

# Wild Horse Roundup Memories



**Prince**

by  
**Gerald West**

edited by  
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## In The Early Years

In 1923 Gerald's parents settled in the Lea Park district, on the land where Gerald and his wife Margaret now live , high above the Vermilion River and not far from where the Vermilion and North Saskatchewan Rivers meet, about eighteen kilometers north of Marwayne, AB. Among other things, Lea Park is known for it's famous annual Lea Park Rodco.

"My folks moved out of the dried out areas of southern Alberta in 1921. They lived in various spots in western Saskatchewan then came here to Lea Park by team and wagon from Mendham, near Leader, Saskatchewan. This was private land that my folks bought from the local store owner. My mother thought this was the place to settle down. A lot had to do with the clear water running out of the spring on the riverbank. Water was precious to her after having left the drought of earlier years. Lea Park is a very scenic place. It has always been a meeting place of some sort or other since way back into the early Indian year's." (Ed's note - In fact, opposite from where the Vermilion River runs into the North Saskatchewan River were two rival fur trade posts, The Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company's Paint Creek House, both established in the early 1800's.)

"I was born on this place . I'm the youngest of ten children. We used horses for transportation and for farming until 1950 when we got our first tractor and our first automobile. I owned my first horse when I was about nine years old and it was given to me by my oldest brother Ron when he joined the army about 1941. Later on I also joined up, and spent 18 months in the navy (Royal Canadian Navy) during the Korean war and returned home to take over the farm in 1951."

He continues.

"I have been interested in horses all my life and I have raised them and we worked with them until 1950. We were probably the last one in the area to work with horses. We used to break horses for the neighbours for the use of them. I've enjoyed my life with livestock and most of the time I've owned anywhere up to 40 horses and up to about a hundred cattle. When my wife Margaret and I first got married in 1956 we went to live at the Athabasca Ranch near Hinton where I worked with their horses. It was at that time that my dreams of

catching wild horses came true and I figured out how to go about it, but 1954 was when I first went out west with my older brother Ron who was working in the Hinton area. That was really where it all started." The country West refers to is about 300 km west of Edmonton, in the Hinton area, roughly bounded to the south by the old coal mining towns of Robb, Cadomin, and the McLeod River, then to east to Edson, and to the north, past the Athabasca River and up into the Berland River basin, almost halfway to Grande Cache. He talks about his first foray into this adventure.

"Ron was acquainted with a fellow who was a guide named Tommy Plante who said he owned or claimed to have owned quite a bunch of horses in the area so I went out with a fellow by the name of Wally Carlier to have a look and it turned terribly cold. We stayed in a shack of Tommy Plant's and it turned 40 below that night. We had to get up every 3 hours and start the truck. This was at Obed, west of Edson. We did do some riding and by what we had seen assumed the horses were owned by more than one person. There were many owners who had let them go. They had actually gone wild. So we gave up the thought of buying these horses from this guy and I never went back to the Hinton area for some time."

### Why Did West Round Up Wild Horses?

I asked West if he caught wild horse (wildees) for enjoyment or to make money or perhaps both.

"Starting in about 1957 or 1958 I worked at bush camps for three years in the winter time to make extra money. In those days the highest wages were not good. When I was running the loader at the pulp mill (at Hinton) I was only getting \$2.26 an hour. That was not big money. Like \$2.26 an hour for an eight hour day and that is less than \$20.00 a day. I figured that if I was catching horses I could average a horse a day and even after I paid all of the dues, I still made more than by plugging in a whole day on the loader. And I had fun doing it."

## About Wild Horses In Alberta

I briefly mentioned an organization called Wild Horses of Alberta (WHOA) who are trying to protect wild horses saying there are only about 200 or so in Alberta. West says that there are more than that.

“There are wild horses scattered from north of Peace River all the way to the American border. There are little groups of horses here and there and they might be 100 miles in between little groups here there all over. I figure there are at least 1500 horses are out there yet. But I don't want that known because people will then think there are too many. There are at least 200 head in the Sundre area alone.

We had a bit of a discussion about WHOA and how they're trying to protect wild horses. West agreed that anything that might harm these horses should be banned. He gives this example.

“Alistair Needham from this area became a ranger in the Medicine Lodge area and he used to go down along the McLeod River. One time he found seven dead horses down there. One guy had shot the whole works. He just sat in one spot and as they came along he shot them. And those kind of things were going on all the time and it wasn't right.”

West explained a bit about how the wild horse came to be.

“Most of them had real good ancestors because they had good stock in the Hinton area before we had them here. The big Athabasca Ranch north of Hinton owned by some Americans shipped in some very good stallions. One stallion was the grandson of Man of War and another was Dan Gaines, a Kentucky Whip (American Saddle Horse) which eventually wound up at the Queenie Creek Ranch west of Clandonald, AB. Homer Campbell bought him from the Athabasca Ranch. Ask any of the old timers about Dan Gaine's colts and they will tell you they were good ones. The Athabasca Ranch also brought in a paint stallion.

## His First Ventures

"These first horses were bought under my brother Ed's name. That's why his name shows up on these permits. I was hired by my brother to round them up. Here's a bill of sale to Albert Norris. He is that ex NWMP policeman I was telling you about. In here is another bill to Shaefer. He's the guy I stayed in his yard." (we spent some time looking at old permits and sales receipts, some of them witnessed by others.)

"And that's when we purchased Albert Seale's horses. He was an ex packer and guide in the area in about 1959 when we purchased these horses from him. When we bought the Seale horses there was a fellow by the name of Ken Ricky from Ontario who had been rounding up a few of them but he wasn't really good enough at it so we would ride together and he helped out. And talk about a lesson well learned. He was a fair horse rounder but if anything went wrong it was always your fault. It didn't matter whether it was his fault or your fault it was still your fault. And I put up with this for a little while and I vowed that if I ever had men working for me, no matter what happened, I was never ever going to blame one of them for what went wrong. I stuck to that all of the time I was out there and even later. And it was a lesson well earned from this guy.

I started rounding up wild horses in about 1958 and stayed at it for 14 years. And I kept records to about 1972. All of the unbranded horses that we rounded up were mine and branded horse the owner had to swear an affidavit that they were his. I worked horses under Seale's permits until 1962 when I got my first permit and continued on around that country. I had three areas to work. One of them was the McLeod River area, another the Obed Lake area, and the Berland River area. The other areas were pretty well cleaned up by them. And there were no other areas the Alberta government wanted done at that time.

The first permit was \$100 and for any horses that were not claimed you had to pay one year's dues. The ones that were claimed you did not have to pay dues on. (West is thumbing through some papers). Here is dues charge that cost \$7.00 for 1 gelding - that's per year. You had to pay \$15.00 a head for grownups plus \$7.00 for dues. Horses that were claimed you did not have to pay dues on. You bought them off the owner and he had to pay grazing dues."

West tells me that he rounded up the horses for Scale and paid the grazing dues on them. Eventually after all dues are paid and the owners are paid, West now owned the horses to do what he wants with.

### How Much Time In a Year Did West Spend Rounding Up Horses?

“When I say years it was a very short time that we rounded up horses in a year. We never worked in the summertime because of the mares and the colts and you couldn't track them and they would split up so we didn't do anything then. In the wintertime one winter we worked in the month of January but the conditions had to be right. You had to have snow a foot deep. It was best if the roads were plowed by a seismograph crew working in the area because those crews went for miles and miles in all directions and they snow plowed the lines which made a good access in and out of the area where the horses were. If you were after a horse and he got onto one of these cut lines and thought he could outrun you and in all cases that was a mistake on the horse's part. That's when you just rolled up and threw a rope on him because they just couldn't outrun you. You wanted snow for tracking and you needed some resistance to wear them down. I preferred warmer weather because you could ride in colder weather but the horse is puffing and taking in a lot of cold and that's not good.”

I asked West if horses ever died of exhaustion and he said no but he had heard of it happening.

### The Berland River Area

“We took all of the poorer ones out of there and left good ones. They were in there for quite awhile and every now and again we would go in and take a few out. But we noticed the horses were disappearing and we didn't know why so I went up and started snooping around and I went on some of the trails and there was a cut road in there as it was seeded to grass and I went along and I saw horse bones lying alongside the trail. So I got looking at them and it was a six year old mare by the teeth and I got figuring why did she die along by the trail like that and then I came to this open cut line. I discovered that somebody had been shooting here and found two more dead horses along the trail so we got suspicious. There was a hunter's cabin in there. I knew the one guy from the hunter's cabin and I see someone had written on the wall about this guy shooting these horses and so I asked this one guy



about it and he told me that there were four of them in on it and this one guy was shooting horses so they kicked him out of the cabin. The guy was a nut from Fox Creek who had started to shoot them and he killed quite a few. This guy went way down the river and built another spot of his own but he continued to shoot horses. This was in the Berland River area. It had something to do with not enough food for the elk in the area. I got his name and everything but I never did run into him. These other guys I got to know real well and they gave me some information about what went on there. Those fellows asked me what I would have done if I had caught that fellow.”

We will leave the reader to figure out what his reply was.

“But I just about caught him one day. I went up there to have a look around a day later than I had planned and there was a quad track up there and by the look of it that track had come in there from the north and there was a horse on the road and he had shot the horse the day before I got there so I just about caught him.”

### Why Are There Wild Horse Roundups?

West explains.

“In the thirties and forties when the war (WW II ) started there wasn't very much to do and out in that country those folks were mostly packers and outfitters. Some of these guys went to war and the outfitting business wasn't paying and these fellows just turned their horses loose in the bush and these horses were all broken and as the years went by they multiplied and they weren't the only ones who contributed to horses in the bush. The odd person living in the area had saddle horses that they turned out and didn't get back and there were some horses in the bush camps that got away and never came back and they were people in Mountain Park for example who had horses they wanted to get rid of but they were only worth a cent a pound and not worth hauling to Edmonton so they just let them go. So there were many contributors to the foundation stock of wild horses. And then in the early fifties Hwy 16 was becoming busier and the traffic was getting faster and the road was getting better. The pulp mill was going to be built to the Hinton area and more people were coming to work. This went on into the mid fifties. In mid-spring the horses would come down from the high country where the snow was deeper and down into the lower muskegs which was closer to Hwy 16 and Hwy 16 was being salted at different places and the horses would get

up on the highway and lick salt and get hit. West of Hinton they grazed both sides of the highway at what was called the Green Timbers area and then the area down towards Folding Mountain. The horses crossing back and forth over the highway also contributed to many deaths. The government decided they would have to reduce the horse population so they let a permit out to the owner of the Bar F Ranch west of Hinton by the name of Reon Fisher and he would recruit cowboys to gather the horses. And it was successful to some extent. But eventually he had let it go because he couldn't get any help. That's where Verne Franklin and those guys went out and they took a lot of horses out of there and thinned the population down to about where the government wanted it. And then a lot of the local guys went out and rounded up horses as they had some of the foundation stock.

I asked about Kelly.

"Kelly was raised in the Hinton area and right from a young man on he was quite a horseman. He turned into what I call the best horse chaser in the world because when he took after a horse he caught it. He had an amazing sense of what his horse could stand. And what speed he had to go to preserve his horse to have just enough left when you needed it most to catch that wild horse in front of him. He knew his saddle horse, he knew the horses he was chasing, and he knew the terrain and that made him one of the best. I've seen him jump off his horse when going up a hill and lead his horse to help it out. And he could not only catch a horse in the open but in the bush as well if it was clear so he could throw a loop. Kelly got cancer and died about two years ago. I was a pallbearer at his funeral. I had a couple of other guys out with me, like Sherman Djuff from Rivercourse, AB and Bob Beggs from nearby McLaughlin. I also worked with the fellow named Ross McLeod on the McLeod River for two years and George Kelly and I worked together for five years. Ross had rounded up horses for Reon Fisher when he was in the horse business."

I asked West how many other fellows were doing the same thing and he said that there weren't many.

"I was the only one east of Hinton that had a permit and Fisher had a permit for west of Hinton but he had trouble finding help and quit. Fisher asked me to come and work for him but I never did. There might have been five or six others working in the area but real small operations but fisher and myself were the only ones working out of the Edmonton office who proved up on our permits. There was also a Finley and a Metis fellow but they did not do



well. The first five years I worked alone and each night my brothers would be at the barns waiting for me to come back and to see if I made it. Over the years there were some people who wanted to come with me but I would not let them and there were a few hard feelings. When you got all the trouble and expense of having a place to stay and all the feedback and other expenses you want to make sure your help has earned their keep and this may not always have been the case. These men have to carry their weight. As far as the time of year when we went out it was generally March and April and I would go out for about 10 days or until I had a load of horses and then I would come back for a few days just to rest myself and my horses and then I would go back out again and that was only weather permitted. While I was gone home, my brother Ed would look after the saddle horses. When the snow was gone you had to quit. You didn't want to be chasing them during foaling time.”

West is quick to point out that wild horse roundup was closely controlled by the Alberta government. One just didn't go out and start catching horses.

“You always had to have a place to stay and a place for your horses which you had to arrange for ahead of time. The longest would've been about six weeks in a horse roundup. The horses out there were always fat and in good condition. There is a tremendous amount of feed in that country. The stallions out in that area seem to be so much faster and in good shape and it had something to do with that goose grass which is like a prairie wool and is a good rich grass growing in the swamp areas. Also when the ground is frozen it was a good time to round up. In the Obed area we cleaned out pretty well all of the mares but the studs could get away on us. But one time there was a seismograph crew that opened up some roads and then it snowed then thawed, then froze again leaving the hard crust which was ideal for rounding up the studs because it slowed them down and with my old brown horse I could catch them in no time. That icy crust sometimes caused small cuts but never enough to badly hurt them.”

West talks more about something called ‘popping“. This is a short-term conditioning, a second wind, for their riding horses to give them an edge over the wildees before a chase. It was a mix of a walk, then a trot, then a gallop and then repeated but mixed in with this is when the riding horse has a poop and a pee. The wild horses would play out when pushed and played out if they did not have a chance to do this. If it ever happened that wildees got their wind back they were harder to catch.

West talks about Sherman's horse getting its foot caught in a hole in the swamp and he was

stuck and could not get his foot out so he had to use his jackknife to cut away the hummock so the horse could get his foot out. This horse was quiet and just stood there until his foot was free. If he hadn't been such a quiet horse, he might have broken his leg.

“Another time Sherman and I went down lower by Obed to look at some horses and he was riding a good looking horse bought out of the stockyard in Edmonton but he did not know that this horse was a runaway. So we took after these horses all the sudden Sherman comes zoom and his horse was running away and it got right up in among the herd of wild horses and the wild horse are trying to get away and he couldn't hold him. Although we did not see it happen, his horse went between two trees and peeled him right off. So I came along and there was Sherman and I asked if he was hurt. so I had to catch up to the wild horses and get his horse. I would say I went two miles before I got that saddle horse. So I caught the horse and brought it back and I met Sherman staggering along the trail. And so the next time I went by the place, I carved the words Sherman's Homestead on a tree.

And talk about carved in trees, way out in the bush south of Hinton, carved in a tree was the words Kilroy was here. And I thought that was funny so I wondered why that would be carved way out there so I got asking some of the older guys in there and I found out Kilroy was an old pack horse that was owned by one of the packers out there and he would be running with a herd of horses and when they went to capture the horses he would split and maybe a week later another packer would be out and there was Kilroy with his horses and as soon as they started running Kilroy would split again and run away. And that old pack horse was so smart he knew that if he got caught he would have to work.”

### What Were The Living And Working Conditions Like?

“The weather was not always cooperative. One day it seemed to be pretty cold and I saddled up and went out into the hills to look for horse. I had ridden for about 3 hours when I started to get a little chilly. I knew where there was an abandoned logging camp and that in one of the buildings there was a tin heater and so I rode over there, tied up the horse, went in and started a fire in the stove to get warm. After I got warm I went out to the horse to ride out and he was just white with frost. I figured it must be kinda cold out today so I'd better head back home. When I back to Shaeffers I said, ‘You know it seemed very chilly out there today.’ Pete said it should be because it hasn't been warmer than 30 below all day.

use a dally rope and let some get away because if a horse gets away with your rope on them you lost the rope and the horse and you probably will never get him back. There was one instance when I was tied solid to the horn and this little band of horses we were chasing were going up an old logging trail. I roped a mare but just as I caught her she turned sideways and ran into the bush and I knew there might be a wreck and old Prince might be pulled sideways and go down so I took my left foot of the stirrup and jumped off into the snow on the right hand side of the horse and old Prince was just able to hold the mare. I was afraid it might flip him right off his feet but not that old Prince because he lit on his feet. I had the mare where I wanted her. Ross McLeod was right behind me and witnessed the whole episode and said he wished he could've had it on film."

I asked West about the years he had when he was alone on these adventures and he admits now all that it scares him a little bit.

We got talking about accidents. West says about the closest he ever had to an accident was when he got flipped on the ice down on the creek. He goes on to explain how in the muskegs the ice builds up down below on the creek and the forms channels or coulees and so it gets very icy on the banks and this is where he ran into some trouble.

"I was out hunting with Sherman Djuff and Bob Beggs and we'd caught three studs and we just tied them in the bush overnight. We had caught two of them up above the muskegs and the other one down lower on a steep bank of a creek. So I said I'll go down by the coulees and get that one if you guys can get these other two up on top. I went down there and the horse was minding the rope pretty good so I hooked onto the horn and we started out. The spring was flooded over so there was about 5 or 6 feet of glare ice. I had my horse shod and I thought I'd let out enough rope so that I can walk my horse across the ice and then I'll pull the stud across the ice with my saddle horse. But instead of walking across the ice, for some reason my horse decided to jump and when he jumped it scared the stud and the stud pulled back very quickly and caught my horse in midair and flipped him right over. And when we were going over I jerked my foot out from the underside and when I lit on the ice all I could think of was to kick and kick to get out from underneath. My horse was trying to get up and he smacked me in the head with his head and knocked me onto the ice again. I was actually kind of cuckoo. But when I woke up the saddle horse and the stud were standing on the other side of the creek. The saddle horse would not leave me and just held the stud. If I had been hurt it probably would have been the next day when they found me. The guys I was with would track me out but would be too late for that day and so I would have had to stay

there over night. That was probably the closest I ever came to getting hurt.

Before I started wearing shin pads I had some knee injuries And once or twice I had to have water drained off my knees. And one time I ran a stick into my eye when I was chasing some horses for Schaefer's. It was getting late in the day and I was riding through the bush when I ran the stick into my eye. And the stick broke off before it went far into my eye but I pulled it out. It poked a hole in the white in my eye but when I saw a doctor he just cleaned it out and he put a patch over my eye so I was OK after that. I think I did not have too many injuries because I was being very careful and I probably was a little lucky too. You just can't be in a hurry when you are working with horses because that's when accidents happen. You have to keep your distance and you have to watch out that you don't get kicked or bit. You have to watch out for all of that."

I asked the question if anybody knew where West was at.

"No. I never ever left a note on the truck or anything. When Ross McLeod and I worked together we had a few rules that we worked out between us. We always got separated when we were working but Ross was very good at figuring out the country and where we were at and how we would get back to where we started from. One rule was if we're going home or going back to the truck you dragged the rope on the right hand side of the saddle and it would leave a trail in the snow. Then all a person had to do was to figure out which way the horse was traveling and then you knew which way the rider was going. If there are was a track on the left side it just means that a horse maybe got away or something like that but normally we would never ever drag it on the left hand side. It worked out lots of times too. We traveled seismic lines a lot and one time I came across a track at a crossroads and I knew from the signs that Ross had been by and which way he was going. There's not many good trackers. A lot of people backtrack - sometimes they got the horse going a wrong way. A horse footprint will go straight down and then drag ahead and most people think that it should drag going into the step. I've seen a lot of guys backtracking going the wrong way because they don't understand the print properly.

I had one horse who would actually track. One time we were on ridge and the snow was gone so you couldn't really tell which way the wild horse had gone but I just gave her head and she put it down and she would track those horses across bare ground. She did it by the smell. That's the only horse I ever had that would track on her own."



We switched topics.

"I have a little bit to say about tranquilizer guns. They were called capture guns and I decided that it may be worth a try so I bought one powered by two CO2 cylinders. They're good for maybe 50 yards. So I took a gun out, loaded the recommended dosage and headed into the McLeod River area and found some fresh tracks in kind of an overgrown meadow with tall willow all over. I found the horse and knew I was very close so I got off my horse and loaded the gun and pretty soon I heard a snort and I knew a stud had heard me so I just sat down in front of my horse and waited. Pretty soon the stud came up bobbing his head and came a little closer and a little closer being real cautious. When he got in range I shot in him in the chest with a tranquilizer. In about a minute he was laying there out cold. I went up and put the rope on him. When he came to, and got up I figured this was the answer and that we will clean out all wild horses in no time flat. But that was the last horse I got with it and we never did get another one. I figure what happened is that the dart must have hit a blood vessel and the chemical went right into his blood stream and that's what put him out. But I tried it several times after that, shooting them in the rump and all it did was make them run faster! I shot one in the rump another time and I waited 20 minutes but nothing happened and so I never did see that horse again. I figure that running must cancel the tranquilizer and that it didn't do any good at all. So that was the end of the tranquilizer guns. I figure it had something to do with the type of chemical because today's tranquilizer guns work well but it's a different chemical used. And also the guys who made the tranquilizer did it in a lab and then tried it out in barns so that made quite a difference."

### Horse Medicine

"I always carried a bottle of Dr. Bell's Miracle Wonder Cure with me. One time I had to use it when we were in the Obed area. We saw some wild horses and took off after them and we got about 100 yards when I heard Bob holler, "My horse quit!" I stopped and went back. He had jumped off the horse and it was standing there with its head lowered. Bob said that the horse just quit and put his head down. I listened to its heart ,and his heart beat was very irregular just a thump thump then a single thump and so on. I had my Dr. Bells with me and their instructions were to put 20 drops on the back of the horse's tongue every 20 minutes and we did that for an hour and before long he got better. We walked him back to the truck. The next morning he was all right."

I asked what would that medicine be.

"It's a very strong stimulant. It's been used by livestock people and horsemen for many years. I still have some. When I was doing pick-up work in rodeos I always carried it in the cubby hole of my truck because you never knew when you might need it. Something else I always carried was a package with some string and a needle in case you had to sew up cut or something like that. And at one time I used that too. Ross McLeod and I were out and he was riding an Appaloosa horse and they're inclined to have a bit of a flat foot. Apparently this horse had stepped over a log on the trail and cut just back of the hoof. Every time the horse stepped on it the cut would just gush blood. So we looked around at it real close and we found the vessel that was pumping the blood out. I managed to get at it with my fingers and squeeze it and pull it out, then Ross tied it off with the string and stopped the bleeding. We got the horse in the truck and took it back to Hinton. I don't know what we would have done if I hadn't had that string. Both those items like the Dr. Bell's and the string were important and you never knew when you might need them."

West showed me a bottle of Dr. Bell's. It's useful for all types of animal treatments, like shock, cuts, colic and so on. We looked at the label on the bottle and there were two medicines of interest in the mix. One was belladonna and the other was digitalis. Belladonna is actually a poison and how it's used we weren't sure but digitalis is a heart stimulant. West points out that you can no longer buy this. "I got this bottle in a store in Pierceland, Saskatchewan before they closed." We noted that the bottle cost \$13.95.

West talks about having a visit with a neighbour who is telling him that he might have to shoot his old horse because he had diarrhoea caused by a bad gut. "I told him that it wasn't stomach trouble. It was his teeth and that if he had it looked after he probably would get better. I haven't heard back yet from him whether this worked or not but I hope so."



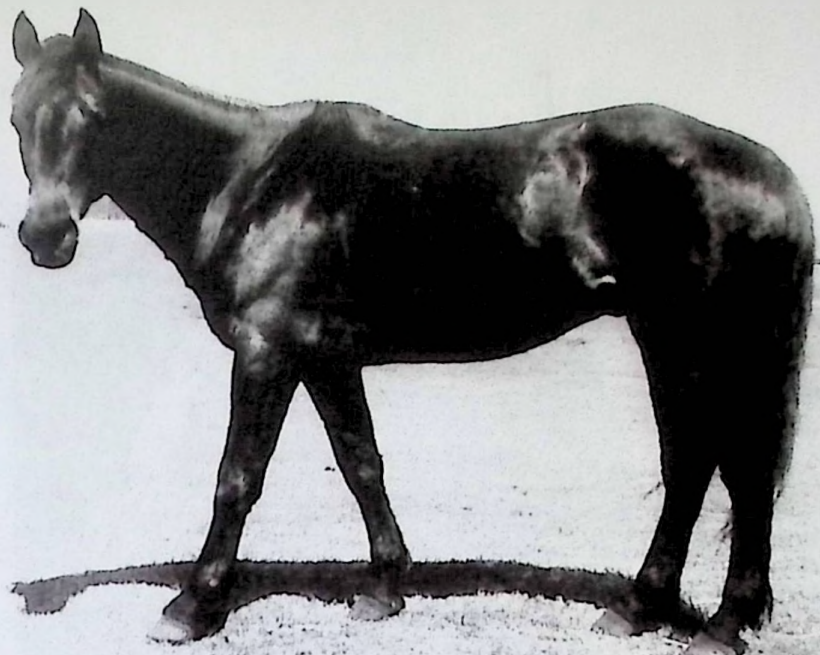


My daughters Rhonda and Pat and myself on Prince.

Below – two wildees a few months after being caught.







Rambler – half brother to Prince.

Below – more that I brought home.







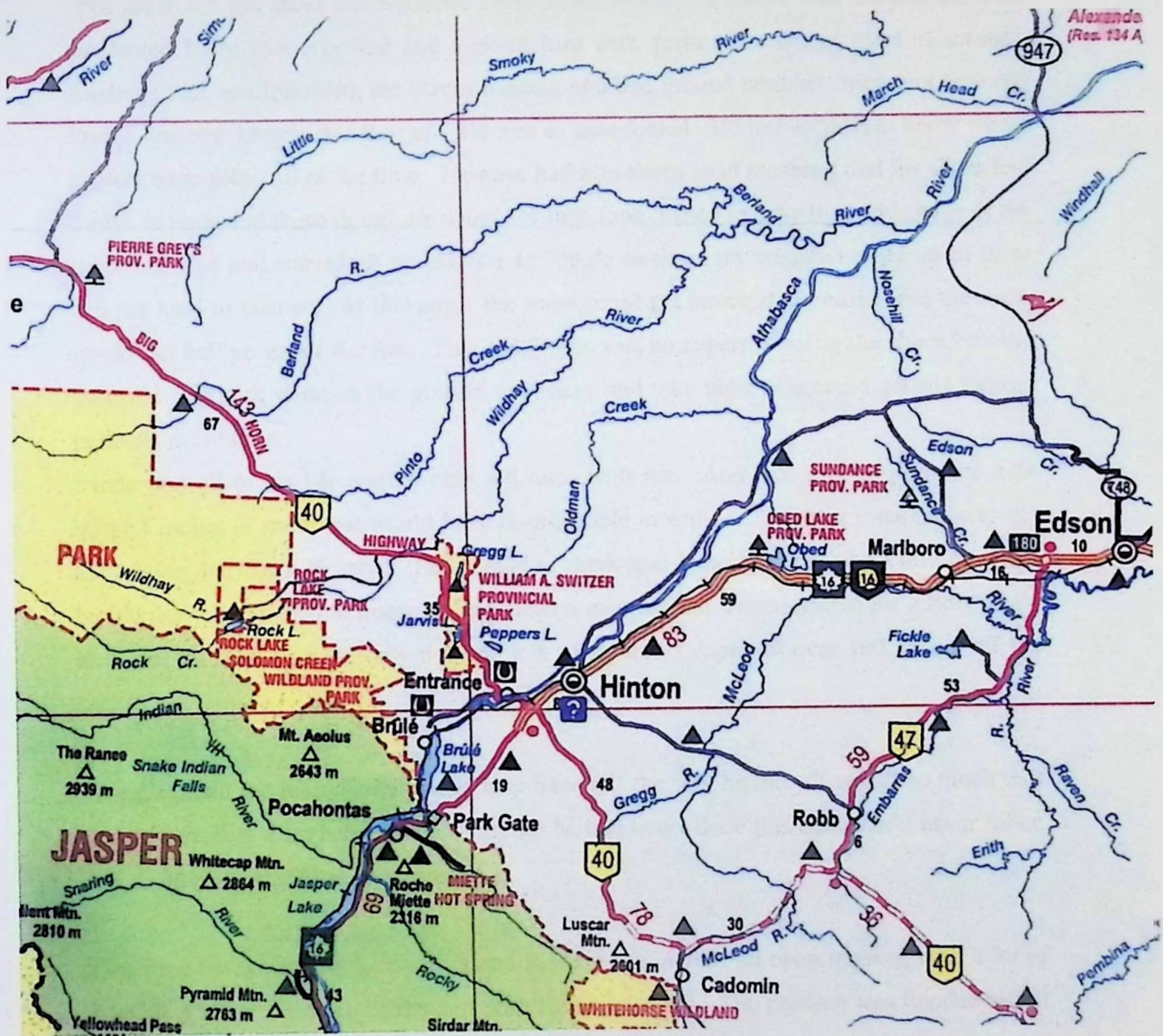
More that I brought home.

Below – my home raised saddle horse type.





# The General Catch Area





1912



## A Favourite Riding Horse

West talks about his old brown horse Prince.

"I've got to tell you about this old horse I had called Prince, the brown one. He was the most surefooted horse I've ever had and I credit him with getting me out of a lot of scrapes. Anybody that was following me across muskeg and bad ground couldn't figure out how old Prince was able to stay standing up. He was so sure footed. He just seemed to know where his feet were going all of the time. I always had him sharp shod meaning that his shoes had caulks in them and those things are about 3/4 inch long. I used to have the inside edge of the shoes bevelled and shaved off on about a 45° angle so the snow wouldn't build up in them and get hard to take out. At this angle the snow could get knocked out easier and the snow would not ball up under the feet. This old Prince was an expert in using the shoes because he could just stick them in the ground anywhere and take hold. He could get his footing perfectly every time.

I rode him all of his life and he only fell once with me. And that was on glare ice with about 4 inches of snow that would have been terrible to walk on. He just wasn't able to get his footing and down he went. He seemed to think that I was going to beat him up when he fell down he seemed to know he had made a mistake and he was scared for a little while after that but that was the only time he fell. I figured I captured over 100 horses off his back."

We discussed the reason why Prince may have felt the way he did. It wasn't so much that he was scared of West being mad at him but he had never done this before he'd never fallen so it could be he had been embarrassed.

"One time I was way out on the McLeod River riding across an open muskeg with a lot of snags in it about six or eight feet tall with limbs on them. The muskeg was flooded and it was glare ice maybe three or four acres of glare ice I almost got to the far side when I took a look behind me and there was a wolf sitting on his hind quarters watching me. He had been following behind all this time. So I thought I'm going to have a little fun here. I worked around as if I was going away from him and got to the edge where the bush was closest and he was right in the middle of this patch of ice so I took after him with Prince with these



shoes on. Well, the wolf couldn't run fast because it was so slippery and Prince just seemed to drop his shoes just right in the ice and the wolf was going zigzag to get away from me and every time he zig zagged he'd fall down because his feet would go out from under him. I would get up to about eight or ten feet from him and I got my rope ready to rope him. I was just ready to throw and the wolf went by one of these jack pine snags and the rope got caught on the snag as I went by and pulled it out of my hand. By the time I got the loop built again the wolf was long gone. We both agreed that this day the wolf was saved. If I hadn't got the rope pulled out of my hand, the wolf would've had a rough ride."

West mentions you can tell a lot about an animal's health by their teeth.

"In some places the snow was gone and along the trails sometimes there were dead carcasses and you could tell a lot about what happened to them by looking at their teeth. I would stop and look at the carcass to see if I could find out what happened to them. I could tell how old the horse was when he died. I can also tell sometimes what caused the death. I ran across one horse where the bone between the leg and the hip had been broken and that's what killed that horse. Another time I found a dead horse that was missing an upper tooth and the one below it had grown out long enough to fill the gap. It had grown maybe an inch up into the upper jaw. That's what caused that horse's death. And sometimes you would find this skull of a three year old with no sign of why it died. These are some of the interesting things that you run into."

### Some Adventures

"I wanted to tell you about going into the ranger's cabin on the McLeod River . The forest rangers had a cabin on the McLeod River about 25 miles south of Hinton and in about 12 miles from Highway 16. It was in an area that was too far to ride so we made arrangements with the rangers to stay in their cabin and to catch a few horses in that area . There were the three of us going in there , myself , Sherman Djuff and Bob Beggs . I had gone in earlier with my truck and there was about 6 inches of snow and it was tough going. I had some difficulty getting in there because there had been no traffic But I finally got there . Before long Sherman and Bob came with their trucks. After we got organized we made a place in the trees to tie the horses up . We had blankets and everything for the horses . Then we went into the cabin and lit a fire . There were two stoves in the cabin so we lit a fire in one of them and as the cabin warmed up, the flies started to come out, and the warmer it got the more flies showed up . The flies are so thick they were getting into the

water pail so we had to put a dish towel over the pail to keep the flies out. The question now is what are we going to do about these flies. We couldn't cook or anything in there because the flies were so thick. So we opened up the door and one window and got some towels and started shooing them out the door and window. It was kinda dark in the cabin and the flies headed for the light outside but they only get about 40 feet and down they'd go because it was too cold for them outside and they died. After awhile it cleared out enough so that we could make our supper, get things cleaned up, and get some sleep. In the morning we lit another fire and the same thing happened. There were flies all over again and the warmer it got them, the more the flies. So we did the same thing, opened the door and opened a window and shooed them out again. But it was pretty cold this morning and they didn't get very far so we kind of figured out that this might be our thermometer. The further away from the cabin they got, the warmer it was outside. This trip turned out to be a good trip and a bad trip. The snow was between six and eight inches when we went in but we were able to go riding and catch a few horses but before long we had 18 inches of snowfall so we were stuck. There would have been almost two feet of snow by then. We're trying to figure out what are we going to do. The snow was hanging in the trees and we could never get out with the trucks so we decided that Bob and I would ride straight to Hwy 16. We did that and got to Hwy 16 in the Obed Hills and Bob turned around and went back to the cabin and I hitchhiked a ride to Hinton. I knew a fellow in Hinton who owned the Hinton Heavy Haulers and those fellows had a D6 cat which they loaded onto a truck and headed off south and opened up a road for us right to the cabin. So now we have an open road to the hwy and thought we may as well catch some more horses to fill up our load. We had a problem though because of the heavy snow hanging on the trees that would fall down and get us wet. Now to solve this problem, we split gunny sacks and tied them around our waist and hung them over our legs and saddle so we would not get so wet. We carried on and finished up our load but we were still mighty wet.

Now that our trucks were loaded, we headed out for the highway, with Sherman in the lead, Bob next and myself in the tail end. Things are going pretty well until we were crossing a creek and since I had the heaviest load on my truck broke through the ice. I figured now we're in big trouble. I'm loaded down with horses and if we have to unload to get the truck out, how will we ever load the horses again. But what we did was to chip the ice on a slope and Bob had chains so we put them on his truck and he was able to pull me out without having to unload.

The adventures continue.



“While I’m talking about the McLeod River , one day Ross McLeod and I were riding through a big stand of timber not far from where that cabin was , and we ran across this big rock in the bush. I’d say this rock was at least ten feet by twelve feet and maybe eight or nine feet high with a roof having a one to three pitch roof. We thought this was kind of an odd rock so I said to Ross “Let’s call this House Rock “and so if any time we get back here we can say we were down by House Rock. One day I was with my brother telling him about this rock and he was pretty good with history so he got telling me he had read about a rock shaped like a house that was called just that - House Rock. Apparently it was a place where the Indians gathered to hold ceremonies . When we were there it was heavily timbered but it’s possible that at one time it was a meadow with the river running by and that would have been a good place for Indians to gather . I was always going to go back and have a look to see if I could find any signs if humans had been around there but I never did get there yet .

I want to say something again about chasing wildcees. When you get anywhere near them , the stallion will start to snort but then when he’s satisfied who you are , he will take off with the mares. Something I’ve noticed is that the stallion is seldom in the lead . Usually it’s a lead mare who is out front. And as you get closer , he’ll split from the herd and make a big half circle and come in from behind, kind of pushing them along . Sometimes he won’t even come in to the bunch, maybe not till next morning. He seems to be acting as a decoy. If a herd has ever been chased before, they are really hard to catch, especially studs because they’re got more power and wind than the mares. The worst ones to try to catch run at a steady fast trot.”

West talks a little more about stallions.

“Quite often a stallion will stop running and turn around and look at you and snort a lot. Some people say it looks like he’s going to chase you or charge but then this is never the case . All the stud is doing is trying to have a good look at who’s chasing him . I know that if the stud was trying to charge me it would have saved me a lot of running because I would’ve just roped him and be done with it. In one case when Bob and Sherman and I were out, we came up to a group of wild horses that started to run and before they got very far , the grey stallion cut out to the right . Bob told us to carry on chasing the mares while he went after the grey mare . So while we were chasing the mares, Bob is chasing what he thinks it is this grey mare, but he never did see that grey mare again! He did not know it at the time that he was chasing a stallion . We all had a good laugh at that one.”

West continues on talking about stallions.

“Bachelor studs could be a nuisance and had to be thinned out. In any area where there are a few bachelor studs the stallions will go and deposit in one pile and you’ll find these piles especially around salt licks. These are called stud piles. I’ve seen and maybe two feet high and five feet around. This George Kelly liked to see these piles because it was an easy way to catch studs . He would set up a stud trap and would catch quite a few this way. This was his way of thinning out the studs. He had a little board rigged up with a loop on it and when the stud stepped on the board , it flipped the loop up and caught the horse by the foot. Kelly made sure that he checked the trap everyday. That way he knew that the horse would not be hurt. This helps to thin out the bachelor stud herd and saved a lot of hard riding . There was a Mountie at Hinton by the name of Carlson who my brother knew who wanted to chase wild horses but I was very reluctant to do that. I didn’t know what he really wanted . Maybe he was trying to spy on us or maybe he was just interested in chasing wild horses. We didn’t know. Anyway we decided to give it a try so we went a mile north of the highway in the Obed area where we ran into an old stud and some two year olds. Snow conditions were just right. So I caught the two younger ones and Carlson helped me with the ropes and so on then I took off after the old stud. I finally got him and found out that he had a funny foot shaped kinda like a ski. It had grown out about a foot or more and was turned up on the end like a ski. It looked like it had been injured at one time. Carlson got to telling me about some horses that had been shot between Hinton and Grand Cache. One horse that had been shot was an old pack horse. The police dug out the bullet and had a good look at it . Carlson asked me how a person would ever find out who did that and I said that was easy. At that time most gun fanciers had gun racks in the back window of their trucks so I told Carlson to watch for trucks traveling in that area that had gun racks and check them out. I guess they must have followed my advice because Carlson stopped at my brother’s later on and told him they had caught the guy who had shot the horse. I’m not sure what happened to him but he probably got a fine and had to pay some restitution. I found the greatest enemy of wild horses is not cougars or bears even though they probably kill some horses especially colts but man on horseback. This seems to terrify wild horses.”

We got into talking about trucking these horses.

“With this type of horses I could usually carry about eight but sometimes I had did take two saddle horses so that left room for only six wildees. These animals usually weighed less than



1200 pounds each. When we caught them they were usually quite fat and round, but over a few days after being in the corral there would be a some tremendous shrinkage so they didn't look as nice they would lose weight but that made a lighter load. After I got them home it took awhile for them to gain weight but they picked up well after the grass got green. And the stress of trucking and the change of environment also accounted for the weight loss. I used a three ton truck with side racks to haul these horses. Sometimes I used partitions so my saddle horses would be on one side and the wildces on the other. These horses were hard to load and you had to have lots of patience. Sometimes it took up to two hours to load one horse. You couldn't get abusive with them because what good would that do so you just had to outsmart them. In one case I caught a stallion who just refused to be loaded. I had the truck backed up to a bank and took the end gate out and tried to pull him in with my saddle horse that that did not work either so I wound up putting a head rope on him and tied it as tight as I could, then put a rope on his front foot and pull that ahead then do the same thing with the other foot. I kept repeating this over and over until I had the horse in the truck and put the end gate in but what he did right away was to lay down so I just left him lay there. It was tiring for both the horse and for me. But he still had the ropes on him and I did not dare go in to take them off so the only way I could get them off was to get a long stick with a wire loop on the end and loosen the ropes with the loop and pull them off."

### The Catcher Horses

In this interview, West begins talking about the horses that he used to catch wild horses, calling them catcher horses.

"In the 14 years that I was catching horses I used about 21 or 22 different mounts. Out of all of these horses there were seven good catchers and you could pretty well be sure that by using any of these seven horses you are going to come back with a catch. With the remainder it was kind of an iffy deal and if you caught any or not. A lot depended on the amount of snow and how the wild horses reacted. If everything went right you caught a horse but sometimes the catcher horse just wasn't good enough. My catcher horses had only one chance and if they didn't pan out I never used them again. All of the horses that I took out there were in excellent condition. They had to be to stand the pace. I remember two horses that were totally useless. One of them was a horse that I raised myself from a colt, a quarter horse. He was in excellent stock horse for around the ranch here but when I took him out west he could not stand those long hills and the slopes that you had to travel over

when you're moving from one watershed to another. The other one, a tall black horse I bought off another fellow who used to chase horses, like rounding up horses for different farmers and so on. I bought him in good faith. He was another horse that was absolutely useless. It seemed like his feet were going in every direction. I tried to shoe him but he wouldn't have anything to do with that. He'd jump and kick and so we hog tied him, threw him down and were finally able to put shoes on but that didn't help either. He was still just as clumsy. Well we took him only as far as Edmonton where we dropped him and at the Al-Sask Meat Processors and I never even bothered to take the shoes off. Another horse, one of the good ones that I bought at a horse sale, was a little bay that I doubt weighed over 1000 pounds. This one I called Weasel because he was terribly fast over a short distance and he could go through the bush just like a weasel. You very seldom ever bumped your legs on the trees. With this horse, if you came across a herd of wildees, you were pretty sure to catch one. But one time I had to go quite a distance on a chase and this little horse would not give up. He would just keep going with all he could. I finally caught one and when I stopped I noticed this little horse had the thumps. This is a heart condition where every time the heart beats, the horse jumps a bit with a small body movement. There again I use my Dr. Bell's medicine and 24 hours later he was normal. By this time I figured out that was why he was at the horse sale - he had this heart condition brought on by over exertion. He was the type of horse that would keep on until he died, so I found a home for him on a cattle ranch where he would not have to work so hard. In those days I was constantly looking for better horses, or a super horse, but with the limited funds that I had I just couldn't go out and buy what I wanted because if the horse did not turn out to be any good it was a waste of my money so I had to be careful. The trick was to buy the best you could get for the least amount of money. And not always the best looking horse turned out to be the best horse because appearance did not always mean anything. I always preferred a thoroughbred cross because you had to have the high withers and sloping shoulders and that seemed to give the horse a little more stamina."

Once again West refers to Prince, one is his favourite chase horses.

"I can think of an incident when I was down on the McLeod River chasing two mares and two colts. We came to the river and some of it was open. The horses had gotten quite a ways ahead of me and upriver but they had turned around and were coming back down river on the opposite side by the time I got there. When I came out of the bush they were just about across from me and I thought oh boy what a break if I could just get across. The river is not that deep at that time of year like maybe two feet with rocks on the bottom and I could



see the ripples where the rocks were so I headed old Prince right across. He'd jump from the ice into the water in one jump and then jump up on the ice on the other side and he never missed a stride. Only one in a 100 can do that. The result was that those horses were soon wearing ropes. That incident was one of the breaks I had but I'll tell you about another time that I did not get a break.

I was south of Hinton near the McLeod River when I ran across some horses, with maybe eight or so in the bunch, which was typical. I had never seen these horses before which I thought was kinda funny. When they saw me they started to head west toward the park and toward Pocahontas Mountain and toward the Robb road that was that the western boundary of my permit. Soon they had crossed the road but kept going west so I thought I'd follow them for a while and I might get a chance to throw a rope on one of them. But in another seven or eight miles more they came to the wing of a corral and since I had never been there before I wasn't sure what to do. When they came to the wing they turned left which I thought was the wrong way because they would be trying to get away from me so I went around to the left and started them back down the wing but as it turns out they were headed towards a corral and if I'd let them go they would have run into the corral and I would have had the whole bunch! That was a piece of bad luck for me. I found out later that the corral had been built by Fisher who had a permit to the west of me. It seems that Fisher men had been chasing this bunch before and they had traveled over into my area and I was just chasing them back to the country they were familiar with so they must have known where the corral was. That's one of the times when things didn't work out."

I asked what would have happened if West had caught one or more of those horses out of his permit area. He said he would have just contacted Fisher and offer to make arrangements to share what he had caught with them.

We talked briefly about permits.

"Our permits gave us two years to produce but if we did not catch any horses In that time period the permit would be withdrawn. Two other Fellows also had permits in the general area Fisher being one and Finley was another while over in the Obed area there was another fellow by the name of Cherry. Neither Finley nor Cherry caught any horses so their permits were cancelled and I took over their permits. Permits could also be renewed. "

West points out that trails were very useful.

"In that Hinton area south of Highway 16 there was an old pack trail called the Casper Cut Trail that ran between Edmonton and Tete Jaune Cache following the high ground between Hargwin and Hinton. It was one of the first trails through the area but was only suited for horse travel . We would cross this trail several times a day because it was very noticeable and sometimes useful being all season. The muskegs were all corduroyed and trees had blaze marks on them. The trail may have been named after the fellow who opened it up . Seismic lines too were very helpful.

When you are catching that many horses over that a length of time you are bound to run into some misfortunes. One misfortune I'd like to talk about was when I was down on the McLeod River and I came upon a smaller herd of horses which took off and I took off after them. One black mare stayed toward the back of the bunch and couldn't seem to run very fast so I caught her very quickly. She didn't fight or anything which struck me a little bit strange but I was in a big hurry and didn't play much attention so I went on and caught another horse and tied it to a tree. When I came back to the black horse she was laying down stone dead. I figured that she must have had a heart condition and that's why she was running so slow and easy to catch.

Another time I was chasing a roan mare which took off across the muskeg and about half way she just stopped. I was just about to throw a rope on her when I saw that she'd broken her ankle between the ankle and the hoof. She had stepped into a hole on the frozen muskeg and snapped it off. The sad part to this was that I had to put her down. As I said before when you're handling horses for that length of time in rough conditions, something is bound to happen up like it did here. The law of averages just won't let you do it.

Kind of a funny thing happened when I was staying at Pete Schaefer's. He told me that he had a three year old roan mare that had gotten away on him about a year ago and he asked me if I could try to catch her before the snow goes so I said yes . It was a while later when I ran across a small bunch of horses down on the McLeod River in an open muskeg. They all took off except for this roan mare who turned and looked at me and snorted a few times and didn't seem all that scared. I was riding Prince at that time and pretty soon I caught her and snubbed her to the saddle horn. We just sat there for awhile letting Prince get his wind. The mare wasn't fighting very much so I just made a rope halter and after a little fight I put it on her. She started to tame down and I got to petting her and tried not to spook her. Before long I had her snubbed to the saddle horn but when I went to leave she would not lead so



I'm thinking to myself Pete Schaefer hadn't done a very good job in teaching her to lead. I played around with her for about an hour and before long she started to follow Prince so I headed back to the ranch. It was pretty dark when I got back, about eleven o'clock, so I just turned her loose in the corral, looked after my horse and went to my trailer. Before long Pete showed up and I told him I had caught his mare so he was pretty pleased. Now the next morning Pete was doing chores so we went and had a look at his horse. Pete walked around her and had a good look. Then he said this is not my horse! As it turns out I had caught a wild horse that looked just like his and we had a good laugh over that. I brought this horse home and she was pretty easy to break. Later I sold it to a neighbour, Jerry Fulton, and he used it for a cow horse. It was a naturally quiet horse and I found most of them were that way if you took your time with them. The colts were especially fun to work with and once they got to know you and trust you they were easy to train to lead and would follow you like dogs. It seemed like that was their nature because they were used to following each other through the bush."

Towards the end of March and early April when there is still frost in the muskeg, West wants to load up a saddle horse and go back out to the general area around Hinton where he used to catch horses and this time he'll have a camera and take pictures, not exactly where he caught horses but not too far away. In this manner he will also relive some memories that likely will bring back others of those days. Back then when my memory was sharper I could remember what horses I saw, what they looked like and where they were but today I can't do that."

We talked a little more about the Athabasca Ranch which is still in operation. West states that the Athabasca Ranch was a source of well bred horses that the packer's and outfitters released into the wild. These were the ones that West was catching that he brought back and bred to thoroughbred stallions, producing many good horses that way. He remembers a young fellow about 15 years old by the name of Jim Swan who bought two colts from him. Apparently Swan did not know much about breaking horses but West was impressed with the work that Swan did with these two colts which likely turned out to be very good horses.

We talked briefly about curley's which is a breed of horse used by people with allergies. West had seen them before but he had never worked with them. On this topic he did mention that wildees had a different smell about them than saddle horses and many of the round up horses hated that smell. West talks about moose ticks and sand flies and how rough they can be on horses. If these ticks are bad enough they can kill an animal.

West caught a stallion once that had a bullet wound in the neck and was in pretty bad shape. Apparently it may have been the result of another method used to catch wild horses that seemed pretty disreputable. It was called creasing, something he had only read about in old Western books. The way it was done was to use a small calibre gun and shoot high up into the neck by the mane hair, hitting a nerve, partly crippling the horse so that it couldn't run.

West talks a bit more about Prince.

"Three of the top horses that I used was Prince, then a half brother of Prince called Rambler and also the half sister of Prince called Queen. These were superior horses and it proves that it runs in the strain where some strains are better than others for chasing wild horses. "

### The Chase

West talks about every chase being different and always exciting .

"To begin with you'd have to go out and start looking for tracks and once you found them you had to figure out what they're trying to tell you. There would be quite a few signs And every sign meant something like how many horses there would be in a herd and in which direction they were going. You could tell by how fresh the horse manure was. And there was the excitement when you got close you could tell about many there would be in the herd and if it was new bunch or if they had been chased before. Sometimes if they had been rambling about and doing a lot of backtracking it would seem like they're a lot of horses but sometimes it was just a small herd, maybe a stud and maybe a mare or two. All of these unknown things were what made it exciting. As it turns out in the area that I was in there were no big herds. You had to have a certain skill to sneak up on these herds. You always travel slowly and be very quiet. I tried to travel in open places because that way my legs and clothes were not brushing on the branches and making a noise. If they heard you coming they would most likely know it was not just another horse but something strange. The trick was to see if you could get a good look at them before they took off.

Talking about chases, they sometimes did not last long but the longest chase was about over four hours and 20 minutes. That was a real long chase. And that long chase was because it was a horse that had gotten away on us before, kind of a thoroughbred looking bay mare



with a white spot on her forehead. She got away on us in the Hinton area and the next time I saw her she was down on the McLeod river at White Creek. I knew she was down there so I told Ross that we should go down and get that mare so away we went. Ross was riding a pretty good horse. We located her down on the meadows on the McLeod river and she headed up White Creek and did a few big circles. We followed her for about two hours and never got to see her. She had hit a seismograph line and took off south. Ross said we'll never catch her and so he quit. I said you go back to the truck and tonight you drive up and down the Robb road between the McLeod River and Rob and some time before midnight I'll be out on the McLeod road.

So he left and I took off after her. After a little over 4 hours I started to see her and the snow was getting deep and we had a place where the seismograph line had just opened up and she thought she was going to outrun me. Now I hadn't tighten the cinch since we had started that day and the horse shrinks a little as he's running and the saddle gets loose so I started to catch up not knowing the saddle was a bit loose. When I got closer old Prince laid his ears back and we went after that mare - it seemed old Prince was mad and he caught up to her right away and I threw the rope on her when we got real close. I had a solid tie on the horn and when I caught her she made a huge lunge and this turned her sideways and me, saddle and all flew right over Prince's head into the snow. She didn't stop. She jumped over a big snow bank three or four feet high and when I got back up she was dragging the saddle through the trees so I just bailed onto my saddle and then she got all zigzagging in the trees pulling me through the deep snow. I was buried deep down in the snow. There was a tree close by so I got the saddle around the tree and I tied the saddle strings to the rope until I got another rope to tie her up. Then I looked back over to the seismic line and there's old Prince standing there waiting for me. I knew it was getting late and there's no use of me even trying to take her out so I made a place for her for the night so she couldn't go around and around the tree and get caught up in the bush. I knew I was closer to Robb than anywhere else so I headed down the line to the Robb road. But by this time it's dark. And there was a little bit of a straight stretch of road and I saw lights coming and sure enough it was Ross looking for me. He had been by twice looking for me earlier but we finally made the connection. I never said anything and we loaded old Prince and got in the truck and started to leave. Ross said, "Well she is long gone" and I said nope, she's tied up back there by the seismograph line and there was silence for a minute and then he said, "There's not a horse in this bush that old bastard won't catch!"

West explains what he learned from Ross McLeod and the way he did things.

"I was riding with Ross McLeod when we ran across a stud we had not seen before. He was quite a distance when I first saw him but he saw us and he turned around and snorted and pawed and then he took off. He was a mature stallion, maybe late in his teens and he had lost his herd to a younger stud. He was really wild. I told Ross that this fellow was too wild to catch and maybe we'll just leave him. But Ross said I'm going to catch him one of these days but I thought to myself I doubt it. I went home for the weekend but when I got back Ross had the stud in the corral. I could hardly believe my eyes. I ask Ross how he was able to do that and Ross explained. Well I was out there and I was on my best horse and it started to snow and blow. A really wicked storm about as bad as it gets out there. I ran across these fresh tracks. And I knew it was this stud so I just kept under cover and I went real slow and quiet. Pretty soon I came upon him standing on the edge of a muskeg not 40 feet away from me. I took my rope down and stormed out at him yelling and making all sorts of noise and this horse was trying to look back and trying to run and he went out in the open where he could run, by now he's scrambling all the time and the next thing that happened is he went down flat on the snow and that's when I threw the rope on him and he was caught."

West thought this was a pretty good way to catch a wild horse so he decided to try it.

"There was a roan mare that had gotten away on me twice. This is a year later and I'm well mounted and down on Macpherson Creek. I knew that mare was running alone and she had never taken up with a herd. So I thought I'd go down and see if I could spot her. It was a real warm sunny day just beautiful and the snow was soft. I came out on Macpherson Creek and I could see down about ¼ mile. It was just low brush and the creek had flooded and it was quite wide with some high banks on both sides maybe 20 or 30 feet up. I looked down the creek and there was the lone mare standing there. It looked like she'd come out of the bush to lick water off the ice and she was standing there sunning herself and had not seen me. I figured this was about the time that I would try Ross's method of catching wild horses. What I did was to make a big circle through the timber and came back to the creek. I was high up on the bank and I looked down and there she was still sunning herself right below me. Because the snow was so soft she never heard me so I got my rope all ready and since I was well mounted and my horse was shod, I headed down the slope toward her as fast I could go, hollering and shouting and making a terrible racket. She was startled and tried to run away but because of the ice and snow she scrambled and slipped and slid and finally fell down just like what had happened to Ross's stud. The more she tried to stand up the more she scrambled. She never had a chance because I was sharp shod and in no time I had the rope on her. It was that easy. That mare was a beautiful mare, taller than most with a real



nice build so I brought her home. I got some nice colts from her and in time sent her to a PMU farm.

### Some Humour Too

West wanted to tell me about some of the more comical things that had happened during his roundup days.

“This Ernie Muldoon who owned The Hinton Heavy Haulers liked to go to the bush because at one time he had been an outfitter. He always had a good horse around and he kept bugging me to go chase horses on the weekend. What I liked to do was to have a horse or two tied up in the bush that I could bring in on the weekend and so on this particular weekend I happened to have a stud tied up in the Obed area so Ernie and Bob and Glen Beggs decided to go out with me and get the stallion. Ernie had a big police dog call Rega, a likeable dog, that used travel with him all the time and this dog was always in the way. We got to where the stud was and Bob untied him while the rest of us stayed back out of the way kinda spread out so the stud would watch all of us and take his attention away from being led away. Ernie wanted to lead him so Bob brought him over towards Ernie so he could snub him up and take him to the truck to load him. Bob passed the rope over to Ernie who snubbed it up but there was a little slack in the rope and Rega decided to jump over the rope but just at this time the stud started to snort and act up that pulled the rope tight and it caught Rega in the middle and just flipped him up high in the air. About this time to Glenn’s horse spooked and started to buck and threw him off. This all happened at the same time and it was pretty lively around there for a few minutes. If Charlie Russell had seen this he could have painted a real interesting picture.

There was another funny incident with Ernie and Rega. There was myself and George Kelly along with Ernie and Rega and we were going into the Berland River area. We trucked in as far as the Hay River airstrip then headed off about 12 miles to the cabin. The snow was fairly deep. Ernie was on a skidoo and was going to go around on the seismograph lines and Rega would follow and we just cut across country with the horses. Even with the trail cut by Ernie, it was pretty heavy going for the dog and as time went on the dog fell further behind so by the time we reached the cabin it was nearly dark and there was no dog in sight. But Ernie wasn’t worried and said the dog would show up before too long. We put the horses away and made some supper and I took out some sausages so they would be thawed by morning for breakfast. Before long it was time to go to bed but just before we did that we

stepped outside and there was Riga really tired but safe. We brought the dog in and settled down for the night. We got up the next morning and went to put on breakfast of fried sausages and eggs but I soon discovered that there were no sausages. Rega had eaten them in the night."

West talks about the cougar.

"I was out west of Hinton and it had snowed about 6 inches and before long I ran into a fresh cougar track. You seldom saw cougars because they stayed out of sight. I thought I might be able to catch up to him And before long and I did because the snow was pretty deep for him to travel so I was only maybe 12 feet away from him at times but he was smart and he would go around the tree and come out behind me and follow my backtrack. He did that about three times on me but finally we came to the spot where he had to cross an open area and by this time I caught right up to him and he was getting scared so he climbed up a big tree. He was a nice big cougar and I had plans for him so I took off my coat and hung it on a stick to keep him up the tree while I went to get my rifle. I came back and shot him and had him skinned. He was 7 feet from end to end. We made a rug out of him complete with the head and my brother's wife still has that rug.

I remember another time when Sherman Djuff and I had caught a rank stud on the south side of Hwy 16 and our trucks were on the north side of the highway. We had to control the stud to get him across the highway so what we did was put a rope on his front foot and tie him to the saddle horn and in this way we could control him. We came to the hwy and he kinda resisted going across so I gave him a pull and I broke the short cinch on my saddle But Sherman had him by the front foot and he couldn't get away anyway so we got him across the highway OK.

Ross McLeod and I were working together quite a bit and both of us and were hardened up about as much as we ever were in our lives. We rode hard, we caught lots of horses and we were in perfect physical shape. We were riding down the seismograph trail one day and Ross said "Why the hell are we doing this." I said I don't really know because in order to catch anything you gotta be riding faster than it's safe to do so and with the tough ones you gotta be mad in order to catch them. So we decided this was a madman's sport."

West talks about the last few minutes of a chase and how you have to balance out your horse's stamina against the commitment of catching something.



“On a real tough run most people would quit about the time when you should be really pouring it on because in the next few minutes is when you are going to catch your horse. You feel like quitting but you have to decide whether there’s enough saddle horse left to make the catch and still save your mount. You have to estimate how much that horse ahead of you has left and also how much your horse has left and sometimes there’s a very fine line and the big decision has been made to carry on or to stop. You also don’t know where the chase will end or when and often there’s no such thing as coming in for supper at six o’clock. The bottom line of course is to save your saddle horse. In all of the years of catching wild horses I can say that I never hurt a horse by pushing it too hard. Something I usually did after a hard chase was to let my horse cool off slowly by walking him around because if you didn’t he would stiffen up. Something else I did to conserve the energy of my saddle horse was that if I had a choice of traveling through deep snow when there were open spots available a little further away I would go for the open spots because it was much easier on my horse.

George Kelly phoned me one day early in the spring and said that the seismic crews were working in the Berland River area and that we had better get in and catch some horses because they were opening up new trails. Most of the seismic trails weren’t too bad to travel on if you went slowly. As before we trucked in to the Hay River airstrip getting there about midnight then went a little beyond where the seismic crews had camped. It was melting and we had to go in on the frost. As we went past the camp, I thought I saw someone in my rear view mirror waving but it was dark and I did not pay too much attention to it and kept going. We were able to get right to the cabin on Chase’s Flats. We managed to get some sleep then went out in the morning to find the horses. We managed to catch a horse each and the other horses we were chasing weren’t too far away so we grabbed a bite to eat and then went back out and caught two more each before dark. By this time we got six horses caught and so we thought we’d try to get a little sleep but when we went out to check the weather it was raining and real hard. It felt like it was going to rain for days and so we decided we’d better get out of there right away because we’re about 12 to 14 miles back in the bush. We chained up the tires and loaded the horses. By this time it’s midnight but we still headed out in the dark. It’s slippery because of the rain on the snow. We got about halfway back and we knew that we had to drive over a small bridge that crossed a small stream running out of a muskeg higher up. It was not good news when we got to the bridge because the seismic crew had taken it out and there was no way to cross. What are we going to do now. George knew that the seismic crews had cut lines crisscrossing all over and that



if we could pick up some of these lines and keep working our way higher up we might be able to cross on the edge of the muskeg just before the stream started and that's exactly what we did and this is all at about 5 miles an hour with the chained up truck late at night with a load of horses in the back. We managed to cross over to the other side and then traveled downstream again to pick up the road we came in on. But we had one more problem. There was another bridge we needed cross before we were out of there and darned if the seismic crews hadn't taken it out too so we had to repeat the whole thing over again just to get out. It was well in the daylight by the time we got back to where the seismic crew had camped and we continued on to the airstrip and where we unloaded the horses and tried to get some sleep but there was no way. I just could not sleep so we pulled out. We made it back into Hinton about mid afternoon. That was quite an experience. We then figured there had been somebody behind trying to tell us not to go because the bridges were going to be out but we didn't know that at the time and just about got caught in there. We also knew that if we hadn't left when we did when the ground was frozen we would've never gotten out. When I think about things like that now it bothers me because it was dangerous but then we were young and it didn't seem like it was going to be too bad. But something else happens when men are working together and go through something like that. There's a real bonding that takes place and that's not always the case when you're working alone, or with someone you don't have faith in. It also develops the respect for each other that you share the rest of your life. "

West is talking about what the Hinton country was like when he first got out there.

"There were not a lot of people out there when I first came in and about the only hunting going on was with those people are needed the meat, but things change when the pulp mill opened up. There were people from all over the world who came to work at the pulp mill, immigrants and they saw the elk and the moose as cheap meat. I even had a German butcher ask me to shoot a horse for the meat but I refused. There were quite a few animals taken out and that caused a steady decline of the elk and the moose. That should not have happened. I took surveys for the government and I had to list of the animals I saw on one day then pass this information over to the rangers. I would say in the 1960's south of Hinton and the McLeod River area the animals were terribly down in population because there were too many taken when they shouldn't have been. Now this is different. In the earlier years when I went out I would see 15, 20 or maybe 30 head of elk in a bunch and maybe see three or four bunches in the day but later on I wouldn't see anything in the day. Today there is more game then there was then.

Wolves are another problem because they took some animals. West has an opinion about wolves.

"Wolves are about the rottenest animal there is. He will kill anything that's at a disadvantage. For example, if there's a herd of the elk going across the river he'll get in behind and pull down the calves, tear off the muscles of the hind legs and eat them alive. I have no respect for wolves it all. West mentions that cougars occasionally kill horses, especially weaker horses. The country opened up to a lot when the pulp mill came in. Thousands of acres of timber have been cut, opening the country right up so a lot of animals just don't have a hiding places anymore. If a pack of wolves gets on the seismic line they can make 15 miles a day hunting all the time because they don't have to plow through the bush and snow."

West figures with the increasing population, the animal count was down by three to one but it's getting better because the forestry people have more control over it all now and they use helicopters which makes law enforcement much easier. He says there has been no change in poaching laws but it has better control now. West says that the reforestation seems to be working well and that much renewable forest is growing. He was doubtful at first if much would come of it because it would take so long like 50 to 70 years for it to grow again but he said that now he is very positive. If they keep on this program there'll be a plentiful supply of timber for the future.

He says there's been a dramatic change in the staffing of the rangers. In the early days, the rangers were older fellows and they did everything based on experience but today younger men have taken over and it's done a whole different way of doing things. He says there was a time period during a changeover when things weren't so good in the forestry but it has settled down.

West feels that there is room on the land for wild horses but some changes should be made. There has to be more control over things like the bachelor groups who get too strong and powerful. And there should be stud control by one person who knows what they're doing and who can help control the stud population. West talks about how one time he caught twenty nine studs in one round up to help control the male population.

Wild horses help in another way. They feed on the grass during the summer, clipping it off,



making way for new green shoots to grow, but with the onset of winter, these shoots freeze and get covered with snow. Other animals too like elk paw away the snow, exposing these preserved green shoots that provide food for all of them. This is why in a bad year the elk and horses are sometimes seen feeding together.

### What Happened To The Horses He Caught?

“Most of the horses I brought home, about a 350 mile trip, straight through, but we fed and watered them real well before we left because we couldn’t stop. And it sometimes took about 10 hours depending on the road conditions. The only ones I actually sold for meat were the ones with no future like an old stud and some of the better horses I sold for riding and to ranches. Some of the horses I sold to bucking horse outfits who supplied rodeo stock like Stanley Boychuk and Verne Franklin. Most of them turned out to be good bucking horses for at least two years. A fair number of these horses I had rebred and then shipped them out to the PMU barns in eastern Canada and some of them I raised a fair number of colts from using purebred studs, some selling as high as \$500.00. They turned out to be really good saddle horses. I found they were very easy to break.”

### And Other Things

We would be remiss for not including something about the Lea Park Rodeo, partly because West himself has been heavily involved in the rodeo for over 22 years and because some of the land used by the Lea Park Rodeo Association is owned by Wests.

“Rodeo was first held there for about three years, from 1927 to 1929, but the rodeo was discontinued because there was no one to run it. I was kind of rodeo minded and interested in livestock so a fellow by the name of Dewey Hines and myself restarted that rodeo in 1955. During my ranching there I was also a pickup man band with the Franklin Rodeo Company. We ran the rodeo on our own for two years and then the Marwayne branch of the Royal Canadian Legion took it over. To date it’s the 56th annual rodeo there and rated about sixth in Canada for prize money I used to spend months down there building corrals and fixing things.”

West talks about doing game counts while he was catching wild horses. He did this for the Alberta government. His job was to record every animal he saw such as deer, moose, and



elk. He then turned results into the government on a regular basis. There was no mention of whether he was paid for this work.

### A Significant Other

And we must not forget that in all of these years of rounding up wild horses, there was another person in Gerald's life, his wife Margaret. West recalls there must have been times when he was gone, sometimes for over 10 days, that she must have been concerned about her husband being alone out in the wilds, involved in what must be considered to be dangerous activity. West's brothers were also concerned so after riding solo for five years West hired other people to work with him, making Margaret and the brothers feel better.

This completes what West has told me. He will always have more to tell but the rest will have to wait until it's time to renew more old memories.

*I was pleased to help Gerald record his memories about gathering wild horses many years ago and produce them in written form so they may be passed on to his family and to others. This transcription is based on a number of interviews between Gerald and myself over about a year and is more or less word for word of what Gerald said. All I have done is organize the material and prepare it for printing. - the Editor*

*It's not every man that can get on a horse and get out into that bush and rope a full grown horse and put a halter on him and bring him in.*

*(Anonymous)*

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## Making A Wild Horse Halter

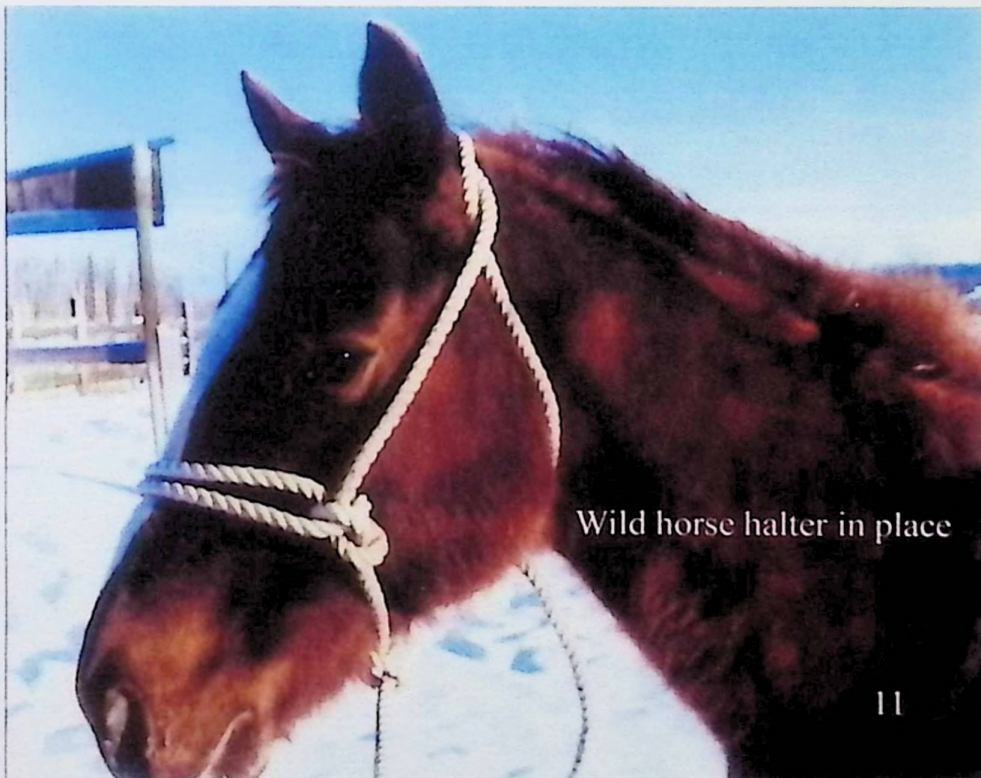
West wishes to share with the readers his way of making a unique horse halter.

He says, "This halter I have used for many years. Most of the time it was made from the rope I carried. The bowline knots are used because you can always get them untied no matter how tight they have been pulled."

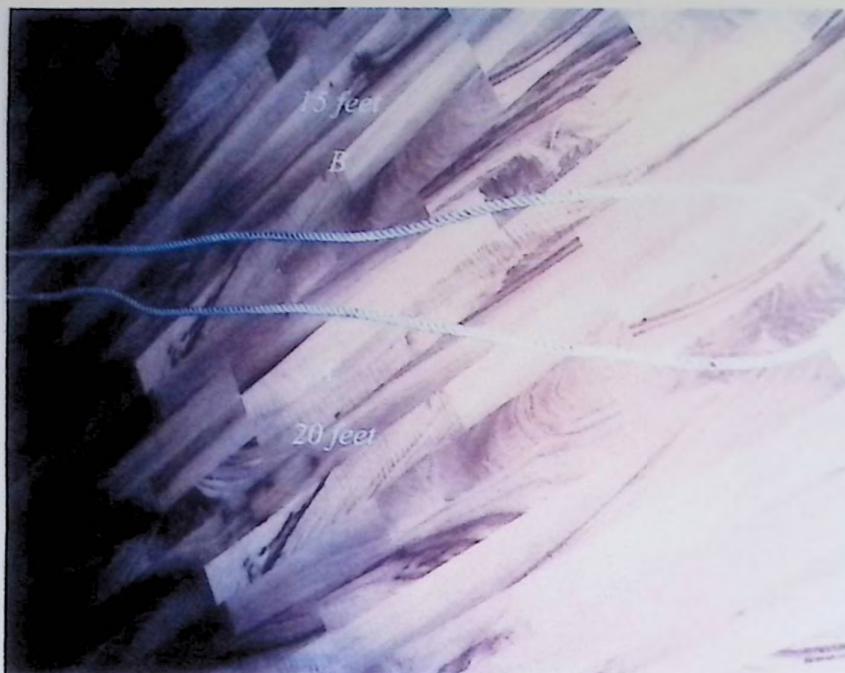
West preferred making this halter using a softer rope because hard twist rope is difficult to form.

Where he learned how to make it and who from remains a mystery to him.

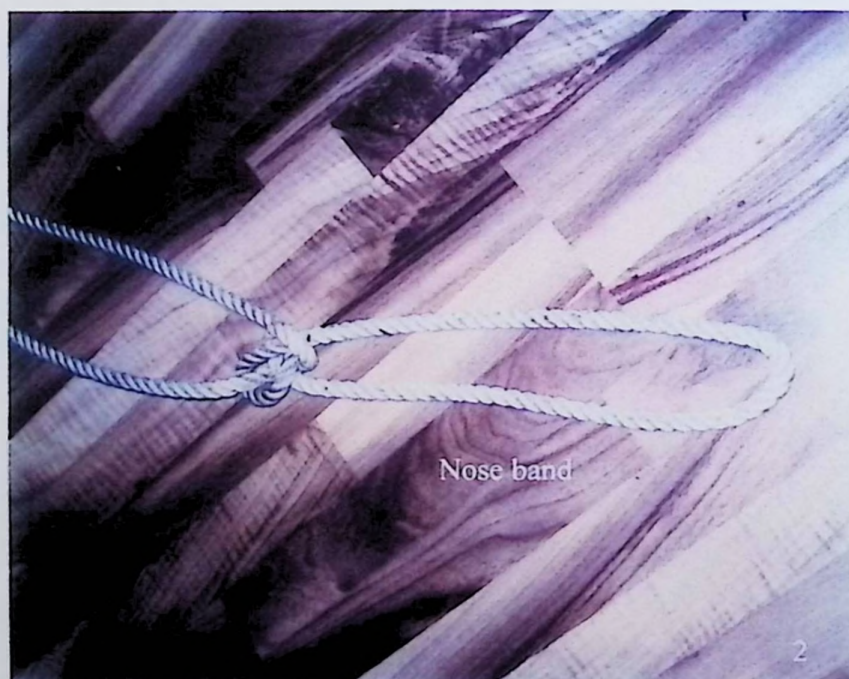
Here is the halter in use.







1. Take a medium twist  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch nylon rope 35 feet long. Double it back as shown. Make Side A 20 feet. Make Side B 15 feet.
2. Tie a bowline knot in Side B, 14 inches to 18 inches long. This will be the nose band.





3. Next will be the head stall that goes over the head behind the ears. Estimate the head size using the shorter rope Side B. Put a half hitch around the nose band Side A opposite the knot in Step 2.

4. Thread the end of the shorter rope B through the opening created in Step 3 where my thumb is and pull it through.





You now have a headstall and a nose band. But you're not done yet!







5. Now turn halter over, headstall downwards. Tie a bowline with the short end of the rope about 6-8 inches from the other knots.

6. With bowline completed, the halter will look like this.

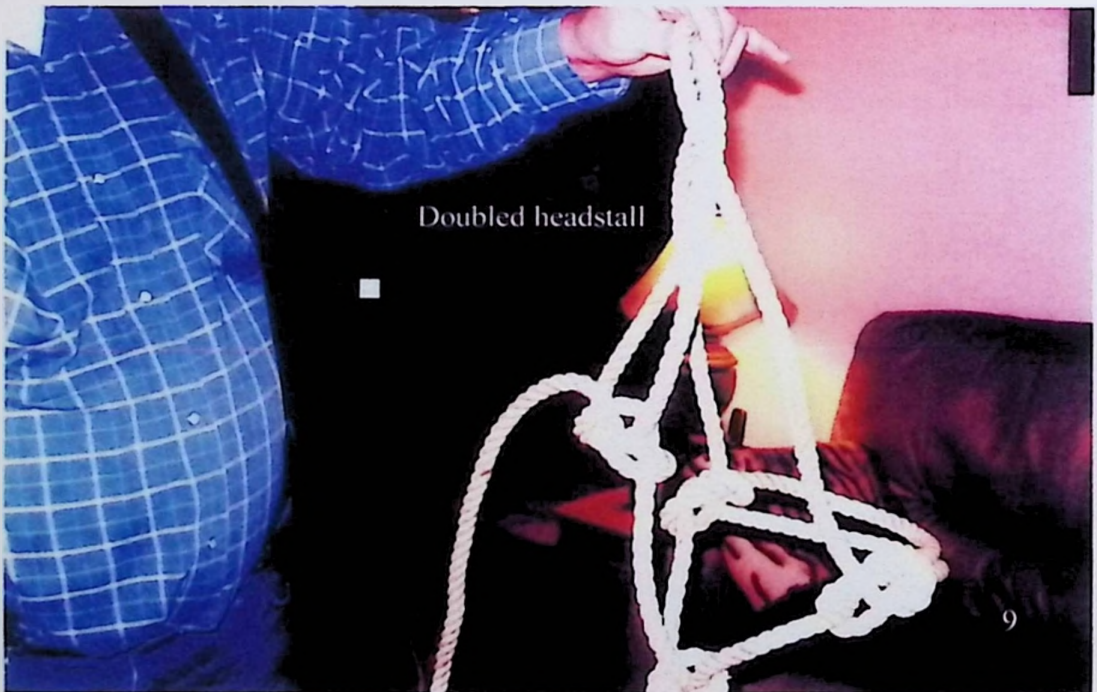




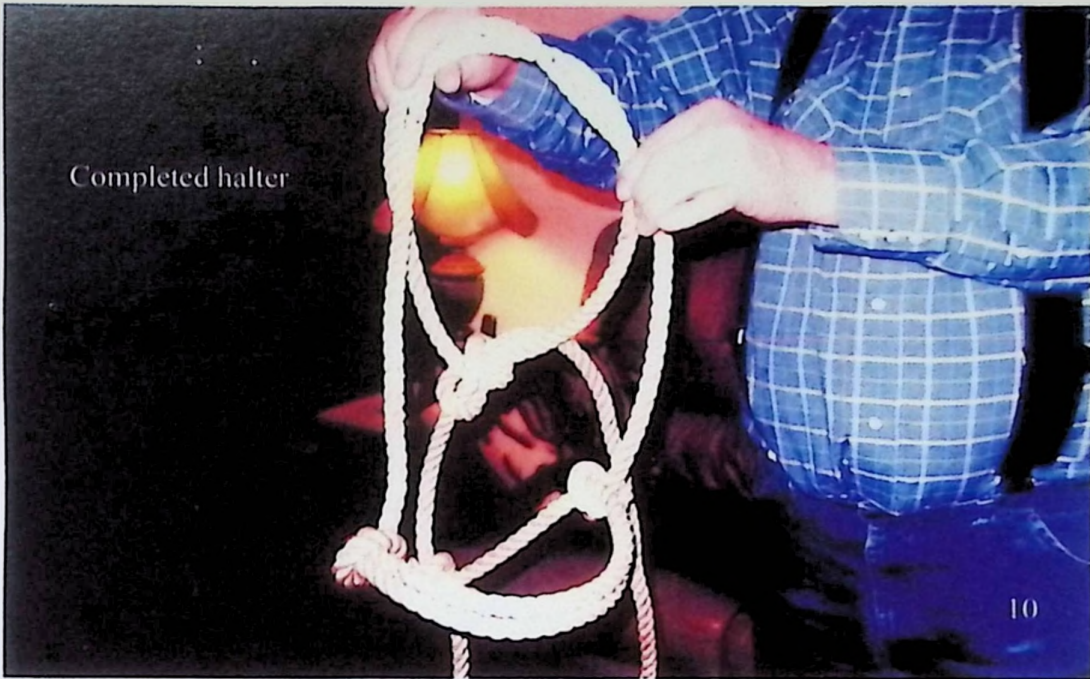


7. Hold the halter upright using the short end of rope. Wind it twice around the top of the headstall.

8. Bring the short end back down and tie a bowline to form the jaw piece.







9. This completes the halter. Adjustments can be made by moving the knots. The under chin piece is undone when putting the halter on the horse, then is re-tied.

