incredibly different.

Doug Baum [01:54:02] One of the first academic papers I ever submitted for publication was on the history of the camel saddle. And it's a lifelong study for me and probably I'll never complete it because every time I do travel abroad, camel-related travel, I'm learning something, seeing something new, upending what I thought was true about this region, or seeing kind of cross-pollination of saddle usage from one area to what would seemingly be a disparate area.

Doug Baum [01:54:38] So, this is, unfortunately your Aunt Ethel's camel saddle that she has on the living room floor that she brought back home from her travel to Egypt is probably not even actually a camel saddle. It's a lightweight replica. It's just a souvenir made for the tourist trade. And if you were to put it on the back of a camel, it would splinter apart under the compression and the tension of cinches and straps.

David Todd [01:55:08] Gosh, it's amazing what these saddles can tell you about, you know, the people and the uses and the animal and the landscape and even the tourist trade.

David Todd [01:55:23] Well, I just have a couple more questions. And you've been very patient with me.

David Todd [01:55:29] This one thing I wanted to ask you is just sort of a general one, and that is that I think I read somewhere that maybe 2% of citizens in the U.S. have anything to do with agriculture. And I imagine that many of them are farmers who ride a tractor. And so the number of people that actually deal with animals as livestock or beasts of burden has gotten really small. And, and so I'm curious if you know your experience of working with, you know, the churches or your tourist clients or, you know, your classroom students, if they find these camels to be really exotic and not just that they're from another part of the world, but that they just, the idea of being with a beast, a big animal, is just very foreign. And that, you know, over the last hundred or 200 years of getting mechanized travel, we've kind of lost that link that people had for thousands of years with animals. What's your thought?

Doug Baum [01:56:49] I think, I think in the West, that's absolutely true. The statistic you used of 2% live in an agricultural lifestyle is absolutely true. Now, a hundred years ago, that stat was perfectly flipped. 98% of Americans lived on farms and everybody had a team of mules that helped plow the field. Even if you were a city family, you would have a buggy and a horse, in the city, in Manhattan.

Doug Baum [01:57:20] We don't live there anymore. That is not the paradigm in which we find ourselves today. So, I think to some degrees there are even city kids to whom a dog is foreign.

Doug Baum [01:57:35] But I do recognize that the camel in America is ... it will raise an eyebrow. You don't see a camel every day. And I'm not even immune to that after 30 years at this, David. Every few years, I'll be walking through my kitchen and I'll just look out the kitchen window and I'll see the camels in the field out there and I'll go, "Holy cow, that's cool." And I'll really remember how I felt that first time I stood next to an eight-foot tall, 1800-pound camel. And I thought, "This is crazy."

David Todd [01:58:14] That's great. It's still fresh for you.

David Todd [01:58:18] Well, thank you for introducing us to living and teaching with camels.

David Todd [01:58:26] I just wanted to ask you if there might have been anything we missed in the course of our visit today. Something you'd like to add?

Doug Baum [01:58:35] David, I think we ran 30 million years of camel pre-history and all the way up to the 21st century. I don't think anybody could accuse you of missing anything.

David Todd [01:58:49] Well, you're generous. Well, if you feel like you've had your say, all that remains to me is to thank you and tell you how much I enjoyed visiting with you and learning about camels along the way.

Doug Baum [01:59:06] David, It was my absolute pleasure. And now being familiar with your project, I can tell you that it's an absolute honor to be included among the oral stories that you're recording and understand that what you're doing is important, and I'm just truly honored to be a part of it.

David Todd [01:59:31] Well, hey, thank you. That's very kind of you. And thank you for participating. And someday I hope to see you and maybe get to ride one of these great camels.

Doug Baum [01:59:45] I've got one saddled for you.

David Todd [01:59:49] Okay, fair enough. Well, thank you, Doug, And I hope you have a good day. I'm glad we got a chance to visit.

Doug Baum [01:59:58] Thank you, partner.

David Todd [02:00:00] All right. Thank you. Bye now.