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Article: Off the Beaten Path by Howard Bryan

Finding a mate in the mountain villages of northern New Mexico is not an easy task because most of the families are interrelated.

Antonio Duran of Albuquerque, a native of Taos County, writes that he was reminded of this while reading last week's column about Esquipula Romero de Romero's 1913 motorcycle trip into northern New Mexico to win a wife.

Duran says he is related to practically everybody in the Penasco Valley.

As a young man, he says, he once dated a young lady without realizing she was his first cousin.

When his mother found out, she hit the ceiling.

She warned him that he should not become serious about this girl, contending that marriage between first cousins could lead to idiotic children.

Not wanting children who would be idiots, Duran stopped seeing the young lady.

Duran goes on to relate an idyllic story of how his parents met:

"My grandfather Duran had in his time about 500 goats which he pastured in the mountains of Penasco, and as a sideline he would gather all the billy goats from all the people who had goats, herd them separate from the other goats during the summer, then return them to their owners in the fall.

"My Father's job was to go and pick the billy goats in the spring, and take them back in the fall."

Among the customers was a man named Lopez, who had a beautiful daughter, and Duran says his father would see her twice a year when he picked up or took back the Lopez billy goats.

These spring and fall visits led to romance and marriage.

"I remember how my mother would tell me how she and my father spent their honeymoon in the mountains herding my grandfather Duran's goats," he writes.

"They would milk the goats and make cheese to buy coffee, sugar and baking powder."

Duran writes that his grandfather Duran was a native of Talpa, near Ranchos de Taos, and that his great-grandfather built the first chapel at Talpa. Grandfather Duran married a Madrid girl from Penasco.

Duran's letter becomes more and more complicated as he explained his relationships to the Lopez, Madrid, Lucero, Rodarte and other families of the Penasco Valley.

In Some ways, it reminded me of that old Kentucky hillbilly song, where a series of complicated family situations inspired the title, "In My Own Grandpa."

Duran says one of his uncles was Julio Rodarte, whose ancestors came from the Basque country of Spain.

"When New Mexico became a state a post office was created and they named it in honor of the Rodarte family," Duran writes.

"The post office has been in our family since it was created, Rodartes, then Lopez, Madrids, Duran, etc., and right now one of my nephews is postmaster.

"Julio Rodarte married one of my aunts and became my uncle. One of his son's married my mother's sister, and also my uncle on my mother's side married one of Julio Rodarte's daughters"

Anyway, I can understand why a young man in that country could date one of his first cousins and not be aware of the relationship.