



OLD-TIMERS
of
Southeastern California

LR

by **LESTER REED**

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ROY AND JOY HUNTER

I have reason to believe that no man living today had the opportunity to start his experiences with wild horses younger than did Roy Hunter. As a tiny boy of five years, he was determined to go to the horse traps and wait in hiding with his father Bev to trip the canvas gate, causing it to fall behind the horses when they came to get a drink. In previous pages I have described, to the best of my ability, how a heavy canvas was rolled on a piece of pipe the width of the corral gate. The upper end of the canvas was fastened to a cross-piece that was extended across over the gate opening, and the rolled canvas would be fastened to the cross-piece with a string that could be broken by a quick jerk on the line that extended from the trap gate to the place of hiding.

Roy tells of how he and his older brother Mark would go to the Cosos or Hunter Ranch for the summer season after school was out, and assist their father by riding a long way around a band of wild horses. The



Joy and Roy Hunter as team in catching wild horses and wild burros. Collection of Joy and Roy Hunter.

plan would be to start them in the direction of where their father would be waiting with the thought that he would have the advantage to rope some certain horse in the band that was of the type he wanted for someone who had ordered a horse, or it might be a type of horse he wanted to break so that it would sell to a better advantage. If they sighted a band of horses they wanted as a band, the father would start just following them, never riding in a gallop or run, but following in a walk or trot.

The two young boys, remaining in camp at nights, would go out after a day or two with a fresh horse or mule for the father, and some food for him. The father, of course, at night, would get a rough type of rest for himself and saddle animal, but would be right on the trail of the horses he wanted. Camping on the trail of the horse he wanted was a great advantage, in comparison to what he would have had should he have gone back to camp every night. No doubt it made the difference between failure and success. Usually after about three or four days, Roy and Mark would join their father in following the band, and by that time, with the boys following behind, the father could turn the horses and have them on the way to Owens Valley.

After such bands of wild horses could be driven from the range familiar to them, they appeared to be very much bewildered and were not too difficult to guide in the direction they wanted them to travel, providing the horsemen did not move too fast and get them frightened. Rounding up wild horses served as a part in the everyday life of the Hunter family, and for sure, money received from them found its way into the family support.

At this writing, when Roy is telling of his start in the hunting and catching of wild horses, he emphasizes the long weary miles and hours for little boys to travel with saddle horses and pack animals from near Independence in Owens Valley to any camping place in the Cosos, or to Hunter Ranch between Saline and Panamint Valleys. Usually they made such trips in what they call a day, and I have worked with cattle enough in the area that I know the eight hour day would not have had them very well started on their mission.

Today, Roy Hunter and his wife Joy can load their saddle horses onto a truck and be into wild horse country within a matter of minutes in comparison to the long weary hours the same journey was made in the past on horseback and leading pack animals. Later on in these pages, I will have something concerning their experiences in catching wild horses



Cattle camp at Lee Flats on Bev and Roy Hunter cattle range. Photo, collection of Roy and Joy Hunter.

and wild burros in the Hunter Ranch area. These wild horses are descendants of good horses owned by the Hunter family down through three generations. The wild burros (or jackasses) are descendants of about 40 head of good jacks placed on the Hunter Ranch range by the Hunters quite some years ago, most of them dark in color, and a much better animal than the many burros of the Cosos that are so mixed in color, the latter no doubt being descendants of burros that escaped from the old-time prospectors, or perhaps were abandoned by them for various reasons.

A number of years back the wild idea developed somewhere within our human ranks that the wild-burro could be classed as a game animal, and too many of us flocked into desert areas, who apparently could think only in terms of killing, and giving very little thought, if any, to the welfare of the so-called "game animal," or to the fact — even though they were wild — they could be the property of some individual. This resulted in too many wounded burros being seen by persons who cared (including those of us to whom true hunting is much more than a lusty desire to kill). Naturally, there were many people who objected to this type of "sportsmanship," and it appears that their objections — somewhere — came to the attention of persons who took a broadminded view of the over-all picture, and at least helped some in bringing about a better situation.

Another very harmful situation lies within the shooting of wild horses and wild burros by the poisoners, and then the meat impregnated with Sodium Fluroacetate (Compound 1080) with its secondary poisoning hazards. It is also described by the National Research Council as being a poison for which there is no known antidote. I have photos taken in Mono County, California, showing how the meat of wild-horses and wild burros is used as poison stations. These photos show how pieces of meat are torn from the main lethal bait station, giving the idea of how they can be carried and dropped over a wide area. In addition to this, re-gurgitated materials are deposited over wide areas by poisoned animals and birds. There is very little chance for doubt that some of our near extinct condors have been lost to such poisoning procedures.

Some may wonder why I bring this up while writing about the Hunter family, but wild horses and wild burros have been a source of income to the Hunter family through a period of many years. Having been a poisoner, I know that both wild or semi-wild stock belonging to individuals are in jeopardy when poisoners are looking for bait material, or when the so-called "sportsmen" are hunting wild burros as "game animals." I happen to know that neither Bev nor Roy Hunter approve of the shooting of wild horses or wild burros. On the Hunter Ranch range, many of the wild burros are dark in color, still showing they are descendants of the 40 jacks Bev brought from Missouri to improve the breeding of the burros and mules on their range. Around over Southern California, many of the Hunter burros have been sold where people need or want them to ride. These animals serve well as a part of winter-time income to feed a family. How happy I am that as a poisoner I never have shot any burros through which to expose all the birds and animals of our wildlife heritage to poisons in the name of predator control. I am again happy that I never killed or wounded a burro when calling myself a "sportsman."

I once traveled through wild burro country that was over populated with them, and it was the only time in my experience that I saw burros in poor condition. The situation convinced me that some kind of control must be necessary. Never would I agree to classifying them as a "game-animal" and again have wounded burros running around for the public to see. All methods of marketing burros might not be exactly to our liking, but most certainly, in my opinion, to shoot and wound many of them as "game-animals," or to use them as bait stations impregnated with the dastardly sodium fluoroacetate (Compound 1080) or any other type of poison, is not within the interest of the general public, nor within the ideals of sane and sound conservation.

Now back to Roy Hunter at the time he was a small boy helping his father in the Coso Range. One day when they were in the Coso Range, and in the vicinity of the Chappo Water, they saw a sorrel stallion traveling as if on his way to water. Bev and young Roy separated with the idea that after the horse had satisfied his thirst, he would go by where they would be waiting with an advantage; first going by where Roy could take a try at him, and if unsuccessful, the horse would then be chased by where Bev would be in hiding. Evidently the horse smelled them, and bewildered as to where they might be, he came at full speed directly to where Roy was. The horse was so near to Roy before seeing him that he evidently became bewildered and in his effort to get by he bumped into the horse Roy was riding. Roy had a loop made in his rope, and suddenly he realized the loop was tightening around the wild stallion's neck. Roy was far enough advanced in learning to rope that he got his dallies on the saddle horn in time to stop the victim to his loop.

Roy remembers the situation as being very much on the wild side, for quite some time, due to the jerk the running animal gave the horse he was riding, then followed up with many desperate efforts to escape. The young boy was truly thrilled at catching his first mustang, and all the time the horse was trying to get away, Roy was yelling at the top of his voice hoping to make his father hear. Roy states that by the time his father came to him, his imagination was very busy building up on just how he caught his first wild horse. To start with, it was just unbelievable that a rope the length of the one he was carrying could reach out to such a distance and the loop settle so neatly around the horse's neck after passing over the head with such accuracy. What matters most is: a young boy was very happy because of catching his first wild horse, and better still, his father was very happy for him.

They took the stallion home, castrated and branded him, and the boy started in with the idea of breaking him to ride. The horse kept bucking Roy off, so he was sold, and later was seen in Cuff Burrell's bucking string used in the bareback riding events. Roy states that the Coso horses as a rule did not turn out to be what they would choose for their own work. He says he remembers one horse they did keep for a time and then he was owned by Curley Fletcher, and then was owned by the Pickwick Stables in Burbank. This horse was caught down at the Lamott Water to the south of Mark Lacey's Junction Ranch, and for some reason was of better quality than most of the Coso horses. The Hunters did use for a time two other Coso horses, one they called Sullivan, and the other was Barney. They too were of better quality and stamina, and made



Roy Hunter at home in wild horse country. Photo, collection of Roy and Joy Hunter.

good serviceable horses. Perhaps these two horses were descendants of some good stallion that had been turned loose on the range.

Horse traps used by the Hunters in the Coso Range were built usually around the watering places, but in the Hunter Ranch area Roy mentions the traps being blind traps that would be built on some wild horse travel way. By watching the routes the wild horses would take in making a get-away from horsemen, corrals were built in some spot where the horses would be inside before realizing they were in an enclosure, and then the boy or father who would be in hiding would be in the gateway by the time the horses turned back to make an escape.

We read of pioneer women and their way in life, but perhaps there are not too many still living today who have had the experiences of Roy Hunter's mother (Ruth Hunter). Roy tells of her going into wild horse country to help at a camp when the father (Bev) had several Indians hired in the building of wildhorse traps. No doubt her work was rather difficult, but might have been more so, for not too long ago Ruth and Bev Hunter celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

When Roy was a very small boy, and waiting at a trap with his father, he sighted a black stallion that he thought he would surely like to have, and thinking of him as seen by moonlight as a sizeable horse, the boy was surely surprised when he finally ventured into the trap and was a pony of about five hundred pounds. Even though the stallion was very small, he was still very black in color and looked good to the young boy.

What Roy mentions as the running corral like they built in the Hunter Ranch area, did not prove to work with any degree of success in the Cosos. There they depended on the traps at water holes, or to follow a

band for a few days as I have mentioned before in these pages. Bev would not take out after a horse when sighted, but to wait where the boy could run a band by where he was in hiding was at times his way of catching some certain horse he had picked. Roy states that he saw his father miss but one throw at a horse when taking this advantage. One time when Bev and I were roping calves together at a branding, he said he had always felt more sure when roping horses than he did when roping cattle. However, I would be more pleased to know that I could be as good as he was at the cattle.

In Bev's day of gathering wild horses and driving them to Owens Valley, the saddle horses did not have the chance at hay and grain that they do today. Often they had to be hobbled out to graze on what they could find, and a saddle horse was very lucky when ridden by a cowboy who would give him every advantage. Today, most horses get both hay and grain; they are hauled in either truck or trailer into wild horse country, and the drives from the range to the ranch are no longer a part of the picture, for the captured horses are loaded into trucks and hauled to the ranch.

Hunting wild horses and wild burros is to Roy and Joy Hunter what the hunting of game and fishing are to many people. The major difference is that they do not choose to hunt to kill as was the case with me during the nine years and eleven months that I worked as a hunter and trapper for the California Department of Fish and Game. Roy grew up in the same area as do the wild horses and the wild burros, and for his wife and him to hunt, out-manuever them in a way to rope them, is a major recreation in addition to being a part of their way of making a living.

Roy tells of one day when he and his wife sighted a small band of horses in which was a colt that he especially wanted. At times like this is when his wife Joy plays the part for Roy that he did for many years as a boy for his father. On this day Roy was riding a mule, and his wife a grey mare of hers that had plenty of speed. They exchanged mounts, and having the advantage of a very strong wind that was blowing from the band of horses toward them, they managed to get up within about twenty-five yards. A young brown stallion was nearest to them, and when Roy made his charge to rope the colt he wanted, the young stallion was so surprised and startled that he suddenly raised his head with mouth open, the tips of his ears coming almost together, and started to run backward when his hind feet caught on a bush and caused him to fall over backward. Evidently the fall stunned the stallion to some extent, for when Roy caught the colt he wanted, he looked back and the stallion had just struggled to his feet and took off in an awkward gallop reminding Roy of an old renegade steer that is just about run down. Roy states that the surprise the young stallion registered is indescribable.

Roy — with the help of his wife Joy — has caught many wild burros, and she knows the thrill of catching them herself. Through their experiences, and through teachings from Roy's father they know the importance of planning for an advantage, and that successful hunting of either horses or burros does not come through just taking out after them as soon as sighted as the inexperienced is most likely to do. However, because of being inexperienced, I did manage to catch two one day in the desert area to the south of Palm Springs, California. I was mounted on a mare sired by a thoroughbred stallion known as Judge David, and

for anyone who would give her a break, she appeared to have almost unlimited wind for running a long distance, and had a lot of speed. Before the end of my short experience with wild horses in the Palm Springs area, I learned that the two mares I caught in one day were by no means the better grade of horses. One day I started two mares and a good-looking sorrel stallion that I thought I would like to catch. I could outrun the two mares easily enough, but when the stallion saw how I was gaining he looked back over his shoulder and outran me as easily as I had outrun the mares so I quit the chase with no horse in the loop I had prepared.

There have been times when Joy and Roy Hunter were working together, that they roped as many as seven or eight a week of the wild burros. These figures represent about what can be done under average conditions. When telling of the best catches he has ever made, Roy tells of himself and another man catching 23 of the burros in one day. During times of better luck, Roy and Joy have caught as many as 8 to 10 in a day. At the present time Roy and Joy own an old thoroughbred stallion that they use in catching burros and wild horses. This old horse has plenty of speed which makes a good combination when added to maneuvering for an advantage. Roy says that when running down hill in rough country, he believes the wild burro is faster than the wild horse. Sometimes when gathering burros, Roy says, it works out as good strategy to let a burro think he is getting away, and in the meantime be playing him for an advantage, but warns that you want to be sure you never get to thinking you are smarter than the burro.

When talking about burros being found in sizable bands, Roy tells of himself and his father finding about fifty head of them in Grapevine Canyon below the Hunter Tin Barn and just starting out to follow and letting them choose the route of travel. They traveled in a northerly direction by way of what is known as the Racetrack, then to Tin Mountain, from there to Hunter Mountain, then beginning to gently guide them they were started on the way to Olancho by way of Lee Flat. A day and night had passed during this mission, and about 10:00 A.M. of the second day they arrived in Olancho. In early days when Bev Hunter would be planning a drive of wild burros, he would catch ten or twelve, put side hobbles on them and drive them around until broke to the idea of being driven, then starting on the way to Owens Valley. He has collected, along the way as many as 150. Bev and Roy both tell me that if one burro breaks away from a band to make a get-away you had just as well let it go for it cannot be headed back.

One time when my brother "Gib" and I were in the Hunter Ranch area we marveled at the burros being larger than most we had seen and also remarked about their being of darker color. Since then when we learned from Bev and Roy of the 40 head of jacks from the Missouri Tagus Ranch they at one time placed on the range, the size and color were then understandable. From the wild burros the Hunters have gathered, about 75 have been sold to Disneyland and Santa's Village in the San Bernardino Mountains bought a number of them. Can you imagine yourself being a so-called "sportsman," going out onto a range to shoot, kill, or wound burros after good jacks had been shipped all the way from Missouri to improve the animals making them more salable as part of a rancher family's way of making a living? Roy Hunter tells of one time rounding

up one bunch of wild burros in which there were 57 head and all were jack but one.

From telling of how wild burros can be handled successfully or of how easy it is to be unsuccessful in catching or driving them on horseback, Roy Hunter switches to telling about working with an old-time wild horse man who used an airplane in the rounding up of wild burros and wild horses. Roy tells that it was not at all difficult to see that the man's experience as a cowboy was of real help to him when in the air. The man in the plane would maneuver around the burros in a way that would drive them out into the open where Roy and another man would be waiting in a jeep with several lasso ropes tied to heavy truck tires that were in the back of the jeep. One day the man who was working in the jeep with Roy caught a burro with a rope tied to the tire in which he was standing by mistake, and, of course, when the rope tightened on the burro's neck, the cowboy was jerked from the jeep. Fortunately he landed with head and shoulders on the tire breaking the fall, so was not injured. They caught a sizable number of burros by this method. One time when Roy roped a burro from a jeep, he suddenly handed the rope to the man driving, saying, "Here, take this." Not having time to think, the driver grabbed the rope and was jerked out of the jeep, landing on the ground yelling for help. With Roy's help they managed to keep the burro from getting away. Burros caught from the jeep, when tied to the heavy tires, were hindered so that the men could go get their horses to tie the burros down so they could not get away and when all of them were caught, they would be driven to a corral.



Joy Hunter as ready to gather wild horses, wild burros, or as hand with cattle. Collection of Roy and Joy Hunter.

The man in the airplane would maneuver around wild horses in a way to drive them by where Roy and another cowboy would have good ground over which to run to catch them, and they have caught as many as 25 in one day, but Roy does not want anyone to think he is trying to tell that this is the usual success. Hobbles were put on these horses above the ankles to prevent the horse from getting a hind foot through between the front legs above the hobbles. A horse can kill himself in this kind of mishap, so that is why the hobbles are placed above the ankles. The horses are then taken to where the truck is, or to a place where the truck can be driven to them.

One time when Roy and Joy were at Spanish Spring, he roped nine head of horses in one day with much less running than what it sometimes takes to get just one. Roy tells of a time when leaving the Tin Barn with some wild horses in the truck, and not having a full load, he decided to catch another one from a bunch he saw coming in to get water. Taking a shortcut to where he knew the horses would be crossing an old road, he waited until they were where he thought he had a good advantage to catch one. He picked out a husky mare he wanted, and catching her in the old road where it was rather steep he did not try to stop her right there, but thought to keep running along behind her until reaching a sandy spot at the bottom. He had not yet taken his dallies, but when the mare suddenly turned off the road, and he did take his dallies, the next thing he knew, his horse had been jerked off his feet and was on one of Roys legs, unable to get up. Roy then worked his leg out from under the horse and was then able to help the horse into a position so that he could get onto his feet. He speaks of this horse being the best he has ever ridden in the wild horse work, but somehow the husky mare jerked him just right to throw him. I was at Olancha when Roy got there with this load of horses, and noticing that he did not move around as usual, I went over to the corrals and asked what was wrong. He then told me his story and I was afraid he was hurt worse than he thought, but the following morning when I went to see how he was, he had gone again after more wild-horses.

When talking about how much farther he has had to run to catch one horse than he did to catch the nine at Spanish Spring, he tells of a time when he was leaving the log cabin on Hunter Mountain, and seeing two mares he thought he would try catching one to add to the part load he had in the truck. The saddle horse he had along was an old sorrel that he speaks of as being plenty tough, but mean to buck if things went a little wrong. He took after one of the mares and caught her right soon, but his saddle was loose and when it was pulled onto the old horses' neck the horse thought it a good time to unload a cowboy, and got out from under both cowboy and the saddle. Fortunately the horse did not run off as usual, so Roy was able to get the outfit together and take out on the trail of the mare dragging a rope.

Roy was carrying two ropes during this experience, and when getting in sight of the mare he made a loop in the spare rope, but being in a brushy area he managed to pick up the rope the mare was dragging. When getting back near to the log cabin where he started from, the mare suddenly hit the end of the rope real hard and the hondo broke, turning the mare loose again as a free animal. Taking after her with the other rope, this chase lasted for another four or five miles before getting her

again. This time when getting back near where he started from, he had his dallies on the horn and was sitting with the end of the rope under his leg. The mare sulked so, Roy started to get closer to her by taking dallies again over the ones already on the horn. The mare suddenly bolted again, and this time he almost lost a hand. The mare was gone again dragging a rope, and for the third time Roy was in pursuit with a very painful hand. After a chase of four or five miles, the mare was again overtaken in a brush area where the rope was dragging over the tops of the brush, making it easy for the rope to be picked up. About nine o'clock that night the mare was turned into the corral at the Hunter Ranch log cabin, summing up to about 13 hours of hard chase, as Roy states: "After one old potbellied mare." Quite different from catching nine head with much less running and hard work.

To me it is truly great to listen to men like Roy Hunter and his father Bev tell of their experiences, or perhaps I had better say telling of what they have learned from the wild horse and the wild burro while giving them credit for being plenty smart. Roy has told of starting out to follow a band of horses when he thought there was little or no chance of having any luck to catch one, but after following leisurely along for a time the stallion might drop back behind and through some mistake give him the advantage he needed. This also sometimes happens when the stallion works ahead of his band. Perhaps this kind of maneuvering comes by way of the stallions having such fierce battles among themselves.

Down through the years there have been times when men would come to Roy's ranch wanting to get photos of wild horses, and others perhaps would have a pretty fast saddle animal that they would like to try in a chase in effort to rope one. He tells of one time, when having three men out, when one wanted to get photos and another wanted to try out his horse in pursuit. They sighted a small band off at a distance, and when getting as close as Roy thought possible, he told the men to get off their horses and stand quietly beside them. This was difficult for the men to understand, but they did as Roy asked them, and it was not long until the stallion of the band began to get curious and started circling with the band following him. This brought the horses well within range for good pictures. The men were then told to get on their horses if they wanted to give them a try with the ropes. I do not know what luck they had with the ropes. However, they learned that to be successful in getting photographs or in roping, the big idea is not to take off in pursuit as soon as a band of wild horses is in sight.

There are still plenty of wild horses in the Coso Range. Down through the dry years, and no doubt through inbreeding, the Coso horses are not as good as they were back in the years when a good stallion was turned among them by Summers and Butler. It is difficult to tell how many there may be, and perhaps the nearest any person could come to knowing would be by the use of a helicopter. My brother "Gib" and I, a number of years ago, counted 180 in a comparatively small area, and knowing that we could not further count without the possibility of counting the same horses again after running from us, we did not attempt to go on with the idea. I hope the day will never come when there are no more wild horses in the Cosos or in the vicinity of the Hunter Ranch.

