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**On the Cover:*
Kent Rollins © Shannon Rollins

RANGE

Volume XXXVI, Number 3, Fall 2026

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RANGE (ISSN #1093-3670) is published quarterly for $5.99 per copy or $25/yr U.S. ($32/yr Canada, $58/yr all other countries, in U.S. funds only) by **RANGE Media Company, 31 S. Maine Street, Fallon, NV 89406.** Periodicals postage rate paid at Fallon, NV, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Address changes to: RANGE Media Company, 31 S. Maine Street, Fallon, NV 89406

775-884-2200
1-800-RANGE-4-U *(credit card orders)*

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RANGE is an award-winning quarterly devoted to the issues that threaten the West, its people, lifestyles, lands, and wildlife. No stranger to controversy, *RANGE* is a leading forum for opposing viewpoints in the search for solutions that will halt the depletion of a national resource, America's cowboys and sheepherders.

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Opening Lines

By Rachel Dahl



Pat Russell and Joe Dahl on the porch in Fallon. Photo by Rachel Dahl

The house that I grew up in on Yeoman Lane in Fallon, Nevada, has a great big, expansive front porch that my mom designed and mostly built on her own. She meant it as a gathering space and an overflow of the kitchen and dining room. It is where all the important family events take place — between the front lawn and the house — family photos, deep conversations and lots of bonding.

It is where my dad lives now, and for the past 20 years or so, we have been beckoned there for birthdays and reunions and weddings. Or simply a lovely afternoon chat.

"Come sit on the porch with me," Dad will say.

The other day we were enjoying the shade of the porch and a good long visit when one of his old friends called to say he was in town and asked if he could swing by.

I remember Pat Russell from the Chimineas Ranch east of Santa Maria, California. We were there during my third and fourth grade years, and us kids spent more time horseback helping move cattle across that ranch, from the Carrizo Plain to the rolling, oak-covered hills to the feedlot north of Cuyama, than we ever did in school. I was excited to share my porch-sitting time and knew the stories would be worth it.

And were they ever.

Sitting there listening to those two talk of the people and the horses and the country they had covered over the years — story after story — I found myself wishing we had all these stories for RANGE. And believe me, the voice recorder on my phone had switched on the minute they sat down.

A couple of the names caught me, and I thought to jump online real quick and check RANGEdex on our website. Sure enough, we had a great story on John Lacey and the Owens Valley back in 2016, and I read through it as those two old hands rambled on with more of the backstory than most people will ever know.

We still have a lot of life to live and a whole lot of stories to tell.

It hit me then, as it does most days in a million little ways, how important this work is we're doing here. And how much I appreciate the support you all give us to keep telling these stories. As trite and repetitive as it may sound, we cannot do this without you.

This past year has been a roller coaster. I've been blessed with good people who see this vision and have committed to do whatever it takes to keep this magazine alive so we can keep telling these stories. We've also had some roadblocks — some people who've made it more difficult than it needed to be — and we've done what we can to work around them, over, under, around or through, whatever it takes.

Ride for the brand.

My first boss told me one day, talking about a project we were working on and life in general: "It's a great ride, Rachel, if you don't weaken."

That advice has served me well over the years, and there's no reason to weaken now. We still have a lot of life to live and a whole lot of stories to tell.

There's a lot of work to do — so load up!

— Rach

P.S. If you have some stories to tell or know someone who does, please shoot me a note at 31 S. Maine St., Fallon, NV 89406, or email me at **edit@rangemediaco.com.** We love hearing from you, and we need help finding some of these long-buried tales. ■



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SHEEP STILL TRAIL THROUGH IDAHO

BY RACHEL DAHL



For more than 150 years, sheep have trailed through Idaho's Wood River Valley, moving with the seasons from high mountain summer pastures down through the valley to traditional winter grazing and lambing country in the south.

That annual migration is not a reenactment or a staged tourist attraction. It is a living history of wool, dogs, dust, families, herders, food, music and memory all moving together through one of the West's most beautiful valleys.

This fall, the Trailing of the Sheep Festival will celebrate its 30th anniversary with five days of events Oct. 7-11, 2026, throughout the Sun Valley area of Idaho. The festival has grown into one of the most unique cultural gatherings in the West, recognized over the years by national travel writers and publications as one of the top fall and animal festivals in the world. But at its heart, it remains what it was from the beginning: a celebration of sheep ranching, the families who built it and the cultures that shaped it.



The Wood River Valley's sheep story reaches back well over a century and a half. Long before resort towns and ski lifts, sheep outfits moved through this country as part of the seasonal rhythm of Western ranching. The trailing of sheep from mountain pasture to winter range became part of the valley's identity, and the people who tended them, including Basque, Scottish and Peruvian herders and families left a deep mark on Idaho's ranching heritage.

The festival was created to preserve and tell those stories.

Over the past three decades, it has expanded from humble beginnings into a five-day gathering with history programs, music, dancing, food, wool classes, sheepdog trials, storytelling, children's activities and the crowd-favorite Big Sheep Parade, when more than 1,200 sheep hoof it down Main Street in Ketchum.

That parade may be the image that stops people in their tracks, but the real power of the festival is bigger than spectacle. It helps people understand where food and fiber come from and it connects visitors to ranch families, working herders, dogs, wool, lamb, horses, music and cultures that have sustained rural economies for generations.

In a time when much of America is separated from agriculture by several generations, the festival has become a touchstone to our basic needs of food and fiber.

The 2026 festival will include the Big Sheep Parade in Ketchum, sponsored by the City of Ketchum and Jay Cutler Event Services. It will also feature National Qualifying Sheepdog Trials,

On the left:
Kids pet sheep at the Folklife Fair.
Photo By Carol Waller



Sheep trailing down to valley. Photo by Carol Waller

with 80 of the country's most talented border collies and handlers competing for top honors. Anyone who has watched a good dog work sheep knows it is part athletic contest, part partnership and part miracle.

The Sheep Folklife Fair will bring together Basque, Scottish and Peruvian dancers and musicians, sheep-shearing demonstrations, children's activities and more than 80 vendors offering sheep and wool products. Wool Fest will feature more than 20 classes and workshops for those who want to learn to work with wool themselves.

And then, of course, there is the food.

The festival's culinary events include For the Love of Lamb dine-around, Lamb Fest at the Folklife Fair, Cooking with Lamb classes, a cheesemaking class and farm-to-table lamb dinners featuring Idaho lamb from local ranchers. These events do more than feed visitors. They make the connection between the animal, the land, the rancher and the table.

That connection is exactly what the festival has worked to preserve for 30 years.

The Sheep Tales Gathering will feature a humanities program to be announced, continuing the festival's tradition of placing sheep ranching within the larger story of the West. The Happy Trails Closing Party in Ketchum Town Square will wrap the event with vendors, food and live music before and after the Big Sheep Parade.

Over the years, the Trailing of the Sheep Festival has earned honors from MSN Travel, SmarterTravel, USA Today, AARP, Northwest Travel and the Society of American Travel Writers, among others. It also received the Idaho Governor's Award for Cultural Heritage.

Those accolades are impressive, but the better measure may be simpler: after 30 years, the sheep are still trailing, the dogs are still working, the families are still telling their stories and people still gather to watch a piece of the old West move down Main Street.

For schedules, tickets and lodging information, visit trailingofthesheep.org.■

Rachel Dahl cut her teeth freelancing for RANGE, first writing stories about wild horses and water in the West, learning from Tim Findley how to be an investigative reporter. She lives in Fallon, Nevada where she now leads her own team of local, community newspapers, magazines, and websites.



Opinion from Cowboy Country

I LOVE RANGE

I called today to have a replacement issue of the Spring magazine sent to my friend Bob Santos in Fresno. I don't know why he never received it as he has a secure mailbox, maybe someone at the post office decided to keep it. The girl I talked to was so nice. I just want to compensate you for the magazine and postage. I love RANGE and appreciate all you do.
—Vaudine Cullins, Alturas, California

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED "SCIENCE"

The stories are educational—but some of your politically motivated "science" is pathetic.
—Robert Dewhurst, Goldfield, Nevada



WE LOVE RANGE

We love RANGE magazine! Especially here in liberal, woke Oregon. May God bless y'all always and continue your truth telling!!
—Cyndi Harvey, Stanfield, Oregon

THE WORK THAT YOU DO

My life has been crazy over the past year, and I haven't been able to sit down and read RANGE as thoroughly as I should. Nevertheless, I am enclosing my subscription fee because I believe in what values you represent and the work that you do. Hopefully in 2026 I will be able to read RANGE like I used to.
—Bryan Cowan, Hornbrook, California

HOWDY

Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers. God's blessings and Jesus's love to all. AMEN. Happy Trails.
—Keith Horne, Helena, Montana

HELLO RANGE!

If no one has told you yet today that they respect & appreciate you – I get to tag you 1st!!! Thanks for all you do. Happy Trails.
—Ronda, Rose & Quincy the wonderdog, Grass Valley, California

THANK YOU SO MUCH

Thank you so much. I simply love your magazine.
—Susan McNally, Newport Beach, California

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

You have a got a fine magazine that tells us how it is. Keep up—the good work! Let's keep the cowboy spirit alive. Yeah.
—Joel Stauffer, Bainbridge, Ohio

(Continued on page 57)

ON HIS HIGH HORSE

BY LEE PITTS

As our country celebrates 250 years of freedom and independence from England, I am so glad we don't have to bow down to a Monarchy, sing God Save the King or suffer the self-righteous behavior of pompous Britishers. Although I've never been to the United Kingdom I did study in Australia for a year thanks to a Rotary Graduate Fellowship. When I got the fellowship, I could pick anywhere I wanted to go in the world and my choice came down to the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia, and the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, which for over 500 years has been one to the top higher education institutions in the world.

Initially I was leaning towards Edinburgh because I wanted to go where most of the English breeds of livestock originated. I was also a huge fan of the veterinarian turned author James Herriot, and I wanted to visit the Dales and walk where he walked. But it would have meant living in a big city which I never could abide. So, my wife and I moved to Australia where we met lots of fullblood Britishers and I gotta say if they are all like the ones I met "down under" boy am I glad we chose Australia.

We loved almost everything about Australia, and we heard from many Americans who'd moved there that Australia was like the United States used to be before it started going off the rails. We ate crumpets, drank cordials, watched cricket, went to the local races where we watched the horses run in the wrong direction, played tennis and became members of Roteract which was a great group of young men and women whom we enjoyed immensely. My wife became a big hit with her Mexican food which few Aussies had ever tasted. We watched in amusement as their glasses fogged up and they drank copious amounts of water to put out the fire in their bellies. Then they asked for seconds.

"MY DEAR MISGUIDED FELLOW, UNLIKE YOU UNCOUTH AMERICANS WE DO NOT BREED THE WORKING STOCK NOR DO WE WORK THE BREEDING STOCK."

The only negative thing I have to say is that we had to suffer the snobbery of some Britishers. It wasn't just us that felt that way, most of the Aussies felt the same way. They called them Bloody POMS, which referred to British prisoners England populated Australia with in the 1800's. It stood for Prisoner of her Majesty, or Prisoner of Her Majesty's Service. Although we had gained our independence by then, England tried to do the same thing in the United States. You see, the first son in England inherited everything and many of the second sons were shipped elsewhere and were called "remittance men". Many of them established large ranches in America before they went broke in the big die-up of 1886-87 when tens of thousands of Scottish owned cattle froze to death on the Great Plains.

Anyway, back to Australia. We visited many stations (ranches) while we were there, and some were started by remittance men from England so there are still lots of purebred Britishers in the country. One we met could supposedly trace his lineage to royalty and, being quite impressed with himself, he let everyone know it. When I said that some of his horses showed a little draft horse breeding with "feathers" of hair on their legs he became very angry and said, "My dear misguided fellow, unlike you uncouth Americans we do not breed the working stock nor do we work the breeding stock."

Well excuse me!

Once back in America I couldn't wait to tell a British friend of mine about the incident. My friend always told me that he had a relative who came to America as a remittance man. My friend is really down to earth and not at all insufferable and when I told him the above quote he said, "That's the difference between growing up under the thumb of a Monarchy and being bred and born in America. My relatives worked hard without any money from home and like most Americans we sweat and suffered and eventually prospered but we weren't haughty and we didn't look down our noses at the unwashed masses. In fact, my father used to tell me that during the dirty thirties if a kid needed shoes and a horse also needed shoes the horse got them every time."■

Lee Pitts lives in Los Osos, Calif. For information on his books, please call 1-800-726-4348.

AMAZING FACTS & QUOTES

Compiled by Denice Pinder

► "When in doubt, let your horse figure it out." —*Western Wisdom, Author Unkown*

► "Bureaucracy doesn't fuel production, it cripples it. It doesn't safeguard freedom, it shackles it." —*Stephen M. Studdert, Former Senior White House Advisor to three US Presidents*

► "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." —*William Butler Yeats, Irish Poet and writer, 1865-1939*

► "None can love freedom heartily but good men; the rest love not freedom, but license." —*John Milton, English poet, 1608-1674*

► "It is amazing how much can be done if we are always doing." —*Thomas Jefferson, US President*

► "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." —*Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Essayist, 1803-1882*

► "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." —*Edmund Burke, Writer and Philosopher, 1729-1797*

► "Some people complain that God put thorns on roses, while others praise Him for putting roses on thorns." —*Anonymous*

► "A lie goes halfway around the world before the truth can get its pants on." —*Winston Churchill, British Statesman and Prime Minister*

► "The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time." —*Abraham Lincoln, American President*

► "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." —*Thomas Edison, American Inventor, 1847-1931*

► "Whenever I find myself in a cellar of affliction, I always look about for the wine." —*Samuel Rutherford, Scottish Minister in the 1600s*

► "Be great in the little things." —*Francis Xavier, Jesuit Teacher, 1506-1552*

"Life is getting up one more time than you've been knocked down."

—*John Wayne*
American Actor
1907-1979

► "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen." —*Winston Churchill, British Statesman and Prime Minister*

► "Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not." —*Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Essayist, 1803-1882*

► "Not quite sure how to do it wrong, but pretty damn sure I didn't get it right." —*Excerpt from Poems and Prayers, Matthew Mconaughey*

► "I cannot see the sun, but I can feel its heat. In the same way, I cannot see God, but I feel His love in every part of my being." —*Helen Keller, American Author and Advocate, 1880-1968*

► "I reckon if she knew what all was comin' she'd have a fit and fall in it." —*Excerpt from All the Forgiveness, Elizabeth Hardinger*

► "We need to do our unfinished work. We need to do the things we have thought of doing, intended to do, talked about doing, and are abundantly able to do." —*A.B. Simpson, Theologian and Author, 1843-1919*

► "To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness." —*Bertrand Russell, English Philosopher and Mathematician, 1872-1970*

► "My dad used to say you wouldn't worry so much about what people thought of you if you knew how seldom they did." —*Phil McGraw, TV Personality and Psychologist*

► "Behind every great man is a woman rolling her eyes." —*Jim Carrey, American Actor*

► "True terror is to wake up one morning and discover your high school class is running the country." —*Kurt Vonnegut, American Author and WWII Prisoner, 1922-2007*

► "You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." —*C.S. Lewis, British Author and Theologian, 1898-1963*

► "The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you figure out why." —*Mark Twain, American Author, 1835-1910*

► "Good judgment comes from experience, and a lotta that comes from bad judgment." —*Cowboy Proverb*

► "Don't ever underestimate the power of a good song, a good horse and a good hat." —*Gene Autry*

► "To succeed in life, you need three things: a wishbone, a backbone and a funny bone."—*Reba McEntire*

► "You can't yell 'turn him loose' and take it back." —*Tuf Hedeman, World Champion Cowboy*

► "Life starts all over when it gets crisp in the fall." —*F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby*

► "Faith does not rid doubt, rather it carries us through it. May our faith outshine our doubt." —*Excerpt from Poems and Prayers, Matthew McConaughey*

► "No one appreciates the very special genius of your conversation as the dog does." —*Christopher Morley, artist, philosopher, author*

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

To Pick a Fight

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

Once again, the statute of limitations has run out on another episode from my childhood. This one involved my three cousins and an uncle who lived a short distance up the road.

The five of us—my three cousins, my brother and me—were all born within a five-year span, and for several years we lived on my grandpa's ranch in north-central Texas. The early 1960s were a different time and place. As kids, we spent our days avoiding snakebites while playing with poisonous snakes and enjoying games of chase with Grandpa's Hereford bull, which wore a nose ring with a 10-foot spinning chain attached to slow him down.

This particular event happened around midnight one spring. My oldest cousin, who was about 15, had rubbed one of his classmates the wrong way. The kid told his dad, and his dad took offense that the family honor had been challenged. So, after a few adult beverages, he loaded his three teenage sons into the station wagon and made the journey out to the ranch.

A knock at the door summoned my uncle. The offended father explained that he was there to oversee his sons giving my cousin an ass-whooping.

Naturally, my uncle woke my cousin and asked whether he wanted to fight them.

"Sure," my cousin said, "but not all at once. I'll take 'em one at a time."

Out in the moonlit yard, my uncle held a shotgun on the old man while my cousin proceeded to kick each son's behind in turn. When he finished, my uncle handed my cousin the shotgun and proceeded to beat the tar out of the old man. He shoved them all back into the station wagon and told them to get out of Dodge before he called the sheriff.

My uncle and cousin went back inside, had a beer and a good laugh, and returned to bed. A good time was had by all.

My brother and I got the story the next morning from our noncombatant cousins, who had watched the spectacle from the yard. We were extremely disappointed that no one had come down to wake us for the charivari.

Oh, well.

Speaking of picking fights, the Biden Administration used new statistic models for the 2020 Census that overcounted small group populations across the States, and that was evidently used to introduce significant bias into some Congressional District maps.

According to the House Oversight Committee, the bias leaned to the Democrats. To counter, the 2025 Texas State Legislature lit the fuse of the current redistricting arms race by redrawing their U.S. district map mid-cycle (normally performed following U.S. Census years).

Democrats countered with gerrymandering districts in California, Virginia, and Louisiana.

SCOTUS (Louisiana v. Callais) struck down the Louisiana congressional map for unconstitutional racial gerrymandering. The Virginia Supreme Court struck down the Commonwealth map on the grounds that the Commonwealth broke its own rules. They submitted the map to voters after early voting had already begun for one thing. Virginia Democrats countered with a plan to lower the mandatory retirement age for Court personnel, retire, and replace them with more agreeable political hacks.

It is likely that SCOTUS will not intervene in the Virginia court ruling but has allowed the Texas map to stand for the 2026 election cycle.

It's all terribly confusing, and no one knows exactly how it will end.

In a world of best-case scenarios, all congressional districts would be purple instead of red or blue. A district with roughly equal numbers of people on both sides would force candidates to settle somewhere near the middle on most issues. After all, they have to get elected.

The reality is that political viewpoints are not distributed evenly across the landscape. A blue district tends to elect blue candidates, and a red district tends to elect red candidates. That is how California became a—I am not sure how to describe it—a "Twilight Zone" episode, maybe.

That world of best-case scenarios would also include viewpoints discussed and refined in the universe of ideas, logic and thoughtful opinion. Things that make sense to most folks would win the day, and stupid ideas would be regarded as stupid ideas rather than structural planks in a political party platform.

The term "gerrymander" was coined in 1812 after Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry approved a state Senate district that critics said resembled a salamander. A political cartoon combined Gerry's name with the creature and christened it the "Gerry-mander."

So the practice has been with us nearly from the beginning, and it will remain as long as there are political districts to draw.

THE REALITY IS THAT POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS ARE NOT DISTRIBUTED EVENLY ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE.

The challenge is finding a way to draw those lines fairly and impartially. When elected representatives get to choose their voters instead of voters choosing their representatives, it may be a fight worth picking. ■

Your Wasteland Guide is Barry Perryman, who has a Ph.D. in rangeland ecology. He is an educator, researcher, author, speaker and part-time philosopher. He can be reached via bperryman@gmail.com.







The Gifts of the Sheep

A traveling sheep shearer brings new passion to age-old endeavors

By Rebecca Wells Dolph

MaryClaire Geyer is not a shepherd. Her involvement with sheep reaches beyond the boundaries of any one flock. From removing the wool to marketing the finished products, from the great Southwest to the Pacific Coast, MaryClaire honors all that can be gleaned from this age-old domesticated animal.

It may be stating the obvious to say the sheep industry depends on shearers. Hispanic crews from Texas shear in a different style than shearers from Australia or New Zealand. Commercial crews working large operations impress with the number of sheep sheared in a short time, while blade shearers demonstrate an old and beautiful art. Well-spoken and well-rounded, MaryClaire breaks any preconceived notion of what a shearer should be.

She was raised on a fruit farm in Virginia and left home to attend college in Washington state. After two semesters, the call of real, meaningful work prevailed. MaryClaire left college to work on vegetable farms and later at a sheep dairy.

"In 2017, when a team of traveling shearers came to shear those sheep, I was immediately interested in the process," she says. "I left that first shearing day with a raw fleece I was eager to learn to spin and a dream of being the person harvesting the wool."

Although MaryClaire has taught herself many skills, she laughs a little when explaining that shearing was not one of them. After attending a shearing school in California, she began shearing small neighborhood flocks in Washington.

"It was so hard in the beginning," she says. "I kept pursuing any shearing classes I could find. I'm really grateful to the producers who let me shear their sheep when I was a beginner and the shearers who invited me to work with them."

In 2018, MaryClaire attended an advanced shearing school in the Midwest taught by Australian instructor Mike Pora. There she met Jerry Nuytten, who connected her with a commercial shearing run through Texas and New Mexico during February and March.

Working with a crew allowed her to concentrate on improving her interaction with the sheep.

"There is a very dynamic dialogue happening between sheep and shearer," she says. "There is the obvious pattern—the footwork and the blows of the handpiece—but there is also a very subtle exchange between the body of the shearer and the body of the sheep. The sheep will usually tell you when they are getting uncomfortable before they start kicking and wiggling, and you have a fleeting chance to adjust."

U.S. WOOL
PUT TO GOOD USE

America's wool industry has worked hard to remain visible to a public increasingly removed from farms and ranches, but even those familiar with agriculture can forget the breadth of the resources available to us.

America's wool industry has worked hard to remain visible to a public increasingly removed from farms and ranches, but even those familiar with agriculture can forget the breadth of the resources available to us.
MaryClaire does an excellent job explaining how wool can be put to its most appropriate use.
"We have a huge diversity of sheep breeds in the U.S., especially when you include small flocks," she says. "There are the fine-wool range sheep of the West producing fine, soft white wool for the global wool market. There are the heavier-bodied, medium-wool sheep that make great all-purpose meat-and-fleece flocks on small farms and homesteads—Romney, Bluefaced Leicester and Dorset. And there are remarkably long-wooled sheep with coarse, durable fibers in an astounding array of colors—Icelandic, Karakul and Churro. There are countless others."

During a commercial shearing run, wool handlers begin the process of determining how the wool will be used. They identify the type and quality of most fleeces, then separate outliers according to the fineness and strength of the wool.

The differences among wool types become apparent as the raw material is processed. A fleece must first be skirted, with matted or dirty wool removed. Even the washing process differs by type. Fine wool is delicate and laden with grease, while longer, coarser wool contains less grease and may be more easily processed by hand.

The washed wool is prepared by combing or carding the fibers. Fine wool strands have a smaller diameter, measured in microns, and are softer, making them well suited for garments worn next to the skin. Coarser strands are sturdier.

Spinning yarn is commonly demonstrated, but felting is less familiar. Through heat and agitation, the small scales on each wool fiber interlock to create fabric.

Coarse wool, especially from small flocks, is often wasted, and one of MaryClaire's ambitions is to see more of it used. She describes its striking natural colors—black, heather gray and many shades of brown—as well as its durability and ability to shed moisture.

Working with a small mill to have saddle pads woven is a first step toward seeing this wool put to good use. The next is seeing the pads sold, used and appreciated.

MaryClaire is marketing the products through RamblingRoseWool.com. RANGE readers can visit the website and support the use of resources produced here at home.



These days, MaryClaire still uses her time on the commercial run to refine her pattern—the specific sequence through which a sheep is sheared. Under those consistent conditions, she can shear 12 to 16 sheep an hour.

After the commercial run, she travels through the Southwest, shearing for individuals on the Navajo Nation. Those connections were initially made through her involvement with Rainbow Fiber, a former wool-buying cooperative associated with the Churro sheep project. See RANGE, Summer 2025.

May and June find her traveling across Washington state, shearing small flocks. It is a life she loves.

"I have my camper set up pretty cozy," she says. "I love seeing the same places, sheep and families annually. They become familiar but are still novel enough to be exciting."

Most shearing is done during the spring, although small flocks of Icelandic sheep require a second shearing in October. The spring months can be intense. When a shearing day ends, MaryClaire must still wash and sharpen her gear. She uses specialized grinder plates to sharpen the comb and cutter of a motor-driven handpiece. Other days require long drives between ranches. It is no wonder she spends much of the offseason preparing.

The variety of shearing opportunities and the countless sheep she has shorn have given MaryClaire the experience to carry the wool beyond the shearing job.

Her grandmother and cousin taught her to knit when she was young. Around the time she began shearing, MaryClaire learned to process raw wool, spin and felt. Each skill contributed to her understanding of how best to use different types of wool.

"I absolutely love shearing a fleece, assessing the wool for its best use and then seeing it through to its final outcome," she says.

MaryClaire is not tied to any one project. She creates in whatever direction the wool inspires. She enjoys spinning and knitting many kinds of items, particularly those with practical uses.

"If I need a hat, I knit one," she says. "If I need a computer case, I can felt it."

She has made felted slippers, bags, cozies and coasters, as well as larger flat pieces that can be used as rugs. Once or twice a year, she gathers her finished work and holds a sale through Instagram. She has also begun working with local artisan mills on a couple of her most exciting projects.

One is best explained in MaryClaire's own words:

"I have been getting New Mexico fine wool from the King Ranch in Yeso, New Mexico. When we are there shearing, I am just drooling over the fleeces. It exemplifies the bright white, long, fine, high-quality wool for which Roswell has built a reputation.

"I have been designing custom yarns with this wool and collaborating with a great small mill in Washington to have them made. From this, I have my annual yarn supply, the family that cares for the sheep has its annual supply, and we share it with folks who want the same thing by selling it in 10-skein lots I call a *Sweater Share*."

"I usually mix their wool with some colored wool from my small-flock run in the Northwest. Every year's yarn is unique."







During her travels with the commercial shearing crew, MaryClaire gathers fine wool from New Mexico's King Ranch and has it made into yarn at an artisan mill. She uses some for her own projects, like this beautiful handknit sweater. Photos courtesy MaryClaire Geyer



The other project requires a bit of background. MaryClaire explains that many ancient breeds of sheep have not been bred for the qualities dominating the modern wool market. Their wool is typically coarser and more colorful.

Although it is not suited for next-to-skin garments, MaryClaire sees this wool as a gift from the sheep every bit as valuable as finer fleece.

She has begun making ropes from these fibers, hand-spinning single strands and then twisting different colors together on a hand-cranked rope-making machine. The length and durability of the hardy fibers make them ideal for reins and dog leashes.

The wool from Icelandic sheep, common in small flocks throughout the Pacific Northwest, has particular virtues.

"It has a coarse, long outer layer that keeps rain and snow shedding off the sheep and a fine, lush inner coat that holds warmth," MaryClaire says. "It is really durable wool, and the colors are completely captivating."

After washing the wool she gathers during her Washington shearing run, she sends it to a small mill that custom-weaves rugs and saddle pads. Saddle pads have proven to be an ideal use for coarser wool. See sidebar.

"Riding up into the mountains with wool reins in my hands and a wool saddle pad beneath me makes me very, very happy," MaryClaire says. "I feel that I am aligning myself with the gifts of the sheep."





MaryClaire's smile reflects her love of her profession as she shears this sheep near Los Lunas, New Mexico (April, 2025). Photos courtesy MaryClaire Geyer

Gifts Beyond Wool

Appreciating the gifts of the sheep extends to appreciating all that comes from human interaction with nature.

Shearing season does not last all year, leaving MaryClaire time to garden at her home near Washington's Cascade Mountains. She raises food, medicinal plants and plants used for natural dyes. Herbs are dried to make tea for the road, while soaps and salves made from sheep fat become part of the care package she takes on long shearing days.

She cans meat stews to keep herself nourished through the traveling months and explains her sourcing with a smile.

"When someone has a cull ram or an old rooster, they call me to butcher," she says.

Such food projects, along with a couple of mustangs, mule packing and many friends, fill what little spare time remains.

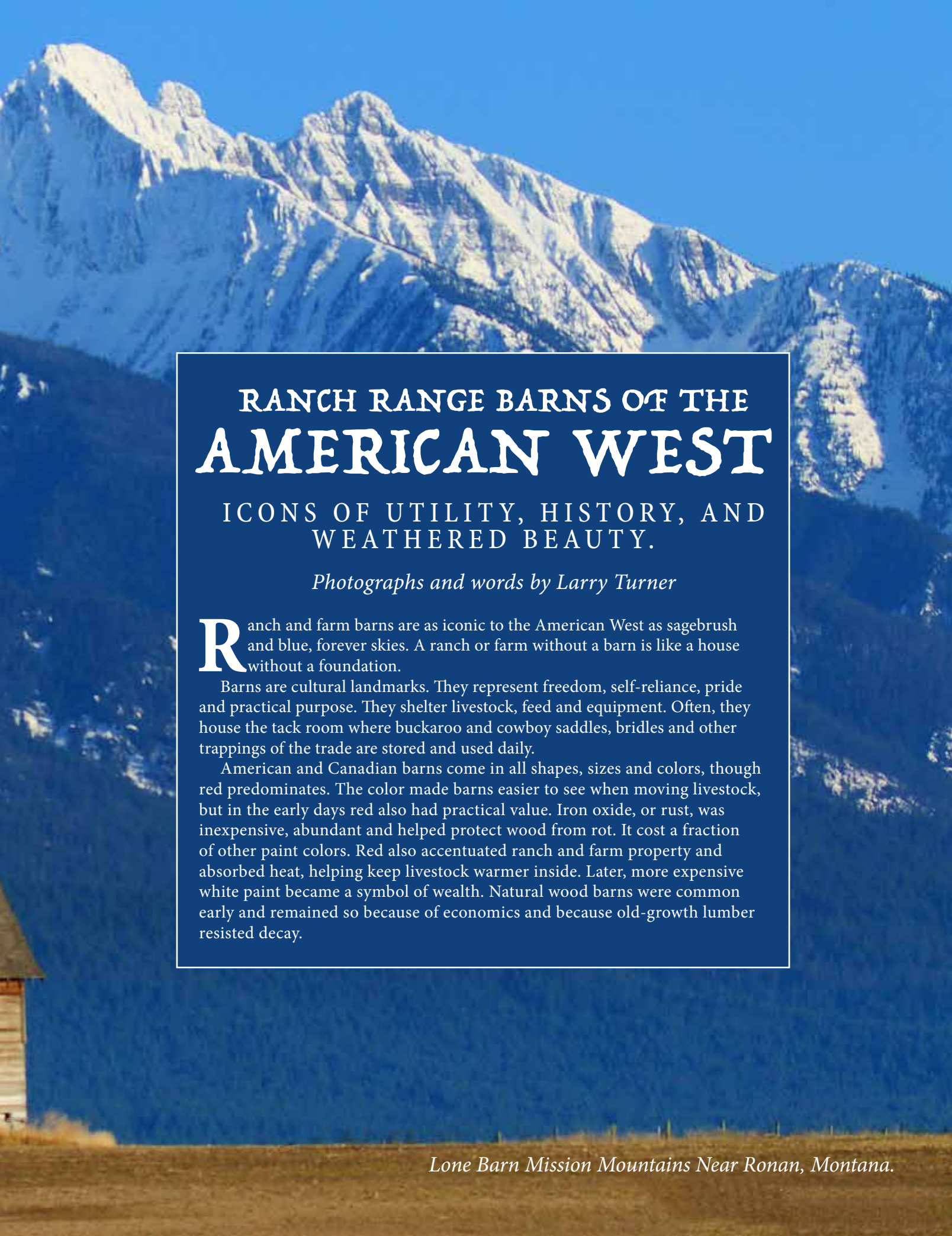
MaryClaire considers herself a professional sheep shearer because she has chosen to make her living in the trade. Other marks of professionalism emerge as she talks: the continued honing of difficult skills, a commitment to the animals and a passion for doing the work well.

Perhaps her own description says it best: Her gift to the sheep is shearing and handling them well. She celebrates their gift of wool by using it well.■

Rebecca Wells Dolph is a ranch wife in central New Mexico. She spends most of her time feeding her family, doing chores and homeschooling, but she also cowboys every chance she gets. Writing for RANGE gives her an opportunity to showcase the life she loves.







RANCH RANGE BARNS OF THE AMERICAN WEST

ICONS OF UTILITY, HISTORY, AND WEATHERED BEAUTY.

Photographs and words by Larry Turner

Ranch and farm barns are as iconic to the American West as sagebrush and blue, forever skies. A ranch or farm without a barn is like a house without a foundation.

Barns are cultural landmarks. They represent freedom, self-reliance, pride and practical purpose. They shelter livestock, feed and equipment. Often, they house the tack room where buckaroo and cowboy saddles, bridles and other trappings of the trade are stored and used daily.

American and Canadian barns come in all shapes, sizes and colors, though red predominates. The color made barns easier to see when moving livestock, but in the early days red also had practical value. Iron oxide, or rust, was inexpensive, abundant and helped protect wood from rot. It cost a fraction of other paint colors. Red also accentuated ranch and farm property and absorbed heat, helping keep livestock warmer inside. Later, more expensive white paint became a symbol of wealth. Natural wood barns were common early and remained so because of economics and because old-growth lumber resisted decay.

Lone Barn Mission Mountains Near Ronan, Montana.

The history of ranch and farm barn design in America began with the countries from which immigrants came, then changed according to location, climate and use. Dutch influence, especially in the dairy business, produced square barns with gable ends and large wagon doors. German settlers built two-level barns into hillsides, allowing wagons to drive into the upper hayloft while livestock stayed below, insulated by stonework. English barns were simpler structures with central driveways. Prairie barns used low-sloping roofs to withstand fierce winds. Heavy-snow regions required steep roofs to shed snow. Round barns developed as hay forks made it possible to store hay with fewer interior support posts.



Oregon's Alvord Ranch crew and a Oregon Public Broadcasting film crew on 9-11. Ranch owner Paul Davis is on the far left. Photographer Larry Turner is fifth from the left. Film producer and director Rick Ponte is second from the right. A film--Shooting the West-- was made and released about Turner as a still photographer documenting ranch life in the American West.



Wampler Ranch Barn, Rocky Point, Oregon

The Dutch and English barns of America's East Coast did not fit the needs of large-scale livestock ranching in the West. That need led to the Western ranch barn, with its large, sweeping roofline and long slopes extending low to the ground. Those lines helped keep roofs from being torn off in high winds. The interiors allowed room for large hay wagons, pens for horses and cattle, and shelter for other livestock.



Whitehorse Ranch, Oregon Barn. Buckaroo Crew Loading Day Mounts



Alberta, Canada Barn



Eastern Washington Horse Barn



Eastern Washington Brown Barn



Hapgood Ranch Barn and Hapgood Family. Lake City, California



Summer Barn. Malin, Oregon



Wausaw Wisconsin Barn

The gambrel roof eventually became common in ranch barn construction, with a gentler pitch on the upper portion and a steeper pitch below. Upper haylofts stored feed, while the lower level housed livestock, often with feeding troughs.

In the early and mid-1800s, barns were scarce on the Western landscape. Cattle roamed freely, tended by cowboy and buckaroo crews. The catastrophic winter of 1886-87 devastated open-range cattle herds across parts of the West. After that, ranchers began building larger barns to protect livestock and feed. Fencing, cultivated pastures and hay production became more prominent.

Tack rooms for saddles and other cowboy and buckaroo gear are often inside barns, making work easier and more efficient for horses and ranch hands. At the end of a working day, horses are unsaddled and released into a corral or field attached to the barn, often near hay-feeding stations. Feed rooms for livestock feed and supplements are also an integral part of many barns. Some include grooming and wash bays with nonslip concrete floors. A few have living quarters for hands, and in rare cases, family living quarters for property owners.



Sue Fairclo and John House Head to the Barn to Get Out of a Snowstorm. Poe Valley, Oregon

Fast forward to 2026, and many old barns have become storage centers for equipment, grain and feed. But plenty of ranches, especially larger spreads such as the ZX in Oregon, still use barns as they were originally intended.

Older barns often must be shored up, especially their roofs, and remodeled if they are to stand the test of time. Many have been abandoned and left to collapse. Less-expensive pole barns have often replaced them.

Still, the Western landscape is dotted with these sentinels and memories of earlier times. Their aesthetic represents history and decaying beauty across North America. Beauty and nostalgia come to mind when traveling country roads and coming upon barns, each with its own character. A working barn remains an enduring and endearing part of the Western landscape. ■

Larry Turner is a longtime contributor to RANGE. He can be reached at skiturn789@yahoo.com. He co-owns the online travel magazine highonadventure.com.

Wilderness Ranch

In the middle of bustling Southern California, there's a ranch.

By Lazelle Jones

A small cow-calf operation surrounded by millions of people, Wilderness Ranch could not feel farther from the maddening crowd if it were in Wyoming's Big Horn Basin.

Tucked along the crest of the Santa Ana Mountains, which run from Corona in the north toward the Mexican border in the south, Wilderness Ranch is small but robust. The land Bob Hank purchased nearly 50 years ago comes with grazing rights on approximately 13,000 acres. The permits trace back to the early 1900s.

Hank says the wilderness designation protects the grazing allotment from being eliminated through a simple administrative decision. The ranch is also crossed by several well-marked wilderness hiking trails, an arrangement that, for the most part, works well for everyone.

The California Cattlemen's Association reports that California is home to thousands of cattle ranches, many of them small cow-calf operations. Wilderness Ranch fits squarely into that category, with roughly 50 mother cows.

It is a grazing operation with no routine supplemental feeding, meaning Hank's cattle remain on the range year-round.

Grazing in these mountains is good. Meadows are carpeted with cienega grass, a bunchgrass Hank says is high in protein and puts weight on cattle quickly. He keeps a mother cow until she stops producing a calf, which is often at about 13 years of age.

Angus is his breed of choice. Hank says Angus calves gain weight quickly and have the bone and body structure to put that weight in the right places.

He purchased the ranch and grazing rights from the Stuart family, which settled in the area in the late 1800s and later homesteaded in the mountains.

For a time, Hank and neighboring rancher Robert Fraser tried raising Scottish Highland cattle. They eventually changed their minds.

The animals are beautiful and produce excellent beef, Hank said, but the breed is not widely recognized at the meat counter. Highland cattle also carry massive horns and know how to use them.

Hank said he once saw a Highland cow turn her head and, with the tip of a horn measuring several feet long, pick a fly from her hindquarter.





To the Left: Bob's Hat, photo by Lazelle Jones.
Above: Bob Fraser photo courtesy of John McGuire

Gathering the cattle

In June, hired hands arrive to gather the cows.

Horses are used because motorized vehicles do not work well in the dense undergrowth and steep terrain. Cowboys ride through coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodlands and coniferous forests, then descend into deep ravines to find the cattle.

Getting the job done can mean riding 14 miles from the ranch house down toward San Juan Capistrano, gathering the cows and pushing them back up the mountain.

The calves are branded, castrated, vaccinated and tagged. Identification chips are implanted, and a detailed record is opened or updated for each animal.

Yearling heifers are retained to replace mother cows that no longer produce calves. Steers and aged cows are sold to a meat processor in Corona.

"The ideal weight for a steer to go to market is 800 pounds," Hank said.

He explained that processing equipment is designed for cattle within a certain size range. Keeping calves until they become heavier can sometimes result in a lower price per pound because of additional processing costs.

The Wilderness Ranch grazing allotment straddles the Orange and Riverside county line running north to south through the Santa Ana Mountains.

The mountains look much as they might have 250 years ago, when the region belonged to Spain and cattle ranching was tied to Mission San Juan Capistrano.

In 1769, the Spanish Crown sent the Portolá expedition to explore and map the region. Sgt. José Francisco Ortega recorded portions of the journey through Southern California, and his name remains attached to Ortega Highway.

California Highway 74 begins near Mission San Juan Capistrano and travels east through the mountains. Hank's ranch house sits several miles from the highway, reached by a primitive road carved through sandy soil.

When rain or snow blesses the country, the road can become impassable, even with four-wheel drive.

Another challenge is spotty cellphone service. Only one provider offers reliable coverage in the area.



On the right: Bob Hank, photo by Lazelle Jones. Below: Roping, photo courtesy of Bob Hank.





Above: Cienega Grass,. Photo by Lazelle Jones.

Drought, water and fences

Ranchers in this country face serious challenges.

The first is drought, a recurring problem throughout the West and no less significant along the Southern California coast. Rainfall has been below average during extended periods, and the effects are evident across the range.

Hank is fortunate to have several natural springs and seeps on his allotment. He checks them regularly to make sure they are still flowing and remain accessible to livestock.

This is not country where water can easily be hauled. When a water source becomes unreliable, the cattle must be moved to another part of the allotment.

Hank also watches for damage around the springs. If cattle disturb a water source, he must repair the area or move the herd.

With 13,000 acres, there are miles of fence to ride and plenty of repairs to make. Fences and deep ravines are what keep the cattle within the allotment.

Living with fire

A second challenge is wildfire.

Fire is a constant threat in the Santa Ana Mountains. Drought dries the landscape, while wet years can produce heavy growth that later becomes fuel.

Hank has survived several major fires. One came close to destroying the ranch house, outbuildings and livestock.

Brush fires ignite quickly, spread rapidly and leave the landscape scorched.

During one major range fire around 1990, Hank was in San Juan Capistrano, about 20 miles west of the ranch. When he saw smoke billowing to the east, he immediately headed home.

He had left half a dozen horses in a corral that morning and knew they would need to be turned loose.

When he reached Caspers Wilderness Park, about halfway up Ortega Highway, the California Highway Patrol stopped him. He could go no farther.

When authorities finally allowed him to continue, the land on both sides of Ortega Highway was black and charred.

The ranch house, however, was unharmed.

Hank had deliberately built it down in a ravine, believing a fast-moving fire might leap over the buildings. That is exactly what happened. Every structure survived.

The horses were gone, but not lost. A neighbor had come to the ranch, found them in the corral and opened the gate.

Hank believes livestock have an instinct for avoiding fire. They move into ravines, find open ground and remember where gates are located.

He also offers a warning to anyone who thinks it is safe to drive at high speed through a fire.

It is not.

Fire consumes oxygen from the air. Under extreme conditions, a vehicle engine can stall from lack of oxygen, leaving its occupants trapped.



Fire on the Santa Ana Mountain, photo courtesy of Bob Hank.

A costly decision

A third challenge faced by Hank and Fraser came after another range fire.

This time, their hands were tied by a federal wildlife decision, and the two ranchers say they lost substantial amounts of money.

After a fire burned near the boundary of their grazing allotments, concern arose over habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher in an adjacent area.

Hank and Fraser had recently invested in replacement heifers and breeding bulls. They were then ordered to move their cattle to make additional ground available for wildlife habitat.

The two small ranchers had nowhere else to place the animals. With no practical alternative, they sold the cattle at a considerable loss.

The decision also disrupted their breeding programs and calving schedules.

Later, officials determined the gnatcatcher habitat was not in jeopardy, and the restrictions on the two cow-calf operations were lifted.

But, as Hank said, "That horse was already out of the barn."

Their losses were never recovered.

Epilogue

It was largely by chance that Bob Hank became a rancher, and he readily admits he was fortunate.

At age 23, he was an officer in the United States Army during the Vietnam War and appeared to be on a fast track for promotion to captain. Instead, he chose to return to civilian life.

Through friends in Southern California, he found work as a hand on Bob Fraser's ranch in the Santa Ana Mountains.

The two became lifelong friends, pushing cattle and doing business together for many years.

In 1979, the opportunity arose to purchase land from the Stuart family. Hank took it.

Nearly half a century later, it is important to listen as he reflects on the gift of living the cowboy life.

"When I think about the life I've lived for 50 years here in the Santa Ana Mountains, about what made it so special and why we endured drought, fires and all the things that go along with the life of a rancher, it comes down to two things," Hank said.

"One is the community of people who embraced me. My neighbors became my family. Where can you find that today?

Second is the way of life. I have always admired cowboy culture and the code of ethics ranchers and farmers live by. I grew up admiring those ethics, and as I approach my 80th birthday, their importance becomes ever clearer.

Family and love of the land are at the core of how I feel.

As a rancher, you learn to love the land like it is your child. Cowboy ethics and culture involve living an honest, truthful life. That is what attracted me and kept me up here for most of my life.

I love working this land. I am blessed that I have been able to live this life.

The people in my community—the farriers, veterinarians and cowboys—all share this view. I can trust them. They are honest. They love their country and their families. Everything is anchored in their love for the land.

I have heard people criticize ranchers and farmers for the harm they cause, and they are wrong—so wrong. There are no better environmentalists than farmers and ranchers. They love the land. They care for the land. They are stewards of the land.

And I find that those who love and care for the land as ranchers and farmers do ultimately end up closer to the Creator."

Amen, Bob Hank.■

Lazelle Jones roams the west on perpetual walkabout, meeting ranching families and telling their stories on the pages of RANGE magazine.



U.S. CAPITOL ROTUNDA © TOM STACK

From the Inside

Celebrating American Agriculture, Farmers and Ranchers on America's 250th Anniversary

The destiny of the West is on the line.
By Stephen M. Studdert

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, this is a moment to reflect on the foundations of American prosperity, independence and resilience. Our nation should celebrate not only the battles, documents, presidents and movements that shaped its history, but also the farmers and ranchers who sustained it from the beginning. American agriculture is not a side story in the nation's founding and growth. It is one of the central pillars of the American experiment.

For 250 years, farmers and ranchers have done more than produce food. They have anchored communities. Across the country, rural America has been built around planting seasons, harvests, livestock markets, county fairs, grain elevators, feed stores, churches, schools and family operations that endure through drought, flood, low prices, high costs and uncertainty. Agriculture has taught generations of Americans discipline, patience, risk, resilience and respect for forces larger than themselves.

In 1776, roughly 90% of the colonial population worked the land. Many signers of the Declaration of Independence were farmers or planters, including Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Stone, who operated Haberdeventure, a 442-acre plantation in Maryland. Jefferson championed agrarian ideals, viewing independent yeoman farmers as the backbone of a free republic. These "Founding Farmers" understood that self-sufficiency in food production was essential to political independence. Agriculture supplied the Continental Army, fueled economic growth and helped forge a new nation.

That legacy continues powerfully today. In 2026, the broader food and agriculture sector generates more than $10.4 trillion in economic activity—nearly 20% of U.S. gross domestic product—and supports approximately 48.7 million jobs, or about one in five American jobs. Direct farm output contributes hundreds of billions of dollars, while the ripple effects sustain manufacturing, transportation, retail and exports. Agricultural exports are projected at about $174 billion, strengthening the trade balance and rural economies.

Conservation, productivity and responsibility are not competing values; at their best, they are part of the same calling.

American farmers and ranchers are among the most productive in the world. Thanks to innovation and stewardship, a tiny fraction of the population—roughly 1% to 2%—feeds not only the nation but much of the globe. U.S. consumers spend only about 12% to 13% of their household budgets on food, one of the lowest rates worldwide, reflecting remarkable efficiency.

Beyond economics, agriculture ensures national security. Reliable domestic food production protects against global disruptions, supply-chain shocks and geopolitical instability. Farmers and ranchers serve as environmental stewards, managing vast landscapes, improving soil health, implementing conservation practices and contributing to carbon sequestration. Many embrace no-till farming, cover crops and renewable energy to balance productivity with sustainability.

On America's 250th anniversary, celebrating agriculture is also a way of honoring national security. A country that cannot feed itself is not truly independent. American farmers and ranchers contribute to food security, economic strength, trade, energy and stability. Their work supports truckers, processors, equipment manufacturers, veterinarians, agronomists, scientists, retailers, exporters and countless other sectors. Agriculture is not only rural; it is national.

The best of American agriculture is grounded in care for land, water, animals and community. Farmers and ranchers live with the long-term consequences of their decisions. Many operate on land held for generations and hope to leave it better than they found it. Conservation, productivity and responsibility are not competing values; at their best, they are part of the same calling.

America's agricultural producers face formidable challenges, especially drought, rising input costs and regulatory pressures. Yet they persevere. Their determined grit mirrors the pioneering spirit that built the country.

Today's farmers and ranchers are indispensable to the nation's growth, security and identity. Their rural communities embody the core American traits of resilience and self-reliance. Celebrating them is not merely symbolic; it recognizes their enduring contributions to feeding the world, powering the economy and embodying American values.

America's 250th anniversary should remind us that freedom is not only defended in courtrooms, legislatures and battlefields. It is also sustained in fields, barns, pastures, orchards and ranchlands. Farmers and ranchers have fed the nation, strengthened its independence, shaped its character and carried forward a tradition of honest work essential to American life.

To celebrate America is to celebrate those who have nourished the American experiment—its independence and values—for 250 years and will carry it forward for generations to come. ■

Stephen M. Studdert, a sixth-generation westerner, was a senior White House advisor to three U.S. presidents and is a passionate public policy advocate for liberty and less government.

The Flock at Singing Wheels Farm

By Lynnae King

In the beautiful Grand Valley of western Colorado, Ed and Timi Weaver are raising a flock of Dorper sheep along with their four children: Zach, 12; Lexi, 9; Ty, 6; and Lincoln, who is almost 2.

The sheep came to Singing Wheels Farm in 2021, when Ed bought 25 lambs from Utah. They were about 4 months old at the time. The family also added a burro named Balaam to help protect the flock from predators.

Whether it is Balaam's presence or something else, the Weavers have not had too many problems with animals killing their sheep. One year, however, an eagle killed about 10 lambs. Another time, a full-grown sheep was badly injured. The family never learned what attacked it, though they suspect it may have been a coyote or mountain lion.

Ed chose sheep because he wanted livestock small enough for the children to handle. He and



In the beautiful Grand Valley of western Colorado, Ed and Timi Weaver are raising a flock of Dorper sheep along with their four children: Zach, 12; Lexi, 9; Ty, 6; and Lincoln, who is almost 2. Photo By Lys Showalter.

Timi also thought sheep would give the children a way to begin building enterprises of their own.

Ed's original goal was to keep the flock below 100 head. When he counted this spring, however, the number was closer to 180.

The sheep graze across the fields Ed farms. He had hoped to rely on full-time grazing this year, but the water situation in the area may mean feeding more hay in the barn.

Everyone in the family has a part in keeping the flock healthy and growing.

On processing days, Timi records tag numbers and notes whether each lamb is a ewe or ram. Zach, Lexi and Ty help bring the sheep back whenever they escape their pen. Lexi said she does not like it when the family is late for school because the sheep got out.

The children also help with fencing. Even little Lincoln follows behind his dad while Ed waters and feeds the sheep. Lincoln especially enjoys running around and chasing the lambs.

Once, Ed received a call from someone who had seen a Facebook photo of his sheep trailing down the road. Balaam was leading the flock, and the sheep were headed down 21 1/2 and J roads headed to Grand Junction.



Carson King with Ty Weaver and the little lamb. Photo by By Lynnae King.

The family got the sheep into a woman's corral along the road and then hauled them back to the farm.

Ed said the highlight of the sheep operation is lambing season, especially when the week-old lambs are frisking around full of energy. Lambing usually takes place in the spring, but he hopes eventually to have both spring and fall lambing seasons.



Balaam with the herd of sheep in the spring grass. Zach is standing in the back of the herd. Photo by By Lynnae King.



The sheep grazing the grass in the snow. Photo By Timi Weaver.

Zach has most of the responsibility for feeding the bottle lambs. He fills a measuring cup at the kitchen or bathroom sink, carries the water outside and mixes in the correct amount of milk replacer. He then uses a funnel to pour the milk into glass pop bottles and places a plastic nipple on each one.

"Then go have fun feeding once you put it into the bottles," Zach said.

Ty and Lincoln also like to help, as long as the lambs hold still. When Lincoln is left outside, he sometimes finds the empty bottles on the front porch and tries to feed the lambs by himself. Someday, he may be a handy little fellow to have around during bottle-feeding time.

Each Weaver child receives a lamb when he or she turns seven. Zach and Lexi have already started small flocks of their own within their dad's larger flock. Ty is excited for next year, when he will get his own lamb.

Ty also remembers a sad experience with a bottle lamb named Orphan. One day while Ty was napping, Orphan wandered too close to the pigpen, and the pigs attacked it. Ty cried when Ed told him what had happened after he woke up.

Dorper sheep are hair sheep, so they do not need to be sheared. They shed in the spring and grow a heavy wool coat in the fall.

They also have a strong flocking instinct. When one sheep gets out, the others become unsettled until either they follow it or the farmer returns the wandering sheep to the flock. When Ed opens a fence into a new section of field, the sheep know what is happening and run together toward the fresh grazing.

Singing Wheels Farm is a place where the Weaver children can learn new things and experience the rewards of hard work. Ed and Timi are raising their children in a Christian home and attend the Mennonite church and school in Loma, Colorado and support church and school activities.

The sheep are part of the family's work, but they are also part of the children's growing-up years. At Singing Wheels Farm, there is always another fence to fix, another lamb to feed and another lesson waiting in the field.■

Lynnae King lives in western Colorado, where she helps with farming and ranching at Wagon West Ranch and tries her hand at writing.



Lincoln trying to bottle feed the lambs. Photo By Timi Weaver.



RANGE HEROES

RANGE is supported by subscriptions, donations and select advertising. We welcome assistance—cash, subscription promotion (free ads and mailing lists), and distribution (at fairs, shows and special events). Every subscriber and advertiser helps RANGE but several offered more. Our sincere thanks to all (in alphabetical order) who have shared big cash, mailing lists, publicity or large lists of gift subscriptions. You have all helped produce this issue.

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Harry Knight's Triangle HC Dude Ranch

By Kathy McCraine



Harry Knight was the perfect host, delighting guests with humorous yarns and showing off his expertise with a rope. Photo courtesy of the Sharlot Hall Museum Library.

The history of dude ranching dates back to the 19th century and the post-Civil War cattle boom of the 1880s. It was a time when historians began to romanticize the American West and write nostalgically about "the end of the frontier."

With the Industrial Revolution, diminishing open space in the East and the advent of the automobile, affluent Easterners began looking west for adventurous ways to spend their leisure time. Railroad travel boomed after World War I, and by the 1920s, dude ranching had spread throughout the West.

Cattle ranching had never been reliably profitable, and as one rancher noted, "You can run more dudes to the acre in these hills than you can cattle."

In 1918, Harry Knight, a cowboy and one-time performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, bought the Triangle HC Ranch north of Prescott, Ariz., with every intention of running a working cattle ranch. As the dude ranch era peaked in the Roaring '20s, the cattle market plummeted. It is doubtful Knight had any desire to wrangle dudes, but he was shrewd enough to adapt. By the mid-1920s, he had turned the Triangle HC into one of Arizona's first dude ranches. In all probability, it saved him from going broke in the cattle business.

Born May 3, 1878, near Carlin, Nevada, Harry Knight was 2 years old when his family moved to Arizona after losing 15,000 head of cattle in an unusually harsh winter. A team and wagon were all they salvaged from their cattle operation, so they came to Arizona, where his father began hauling freight in the southern part of the state.

In the mid-1880s, the elder Knight traded a mule team, wagon, harness and $50 for 160 acres of

farmland west of Phoenix, where he grew wheat. In 1886, wheat rust disease nearly broke him, so he moved on to the lower Gila River. Over the years, he tried again and again to return to farming, but each time he went bust.

Knight was 13 when he went to work for the Horseshoe Ranch southeast of Prescott. For the next few years, he worked on a number of Arizona ranches, including the Diamond Outfit in the Four Peaks area, the OK Outfit on the Verde River and the JL Bar Outfit at Castle Hot Springs. Apparently, he gained a reputation as an accomplished cowboy and horseman, because in 1900 he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a bronc rider and trick roper.

Col. W.F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, a former U.S. Army scout and guide, founded the show in 1883, turning his real-life adventures in the American West into the first outdoor Western show. The highly popular attraction, which ran until 1915, featured romanticized re-enactments of historical events, sharpshooting, racing and rodeo-style events. Among the venues where it performed were Madison Square Garden in New York, the Chicago World's Fair and the World's Exposition in San Francisco.

Knight performed for a couple of seasons but balked when Cody decided to take the show on a European tour. Instead, he joined other Wild West shows put on by Cole Younger, Frank James, Texas Bill and Indian Bill.

Meanwhile, he had moved to Los Angeles, where he began to rodeo, winning in roping, bronc riding and bulldogging. While there, he met a man who had a contract to supply horses to the English army during the Boer War. Knight reportedly broke 1,200 horses for him that year. Also while in California, he met and worked for billionaire George H. Bixby, whose family owned the historic Los Cerritos Ranch at Long Beach.

By 1912, Knight began to long for his own cow outfit in Arizona, but he worried about going into debt. One night, he was sitting in Bixby's living room as the California rancher smoked a cigar and stared at the ceiling. When Knight told him of his plans, Bixby said in his characteristic whiny voice, "That sounds pretty good. Why not let me in on it, and we'll buy a bigger outfit?"

The two wound up buying the Three Links Outfit at Walnut Grove, just south of Prescott, for $30,000, with Knight as a one-third partner. There was only one catch. Bixby said he refused to do business with married men—perhaps he had an aversion to meddling wives—and told Knight, "As long as you stay single,



Harry Knight, who had once performed in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, turned the Triangle HC Ranch north of Prescott, Ariz., into one of Arizona's first dude ranches in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of the Sharlot Hall Museum.

everything's all right, but if you ever get married, you will have to sell out to me, or I'll sell out to you."

When Knight married Edith Craven in 1918, he sold his third of the Three Links to Bixby for $50,000. With his profits, he bought the Triangle HC Ranch, which had several owners since it was first settled in 1880.

Knight quickly became a respected and obviously well-liked cattleman in the area, serving as president of the precursor to the Yavapai County Cattle Growers Association shortly after moving there. He was a cowman first, but plagued by lack of rain and poor cattle markets, diversifying into a hunting lodge and dude ranch must have come naturally after his days as a showman. By the late 1920s, he was open for business as a dude ranch, an operation he continued for about 20 years.

A brochure aimed at potential guests touted the Triangle HC as "a real cow ranch in a real cow country, run by a real cowman." It went on to say, "It is paid for by hundreds of Herefords grazing placidly on their own home of 50,000 acres of the finest range land. They are handled and worked by expert cowboys and cow horses who know their business. ... This is a real working cow ranch and nothing is done for show."

The accommodations were upscale for the era and the remoteness of the location. Guests could gather in a spacious lodge for singing and storytelling, dancing to a local band, or cozying up to a roaring fire, welcome even on summer nights, which were often chilly at that elevation. The log guest cabins scattered through the pines eventually offered hot water, private baths and electricity. Rates were $40 per week for a room with a detached bath in a separate building and $50 per week for a private room with a private bath.

Unheard of at the time, ice was delivered weekly and stored in an icehouse with sawdust-packed walls. Likewise a novelty, the lodge was initially lit with carbide gas lights fed by a large tank installed outside with a drip system.

Guests were invited to participate in the cattle work. The perfect host, Knight delighted them with his humorous yarns and his expertise in handling cattle and horses.



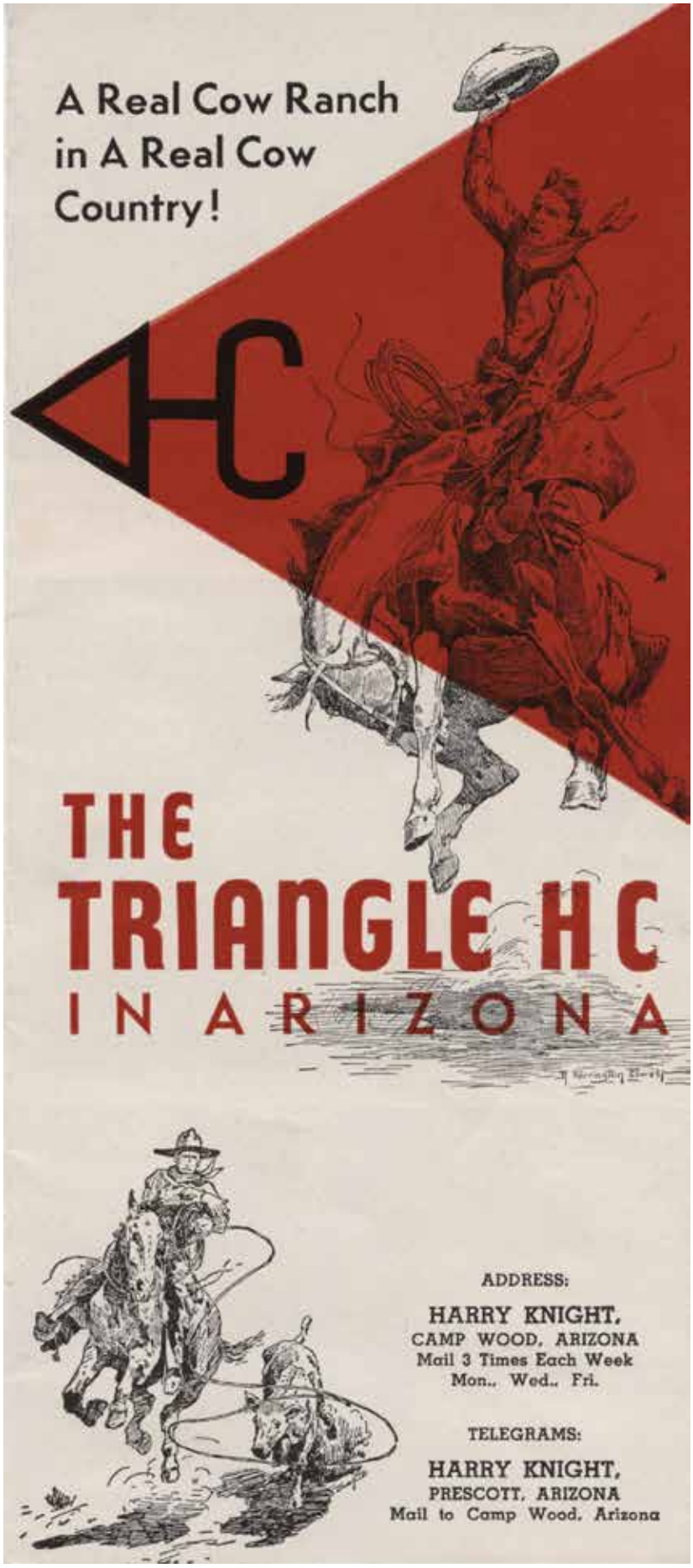
One of the cabins nestled among the pine trees at the Triangle HC Ranch headquarters as it looks now. After 100 years, only one stucco house remains livable today. Photo by Kathy McCraine.

His wife, Edith, personally oversaw the preparation of all the food served, a bounty that included range beef, vegetables from her garden, home-cured hams, bacon, sausage and cheese, as well as chickens that roamed freely on the grounds and a milk cow that provided butter and cream. Jellies, soups, ice cream, bread, cakes and pies were all homemade and "second to none," the brochure boasted.

It was the golden age of the dude ranch, and by the end of the 1920s, the business was flourishing. City dwellers from the East, hungry for a taste of the romantic cowboy life, flocked to Prescott or Phoenix by rail and then traveled by automobile to the Triangle HC, the last 45 miles on a rough dirt road that snaked through the pine-covered mountains to an altitude of nearly 6,000 feet.

Many celebrities of the time signed the Triangle HC guest book, including noted cartoonist J.R. Williams, best known for his syndicated panel, "Out Our Way"; prolific Western writer Walt Coburn; and James Jeffries, once considered one of the greatest heavyweight champions of all time. Guests from Beverly Hills, New York, England, Nigeria and Italy returned year after year to enjoy the wide-open spaces and Knight's generous hospitality.

As the dude ranch and hunting lodge industry grew in the area—the nearby 7 Up Ranch and Bar 37 were also popular destinations by then—Yavapai County gained notoriety as a tourist destination. A June 22, 1933, article in Phoenix's Arizona Republic raved that Yavapai County had "a wider diversity of climate and scenery ... than any other area of similar size in the known world, combined with the charm of the Old West ... and in addition to the most cordial hospitality, will give you the best food, and the best ponies to ride, and in season, the best hunting in the state."



This 1920s brochure promoted the Triangle HC as "A Real Cow Ranch in a Real Cow Country." Courtesy of Kathy McCraine.



Lodge — The Triangle HC lodge, no longer in use, as it looks today, facing the shipping pens of Campwood Cattle Company's 7 Up Ranch. Photo by Kathy McCraine.

The Knights raised four children: a daughter, Margaret, and three sons, Robert, Richard "Dick" and Harry Jr., known as Hal. As a young man, Dick became a cowboy polo star after playing at the New Mexico Military Institute and then at the University of Miami with two other ranch-raised boys on the team. The team was undefeated in 1948 and went on to capture the United States title, vanquishing such noted Eastern teams as Princeton and Cornell.

Later, Dick had a distinguished career training cutting and reining horses, including Doc N Willy, the 1980 World Champion Cutting Horse. He was a founder of the Snaffle Bit Futurity, served as president of the Pacific Coast Cutting Horse Association in 1972 and remained active in the industry throughout his life.

His older brother, Hal, also played polo at the University of Arizona and was a rodeo champion. In 1943, at age 24, Hal was fatally injured when a mule fell on him at the Triangle HC.

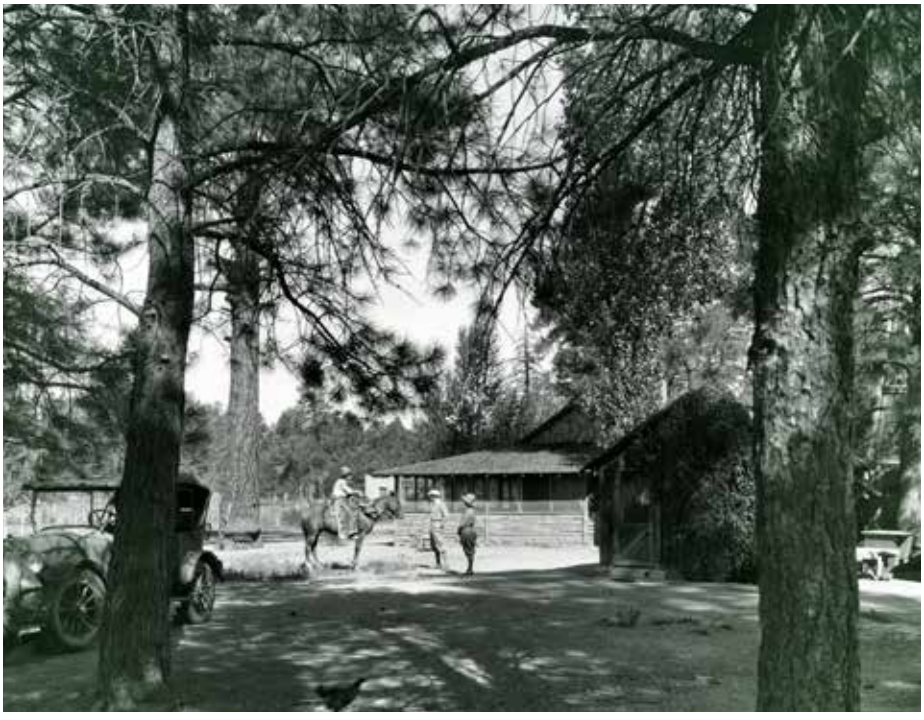
Whether it was grief over the loss of his son or his advancing age, Harry Knight sold the Triangle HC in 1948 to Sam and Vennie McElhaney for $150,000.

He later called it "the biggest mistake of my life. I had the best little ranch for the size of it, 350 cows, good winter country, good summer country, fenced and cross-fenced, a one-man outfit, everything perfect."

What really got to him, though, was that Sam McElhaney later turned down an offer of $750,000 for the ranch, a large sum at the time.

After selling the Triangle HC, Knight bought a farm in Yuma, Ariz., where he died in 1974 at age 97. ■

Kathy McCraine is a rancher, writer and photographer from Prescott, Ariz. Today the Triangle HC is part of the 7 Up Ranch which she owns... This article is excerpted from her book, The 7 Up Ranch Cookbook, available at www.kathymccraine.com.



THC Old Car — The Triangle HC headquarters was an idyllic dude ranch setting for Eastern tourists hungry for a taste of the romantic cowboy life in the West. This photo was taken in 1929. Photo courtesy of the Sharlot Hall Museum.

Kinship

Little Muriel Rietmann had the best seat on the ranch, watching from the pickup window as her dad, Jacob Rietmann, let cows pair up before moving them into a new pasture on the F-D Ranch near Datil, N.M. Her mother, Leann, caught the moment in the rearview mirror: Muriel studying the work, the ranch dog eager to join the others, an old house behind them and the wide New Mexico country stretching beyond. Muriel is the great-granddaughter of Ed Ashurst, rancher and author from Douglas, Ariz., who sent the photo to RANGE. Some lessons in ranch life start early, and some are learned simply by watching.



Photo by Leann Rietmann

HOME ON THE RANGE AND THE GREAT DIVIDE

By Beth Ann

I'm not speaking of the "Continental Divide," I'm referring to a division in our nation, which, if we don't connect the barriers soon we will lose our nation, our freedom, our Liberty, our American way of life and possibly our lives. I'm not trying to scare anyone; I'm trying to unite everyone.

Is our great divide caused by America's flyover states from sea to shining sea? Is our great divide from the city to the suburbs, from the vast lands down on the farm, to the wonders out on the range, or those fishermen of America's deep seas?

Do these differences separate us or complete us?

I have to confess I was a Kansas City suburb girl. My parents went all "Green Acres" on us when I was 14 years old, they decided to pack up all we owned and move us to the country; a very small farm community. The little town where I finished my public school education had a population of 200. The town was small but it was surrounded by farmland and busy family farms. It was a culture shock for sure, but it was a blessing indeed!

My paternal grandparents lived in Bonne Terre, a very small southeast Missouri lead mining community. My grandparents were not farmers, as Grandpa was an electrician in the mine. Grandma did, however, raise chickens for eggs and meat; she fed the chickens, she gathered the eggs and when the time was right, she killed, cleaned and fried up those chickens to feed her family. They had a vegetable garden; there was a woodshed in the backyard and a rain barrel on the back stoop. I fondly remember there was a picket fence around the front yard and an apple tree in the yard, which apparently was not there for me to climb.

I'm concerned that today Americans are too many generations removed from the farm, the ranch, and that good old independent simple life style. No longer do their grandparents or an Uncle and Aunt live on the land.

Neither the city people nor the country folks seem to understand one another. My opinion, of course, is that the country; the ranchers, the farmers and the producers are the backbone of America. It has long been my belief that Rural America is the foundation of all America. Even though most country folks are self-sufficient, I still believe America needs all of us to complete who we are as a country.

There is a generation, maybe two, that have enjoyed the American way of Life, Liberty and Happiness, but have somehow been convinced that those national attributes are evil; they have certainly lost their happiness. These are Americans who never got dirt under their fingernails, or whose bodies never literally collapsed at the end of the day from total exhaustion; hard work! They have been taught that people are not equal, unless government makes them equal through woke mandates of DEI. They are led to believe Christianity is about hate and bigotry, that family derived from colonialism and is the essence of white supremacy. In their way of thinking, children belong to the community and that government, not parents, know what is best for the children. They have swallowed the lies of Marxism and believe government owns all the land; therefore farmers, ranchers and other private businesses have no right to own land or have personal wealth.

AMERICA IS THE RICHEST NATION IN THE WORLD... BUT I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT OUR WEALTH IN DOLLARS AND DEBT.

I've watched the crowds and protests around our nation these last many years. Perhaps it's my age or perhaps it's my upbringing, but I'm perplexed at the hate and discontent of America's youth, and others. While I've not always agreed with politicians, I've always been proud of America.

American culture. We are told every day that diversity is our strength; it could be if those differences were shared, not forced and if they were respected not cancelled or rejected. Growing up I relished in the fact that America was a melting pot of persons, ethnicities and personalities. I even referred to myself as the melting pot, as my blood heritage is said to be French, Irish, Scotch, Indian, English and German. I usually tell people, "I'm a mutt!" We have a variety of cuisines, occupations, talents, brand-named apparels, numerous denominations and places of worship, education is open for everyone who wants to learn, entertainment of all kinds and… well, Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness abounds in America.

America is the richest nation in the world… but I'm not talking about our wealth in dollars and debt. I'm referring to our land and natural resources, innovations, entrepreneurs and inventors. Recently the World Cup tourists from all over the world were absolutely amazed with America's magnificence; tall buildings, large sub sandwiches, beer, and American friendliness and kindness; their palates were excited over America's ranch dressing; they loved and enjoyed America! It was a completely opposite observation of how the Marxist-generation views America.

America has large cities, small towns, suburbs along with lush vast countrysides, mountainous regions, ranches and farms, seacoasts with beaches, factories and industries of all kinds; We can clothe the world, entertain the world, heat the world and feed the world.

There should be no great divide in America. Marxism is based on envy, not hard work, not on equity or equality.

So how do we minimize that great divide we see in our nation? A part of me says; have all those who believe America is evil spend one year on the ranch or the farm. They'll soon realize life may not be easy but it is good! Share your story with others because every American has a story and all those wonderful stories of hard work, struggles, accomplishments, being independent, how failures can make us stronger and how never giving up makes us American!

Bringing America Home; Home on the Range.■

Beth Ann is the owner and host of CSC Talk Radio. She is an energetic and insightful mother of five and media veteran. "The little lady with the BIG Voice," Beth Ann doesn't shy away from tackling the toughest of today's issues with a good dose of commonsense.

Outback Roundup 2026
THE MERIT WINNERS

There will be more merit winners announced in our Winter 2026-2027 issue. Entry blanks for Outback Roundup 2027 can be found at rangemagazine.us.



"In the trees"

JW Dell'Orto and his dad Stan moving cows last fall in the Stanislaus National Forest of Northern California.

Photographer Robin Dell'Orto



"Cotton candy clouds "

Cotton candy clouds go by in Boulder, Wyoming - Rhett Johnson horseback gathering cattle with his dad Jerimyah.

Photographer Jerimyah Johnson



"Branding calves"

12-year-old Juanita Burk, a 6th generation rancher and her dad Ty branding calves in Springville, California.

Photographer Nicole Burk



"Horses in the dust"

Indian ponies being driven through the dust at the Big Loop Rodeo in Jordan Valley, Oregon.

Photographer Larry Angier

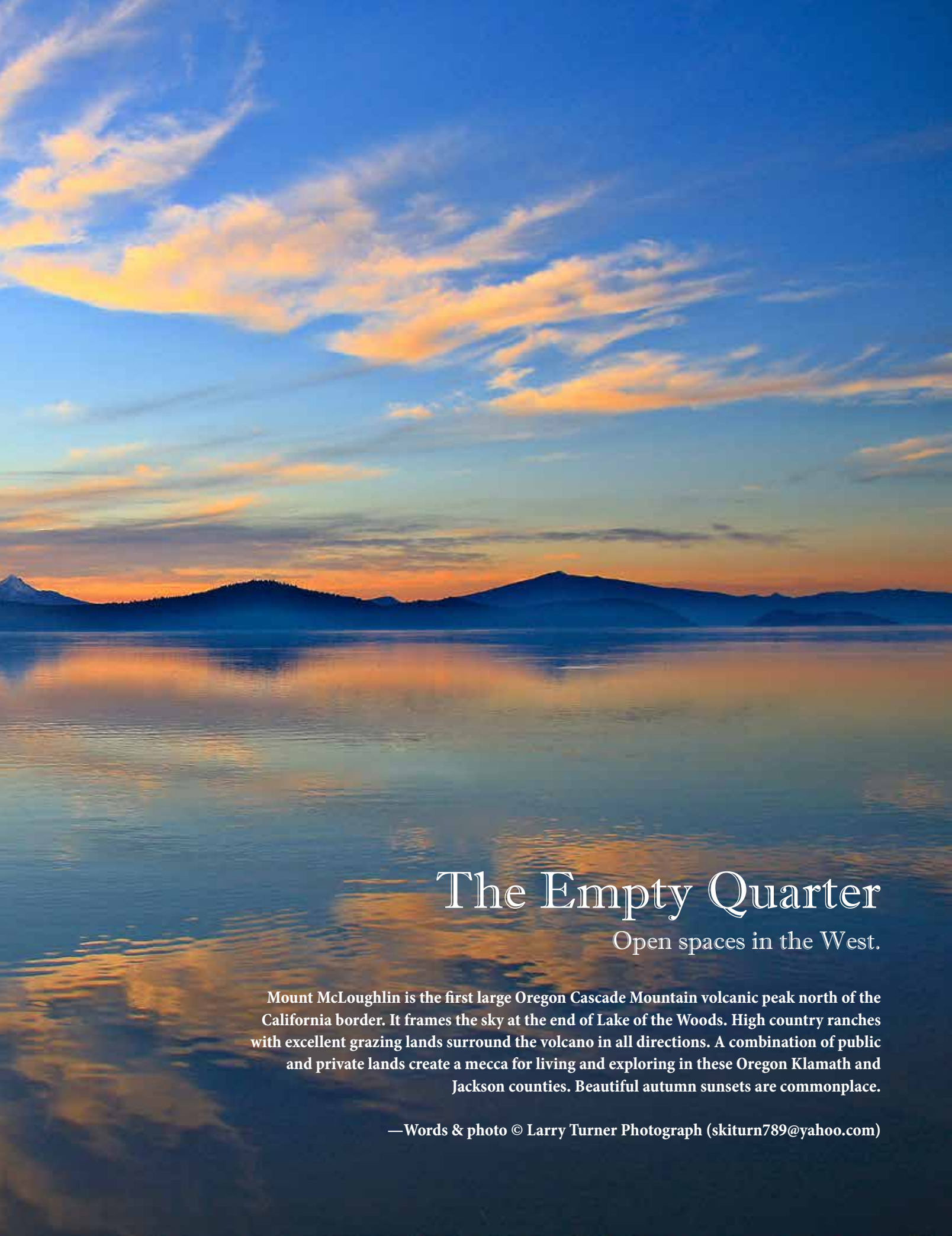


"Big Sister"

Big sister – supervising in the foothills of Central California.

Photographer Grace Matthews



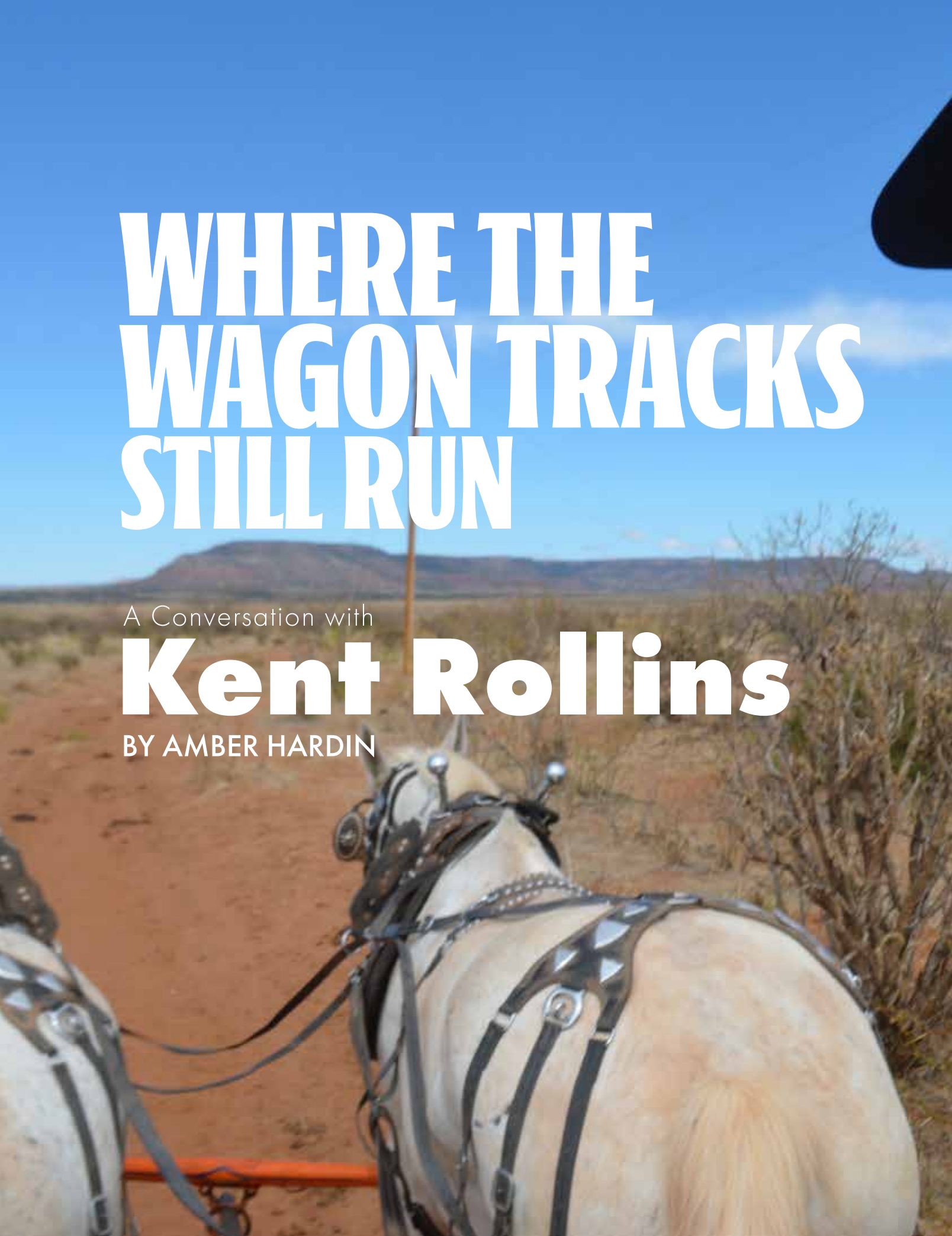


The Empty Quarter

Open spaces in the West.

Mount McLoughlin is the first large Oregon Cascade Mountain volcanic peak north of the California border. It frames the sky at the end of Lake of the Woods. High country ranches with excellent grazing lands surround the volcano in all directions. A combination of public and private lands create a mecca for living and exploring in these Oregon Klamath and Jackson counties. Beautiful autumn sunsets are commonplace.

—Words & photo © Larry Turner Photograph (skiturn789@yahoo.com)



WHERE THE WAGON TRACKS STILL RUN

A Conversation with

Kent Rollins

BY AMBER HARDIN



Photos courtesy of Shannon Rollins

Long before chuckwagon cooking reached television audiences and millions of online viewers, it was simply another day's work.

A wagon creaked across rough country carrying flour, coffee, beans, dried meats, cast iron, and other provisions; enough to feed hungry cowboys working miles from the nearest town. The chuck wagon cook, or "Cookie," as they were often called, prepared three energy-dense meals a day, each with strong black coffee, freshly percolated or boiled over an open fire.

However, the chuckwagon was never just an outdoor kitchen. It was a dining room, a gathering place, a mailbox, a pharmacy, sometimes even a chapel. It was where tired crews shared stories after long days on horseback, disagreements were settled over hot coffee, birthdays might be remembered, and a good cook raised morale after days of hard work. (Some nights, Cookie might even surprise the crew with a nice fruit cobbler or similar dessert, which really lifted spirits.)

Few people understand that tradition better than Kent Rollins.

To millions, Rollins is the cowboy behind a cast-iron skillet whose YouTube videos have inspired a new generation to cook outdoors. Others know him from Food Network, where he defeated Bobby Flay with his chicken-fried steak, competed on Chopped, won Cutthroat Kitchen, and remained undefeated on NBC's Food Fighters. More recently, he and his wife Shannon have introduced television audiences to working ranches across America through The Cast Iron Cowboy on the Outdoor Channel.

Yet despite the television credits, cookbooks, podcast, and millions of followers, Rollins remains, at heart, exactly what he has always been—a chuckwagon cook.

Raised along Oklahoma's Red River near Hollis, Rollins learned to cook as a young boy beside his mother. While other youngsters were eager to saddle horses on freezing mornings, the warm kitchen held a different appeal.

"My mother taught me to cook when I was eight or nine years old," he recalled with a laugh. "I loved helping her. I just didn't know washing dishes was part of cooking."

Those early lessons would eventually take him far beyond Oklahoma.

In 1980, he headed into New Mexico's rugged Gila Wilderness to guide hunters alongside his uncle. There, he quickly discovered that cooking over Dutch ovens in mountain country was far different than cooking back home.

Bread refused to rise. Beans took forever to soften. Nothing behaved the way he expected.

One morning, after serving a batch of biscuits, a hunter looked at his plate and asked, "Is this flatbread?" Rollins simply smiled.

"It is today."

It became one of countless lessons learned through experience rather than instruction.

"Mother Nature will always throw something at you that you didn't know was coming," he said. "That's how you learn."

By the early 1990s, Rollins purchased his first chuckwagon and began cooking for working ranches throughout the West. Word traveled quickly.

"Word of mouth in the cowboy circle is really tighter than you think it is," he said. "News of a good cook can spread from South Texas to Montana pretty quick."

The work was demanding. One particularly busy year found him spending 240 nights sleeping in a teepee. When he finally returned home, his mother asked whether he had missed her.

"I missed you a lot," he answered. "But I missed a sit-down toilet, a stand-up shower, and carpet even more."

He laughs at the memory now, but the years spent living from a chuckwagon helped shape the philosophy he carries today.

"I wouldn't trade it for nothing."

Ask Rollins what a chuckwagon cook actually does, and his answer extends far beyond preparing meals.

"A chuckwagon cook has many more roles than just to cook," he said. "A lot of times when I was working on ranches, I was a doctor, a dentist, a philosopher—everything in the world you could throw in there."

"If it doesn't challenge you," Rollins said, "it'll never change you."

A chuckwagon cook also feeds more than hungry stomachs. Crews working six or seven weeks together become family, and the cook often becomes the center of that community.

"We try to feed cowboys better than anybody else does," Rollins said. "Folks become family. A crew will work better if you have a good cook and everybody gets along better."

It is difficult to overstate how important that role has been throughout western history.

Long after cattle drives faded into history books, working ranches continued relying on chuckwagons wherever distances made daily trips to town impossible. On many ranches today, that tradition still survives.

Rollins smiles whenever someone tells him chuckwagon cooking is becoming a dying art.

"I always tell them maybe not," he said. "You can't see us from the interstate most of the time. We're back in places GPS can't find."

As long as there are cattle in rough country and cowboys working them, he believes there will always be a place for the chuckwagon.

One memory illustrates that better than any statistic. While cooking on New Mexico's historic Bell Ranch, another cowboy motioned him over and pointed toward the dirt road behind the wagon. Rollins still remembers looking back at the fresh wheel marks stretching behind him.

"There hadn't been wagon tracks on these roads since 1952," the cowboy told him, "So you get to carry on real history one plate at a time."

That memory may best explain why Rollins has become such an effective ambassador for Western culture.

The food draws people in. The history keeps them there.

It is also why storytelling has become every bit as important to him as cooking.

While Rollins never set out to become an author, over time, writing became a welcome form of expression for him.

He began during one of the most difficult chapters of his life, while his father battled cancer. Unable to express what he was feeling out loud, he began putting those thoughts on paper.

For years, almost no one read his works. Eventually, those private writings evolved into stories shared through cookbooks, magazine articles, and the inspirational reflections he now publishes each Sunday for readers around the world.

"I think when you can pass on history, whether it's through a story or poetry, you're just preserving part of it," he said.

Looking back, he wishes he had paid even closer attention to the old cowboys who mentored him. "If I'd have been smart," he reflected, "I'd have recorded them old men talking."

Instead, he absorbed what he could, noting, "They taught me the values of God and country, but also horses and cattle."

Many of those lessons have become recurring themes throughout his work.

Faith.
Perseverance.
Humility.
Respect.

"If it doesn't challenge you," Rollins said, "it'll never change you."

Those same values surfaced again as the conversation shifted toward cowboy etiquette. Modern audiences sometimes imagine old cow camps as rough, uncivilized places. Rollins insists the opposite is true.

Real cowboys, he says, were expected to practice manners. You never rode beneath the tongue of the wagon without permission. You never stepped between the chuck box and the stove. You never asked the cook what was for supper. And, most importantly, everyone treated one another with respect.

"They're the nicest people in the world," he said.



“You put your hands in it because your hands are an extension of your heart.”

“Everybody’s looking out for everybody else.”

The comments resonated immediately with RANGE publisher Rachel Dahl, who grew up in ranch country herself.

“I think that’s true,” she replied. “And that’s something I grew up with—that etiquette idea. That is really important.”

Rollins answered with another lesson handed down by an older cowboy, “Manners will open up more doors than education ever thought about.”

It is difficult to imagine advice more fitting for today’s world.

The interview itself even became proof that the cowboy community remains remarkably close-knit. Mentioning Nevada ranches quickly led to familiar names.

Rollins had already filmed episodes at Nevada’s Spanish Ranch during the first season of The Cast Iron Cowboy and at Maggie Creek Ranch for the upcoming second season. When Dahl mentioned Ellison Ranches, Rollins immediately recognized ranch manager Ira Wines, not only as a longtime friend, but as a recent guest on his newly launched podcast.

Within minutes, what began as a magazine interview had become conversations among people connected through the same ranching community. For readers of RANGE, that moment may feel especially familiar.

The West has always been vast. The ranching world is uniquely close.

Perhaps the most revealing answer of the afternoon came when Rollins was asked what he hopes people ultimately take away from his work. Skipping over any desire for people to know about his cookbooks, TV appearances, or even writings, he, instead, talked about dreams.

He encouraged people not to let fear prevent them from stepping into the life they were meant to live.

He also spoke about cooking for the people you love, sharing one final lesson from his mother, “You put your hands in it because your hands are an extension of your heart.” For Rollins, every meal carries something of the cook who prepared it.

Love cannot be measured in teaspoons. Neither can kindness.

As the conversation drew to a close, he offered perhaps the finest description of the table itself, “Food is something that has brought people to the table forever and ever,” he said. “But it’s not the legs of the table that hold it up. It is the family that’s gathered around it.”





It is a sentiment that stretches far beyond ranch country. Whether meals are prepared in a chuckwagon, a ranch house kitchen, or a suburban home, the table has always been about far more than food. It has always been about the people.

Today, Rollins continues carrying that message across America.

Season Two of The Cast Iron Cowboy premieres Sept. 28 on the Outdoor Channel, following Kent and Shannon Rollins as they travel to working ranches, cooking meals rooted in each family's history while sharing the stories of the people who continue the traditions of American ranching. Each episode showcases authentic ranch life, regional recipes and the enduring culture that still thrives wherever cattle country stretches beyond the pavement.

The couple has also launched the Cowboy Coffee Hour podcast, where listeners can pull up a stump by the fire for conversations filled with trail stories, cowboy philosophy, faith, humor and practical wisdom gathered over decades on the range.

"...it's not the legs of the table that hold it up. It is the family that's gathered around it."

For those who already know Kent Rollins, none of this will seem surprising.

For those meeting him for the first time, they may discover that behind the awards, television appearances, and online following, stands a man remarkably unchanged by success, measuring wealth by friendships, believing that good manners matter, and cooking for working cowboys.

And somewhere, on ranch roads that still disappear beyond the reach of GPS, fresh wagon tracks continue following trails where generations have traveled before, carrying history forward one meal, one plate, and one story at a time.■

Amber Hardin and her husband Mike are ardent Kent Rollins fans and have mastered the art of cast iron and Dutch oven cooking. She writes from Fallon, Nevada.

OUT ON THE RANGE

LIGHTNING OVER KUENY

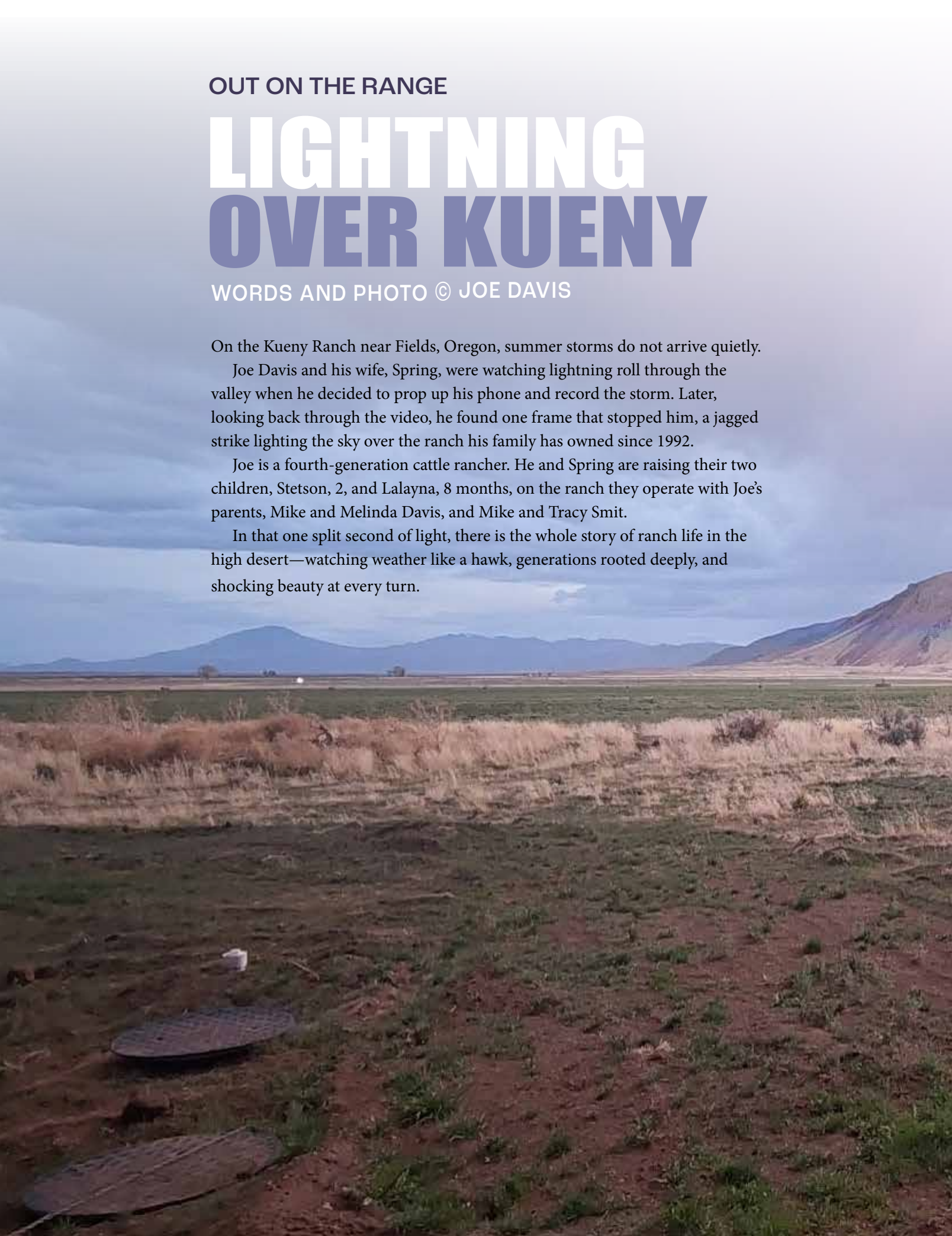
WORDS AND PHOTO © JOE DAVIS

On the Kueny Ranch near Fields, Oregon, summer storms do not arrive quietly.

Joe Davis and his wife, Spring, were watching lightning roll through the valley when he decided to prop up his phone and record the storm. Later, looking back through the video, he found one frame that stopped him, a jagged strike lighting the sky over the ranch his family has owned since 1992.

Joe is a fourth-generation cattle rancher. He and Spring are raising their two children, Stetson, 2, and Lalayna, 8 months, on the ranch they operate with Joe's parents, Mike and Melinda Davis, and Mike and Tracy Smit.

In that one split second of light, there is the whole story of ranch life in the high desert—watching weather like a hawk, generations rooted deeply, and shocking beauty at every turn.





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NEVADA

Gary Snow, 84

On the values of hard work and integrity



Gary Snow's kids learned early that a day horseback did not end when the cows were gathered.

At Eastgate Ranch, summer days started before sunup and often ran until after dark. Gary's daughter, Jamie Frey, remembers riding all day, gathering, moving cows or branding, then getting back to the ranch only to be told to feed the horses, pick weeds and do the dishes after dinner.

"I was definitely worked, from before the sun rose to well after the sun went down," Jamie said. "At the time, I thought those days were so long and hard, and now looking back, I am so thankful for the work ethic that it instilled in me."

That was Gary's way. There was always a job that needed done, and if something went wrong, there was always tomorrow to make it right.

Gary Snow was born Oct. 1, 1942, in Bakersfield, Calif., to Lawrence and Ann Snow. His parents divorced when he was about 5 years old. Ann later married Gary's stepfather, Don Maltby. Gary attended school and worked weekends and summers on ranches around Woody, Calif.

On Sept. 9, 1961, Gary married his lifelong friend, Billie Jo Frazier. Billie Jo's parents, who ranched in Glendale, gave the couple five heifers as a wedding gift. Those heifers helped Gary and Billie Jo begin ranching and grazing cattle and sheep.

The family moved to Fallon in 1978 from Woody, Calif., when Gary went to work at the Camp and Mabane Nevada Cattle Feeders feedlot, taking over the manager's position from Sam Broyles after Broyles retired. When the opportunity came to buy the feedlot, Gary jumped at the chance and continued operating the 10,000-head program.

Along with the feedlot, Gary leased the Bench Creek Ranch from Mike Casey, where they could run 500 head of cattle year-round. In 1985, he bought Eastgate Ranch from American Federal Bank. He later sold Eastgate and purchased Fallon Livestock Auction in Fallon.

The Eastgate years left a deep mark on his children.

"By spending time out there as a kid with Dad, I developed a love for the northern Nevada desert that I am so thankful for now as an adult," Jamie said. "I am sure it never crossed Dad's mind, but he really didn't care if us kids had warm clothes, gloves, hats, sunscreen or snacks for being out riding all day. I think things are way overthought these days. Things seemed simpler back then.

"There was always a job that needed done. Dad never seemed discouraged if things didn't go right. There was always the next day to start again to make things right."

Gary leased grazing land for the ranch's cattle and sheep from Cedarville, Calif., to Tonopah, Nev., and from the California border to the Utah border. Managing those leases required long hours on the road and even more time on horseback. Along with 500 head of cattle, the operation also grazed 3,000 head of sheep.

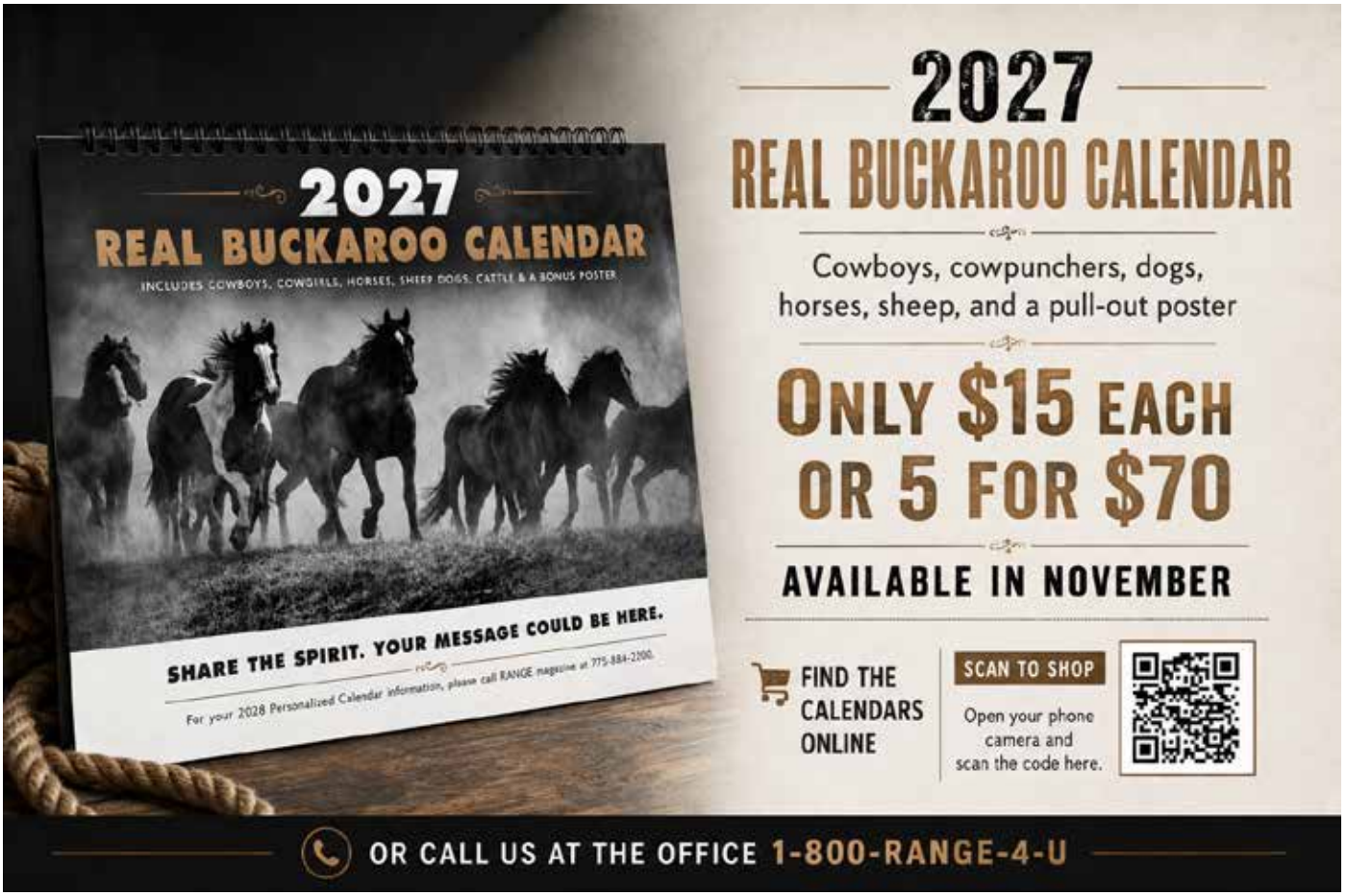
Despite macular degeneration in both eyes that has taken most of his sight, Gary still farms his ranch in Fallon.

"I still work on the farm equipment," Gary said. "My memory is strong, and I can fix anything."

Now beginning his 84th trip around the sun, Gary has taught his children the value of hard work and integrity. Today, he is passing those lessons on to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, teaching them how to farm, raise livestock and build a good life from the land.■

From the top: Billie Jo and Gary's Children Left to Right: Terrie Becker, Justin Snow, Shellie Oney, Kellie Gardner, Billie Jo, Gary and Jamie Frey; Billie Jo and Gary at the NFR; Castrating stud horses at the feedlot 1990; Back row left to right: Stockton Gardner, Billie Jo Snow, Gary Snow; front row left to right: Tyleigh Gardner, Cody Frey, Paige Frey, Emily Frey, Rostin Snow, Hadley Frey

Nancy Chapman is a talented horsewoman from Fallon, Nv and a staff writer at RANGE Media Company.


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Bring America Home!

LETTERS

(Continued from page 8)

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION NEEDED

My initial contact with RANGE was in Meridian, ID then Reno, NV. Date I subscribed to them and for how many years? I am 92 no and still like it. I am writing a synopsis of my life and want to include this information.
—Leo M. Stevenson, MD, Odgen, Utah

BATTLE OF BUNKERVILLE & MALHUER REFUGE

Congratulations on your new ownership of RANGE! I just know that you will continue the fine traditions of CJ Hadley but will be burning your own brand on the contents.

As I mentioned to your receptionist, my wife Irene (now deceased) and I, together with another friend, were heavily involved in the tumultuous and dangerous standoff at Bunkerville. After LaVoy Finicum was assassinated by the FBI and the Oregon State Police, I became his widow Jeanette's bodyguard on numerous occasions. Take good care.
—Weldon C. Travis, Rough and Ready, California

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Hi Rachel. Good job! We really enjoyed your summer edition with stories on all of the families and the ups and downs of living rural. We live in the woods on top of a mountain and have a—360-degree view of nothing but trees and logging—it's the BEST! Keep up the good work.
—Steve & Jan Potter, Myrtle Creek, Oregon

THANKS FOR TAKING OVER THE REINS

Dear Rachel. Thanks for taking over the reins after C.J.'s departure. We were gifted RANGE magazine by a friend who farms down the road a few years ago. Since then, I've been gifting subscriptions to family and friends and received a lot of positive feedback.

There is a radio program called Cross Talk we listen to. A recent broadcast covered the copy of AI data centers being built at alarming rates that use copious amounts of electricity and water. A center in Utah was covered in great details by the guest Tom DeWeese. I got to listen to the presentation by Tom DeWeese and spent some time afterwards speaking with him. A knowledgeable man who speaks the truth. Stephen Studdert's column in the summer issue of RANGE was foreboding over water usage. This problem would certainly be compounded by Data Centers. Keep on for keeping on.
—Thomas Barna, La Farge, Wisconsin

(Continued on page 59)

Restoring Grassland Ecosystems for Higher Value Cattle and Crops

Soil4corners is putting Allan Savory's soil regeneration principles into action near Blanding, Utah, on a two-acre demonstration project that will extend over five years. Our goal is to create functioning soil and potentially alleviate drought conditions caused by bare ground by applying these principles on large-scale acreage on the Colorado Plateau.

Cover the Ground: In Year One, we bunched 150 cow-calf pairs into one-acre paddocks where we fed hay for two weeks. Bare ground was reduced from 95% to about 40%.

Do Not Disturb: As Year Two began, we observed which seeds sprouted with the arrival of spring moisture. We protected living roots by not grazing in order to encourage microorganisms and fungal networks to colonize the ground.

Let Biology do the Work. Converting industrially farmed land to functioning soil will require time to allow a grassland biology to develop. And it will require livestock. Farmers will need ranchers to bring cattle or sheep to graze and trample. We know that grasses grow better when they are grazed. A functioning ecosystem can then deliver higher yields and nutrition at lower costs for years to come.

Soil4corners is dedicated to inspiring adaptive soil stewardship that works with natural processes to build maximum vitality into our soil, crops, livestock, families, and economies.
Visit soil4corners.com for more information.

soil4corners

A Gift for Life:
Learning how to work hard

BY Bill Beck

Let me begin with some quick personal background that will help explain my perspective on hard work. I grew up on a small family farm in Michigan as the second oldest of 11 children. With that many mouths to feed, we had several large gardens and raised our own beef and pork. We also had a milk cow, which, as many readers know, had to be milked twice a day, rain or shine. It could never be skipped.

This is about the great lesson for life that growing up on a farm or ranch affords us.

The pace and tempo of rural farm and ranch life can vary. At times, circumstances demand hard physical labor for very long hours. There are also consistent tasks and responsibilities that never go away. The stock must be watered and fed. The hay has to be put up and in the barn before it rains. That field has to be plowed.

Growing up that way, we learn responsibility at a very young age. You learn that not doing your chores is not an option, so why debate it? You learn that you have to do "it," whatever it is, because nobody else is going to do "it." Perhaps the concept of individual responsibility could be embraced by our government and political parties.

As a child, you are given chores and tasks that are yours and yours alone. Without a sense of responsibility, how can a person succeed? How can someone become a good citizen or parent?

Today, the vast majority of Americans live in cities or urban environments. How does a parent teach responsibility there? Maybe by having a child change the kitty litter or feed the goldfish?

My father taught us that we had to work hard and finish what we started. He would say, "We work until it is done or we are too tired to continue." There were times when we worked through an entire day and into the night. I have described this to some contemporary city dwellers, and they called it child abuse. How far we have fallen.

After completing my higher education and serving a stint in the U.S. Marines, I lived in urban and suburban environments. My career was in a white-collar profession. I have never claimed to be the smartest man in the conference room. But I knew that, because I had grown up on that farm, I could outwork 99% of the other people if I needed to. I knew that because I had already put in insanely long hours of hard work.

"We work until it is done or we are too tired to continue."

Today, I hear construction contractors report that one of their biggest problems is keeping workers off their cellphones. Apparently, some workers feel entitled and do not believe they should have to work all the time.

I also have a good friend who, after retiring from a successful career as a family counselor, went to work in a local bakery and sandwich shop to stay engaged. The manager there has to keep watch because several staff members will slip away to get on their phones. They hide in a corner, or wherever they can, to check texts or emails.

That is the farthest thing from a good work ethic.

To parents raising children on a farm or ranch: You can give your children a life lesson that will hold them in good stead for the rest of their lives. City parents simply cannot provide the same experience.

Learning how to work hard is an advantage too many city-dwelling children do not have today. Studying hard in school to earn good grades is important, but it can also create the expectation that life only requires a person to regurgitate raw knowledge, without applying it or accomplishing a task. We know that is not reality.

Feeling tired but accomplished after a day of working hard and giving it your all provides the sense of achievement and self-respect we all need.

Texting and scrolling through social media do not.

So celebrate what you have learned about hard work and what you have passed on to your children. It is a gift for life, and you have given them a tremendous advantage. ■

Bill Beck lives in southern Idaho and is a Midwest native who grew up on a 100-acre family farm. He is the oldest boy of eleven kids and at an early age learned how to work hard. After college he became a US Marine officer serving for 8 years.



LETTERS

(Continued from page 57)

WELCOME RACHEL

Welcome Rachel to the fight. Keep it up!

—Robert Obermeyer, Kalispell, Montana

I LOVE THE NEW NEWSLETTER!

Hi Rachel. I love the new newsletter! It helps with the agonizing drought waiting for the next welcome surprise in the mailbox. Since I received this one today, I'm not sure if I need to actually 'subscribe' or not, but please make sure I'm on your list. The best to you, CJ and everyone holding down the fort there!

—Thomas M. Reese, Baker City, Oregon

TO GUTSY STAFF & RACHEL

I'm listening to Ian Tyson's "Bill Kane" song. You wrote a wonderful story about Bill and so many legends. Please keep up your good work. At 85 I say I'll ride 'til I die and be reading RANGE forever. Best to you all…

Danny Crampton, Midland, Michigan

YOU CAN'T FIX STUPID

In answer to "A Measure of Bullshxt' John Wayne said, "You can't fix stupid."

So, David Michelson wants to improve all society, why not improve it all the way for himself as well as everyone else? David, stop hurting the climate. SHUT OFF all electric power plants. Even green electric puts bad waves in the air. No vehicles – combustible, gas or electric. No cell phones, no radio, no television as that puts bad waves in the air.

Transportation would be walking only If all food productions is outlawed, then having food in your possession should be against the law,

(Continued on page 68)

LONG LINEAGES

FROM TEXAS TO NEW MEXICO.

By Deanna Dickinson McCall

Photos courtesy of Teague Family

The Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico are beautiful, noted for having some of the cleanest air in the United States. They are home to the southernmost ski area in the country and were a welcome sight to pioneers who came from Texas and adjoining states, drawn especially by the pristine air.

Joe Teague and his wife, Amy Bell Teague, both come from Texas ranching families. Joe was raised on a family ranch near Camp Wood, Texas. After working on ranches in several states, he came to New Mexico to work on a ranch near Piñon.

Both Joe and Amy have ranching histories that run generations deep. Amy's great-grandfather, Jesse Parker Bell, moved as a child from Center, Texas, to the Weed, N.M., area in 1899.

The couple has a background many would envy. Both Joe and Amy have at least five generations of ranching behind them, and they are carrying on the tradition with their own children, Quirt, 3, and Brazos, 1.

Amy, 41, grew up in the West Texas town of Kermit. After graduating as valedictorian from high school, she moved to Jackson, Wyo., and worked as a wrangler in Grand Teton National Park. She later attended Texas Tech University, where she was on the horse judging team as well as the original ranch horse team. She was honored to be selected as the school's mascot, the Texas Tech Masked Rider.

Next came an internship at Parker Ranch in Hawaii, one of the largest cattle operations in the United States. Amy graduated magna cum laude from Texas Tech with a degree in animal and food sciences with an emphasis on animal production. She earned a full-time job at the 6666 Ranch in Guthrie, Texas, working under Dr. Glenn Blodgett and riding horses under head trainer Chance O'Neal.

She then attended the Texas Christian University Ranch Management Program. Part of her graduation project was to create an extensive management plan for a ranch. At the time, her family ranch was not large enough to support more generations, so on paper she created a plan that included neighboring property.

"Ironically, Joe and I were able to actually purchase some of the land and grazing allotments that were part of my ranch management plan from school."

The couple met while Amy was attending Texas Tech.

"I attended South Plains College and rode colts, day-worked and shod horses," Joe says. "When I went to a ranch rodeo, we met for the first time. I started working on ranches in Colorado, Oklahoma and West Texas, including Indian Canyon Ranch near Gail, Texas. When my 14-year-old great-grandfather, George Teague, ran away, he came to Indian Canyon Ranch to work."

Joe grins at the coincidence. He worked under different horse trainers over the years to increase his horsemanship abilities and trained horses for the public while he day-worked.



Corrals in the snow

A HERITAGE OF HARD WORK

The couple reflect their ancestors' values and work ethic. They both do what it takes to ranch and build their future.

Amy has a great example in her father.

"John Dalton Bell, the oldest of Dalton and Doris Bell's six children, is my father," she says. "He tried to buy his own ranch at 16, but the bank told him he was too young. Instead, he started a small herd of dogie calves with a milk cow. He eventually built his little herd of misfits and traded it for interest in an oil lease in West Texas. He was able to purchase a ranch he had always wanted in 2006 in Weed, New Mexico, just a few miles down the road from his family's ranch, the Jesse Bell Homestead. They also bought a ranch in Piñon, New Mexico, a few years later."

Joe's strong family lineage has always been part of him.

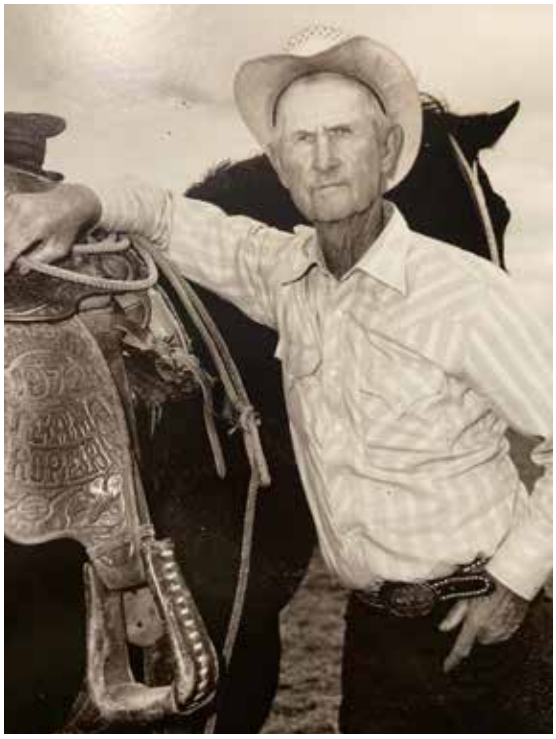
"The ranch I was raised on near Camp Wood, Texas, was purchased by my great-grandfather, Wes Cooksey," he says. "My grandmother, Adana Cooksey, with the help of her father, Wes, was the first girl allowed into the Texas Tech Animal Husbandry Program. Adana was active in every aspect of day-to-day ranching. It was her true passion. She and my grandfather, Earl Teague, lived on and managed the ranch together. Dad and my stepmom, John Earl and Susan Teague, continue to run the family ranch in Real and Uvalde counties, Texas. Dad has kept the ranch together and was even able to expand the ranch. Amy and I travel back to Texas to help when needed."

Joe's great-grandfather George not only ran away at an early age, but also married and became the father of three children. Earl was one of George's sons and Joe's grandfather. George worked with the famous author Elmer Kelton and Kelton's father, Buck. George Teague is included in the dedication of Kelton's book, and later movie, "The Good Old Boys."

Earl roped everything from hogs to coyotes and qualified for the National Finals in Madison Square Garden.

"Granddad was also instrumental in starting the Turtles organization, and the family helped organize both the Rodeo Cowboys Association and the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association."

Joe's maternal grandfather, Carl Griffing, ran large stocker operations on his ranch and often leased wheat farms. Susan Griffing, Joe's mother, learned to help process and doctor at a very young age. She became a competitive contender in team roping, calf roping and even steer riding.



George Teague, Crane Texas



Earl Teague helping as a child



Jesse Bell with a wagon load of posts on the old homestead

EQUAL PARTNERS

Joe recognizes that their own experiences have helped them, too.

"It's been a huge help for us to have worked cows in six different states," he says. "Seeing the way others do things has made a big impact on how we run our operation. I have tried to learn as much as I can from others. When I day-worked, I tried to ask as many questions as I could at each place. We have tried to be as diverse as possible in our operations. Seeing what worked and didn't work for others has helped us be successful."

Raised with strong women in his family, Joe respects Amy. Day-to-day operations are shared equally between them.

Amy adds, "We work together daily on whatever needs to be done. Our kids go with us everywhere, which is a great way to grow up. As we expanded in the last year, we have been blessed with the help of two longtime friends, Randy Walker and Matt Bowerman. We also work together with my parents, John and Sylvia, to help each other with daily ranch operations, along with the assistance of Earnie Campbell in operations and Leslie Peden, who is in charge of bookkeeping and technology."

Amy says her family moved to New Mexico for health reasons.

"Jesse Parker Bell, my great-grandfather, had lost his father and two sisters to consumption, tuberculosis," she says. "His mother, Piney Tatum Bell, moved to New Mexico with her four children for the healing dry air. After some time there, Piney was ready to go back to Texas. Jesse Bell, who was 14, and his brother Bunyan, 12, told their mother they were 'not going back to Texas to die.'"

Jesse and his brother would gather wild horses in the mountains, breaking them on the trail to be sold back to Texas. Jesse married Melissa Moffett, and they did everything they could to make ends meet. In addition to the horses, they would cut stays to sell near El Paso, Texas. He also cut salt from the salt flats and brought it back up to the mountains.

Jesse Bell's youngest child was Amy's grandfather, Dalton Bell. When Dalton and his wife moved to Carlsbad, New Mexico, with their four children, someone asked him, "Are all those your kids?"

He answered, "One belongs to the milkman, one belongs to the mailman, one belongs to the potasher, and one belongs to the farmer."

Carlsbad has potash mines, and he had worked there. Much to his wife's chagrin, he didn't bother to explain that he had worked all those jobs. Eventually, he moved from his farm in Artesia and bought the Little Reata Ranch that Amy and Joe recently purchased.

Amy's mother, Silver Shaw, married Dalton's son, John Dalton Bell, and became Silver Bell.



The Bell and Teague Family branding on the flats

"Mom always had a love for horses," Amy says. "She paved the way as the first girl to be hired as a wrangler for the same outfitter I worked for 35 years later. Mom was the Ogden Pioneer Days Rodeo Queen and Utah Appaloosa Queen, and she loves ranching here in New Mexico. Her father, John Austin Shaw, was an avid horseman and outdoorsman who had a small horse ranch and farm in Liberty Valley, Utah. Mom's maternal grandfather, Henry Aldous Dixon, was the president of the state's agricultural college, Utah State University."



Amy roping on the Parker ranch rodeo team, Hawaii

ADDING TO THE LINEAGE

Joe is proud of their heritage.

"Our ranching and cowboy heritage stems from generations of family members on both sides who worked and sacrificed to provide for their families in a growing world," he says. "We are very proud of our hard-working ancestors who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to make ends meet. As our family branches back, many of our ancestors have been involved in agriculture. We each have at least five generations of ranching family heritage."

"Our families' ranches continue and operate today. However, as many ranching families experience, with continued rising costs and drought, the family ranches are not big enough to sustain all family members who want to participate. Because of this, we have branched out on our own and started our own operation."

Those operations encompass both the mountains and the desert flats below. The couple's varied experiences are a huge help in running cattle in such varied terrain.

Amy wants young people to know they can do this.

"There are ways to get into this industry with a little imagination and hard work," she says. "Don't be afraid to go after supplemental income to make it work. You will have bad years. We have done a lot of different things to make ends meet."

Joe currently helps friends and neighbors acquire or market their ranches as a real estate broker.

"From a real estate standpoint, with the high calf prices we are seeing, ranchers are buying ranches again," he says. "That hasn't happened for decades. We are finally seeing our nation return to beef as a preferred protein for health benefits. People are starting to prioritize agriculture products and realize the nutrition and value our products offer. This is the most optimistic we have been in a long time about ranching and the longevity for generations to come." ■

Deanna Dickinson McCall is an award-winning writer currently ranching in several states. Check deannadickinsonmccall.com


Quirt Teague with the cows


Brazos Teague riding Whedo

THE TRAP OF CHASING THE BIG MARKET

Renewed access to China could bring opportunity for U.S. beef, but real security for ranchers still begins at home.

BY LISA BEDELL

China is one of the largest beef importers in the world, and access to that market matters. For American beef exporters, especially those selling premium cuts, China can represent real money.

But ranchers should be careful not to confuse market access with market security.

After years of tariffs, lapsed registrations and political posturing between Washington and Beijing, China appears to be reopening the door to more U.S. beef. Its 2026 quota for U.S. beef is reportedly set at 164,000 metric tons, while key competitors such as Australia and Brazil are nearing their limits and could face tariffs as high as 55 percent once those quotas are exhausted.

On paper, that creates opportunity for American beef, but in practice, it is more complicated.

U.S. beef exporters to China face a tangled mix of regulatory, political and market barriers that have significantly reduced trade flows in recent years. The U.S. share of total China and Hong Kong beef imports peaked at 8.8 percent in 2022, then fell to 3.7 percent in 2025, as tariffs and access problems choked trade.

Since 2018, China has imposed steep retaliatory tariffs on U.S. beef. At times, those tariffs have climbed high enough to make American beef uncompetitive. Even short-term changes can cause immediate disruption. After tariff announcements in May 2025, weekly exports to China reportedly fell from 2,400 metric tons to just 17 metric tons.



At a Fallon, Nev., sale barn, the question is less what China wants and more what American ranchers need: fair markets, dependable prices and consumers willing to eat American beef. Photo courtesy Nevada Livestock Marketing

That is not a market, it is a political light switch.

A May 15, 2026, press release from the United States Cattlemen's Association welcomed reports that President Trump and President Xi discussed American beef market access during Trump's trip to China.

"Renewal of U.S. beef export facility registrations is an essential step to securing market access, and we appreciate the Trump Administration's work on this," said USCA President Justin Tupper. "Given the current state of beef trade between our two countries — with China's quota-managed system and continued

uncertainty around the details of the deal — we continue to urge U.S. trade officials to pursue truly free and fair trade that delivers stable, transparent and enforceable access for U.S. beef producers. Regardless of the specific terms any deal ultimately takes, U.S. cattle producers deserve reduced volatility in the marketplace and the market access their superior product has earned on the world stage."

That is the right frame. American beef deserves access. But access must be stable, transparent and enforceable.

China's failure to renew export registrations for hundreds of U.S. beef plants was not a minor paperwork problem. About 400 U.S. beef plants — roughly 65 percent of those once approved — were cut off when registrations lapsed without renewal. Those registrations, granted between March 2020 and April 2021, had helped enable U.S. beef exports to China. When they were not renewed, most exporters lost access.

Industry observers have suggested the lapse was not driven primarily by health or technical inspection problems, but by politics. Whether China calls it regulation or negotiation, the result was the same: American exporters were left uncertain, and producers were once again reminded that foreign markets can disappear when politics change.

In May 2026, following the U.S.-China presidential summit, China renewed import licenses for hundreds of U.S. meat plants. The U.S. Meat Export Federation reported that 425 overdue beef establishments received registration extensions, with 77 more added, though 38 remained suspended.

That is a major step toward restoring access. But it does not mean U.S. beef will immediately flood China. High U.S. beef prices and softer Chinese demand have so far prevented a surge in shipments.

Analysts expect U.S. beef exports to China could pick up in the second half of 2026, especially as quotas from other major suppliers are exhausted. The United States still has its 164,000-ton import allowance, which could become a competitive advantage. But the pace will depend on China's willingness to buy, the full resolution of registration issues and the ability of U.S. beef to compete against cheaper cuts from other countries.

That is the export side, but the rancher side is more serious.

According to USDA, the U.S. cattle herd has fallen to its lowest level in more than 70 years. Years of drought, high fuel prices, expensive feed, equipment and labor, and poor profitability forced many ranchers to sell heifers or place females on feed instead of keeping them to calve. Deteriorating pasture conditions from 2021 to 2023 accelerated the shrinkage.

Now, even with high cattle prices, rebuilding the herd is not simple. A rancher needs confidence before keeping back heifers. It takes at least 30 months for a heifer to produce a calf that actually contributes to herd growth. The calf crop has fallen to its lowest level since 1941, compounding the shortage.

This is the part Washington often misunderstands. You cannot rebuild a cattle herd with a press release.

Ranchers need dependable returns. They need stable markets. They need enough confidence to invest in breeding stock. Government or market interventions designed to lower consumer beef prices may sound popular in the grocery aisle, but if they crush cattle prices, they discourage the very restocking needed to strengthen long-term supply.

The United States remains the world's largest beef producer, producing about 18 to 20 percent of the world's beef with only about 5 percent of the world's cattle. That remarkable efficiency comes from high-quality genetics, feed systems, processing infrastructure and generations of rancher knowledge.

American producers excel at high-quality, grain-fed beef, especially steaks and roasts. At the same time, the United States still imports large amounts of lean beef trimmings, often from countries such as Australia, to blend with domestic fatty trimmings for ground beef. In other words, we export premium cuts while importing lean beef for everyday hamburger.

That reality makes the China question more complicated. Exporting premium cuts can help U.S. producers capture higher value and spread risk across markets. But if trade volumes depend on Chinese politics, tariffs, currency swings and consumer trends, ranchers should not be asked to build their future around a market that can be opened or closed by government maneuvering.

Of course, trade and exports and China are all part of the big picture equation.

But the long-term strength of America's cattle industry still depends on resilient domestic and local markets that value American beef, American ranchers and the stewardship behind the product.

Access to China may be good news. Dependence on China is foolish.

As global trade policies continue to shift, one thing remains clear: export markets can create opportunity, but they are not a substitute for rebuilding the American cattle herd, protecting fair markets and strengthening consumer loyalty here at home.

Nevada rancher and sale barn owner Jack Payne put it more plainly:

"Let Brazil ship that inferior beef to China, and Americans can eat American beef!"

That may not be diplomatic, but it is not wrong.■

Lisa Bedell writes for RANGE Media from Fallon, Nevada, where she helps with the daily operations of a local ranch. When she's not writing, she's usually working stock dogs, showing her Quarter Horse at local horse shows, or lending a hand wherever ranch life calls. This is her first feature for RANGE.

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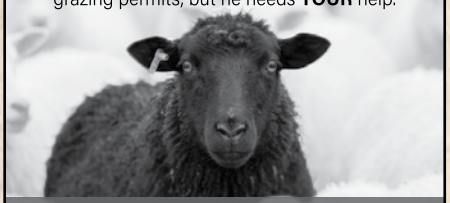
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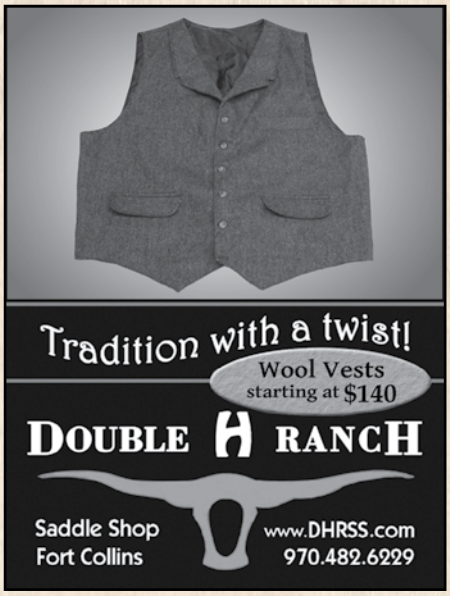
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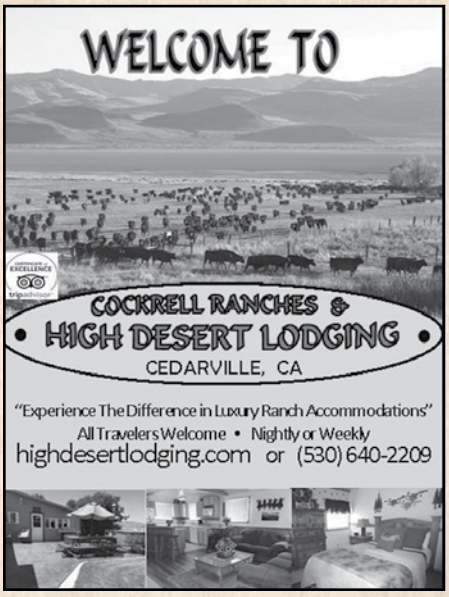
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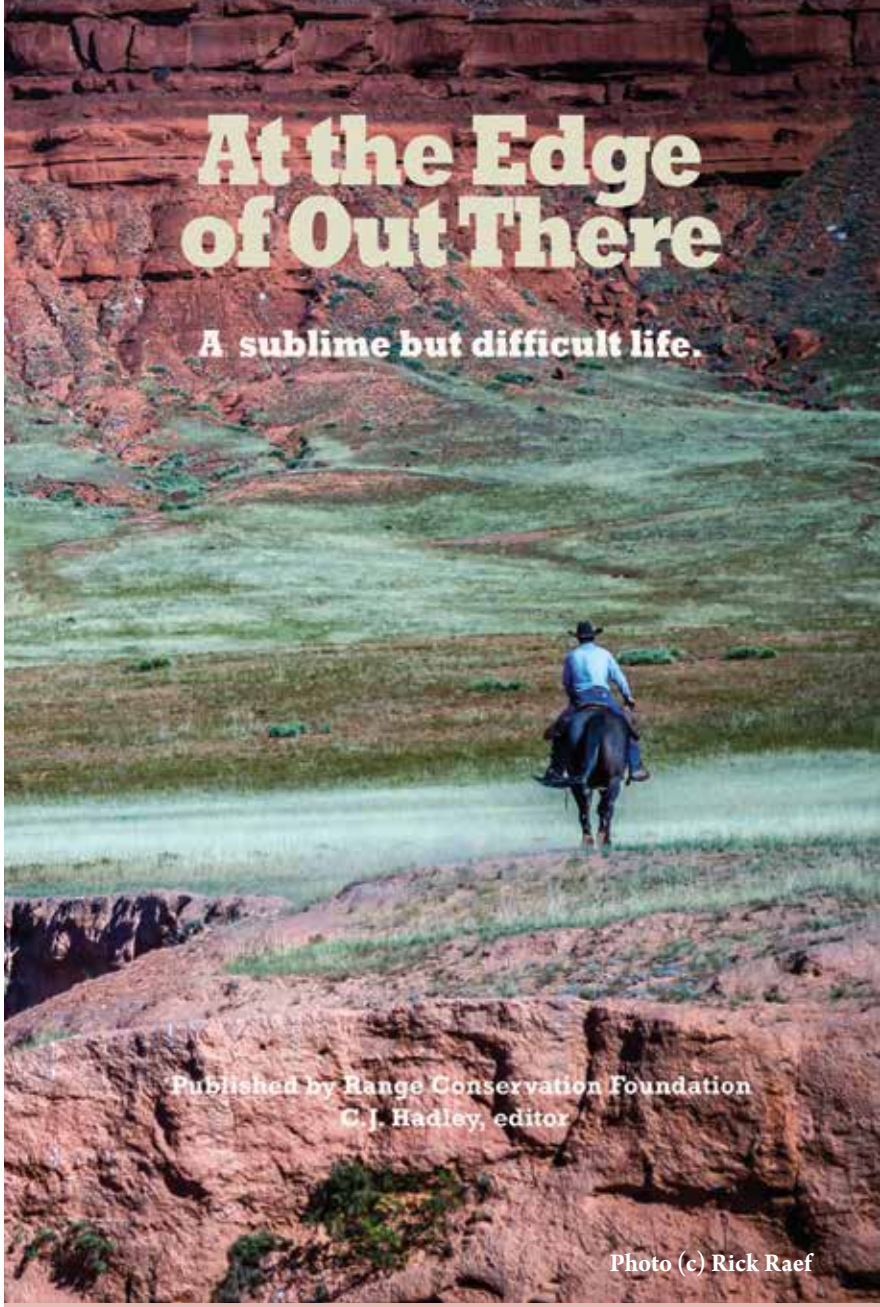
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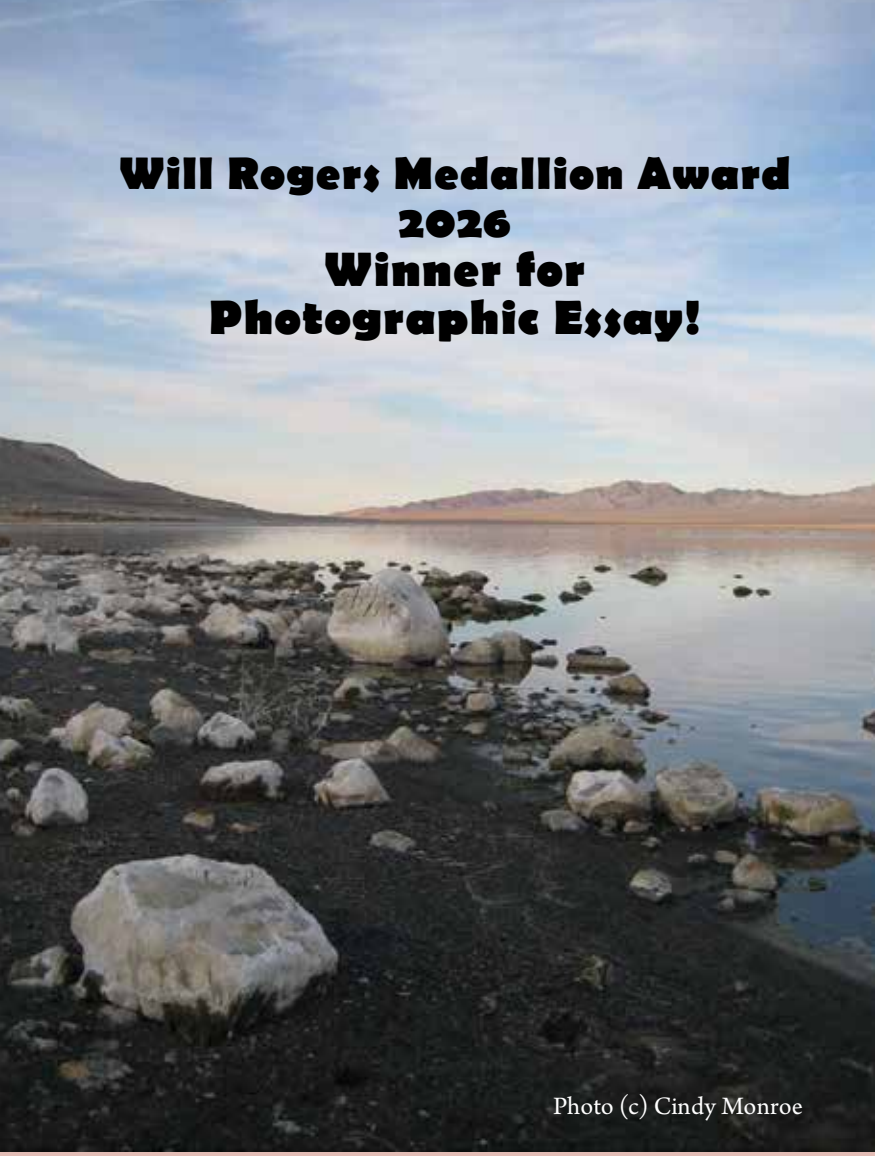
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LETTERS

(Continued from page 59)

making it a
prison sentence. David wants no more veterinarians. There should be no more doctors for people also. With all the animals free roaming—disease should be rampant.

David, after you have gone without food, water, electric and all other every day improvements in life for 30 days please get back to RANGE magazine and let us know how your life is going. PETA is backing you with money—have they stopped large scale euthanasia of pets?
—Wyoming RANGE reader

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I love RANGE magazine and bought three issues at a library book sale.
Mike Bush, Smith River, California

SALTING THE WOUNDS

In my opinion, Ms. Leasa Allington's Letter to the Editor , "Salting the Wounds" (Summer 2026) regarding the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in January 2016 is the best and most balanced perspective I have read about the event.
—Dennis Simontacchi, Lakeview, Oregon

CARRYING CJ'S TORCH

Dear Rachel,
Bless you, thank you for taking CJ's torch for ranching in America and finishing the race via RANGE.

I am sure that hundreds of prayers go out for RANGE everyday—we KNOW you are essential, vital to protect this heritage—this heritage is also essential & vital to America.

My ancestors have been cattle ranching in Colorado and Eastern Utah since 1850. Hence, RANGE is very relevant, and I understand from a deep place what you are doing.

I have heard that RANGE is sent to every Senator & Congressman. That is essential. Studdert is essential.

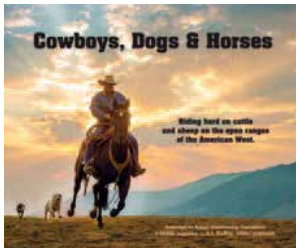
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—Merikae Porter, Montrose, Clorado

(Continued on page 82)

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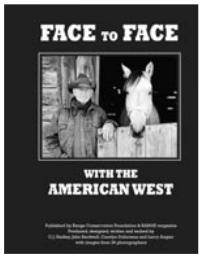


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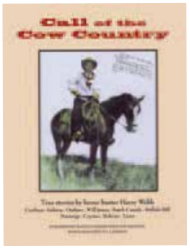


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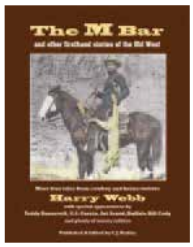
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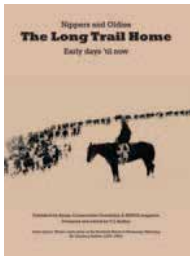


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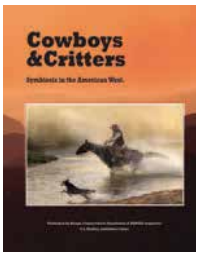
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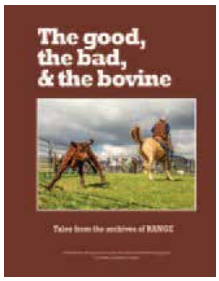
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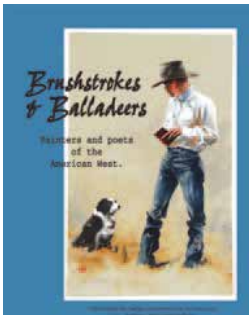


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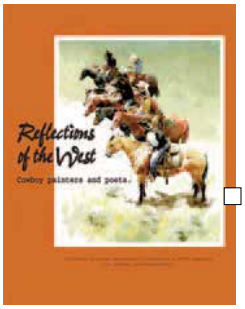
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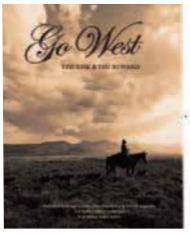
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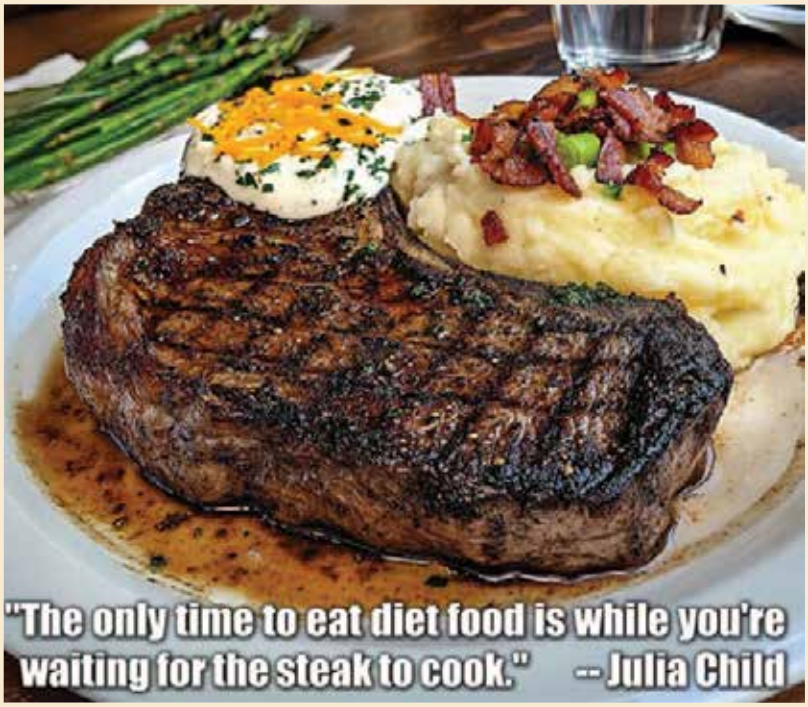
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COMMITTED WHITE HATS

For three generations, the Pettits have turned hard luck into work, service and Santa Carota Beef. Now the California ranch family faces fire, cancer and a David-vs.-Goliath lawsuit with the same old code:
saddle up, help first and keep riding.

BY PATRICIA AIKEN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SANTA CAROTA BEEF



Under a cottonwood on Cottonwood Creek in 2024, father and son, business partners, and best friends, on the left, Justin, and Mike on the right. When the cartels set up illegal cannabis greenhouses across the road, Mike invited the police, who were losing their pistol range to eminent domain, to move their range to the Pettit's side of the fence. "When the cop cars showed up to start target practice, these guys packed their bags and left," Justin laughed.

Growing up on Western movies had its impact on second- and third-generation ranchers Mike and Justin Pettit, father and son. True to form, they mentally don their white hats daily to navigate ranching life's twisting trail, always embracing adversity as an opportunity in disguise.

Those "opportunities" have multiplied of late. Fire, COVID shutdowns, a lawsuit, cancer and the daily gamble of ranching have all tested the family behind Santa Carota Beef, the carrot-fed beef operation the Pettits built 25 miles east of Bakersfield, Calif.

The Pettits have been feeding beef cattle cull carrots for the last 40 years, hence the name Santa Carota Beef. It all started with Arnold Pettit, whose parents came West from Minnesota when Arnold was 4, parallel with the Dust Bowl migration. Hoping for a better life, they lived in a tent in a farm labor camp for Pitt Cotton. Arnold and his three siblings picked cotton before and after school.

"There were railroad tracks right next to their tent, and the kids would walk along the tracks whenever they had a break looking for whatever fell off the train that was edible. Grandma boiled it, and that's what they had to eat. Pretty tough times back then," Mike said.

"As he got older, my dad would look for work with two separate farmers. He'd do anything. One was Clyde Parker, cousin to Butch Cassidy."

Clyde and his wife, Eleanor, themselves childless, took Arnold to live with them on their ranch when he was

12. Arnold always called the Parkers his foster parents and learned ranching while working side by side with Clyde.

After a stint in the Army, Arnold returned in 1958 to help Clyde improve the ranch and married Linda Johnson the same year. Liking the fireman's schedule, Arnold became a firefighter and worked with Clyde in his off time.

In 1961, a neighbor called Clyde asking for help to recover a bull that had gotten out. Clyde saddled up and went to get the bull. Tragically, the bull gored his horse, which rolled over on Clyde, killing him. Mike, born the following year, never had the honor of meeting Clyde.

As the years trickled by, Arnold was known simply as Pop Pettit.

In the mid-'80s, when carrot juice was consumed mostly by California hippies and rabid health-food enthusiasts, Bill Bolthouse had a fledgling carrot company. There was a stack of hay next to the plant.

"Looking to buy hay," Mike said, "Pop and Bill shook hands, and Pop got the hay. He never received an invoice, so he went into the office, and nobody knew what he was talking about. It turned out the vice president was the brother-in-law of one of Pop's best buddies. He said, 'Make our wastewater issue go away, and you can have all the hay you want.' Dad and I started a partnership. We leased the 40 acres right next to the plant, sowed alfalfa and watered it with the carrot wastewater."

Pop and Mike started feeding calves carrots after they were weaned to get them to the 850-pound mark.

"I'm old school. If it ain't broke, don't fix it," Mike says. "But Justin was always pushing me to finish one on carrots. We sampled it on his birthday in 2017. We were like, man, this is good. We've got something here. From there it just took off. That's how Santa Carota Beef came into being."

Justin adds, "Luckily I had married into produce marketing. My mother-in-law sells those cotton candy grapes. So we got to borrow their marketing team. We looked into where people who had tried to make their own label or vertically integrate. They sell their steaks but end up with freezers full of ground beef."

Their adversity-into-opportunity mindset took over.

"We leaned into that. At the time, we were selling meat out of coolers in the back of our pickups to anybody who would buy it. Restaurants, folks in parking lots, whatever we could do to make it move. We finally got into this burger chain because they wanted a dry-aged burger on their menu. They had 25 locations in five states. Overnight we were long on steaks, which I guess you'd call a good problem."

JBS has a Grass Run Farms program. Two weeks after Santa Carota was plugged into the program, JBS raised its price across the board.

"If you want to piss off a chef, you give them a price





Above: Knee deep in carrots, the Pettit herd relish their feed.

To the left: Justin and Brandon grew up playing on carrot piles with Amy the Aussie keeping them company.

and then you change it after they make the menu. These chefs told JBS to pound sand and called us," Justin recalls.

Even though they were off to the races with chefs in Las Vegas and Beverly Hills, they were still probably selling at a loss. Santa Carota broke even at the beginning of February 2020 and turned its first small profit the first week of March 2020, the week COVID shut down the world.

"...Corinne, was selling ground beef out of the back of her Suburban like it was crack cocaine in Compton."

The Pettits were back to selling at farmers markets and out of the back of their pickup again.

"When the ground beef really ran out at the grocery stores, my wife, Corinne, was selling ground beef out of the back of her Suburban like it was crack cocaine in Compton."

The California governor was leading the league on insane COVID policies, such as no social gatherings.

"So we opened up our barn on Thanksgiving and let anyone who wanted to come out. We had one of the biggest turnouts. Going into December, they were busting restaurants for being open. The only lawfare they could do was have the ABC—Alcoholic Beverage Control—take away people's state liquor license. I had enough and just loaded up the backseat of my pickup and started going to all these restaurants that were open. I would just donate meat and tell them, 'We've got your back. We're praying for you. Hopefully you can make a little extra money on this,'" Mike said.

He said he originally got the idea because of celebrity chef Andrew Gruel in Orange County, who is a good family friend. Gruel put out a burger on his menu, and all the proceeds went to a fund he created to help restaurant workers because they were out of work. Restaurant workers are the sales staff, really. So the Pettits donated about 10,000 pounds of trim raw material for that burger program, then started taking care of their hometown and donating boxes of steaks to anybody who was open.

"I posted a video on it, and it got traction. All our local people were replying, 'Hey, go to this restaurant, they're open.' When ABC started tracking our posts and trying to shut down those restaurants, it became a game of cat and mouse. So I'd have people direct message or email me. Every day I would just get up, and I would go find restaurants and help them out, let them know they're not alone. That we're in the fight with them."

They got such a following out of it, they ended up taking a couple of pallets of meat to the ranch and had people come out. They set up a dispatch list, prayed over the meat, gave everyone a couple of addresses, loaded up their back seats and turned them loose, covering Bakersfield and almost every restaurant that was open under protest.

"There's a fireman who has a restaurant and pizza joint," Mike said. "I brought him a box of New Yorks. His wife was there and said, 'Justin, they want me to close the restaurant, and my employees won't get a paycheck before Christmas. If I do that, their unemployment won't kick in until after the first of the year. We can't do this.' So I just told them whatever they need and gave them meat. It was just the right thing to do."

Fire is part of the Pettits' history, too. A fire on the ranch around 2012 threatened both their current ranch and their legacy ranch. Justin and Brandon worked on hotshot crews fighting forest fires when they were younger. Mike was a firefighter for 20 years specializing in bulldozers, and Pop fought fires for 30 years.

"Our neighbors called, and we went up and fought everything with shovels. Dad walked a bulldozer up. The fire was licking the eaves, but we held it."

The neighboring Rankin Ranch was in trouble, and the Pettits were able to save the Rankins' place, an amazing family who incidentally carries RANGE Magazine.

"Now with a chainsaw and a 'water buffalo' trailer, we did a burn operation all the way down because no one came to help us. We ended up tying into another fire that came off Breckenridge Road. When we got to the bottom, it seemed like the whole world was there. All the lights and sirens, and they did a full investigation on us.

"The Rankin family said, 'We will pay your attorney fees. You're not going to jail over this. You just saved our ranch and did the absolute right thing.' A friend loaned us a radio, and we started talking to Air Attack. I named us the Pettit Task Force, and we went right back in the fight."

The Borel Fire, which started July 24, 2024, was not fully contained until



It's clear to see why Mike and Justin are proud of their beautifully marbled, carrot finished Santa Carota steaks.

mid-September. Before that fire, Pop was about to go into hospice. Justin was lobbying the family to bring him up to the legacy summer ranch.

"We were trying to make decisions on whether to save our cows or save the summer ranch."

They managed to save the cows, but the cattle were stressed by the move down to the 110-degree heat in the valley.

During that fire, Pop died.

As the world tried to return to normal after COVID, "The restaurants brought us back on. We were in a big growth mode. But in 2023, our orders really went down for our ground beef program. The math just wasn't mathing," Justin says.

"There's a distributor between us and the restaurant group that grinds our raw material, puts it into burger patties and gets it to Sysco, U.S. Foods or direct to the restaurant. When they canceled an order and said they had product, we knew it couldn't be true."

When Justin did his research, he found the numbers were more than half a million pounds off. Santa Carota's premium product brought double the commodity price. When he confronted the processor, the numbers went back up. The slowdown, then the jump back to previous numbers, was painful for production. There were not enough cattle ready to harvest.



Arnold "Pop" Pettit in full cowboy mode. .



Carrot snacking Angus posing for the camera.

After demand letters didn't work, Justin and Mike filed a David-vs.-Goliath lawsuit May 1, 2024. Two years and several law firms later, the processor has dug in its heels and knows it can financially outlast them.

In the meantime, Justin sold his house to live on the equity. He and his family moved to Texas to get his 6-year-old daughter, who has cerebral palsy, much better physical therapy.

"It just made sense to rent a house, hunker down for a couple of years to get through this thing."



Pop and his brothers; Harlan and Carroll.

He runs the e-commerce side from Texas. Mike and two longtime cowboys handle the ranch.

That habit of loading up and helping did not end with COVID. Chef Andrew Gruel alerted Justin to the Palisades Fire. Justin, by then in Texas, knowing they were always the first to saddle up, called Mike.

"You want to do something about it, Dad?"

Most of their beef was in Texas for their e-commerce site or at a packinghouse. But they had one cold storage with a couple of pallets in Bakersfield. Once their community knew Mike was going, they turned up with clothes, diapers, baby wipes and water. So with the horse trailer loaded with frozen meat and the flatbed with donations, "he drove down through the fire and straight to a restaurant. He asked if they had a forklift.

"'No, but we have manpower,' came the answer, and the crew started unloading by hand. Right in the parking lot, they set up a donation distribution center. The chefs were thawing beef and cooking a week's worth of meals while others were running back and forth making deliveries to the makeshift camps."

The next "opportunity" threw a wrench into life.

Mike was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a blood cancer, on the last day of 2025. They didn't want to do small-town cancer treatments or run back and forth to Los Angeles, so Mike is living with his other son, Brandon, in Katy, Texas, near Houston. Even with a great attitude, cancer treatment is no walk in the park.

Now Justin travels back and forth to the ranch to manage the herd with their two hands. Mike's horse and dog are now therapy animals at Justin's house in Texas.

"The best thing for the inside of a person is the outside of a horse," insists Justin.

Mike comes up about once a week.

After a discouraging mediation on a Tuesday, they gathered heifers Thursday.

Justin recalls, "My best friend came down and helped me. He ran the squeeze and brought his tractor. After we got the heifers done, I just stopped and shot a video with a $12 mic to let everyone know the fight we're in and what we're up against. It was hard to ask for help. I told how we had a GoFundMe. Didn't think anything of it, put it in God's hands and got back to the cow work.

"I posted it that afternoon. I reposted it and tagged Secretary Rollins Thursday evening. We flew back to Texas with broken hearts on Friday. By Saturday night, in the middle of National Ag Day with ranchers and farmers at the White House, she personally messaged me on social media and gave me her email address. She emailed me back the next morning, and by midmorning I had a meeting with her, USDA attorneys and the chief of staff on it. They're looking to help. We had a great 20-minute chat.

"We're usually the first to saddle up for people in need. It was hard for us to ask. But when the chips are down, the right people give it back," Justin shares.

So far, that GoFundMe video has raised $78,000 and a similar amount in beef sales.

As of this writing, the Pettits have a bench trial scheduled for mid-August and hope to have this completely resolved and behind them soon. Mike underwent immunotherapy at MD Anderson in Houston, Texas.Although his fighting spirit was strong, Mike didn't survive the treatment. He passed away on June 21, 2026. Our hearts go out to Justin and the entire Pettit family.■

"The best thing for the inside of a person is the outside of a horse."

Patricia Aiken lives in Diamond Valley near Eureka, Nev. She's grateful she had the opportunity to meet Mike Pettit, a truly remarkable man. He was pleased to be interviewed for RANGE. It was an honor, Mike. Patricia can be reached at stubbornaussie@gmail.com.



Mike handed down his horse Toby to 15 year old Luke seen here on a foggy morning.



12 Year old Hank aboard Yak Yak working with Daisy the Red Merle Aussie.

Given Not Taken

Harry's famous photobomb creates a museum photo that embodies Idaho Shags' treasured traits and the spirit of the West.

By Dianna Troyer



"Harry the Cow Dog" Photo by David Stoecklein

Whenever she moves cattle in central Idaho's Lost River Valley, Susie Morton knows the hard work will be tempered with a little humor from her indispensable, disheveled-looking canine partners, Carl, Rhonda and Blacky.

With their distinctive rascally gaze and wiry hair standing up in random directions, her three Idaho Shags look like they played with an electric fence and have no regrets.

While they may have a comical countenance, they take their job seriously. If obstinate cows refuse to budge and become combative, her courageous trio barks and lunges at them, darting and dodging hooves, quickly persuading them to go in the right direction.

"If they do get kicked, they get up and go right back at it," said Morton, who lives north of Mackay. "They're faithful, tough and fearless. They love to go anywhere with you and can work all day and still be playful. Idaho Shags are becoming more and more popular, and once people get one, they tend to stick with the breed."

An Idaho Shag breeder since the early 1990s, Morton has relied on them while working for livestock associations, managing ranches and helping friends.

Along with being revered for their stamina, loyalty, herding instinct and gentleness with children, Idaho Shags also have a special legacy in Lost River Valley lore. Harry, the breed's unofficial ambassador, became a national celebrity for his infamous photobomb near the Mackay Reservoir. Another Shag, Korkie, was a devoted hospice caregiver.

A scruffy black-and-white dynamo, Harry's enthusiasm is enshrined in a museum-quality photo titled "Harry the Cow Dog." David R. Stoecklein, a nationally renowned Western fine art photographer, unintentionally caught him and a cowboy astride his horse leaping in perfect unison across a ditch — an example of the saying, "Photos are given, not taken."

"That photo always makes me smile," Morton said. "It's what Shags are all about — how they're happy, playful, get excited and become a little wild. They have a lot of personality."

Harry's physical traits and athleticism reflect the origins of the unregistered breed, an innovation of Idaho ranchers. They needed friendly, athletic, 40- to 60-pound stock dogs with an innate herding instinct and a coat to protect them from the cold. They blended Airedale Terrier, Australian Shepherd and border collie, with some ranchers adding heeler and Kelpie.



Rancher Bret Zollinger recounts the backstory of how the iconic museum-quality photo "Harry the Cow Dog" was made, describing it as a fortuitous accident for fine art photographer David Stoecklein, his longtime friend. Harry and cowboy Mike Seal jump a ditch in perfect unison. Photo by Dianna Troyer

The endearing and enduring photo of airborne Harry impressed curators at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles. Although it was taken in the late 1990s, Harry's obvious exuberance for life gives it a timeless quality, noted curators who bought it in 2016 for the Cowboy Gallery because of "its significance in capturing the spirit of the American West."

What's the photo's backstory?

Morton's friend, rancher Bret Zollinger, who values her breeding program and later got one of her puppies, was helping Stoecklein during that photo session and tells its backstory.

"It's cool, plumb cool for that photo to be in a national museum," said Zollinger, Stoecklein's neighbor and the fourth generation in his family to raise cattle in the valley. "It was purely accidental."

Mike Seal, the cowboy in the once-in-a-lifetime photo and Zollinger's longtime friend, agrees.

"That photo was a fluke that made Dave famous," said Seal, a former manager of the nearby 6X Ranch. "Dave tried to re-create it but never could. He kept cussing at Harry for running into every photo and ruining it but later was glad he misbehaved."

Seal, a Realtor in Salmon, said the photo offers timeless advice.

"To me, Harry and that photo remind us to be a free spirit and not follow in someone else's footsteps, to get in the mix of life on your own terms. That was Dave in a nutshell, too. He was one-of-a-kind. His creativity was unbelievable — how he saw the world and composed photos. Sometimes, we thought his ideas wouldn't work, but they always did."

Zollinger, Seal and their decades-old friend Jay Hoggan, who owned Harry, recall their roles in that millisecond photo session as vividly as if it happened yesterday. It is one of their fondest and funniest memories of working with Stoecklein, renowned for his high energy before his two-year battle with terminal lung cancer.



Jay Hoggan says his dog Harry embodied Idaho Shags' treasured traits; their stamina, playfulness and vivacious attitude. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Baldauf Images

Their long friendship and photo sessions were cut short when Stoecklein died at age 65 in 2014. By then, he had published 50 books, many featuring people in the valley. He often said his goal was to tell a story in every photo and preserve a ranching lifestyle he deeply admired.

"We were over at Dave's place that day," Zollinger said. "He needed more photos for his books and calendars. During a lot of his shoots, I helped run the horses. He loved the valley and called it a perfect outdoor studio. He understood light and how to capture it, especially on the mountain ranges at sunrise and sunset. For that photo, he crawled backwards into a culvert so he could be at ground level when Mike jumped over the ditch."

Harry kept getting in the way, recalled Hoggan, a rodeo stock contractor at the time. He was based in Hamer and often provided horses for photo sessions.

"Dave got impatient with Harry," Hoggan said. "He finally had enough and shouted, 'Put that damn dog up.'"

During the next few minutes, Harry was both a naughty boy and a very good dog, according to a post on the David R. Stoecklein Photography Facebook page.

"It almost didn't happen," Stoecklein noted of the iconic moment. "In fact, if Harry had stayed in the back of Jay's truck like he was told, he would not have jumped the ditch chasing the horses, and I would have not caught this on film. Lucky for all of us, Jay did a lousy job training Harry the cow dog."

Hoggan recalled that Stoecklein was using his camera's motor drive.

"Later, he said he just remembered seeing a blur but didn't realize he had photographed Harry until he developed the film."

Harry was always a hero to the Hoggan family and helped

herd their livestock. "Some friends couldn't have a dog anymore, so they gave him to us," Hoggan said. "We named him Harry because he was, well, just so hairy. He worked hard at whatever we asked of him. He loved our kids and was protective of them. He liked traveling, rodeos, and riding on the back of our truck."

Whatever happened to Harry?

Unfortunately, Harry's fate is unknown. While returning home from a rodeo in Washington, the Hoggans stopped in Mountain Home to fuel up.

"He must have jumped off the truck to go find a bush or take a quick run," Hoggan said. "When we drove on, we assumed he was back there like usual but realized he was gone. We went back to the gas station and called and looked for hours but never did find him. We like to think he charmed a family and started a new chapter of his life."



Susie Morton is known for breeding Idaho Shags with herding instincts. One of her puppies went to a rancher in Arizona. Photo courtesy of Susie Morton

To the Hoggans, the photo is a memento of their amazing Harry taking a leap of faith, always confident he would stick his landing.

Impressed with Harry, Zollinger looked for an Idaho Shag. Eventually, he bought one with a distinct gold-and-white hair coat from a breeder in Howe and named him Charlie.

"He was high energy and always eager to work cows," Zollinger said.

Stoecklein published photos of the duo working together, as well as the Zollinger children and their friends with cow dogs. Zollinger still has several cow dog calendars and signed copies of books that Stoecklein gave him as remembrances of their friendship.

"Idaho Shags are so dang tough moving cattle and aren't afraid to get after them at either end," Zollinger said.

Thinking others would appreciate Charlie's traits, Morton gave Zollinger a puppy named Molly for breeding. Although Charlie and Molly have passed away, offspring from their litters are still in the valley. Zollinger invited a friend, Kathie Lambson, to pick one of their puppies.

"I couldn't resist an alert little black-and-white male with his ears always perked up," said Lambson, a Mackay resident. "Korkie is six now. He's the best dog ever — smart and protective. Sometimes cows come off the hill and end up in my yard. Korkie hasn't had any training, yet he instinctively chases them back up the hill. Until he was about two, he liked to heel and herd our friends around when they came to visit."



Kathie Lambert's Idaho Shag, Korkie, was devoted to one of her friends, especially during his hospice care. Photo by Dianna Troyer

Devotion

When Korkie met a family friend, he became devoted to him.

"Whenever he came to visit, Korkie got so excited and ran to see him like his tail was on fire and followed him everywhere," Lambson said.

She made a photo album of the two of them and gave it to her friend.

"He really appreciated looking at those photos, especially when he needed hospice care and stayed at our house," she said. "Korkie slept beside him on the bed and was a huge comfort to him."

Morton said Korkie's devotion is typical of Idaho Shags.

"They tend to pick a favorite person as their own and follow that person everywhere."

Curious about the breed, Morton remembers buying her first Shag during the early 1990s in southern Idaho, when they were still a fairly new breed.

"That dog did a super job working cattle," Morton said. "When she had pups, I kept some and started breeding. I've never have trouble finding good homes for my pups. Most buyers are in Idaho, but I've sold some as far as Massachusetts and Arizona. They can be a little hard-headed, so early on you have to make sure they know who the boss is."

By mid-February, she had found homes for 16 puppies from two litters out of Carl, Rhonda and Blacky. She looks forward to the trio producing more puppies.

"This summer, I'm hoping for another litter of those fuzzy dogs."■

Dianna Troyer is a freelance writer based in Pocatello, Idaho.

RECOMMENDED FROM OUR

RANGE Readers

By Rachel Dahl

At RANGE, reading feels like something we all do together; a long conversation carried on between neighbors. Often, our readers send us books, recommend books, quote books, argue with books and occasionally insist—firmly—that we simply must read whatever is sitting on their nightstand. We love that. The West has always been shaped by people who told stories, saved letters, kept journals and passed along the books that helped them make sense of the land, the work and the lives built here. So, we're making room for that conversation in these pages. Each issue, we'll share a couple books worth talking about, and invite you to read along with us.

Where the Rivers Run North

By Sam Morton

When my dad started telling me about this book, he didn't begin by talking about the characters or even the plot, he talked about the map and the geography and the horse.

The story unfolds in the country where the rivers of northern Wyoming and southern Montana flow north toward the Missouri, a landscape around Sheridan, the Bighorns, the Tongue River and the old Crow and Northern Cheyenne country.

That, perhaps, is the first lesson – in the West geography influences everything.

Although labeled historical fiction, Morton builds his story around real events and many real historical figures; Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Calamity Jane and others, while weaving fictional characters between them. At times you find yourself wondering where history ends and imagination begins. Rather than being distracting, it reminds you how many remarkable stories from the American West remain only partially told.

What fascinated dad the most wasn't the conflict between settlers and tribes or even the cattle drives from Texas. It was the horses. Thousands upon thousands of horses.

Before automobiles transformed the West, this corner of Wyoming and Montana was one of the great horse countries in America. Wild horses covered the range. English investors arrived during the 1880s and 1890s, buying ranches and raising everything from sturdy ranch horses and draft teams to hunter-jumpers and elegant polo ponies destined for New York and the East Coast.

A man who spent his life horseback from ranching to polo himself, dad described ranch after ranch with its own polo field, where English noblemen and working cowboys shared the same game, each needing the other to make the ranches work. It paints a picture of a West that is nearly forgotten today.

And then came World War I, when the U.S. Army bought horses by the thousands, creating a boom unlike anything the ranchers had seen. After the war ended, the market collapsed almost overnight. Horses that had brought premium prices suddenly had almost no value. Like so many Western stories, prosperity and hardship rode in together.

The novel also spends considerable time exploring Native horse culture. Long before reservations and fences, horses were central to life, warfare, hunting and identity for Plains tribes. Those passages provide some of the book's most memorable moments and remind readers that the history of the horse in America cannot be separated from the history of the people who first tamed them.

Dad admitted he enjoyed the first half of the novel more than the second. The early chapters, rich with Native history and the transformation of the frontier, felt especially compelling.

If you're interested in ranching, horses, Western history or simply want a story that captures a remarkable corner of the American West, I'd recommend adding *Where the Rivers Run North* to your reading list.

Brave Hearted: The Women of the American West

By Katie Hickman

History has a funny way of introducing us to the same people over and over again -- the generals, the presidents, the famous explorers, and the outlaws.

Then every once in a while, you pick up a book that boldly shows us a whole new cast of characters.

That is exactly what Katie Hickman's Brave Hearted does, starting with two young women from New York who felt called to become missionaries among the Indians.

Neither had much experience on the frontier. Both found husbands only months before leaving. Then, with more determination than certainty, they headed west on the Oregon Trail.

Hickman tells the story through journals, newspaper accounts and personal letters, allowing the women to speak for themselves whenever possible. Rather than rewriting history, she lets history introduce itself.

Those two missionaries eventually established themselves in the Pacific Northwest, but they are only the beginning.

What follows is less a single story than a panorama of the American West, women crossing the plains with children in covered wagons, native women watching their world change forever, African American women seeking freedom in California, the women who survived the Donner Party, Sarah Winnemucca, whose voice deserves to be far better known in the history of the West.

Even the women history has often preferred to ignore.

One chapter describes the Chinese women who were brought to San Francisco and sold into prostitution. It is difficult reading. My dad admitted he nearly skipped that section altogether because it was so heartbreaking. But perhaps that is part of Hickman's point.

The American West wasn't built only by heroes, it was also shaped by people who

endured extraordinary hardship, exploitation and injustice.

Instead of romanticizing these women and their stories, Hickman documents them carefully through journals, letters and newspapers from the time. You come away feeling like you've been introduced to voices that have waited 150 years to be heard.

We know remarkably little about the women who crossed the same rivers, buried children beside the trail, built homes from nothing, fought for their families, established schools and missions, ran businesses, survived violence and quietly held communities together. But those women deserve to be remembered, too.

Next Up…

Winter Reading Selection

Billionaire Wilderness
By Justin Farrell

What happens when one of the last iconic ranching communities in America becomes one of the wealthiest places on Earth?

In Billionaire Wilderness, sociologist Justin Farrell explores Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where staggering wealth, conservation, ranching traditions, public lands and longtime residents all occupy the same remarkable landscape. Rather than offering simple answers, Farrell examines the tensions that emerge when money, environmental ideals and Western culture collide.

We may not end up agreeing with Farrell, but I'm curious about this issue and want to hear as many perspectives as I can find.

Join the Conversation at
edit@rangemediaco.com

After you finish the book, send your thoughts and tell us what book do you recommend to the RANGE community?

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LETTERS

(Continued from page 68)

RANCHERS OR PEASANTS?

Are we ranchers or are we peasants? In Webster's Dictionary, it defines a peasant as a person that rents his land from the government. In socialist and communist countries, this is common practice. This country we live in is not Cuba, Mexico, England or even Canada. This is the grand old United States of America, where we the people are free and have the right to own property and have it protected, and that right comes from God.

In this country, those grazing rights were established even before water rights or property rights. Many of these allotments were established when he West was still Mexico, and in the treaty between the United States and Mexico, these rights were to be protected.

Since the 1970s, the Forest Service and BLM have joined environmentalists and have tried to eliminate ranchers, while they have stopped all logging and most mining while burning the country up. Agencies that used to have two employees now have first, most of them biologists, archaeologists, zoologists and other 'ologists' making over $100,000 per year and we furnish them all with pickups to drive, and we even furnish them with a public relations team to grab on them. They like to refer to themselves as the permitter and ranchers as the permittee. In other words, the king and the peasant.

—Stanton Gleave,
Kingston, Utah

(Continued on page 84)

BUCKAROO STEW

ENDEAVOR TO PERSEVERE

Would you like fries with that?
By Hank Vogler

In May, I went to a conference with BLM and Forest Service leaders in Winnemucca, Nevada. It was inspiring. The perception was that help was on its way to clean up the lethargic agencies whose motto seems to be, "We have lived through lots of presidents. Time is on our side." Hope I am wrong.

It kind of reminded me of Chief Dan George in Clint Eastwood's "The Outlaw Josey Wales." Chief Dan George talked of going to Washington, D.C., as one of the Five Civilized Tribes. They received top hats and were told to "endeavor to persevere." Mr. Trump's second term is nearly half over. It has been a lot of years since the Taylor Grazing Act and even longer since the Forest Service allotments were instituted. If memory serves me, the Forest Service's original charter was to provide water for agriculture and timber for the cities. The BLM was to protect multiple use and administer grazing. A little change has come about.

Done in record time, NEPA looks like it is being handled at a McDonald's drive-through.

My concern is that I live in White Pine County, Nevada. It is 96 percent under federal control. Nearly every ranch depends on government ground. We hear constantly about moratoriums on green projects. We have 37 green projects. Nearly all will be on some rancher's allotment. All have the potential to affect these individuals' ability to graze. Livestock numbers in Nevada are down 70 percent. Let us operate and Brazilian beef won't be needed if corrections are made Westwide. Money spent on fire will also drop exponentially, saving millions in firefighting costs.

Our reality appears to be that we are the ugly redheaded stepchild. Harry Reid forced the BLM and Forest Service to let a state agency graze livestock illegally after the Southern Nevada Water Authority bought a bunch of ranches with the intent of draining the underground aquifers of White Pine and Lincoln counties to slake the thirst of Las Vegas. Warren Buffett's NV Energy wants a 3,500-foot right-of-way across the state to supply energy to the cities. I wonder if the plan also includes solar panels in that right-of-way? Wild guess, I suppose.

Many of these projects are on white sage. Once there is that much disturbance putting them in, the white sage will be replaced by halogeton, a poisonous plant. These areas are critical habitat for sage grouse and winter range for domestic livestock, feral horses, mule deer and elk. If a rancher ruined white sage, he would be kicked off the land. Southern Nevada Water Authority ruined one of the prettiest white sage areas in an allotment it holds in common with me. No comment from BLM. Crickets.

One of the projects will pour water down a shaft. Its attorney admitted to the White Pine County commissioners that for every 100 units of power used, the project will recover 75. They burned the school down to get me out of the third grade, and the sixth grade was the six best years of my life. Even my math skills indicate this is a negative yield!

The grand champion of what the @#$% is Caltech's Deep Synoptic Array, bankrolled by former Google CEO Eric Schmidt's philanthropy, which would put 1,650 radio telescope dishes across roughly 125 square miles of Spring Valley white sage.

Done in record time, NEPA looks like it is being handled at a McDonald's drive-through. The process appears to be fast-tracked for all these projects. When the speaker asks what you want, they say, "We need 20 sage-grouse credits and an accelerated NEPA." The person taking the order says, "Would you like fries with that? Proceed to the pickup window." The BLM has already approved preliminary geotechnical testing for the array, although the project itself has not received a final right-of-way grant. I am told a fabrication business in Ely has already been purchased by this group.

Yet my issue with the BLM has been stalled through four owners and 70 YEARS of neglect. Others whose families have been in White Pine County for more than 100 years have issues the BLM has neglected for years. You dare not say a word or a federal indictment might show up!

Hang and rattle. ■

Hank Vogler runs needmoresheepcompany in eastern Nevada. He is in a long and unwanted battle with government agents. *See page 62.*



IN MEMORIAM

Tony Lesperance (1935–2026)

Tony Lesperance was not built for vague opinions, soft answers or sitting quietly in the back row.

Born in June 1935, Dr. Anthony "Tony" Lesperance died in July 2026 in Paradise Valley, Nev., leaving behind a long trail through Nevada agriculture, as a rancher, educator, public servant, author and unapologetic advocate for the people who make their lives from the land.

He went to work on a Nevada ranch when he was 13 years old and, as he told the Reno News & Review in 2009, "He's been in the state ever since." By then, he owned a ranch in Humboldt County, had retired from active ranching and was serving as director of the Nevada Department of Agriculture.

Lesperance served in that position from 2008 to 2011, a job he seemed to understand both as a bureaucratic assignment and as a daily defense of Nevada's working producers. The department, he explained, may have been "very quiet," but it touched nearly every Nevadan's life every day, from gas pumps and grocery scanners to food inspection and cattle theft enforcement.

That was classic Tony. Agriculture, to him, was not a sentimental backdrop or a county fair poster. It was statewide infrastructure – fuel, weights, measures, brands, water, land, livelihoods and the stubborn continuation of rural life in a state increasingly inclined to forget where dinner comes from.

He was also a guest on Nevada Newsmakers on July 1, 2010, appearing as director of the Nevada Department of Agriculture with host Sam Shad and co-host Marlene Lockard. (Nevada Newsmakers) For those who followed Nevada agriculture and rural politics, Tony was not a stranger to public debate. He had opinions. He had reasons. And if you asked, you were likely to get both.

Before and after state service, Lesperance belonged to the long, complicated, occasionally exasperating, always necessary world of Nevada agriculture. He was professor emeritus of animal and range science at the University of Nevada, Reno; developed and became superintendent of the Gund Research and Demonstration Ranch in central Nevada; is credited with launching the ag program at Great Basin College; taught and mentored graduate students; and published extensively in his field. He also served as an Elko County commissioner and, with his wife, Nancy, owned and operated a ranch in Paradise Valley.

In 2014, he published It Was Nevada, later issued in additional editions, as a hard-hitting work of historical fiction that followed Terry Hope from his early dream of working on a Nevada cattle ranch into the university, state agencies, politics and the fight to protect Nevada agriculture. The book description calls it "a wild ride through the pages of Nevada history, some true, some fictional—it's up to you to decide."

Tony had the rare advantage of having seen Nevada agriculture from horseback, from the classroom, from the county commission, from the director's office and from the inside of more than one political dust devil. He understood the university. He understood state agencies. He understood ranchers. He understood that protecting agriculture often required more than good intentions and a polite meeting.

Those who knew him will remember his intellect, his humor, his impatience with foolishness and his loyalty to Nevada producers. He could be blunt, but never boring. He could be contrary, but never indifferent. He believed Nevada agriculture mattered, and he spent a lifetime acting like it.

RANGE extends its condolences to Tony's family, friends, former colleagues, students and the agricultural community he served for so many years.

Nevada has lost a good one: a ranch-bred professor, a public servant with his boots still on, and a man who never seemed terribly interested in being more agreeable than necessary.

May we all be so useful.

LETTERS

(Continued from page 82)

KEEPING US OLD BUZZARDS INTERESTED

Here I go again, you have continued with CJ's RANGE magazine and—by golly you are doing a wonderful job. Lots of stories to us old buzzards interested.
—W. Slade, Stevensville, Montana

PETA AND THE PEACE ACT

I have enjoyed RANGE magazine and would like to reply to the article on page 50 about PETA and the Peace Act. I would like to say that those people are lunatics!!!
—Deanna Reesor, Hanna, Alberta, Canada

BOARD OF THE NEVADA LAND TRUST

I was on the Board of the Nevada Land Trust (NLT) for some years, building relationships with the ranching community, using conversation easements to help preserve ranches. NLT has also acquired lands on behalf of federal, state, and local governments for parks, water protection and wildlife. I think that NLT has a booth at the Nevada Cattlemen's annual convention.

You are in an interesting time in preserving rural roots as people move in and have no ed of topics to write up. Congratulations.
Most cordially,
—Tina Nappe, Reno, Nevada

THE FUTURE OF RANGE IS LOOKING AS BRIGHT AS EVER

Thank you, Rachel! So very cool to hear how well you can relate to my photo and this "Outback" way of life. The future of RANGE is looking as bright as ever!
—Robin Paine, Lyon County, Nevada

STILL AFTER THE PACKER CARTEL

Glad you're still after the packer cartel. I did the first RANGE story on the subject. Mike Callicrate was my main source. I've done several others and written some poetry for the magazine. They should be in the archives.And strange to see you talking about hockey and horses, as I was a hockey player in high school and then went to work on the family ranch in Wyoming. Loved them both. I'm writing a book about soil. Might you be interested in a related article?

Just ordered a sub.
—Mark Dowie, Point Reyes Station, California

I LOVE THE NEW NEWSLETTER!

I love the new newsletter! It helps with the agonizing drought waiting for the next welcome surprise in the mailbox. Since I received this one today, I'm not sure if I need to actually "subscribe" or not, but please make sure I'm on your list. The best to you, CJ and everyone else holding down the fort there!
—Thomas M. Reese, Baker City, Oregon

ANOTHER SET OF GREAT REPORTS

And again, another great set of reports! Lots of thinking and discussing ahead!
Sincerely,
—Janna Smith, Fresno, California

LOVE THE DIGEST CONENT

Rachel, Love the digest content. Please include "RANGE magazine" in your subject line going forward so these do not get sorted as spam!
Thank you,
—Daniel Paduano, Los Gatos, California

GREAT MAGAZINE

Great magazine. All the articles have such great stories about the TRUE way of life as we live in the GREATEST country in the world.
—Mike Watts, Summit, Arkansas

A NEW JOURNEY BEGINS WITH THE FIRST STEP

One foot after the other, Rachel. A new journey begins with the first step.
—Weldon Travis, Rough and Ready, California ■





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HORSE STORIES

By Joe Dahl

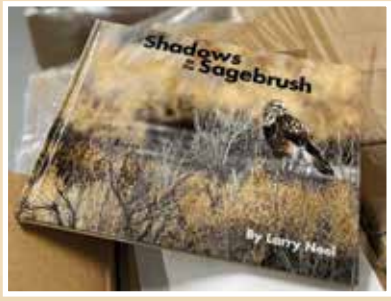
Some horses never leave you. A cowboy can ride a lot of country in a lifetime. And a lot of horses. Some are good. Some are mean. A few settle into your heart and stay there.

In Horse Stories, Joe Dahl tells the stories that come from a lifetime horseback–gathering cattle across open desert, working horses that would rather fight than cooperate, and learning the quiet lessons that only come from long days in the saddle. These are the stories cowboys tell after the work is done.

SHADOWS IN THE SAGEBRUSH

By Larry Neel

The Great Basin as you've never seen it. Wildlife photographer Larry Neel has spent decades roaming the country of Nevada and the West. In *Shadows in the Sagebrush*, he pairs striking photographs–owls, kestrels, coyotes–with short reflections that capture the humor, patience, and wonder of life spent outdoors. This isn't a field guide. It's a love letter to the wild creatures of the Great Basin.



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PEAK PERFORMANCE IN A BOTTLE

BEER FOR MY HORSES—NOT!

Willie Nelson and Toby Keith famously recommended "whiskey for my men, beer for my horses." At RANGE, we beg to differ.

Our version is: LactiGo for my men, FortiGo for my horses.

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For competitive athletes—human and equine—that matters.

Mystik Dan, winner of the 2024 Kentucky Derby, began using FortiGo shortly before the race. Three days before the Derby, his trainer called LactiGo co-owner Kevin Atkinson, reported that the horse was suddenly clocking winning times. Mystik Dan went on to win the Derby and later retired to stud.

FortiGo has also gained attention among top rodeo competitors. "Million-Dollar Cowgirl" Carlee Otero, known for her success aboard AM Regina George, uses the company's gel technology in both her own routine and her horses' program.

Her assessment is simple: "This is what winners use."

FortiGo users also report results far beyond the arena. Canadian equine osteopath Loralei, of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, says she reached for FortiGo during a severe health crisis involving a mare with a high fever, volent shaking and pale gums.

"I truly believe this product saved that horse's life that night," she says. "FortiGo belongs in every serious horse person's vet kit."

That is one user's experience, not a substitute for veterinary care, but it explains why the product has developed such a loyal following.

LactiGo has attracted elite human athletes as well. Four-time Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association world champion saddle bronc rider Zeke Thurston is among the competitors incorporating the gel into his routine.

RANGE reader Jan Derry Romero suffered severe injuries after shattering her femur. Multiple surgeries left her with chronic pain and one leg shorter than the other. At 83, she tried LactiGo.

"Put it on my leg last night and slept like a baby," she reported. "Put it on my leg and hip before I mowed the backyard and again when I was done—no pain. First time in four years it hasn't bothered me."

"Whether it's for you or your equine friends, there's nothing I've seen that works this quickly and effectively," says Clinton Boyles, who has used LactiGo himself and FortiGo with his six performance horses.

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Outback Roundup 2027

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BEST OF SHOW 2026
"For the love of chickens – a girl's best friend" ***My granddaughter Ari and one of her favorite Polish roosters, Espresso enjoying some snuggle time in my Fruita, CO backyard. She loves chickens and has names for all 50 of them.***
© Marina Schultz

Good luck!

If you prefer to enter online, go to rangemagazine.com and click on Outback Roundup 2027.

RULES: All rules must be followed and a completed, signed entry form submitted. One photographer per packet and maximum 5 images per person, plus fee of $5 per image.

CONTENT: All photos must be of the people, places and critters of America's rangelands. Color or black & white. Amateur or professional. All seasons. Entries must be submitted digitally on a thumb drive. Media will NOT be returned but will be secured at RANGE offices or destroyed.

TECHNICAL GUIDELINES: Send high-res JPEGs. Minimum size: 3 megapixels (multiply pixel height x width). File Names: Label each image with your phone number and a numeral to match photo, like this: 775-555-1212-3. No names or dates in file name. **Include a sheet with detailed captions** that match your image label, with who, what, when, where, etc.

Image Manipulation: No cloning of physical objects or major shifts in color or tonalities—that means no removing telephone poles or adding border collies! Cropping, subtle color corrections and contrast adjustments, conversion to B&W, and removal of spots are allowed. Photos with watermarks, names or date stamps will be disqualified.

Image Preparation: Please send us high-resolution images to facilitate publication on high-quality slick paper.

PERMISSION: Contestants **must** grant RANGE permission to use entries for possible use in magazines, calendars, books, and for other contest publicity. Calendar, book, or magazine use (with other feature stories) all earn extra money.

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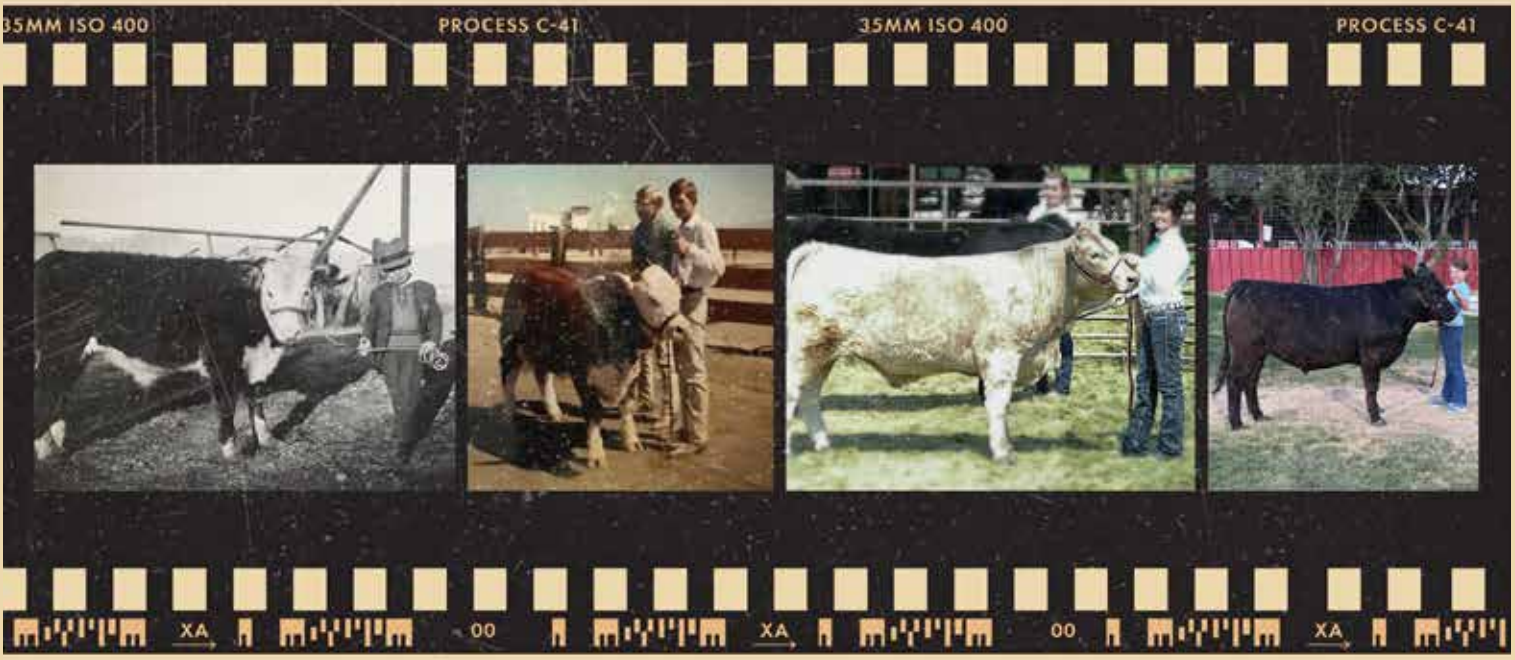
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250 Years of American Independence. Generations of Nevada Ranching.



As America marks its 250th anniversary, Nevada ranch families continue a tradition rooted in hard work, responsibility, and stewardship. For generations, ranchers have cared for Nevada's public rangelands — producing food, conserving open space, and sustaining rural communities. In a land shaped by challenge, resilience isn't optional; it's inherited. From the earliest days of the American West to today's working landscapes, Nevada ranchers remain committed to responsible grazing, conservation partnerships, and keeping our rangelands productive and healthy for future generations.



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