

Three Cowboys Roping a Steer.

THE LAST ROUNDUP

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is in branding season, the cowpunchers generally "throw in" about noon and preparations are immediately made to brand all the calves and "mavericks," yearling calves that have not yet been branded.

Branding the "mavericks" requires not only skill, but a high degree of care and honesty that cattle are not misbranded, for there is more trickery and robbery in branding than in any other part of the cattleman's business. A young calf will be with its mother and hence it is easy to apply the brand of the owner, but a "maverick" is weened and there is the difficulty of discerning the owner. Hence the opportunity and excuse for crooked work were always prevalent in branding season. To prevent this practice, the cattlemen resorted to a system that was at least a partial remedy. Each rancher sent at least one representative to the roundup, it was the duty of the "representative" to see that all the stock of his ranch were properly branded, hence the large number of cowpunchers in the roundup. The older men attend to heating and applying the branding irons. The younger and more active, busy themselves with "roping out" and "bull-dogging" calves, that is throwing a calf not by means of rope, but by one cowpuncher gripping its tail while another pulls the legs from under it. By the co-operation of half a dozen good men, one hundred and fifty calves

and mavericks can be branded in one day. As high as ten different brands are used for as many different owners. Prominent among the brands was that of "Two Dot" Wilson of Gogglesville now the town of Martinsdale, who had for his particular mark, two dots on the left thigh. The Two Dot ranch, became the center of a cattle region known as the county of the "Punkin Rollers," while the cattlemen of the Lower Musselshell near Roundup were known as "Forty Thieves."

Among the other brands that would stand out in the red, raw flesh of mavericks, would be 3 V, used by John T. Murphy of Helena. This brand was later changed to 79. RL was the brand of the Ryan Brothers located at the big bend of the Musselshell River. This outfit was noted for its splendid racing horses, among which was "Montana," a world winner in his class. The HX outfit was owned by Samuel Coffman. This brand is still in existence used by John Chandler. The NF brand was used by the North Field Ranch Company, an English concern with its headquarters a few miles east of the present town of Roundup. The Horseshoe Bar Ranch was located near the present town of Broadview. Other brands that might have been seen were the Circle Bar, N Bar, IH, Box, and Dude E. The last mentioned had a significance that the uninitiated would not at first fully appreciate. It was

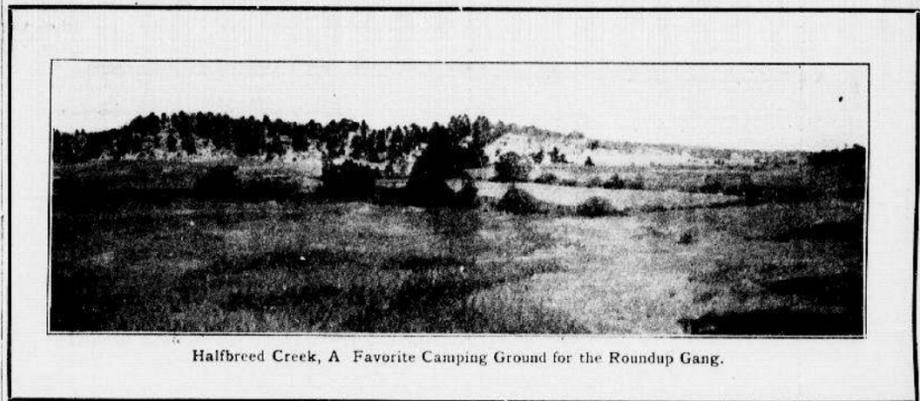
a brand adopted by the Remington Fire Arms Company that owned and operated a ranch near Elso. The brand was a large E made like a Greek character, at first the cowboys didn't know what the brand was, but when they discovered that it was an E they immediately gave it the appellation of "Dude E."

If the roundup was for the purpose of securing cattle for shipment to fulfill large contracts, faster progress was made. Billings was generally the objective point. Here three and four trainloads of Montana rangers would be loaded out on the next day after the arrival of the drive, and it often developed into a gigantic contest to see which outfit would top the market.

The life of the cowpuncher is not all hurry and hustle. He too has his recreation and his festive seasons. The arrival of the outfit at the quaint old town of Roundup was generally the occasion for the social event of the year. The drive was left in the care of one guard on the outskirts of the village, the rest of the outfit proceeding to enliven the town by filling the air with shouts and shots.

In the evening the dance hall is the center of the merry festival. What a dance! The whole town is out, old and young, big and little, cowboys and clerks, fat bartenders and mere babies, all join without regard to any conventionality in the jolly time. Every person knows every other person. No cutaway or pomp will go. No need for formal introduction! There are no blushing wall flowers, all are doing their utmost to keep step to the rag time music that goes well with boots, chaps, spurs and six-shooters. If the hilarity slackens someone smokes up the hall and puts another air hole in the ceiling with his forty-five. The gay time continues till dawn when the cowboys with a few parting shouts and shots begin the drive again.

Such was the roundup of twenty or more years ago, such were the scenes every day along the valley of the Musselshell. But the tide of immigration has transformed the valley in the same way that it transformed other fertile valleys to the eastward. Stockmen fought desperately against the stream, and discouraged all efforts at settlement. They have destroyed landmarks. They have never made known to the world the richness of the soil. They even told the "pilgrim" that it would be impossible to get a living from this land. They even yet console themselves with the mistaken idea, that the new settler will have to make stock-



Halfbreed Creek, A Favorite Camping Ground for the Roundup Gang.

raising an important part of his farming, and if he does not, the lack of profits will force relinquishments, and thus bring about a partial restoration of former range conditions. But in spite of their efforts and vain hopes, the evolution has come and today the tiller of the soil has almost displaced the picturesque cowboy, and the ranchman with his thousands of acres of range for cattle, horses or sheep has been forced out of business by reason of lack of range country. Now the shacks of the homesteader dot the valley where formerly for miles and miles the chuck-wagon and immense herds of cattle were the only visible signs of life. The tendency is ever towards the small farm managed by the individual farmer on a small intensive plan. With the spread of immigration, and advanced knowledge in agriculture and stock-raising two acres of land is being made to do the work of ten or fifty acres of range.

Old Marino, for years the rendezvous of cowpunchers, has vanished, there is now but two log cabins left to remind the wayfarer of the sturdy times of former days. On the flat eminence to the westward occupying the precise spot where numerous herds were guarded during the nights, the present hustling town of Harlowton is located. Surely the onward march of civilization has wrought a tremendous change.

And what has become of the cowboy, the hero of the plains. He has almost vanished. Now and then one comes to town in the conventional garb of chaps, boots, spurs, and broad rimmed hat, but he is a lonely figure, and his appearance only serves to refresh the memory of some tradition of the days of the range. Why has

he gone? His usefulness is gone. Cattle are now kept within fences and are fed in small pastures where the natural grass of the prairies has been supplanted by fodder. Cattle that are accustomed to the sight of human beings, and can be led about by the horn, and fat farm-fed heaves, are driven in small, decorous herds a mile or less to the neighboring railroad station, and it is often that the driver is the stable boy who may have helped to "feed" that morning. There is no need of the roundup, the saddle-bunch, the chuck-wagon, the night-wrangler, or the stray man; the ability to brand, rope and cut-out is possessed by only a few who, at an earlier time took part in that interesting life.

The cowboy is not fitted for any other employment. He will not become a farmer. The fact is, he cannot, he

has attained no greater success as a farmer than the cabby has as a chauffeur. To him it appears ridiculous that the "pilgrim" or "nester," as he calls the homesteader, should walk ten or twelve miles to his claim. The cowpuncher "wouldn't do it on a bet," he would wait for a saddle-pony or break one in for the trip. He is not lazy or indolent, but he has been educated in the manners and customs of the old days of the range, and his whole training has been for a different life than that of the farmer. He could make a frontiersman, but not a farmer.

The cowboy will disappear as the buffalo-hunters have disappeared. A generation or two will pass away, and then the fringed hero of the west will be no more. There are but few left now to tell the true story of life in the

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