

It's Hard To Convince Cowhands They Should Pay To Get To Ride

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One of the national magazines recently published an article eulogizing the passing cowboy. Several old wranglers were interviewed And the usual sad tone bemoaning the end of the open range was carried throughout the story.

As for us ranch operators here in Shortgrass Country, our scheme would have worked much better if the cowhand hadn't starved out of the business before we did. It would have been less tragic if the bosses and herders had disappeared at the same time. Cowboys always were due some luck, and I guess not having to stay around the final tally of ranchdom was their reward. Mercy, you know, can come in an unseen, unappreciated form.

Cowboying does get in a man's blood. It stays there until he expires. Hombres who should have donated their saddles to museums 40 years ago are still riding horses. Every time a man wears out another lining in his saddle, he loses a bit more of his judgment. People can catch the cowboying fever, the same way they go nuts over golf clubs and croquet mallets.

Unlike other writers, I don't ever run into cowhands who are noble enough to make King Arthur feel like a commoner. The ones who pass through here grumble too much to learn the first four words of a condensed code of honor.

Actually, they are the luckiest hands anywhere in the country. When the spring work hits, I make sure they get the opportunity to watch the sun rise and set from the back of a horse for at least 30 days. But they'd start riding a bicycle before they'd show the slightest amount of gratitude. By the time we've worked the ranch and traded work with our neighbor, Goat Whiskers, the Younger, they have had the chance to witness solar spectacles that town folks would pay money to see.

It must take a complete outsider to capture the romance of the rangelands. One pasture we work has a hill offering a view of the whole countryside. From the east point you can see two courthouses. (I don't mean to mislead you; our county has two courthouses but not two county seats.)

Every single time we work over there, the man riding the fence comes in complaining because he had to ride over that beautiful hill. Just what do you suppose a caged city man would give for a chance to cross that same scope of country? What would it be worth to get to chouse a bunch of brush-spoiled sheep down the side of that hill? I'll bet you could charge spectators four bits a head to stand back and watch.

Magazine writers must have better luck than I do. Their cowhands sound good on paper. These out here don't sound good anywhere, except when you start gathering some stock.