

# This and That

By Lona Tankersley Burkhart

As you wander thru these pages, you will meet my history, friends, family and horses that rode with me. It is a trail that has slowly blown over with the sands of time. There will be no more tracks on the land in the ways that these were made. Our time has come and gone. The big open country will soon be a thing of the past, for the permits will soon be a thing of the past.

These pages are full of stories and people of the open range. The ranchers who rode those ranges drove cows from daylight to dark, not just from pasture to pasture. It takes a different kind of hand to start a bunch of thin cows twenty miles from the ranch, and bring them home without getting them sorefooted or mad (bushy).

We didn't gather calves to brand in the spring. We branded each calf where we found him. By ourselves. We had horses that would ground tie while you threw your calf down, tied him up, built a fire and heated your cinch ring. And hoped the ol' cow didn't get too much on the peck.

When you cowboy alone in open country, I mean no fences, it's a WHOLE DIFFERENT set of rules. The cowboys that followed the wagons for the big outfits worked different too. They gathered the cattle and held them and worked in crews. But for the little rancher, the most important thing was NOT EVER stressing that cow, and anyway, we didn't have the feed to hold cattle while we gathered.

The desert outfit where I was raised, was over thirty miles one way and fifty the other. When we had the cows located, the LAST thing we wanted to do was to disturb them by a big gather. We did have a big gather every couple of years, which we called the river roundup. We'd start up the river way above Victorville, and gather the drift all the way down to where the river ended at Cronese dry lake. It was over a hundred miles. Cattle drift in the spring when the flowers are blooming, and they don't water sometimes for several days at a time. Whose ever country we were working, would furnish the chuck for that area. There were no 4x4 trucks and goosenecks in those days, and a lot of the country was too sandy for trucks, so we'd sometimes have quite a drive to get the cattle to where we could load them.

This was always a fun time, and I was thrilled when I was old enough to go along. Of course, after Dad got sick and I took over running the cattle during my high school years, I was the rep for our area.

I remember the first 4x4 truck that I ever saw. It belonged to Mary and Lee Berry of the Slash X out South of Barstow. It was a Dodge Powerwagon, and we all thought it was really something. I still have a picture of it. The Berry's were

fine people. They brought the first brahma cattle into that country. They owned the old appy stud, Joker B, for many years. They bought him for his good Quarter Horse blood. I recently read an article about Joker in the Western Horseman and it was pretty mixed up. Lee and Mary had him for many years. One year when I was running for rodeo queen, we took a bunch of pictures with Joker and Berry's old grey brahma bull Jim. Mary used to ride Joker and lead Lee riding the bull in rodeo parades around the area. When Mary and Lee were just getting that ranch started, Lee stayed in Barstow and barbered, and Mary stayed out at the ranch in a dug-out and took care of the cattle. Later they built a lovely home at the headquarters. They made a success of the outfit, but it took commitment. .... That's what ranching is all about, commitment.

When I talk about the river, I mean a dry river. The Mojave just surfaces periodically most years. It is covered with mesquite thickets for miles, and you darn sure didn't want to crowd your cattle and get them mad or they'd get into the thickets and there was no way you could get in after them with a horse. So you learned early, not to CROWD cattle or get them hot, and to turn them BEFORE they made it to the brush. But oh how fat the cattle got on the beans in the fall! I've heard folks say, "that's when you need a good dog." I was taught that if you were a good hand, you didn't need a dog. Dogs couldn't take the miles, and they got the cattle stirred up.

In the summer when we had to move cattle, we most often did it at night. Its just too hot in the day time. I mean HOT. 120. We'd leave the ranch way before daylight, and get to the water holes and unsaddle for a while, trying to rest, with some big old horse-fly biting you. We always kept a coffee can to boil coffee in, at the water holes.

That country was either sandy or rocky and you sure had to watch that cattle didn't get sore footed. We often had to shoe our bulls, so they would travel and work. We used big hereford bulls, and like our cows, we kept them for years, because cattle that were used to the country did so much better. Even in those days ox shoes were hard to get. Ryerson, who owned the general store in Daggett, used to order them special for us. We'd dally to the big snubbin' post in the center of the corral to bed them down. Rememberin' brings a tear, but at the time, I hated it.

