

Nat Love's Description of One Wild Drive from Texas to Nebraska

Excerpt from:

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WE MAKE A TRIP TO NEBRASKA . . .

The ranch boss's voice rang out sharply, but kindly as he entered our quarters where we were engaged in all sorts of occupations, some of the boys playing cards, others smoking and swapping stories, while those more industrious were diligently engaged in cleaning their forty-fives. I glanced up from my long barreled rifle I was just putting the finishing touches to, wondering what was up now. The boss informed us that we were to take another herd of cattle north, away up in the northwestern part of Nebraska, and that all of us who were on the last trip had been selected for the duty again this trip.

This announcement was met with exclamations of approval from the boys who had now got thoroughly rested up and were anxious for regular duty again. Since our return from Wyoming we had not been doing much, but taking it easy with occasional range riding and were becoming rusty in consequence. We were to start on our second journey north this season as soon as possible, so we lost no time in getting ready. We were to take the same size herd as before. It did not take us long to round the herd up and the second day from the time we received the order we were off. Our route was different this time, starting from the home ranch in Arizona we went by way of New Mexico, Colorado and into Nebraska, by way of the Platte river, which we crossed near where the forks of the North and South Platte unite. It was now late in the season and we had to hurry in order to get through in good weather, therefore we put the cattle to the limit of their traveling powers.

Beef cattle, that is, four year old long horns differ greatly from other cattle in their travel. The first day after being put out on the trail they will travel twenty-five miles without any trouble then as the pace begins to tell on them they fall back to fifteen or twenty miles a day, and there also seems to be an understanding among the cattle themselves that each must take a turn at leading the herd, those that start in the lead in the morning will be away back in the center of the herd at noon, and those that started in the center are now leading. This they keep up until all have had their turn at leading and as a rule if they are not scared by something they will stay pretty well bunched.

We allowed the herd to graze and rest during the night, only traveling during the day, as a herd of cattle should never be moved off their grazing ground until the dew is off the grass because their feet are made soft by the wet grass and if they are moved onto the hard trail while in that condition sore heels are sure to result, and a steer with sore heels cannot travel and will have to be left behind on the trail or the herd held until those affected have recovered.

Our saddle horses travel several times the distance that a herd of cattle does on the trail, as it is necessary to ride from one end of the herd to the other to keep them in line and headed in the right direction. This work is hard on the horses but that is always provided for by having a small herd of horses along under the charge of a horse rustler as we called him and any of the boys could change his tired horse for a fresh one at any time he chose, but he would have no one to help him make the change. He would have to rope, throw, saddle and bridle the horse himself without any assistance whatever from his companions, and this was no easy matter as most of the horses were wild Texas mustangs and had never had the saddle on more than once or twice and so as often happened the cow boy would be led a hard life before he finally made the change of mounts.

On such occasions he always received the unwelcome and unasked advice of the other boys, but as most of the boys were expert at that business there was slight chance for railing and

chaff. But if for any reason he should get the laugh from his companions he always took it in the same spirit in which it was given, only waiting his chance to get even, and such a chance was not long in coming.

This particular herd acted very well and gave us no trouble to speak of. Our route lay over the old Hays' and Elsworth trail, one of the best known cattle trails in the west, then by way of Olga (sic, Ogallala), Nebraska, at that time a very small and also a very tough place. It was a rendezvous of the tough element and the bad men of the cow country. There were a large number of cow boys there from the surrounding ranges and the place looked very enticing to our tired and thirsty crowd, but we had our herd to look after and deliver so we could not stop, but pushed on north crossing the Platte river, then up the trail that led by the hole in the wall country, near which place we went into camp.

Then as now this hole in the wall country was the refuge of the train robbers, cattle thieves and bandits of the western country, and when we arrived the place was unusually full of them, and it was not long before trouble was brewing between our men and the natives which culminated in one of our men shooting and killing one of the bad men of the hole. Fearing more trouble and not being in the best possible shape to meet it, burdened as we were with five hundred head of cattle we broke camp at once and proceeded on our journey north.

We arrived at the ranch where our herd were to be delivered without further incident and with all our cattle intact and after turning the herd over to their new owners and spending several days in getting acquainted with our northern neighbors, the Nebraska cowboys whom we found hot numbers and a jolly all round crowd of cattle men, we left for Arizona on the return journey by way of Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, arriving home in good shape late in the fall without further incident, and were soon engaged in range riding over our own ranges again, and getting everything in shape for the winter, but we had to be out on the range off and on all winter.