

'Til We Run Out Of Road?

It was not so long ago when the old-time working cowboy was kissing his sweetheart goodbye and he would head out on the open trail. These drifting cowboys commonly signed on to drive thousands of head of cattle long distances without modern conveniences and working from the back of a horse. Those incredible drives could take as long as one year. The pace was slow, averaging two or three miles per hour. A 1,500 mile journey might take 4 months and then a cowboy had to trail the entire distance back home.

The trail was hard work with no Sundays or holidays. A buckaroo was up before the sun and still in the saddle many times after dark. He took his meals, sleep, bathroom breaks and small comforts in the open and on the run. Wind, rain and sun were unavoidable and met head on. The trail hand also took his turn "night-hawking." This chore meant babysitting the cow herd at night which boils down to a great deal less sleep.

Trail herding as you can see was a tough row to hoe with hard work and low pay. It was also a lifestyle. It was a lifestyle of freedom where the best cowboys took pride in their work and in their dress. For the top cow punchers it was about being the best at a trade, a trade we call "cowboy." Top hands from Texas, the Southwest and including the Vaqueros of California developed an art form of cattle handling, roping, bits, saddles clothing and equitation that we call horse-man-ship.

From this old time pride the modern equine events have evolved. Bronc riding, roping, cutting, barrel racing, dressage, jumping, pleasure classes, trail classes,

ranch rodeos and more. It is about being the best and each one revolves around the horse and great horsemanship.

It still goes on today although the modern cowboy has made some changes. The modern day cowpuncher, Rodeo hand or horseman is in many cases as apt with his cell phone, fax or computer as he is with his rope or his horse. Many top hands are computer literate and sell themselves in magazines and websites. Although my cowboy pride keeps me from it, many cowboys ride with their cell phones as handy as their reins.

In the old days the country was open and unfenced. A man was free to ride when and where he pleased. The only unfenced and open range today is the highway and the sky. Modern day traveling cowboys make the most of both of them in private and commercial jets or in trucks and trailers that easily value over \$100,000.00; he racks up and logs thousands of miles in the air and on the road.

It is not uncommon for me to do a demonstration in front of 1000 people in California on Friday and be giving a private clinic on a ranch in Texas on Saturday. So goes the life of a cowboy gypsy. It is a fast-paced quick moving lifestyle that sometimes seems like a blur. It is motels, sleeping bags and all night drives. It is photo finishing into your destination with just enough time to "chap up" and work a rank old colt in front of an enthusiastic crowd. What a life!

But in the long run and in the end it is still about the same thing it was about 150 years ago. With all the