

On the Plains

Bob Lemmons rounds up mustangs, wild horses that live on the plains in the state of Texas, in the United States, for teams of cowboys to use on the long drive.

It wasn't noon yet, but the sun had already made the Texas plains hotter than an oven. Bob Lemmons pulled his wide-brimmed hat tighter to his head and rode slowly away from the ranch.

'Good luck, Bob!' someone yelled.

Bob didn't respond. His mind was already on the weeks ahead. He walked his horse slowly, being in no particular hurry. That was one thing he had learned early. One didn't capture a herd of mustang horses in a hurry.

Bob looked around him, and as far as he could see the land was flat, stretching unbroken like the cloudless sky over his head until the two seemed to meet. Nothing appeared to be moving except him on his horse, but he knew that a herd of mustangs could be galloping near the horizon line at that moment and he would be unable to see them until they came much closer.



He rode north that day, seeing no sign of mustangs until close to evening, when he came across some tracks. He stopped and dismounted. For a long while he stared at the tracks until he was able to identify several of the horses. It seemed to be a small herd. The tracks were no more than three days old and he expected to catch sight of the herd in the next day or two. A herd didn't travel in a straight line, but ranged back and forth within what they considered their territory.

He untied his blanket from behind the saddle and laid it out on the ground. Then he removed the saddle from the horse and tied the animal to a post. He took his supper out of the saddlebags and ate slowly as the chilly night air seemed to rise from the plains that a few short hours before had been too hot for a man to walk on. He threw the blanket around his shoulders, wishing he could make a fire. But if he had, the smell of wood smoke in his clothes would have been detected by any herd he got close to.

After eating he laid his head back against his saddle and covered himself with his thick Mexican blanket. The chilliness of the night made the stars look to him like shining slivers of ice. Someone had once told him that the stars were balls of fire, like the sun, but Bob didn't feel them that way.



He thought about the time when he brought in his first herd of mustangs ...

One day several of the cowboys had gone out to capture a herd. The ranch had been short of horses and no one ever thought of buying horses when there were so many wild ones. He had wanted to tell them that he would bring in the horses, but they would have laughed at him. Who'd ever heard of one man bringing in a herd? So he had watched them ride out, saying nothing. A few days later they were back, tired and disgusted. They hadn't even been able to get close to a herd.

That evening Bob had timidly suggested to Mr Hunter that he be allowed to try. Everyone laughed. Bob reminded them that no one on the ranch could handle a horse like he could, that the horses came to him more than anyone else. The cowboys had acknowledged that that was true, but it was impossible for one man to capture a herd. Bob had said nothing else. Early the next morning he had ridden out alone ... Three weeks later the cowboys had been sitting outside the ranch one evening and looked up to see a herd of mustangs galloping towards them, led by Bob. Despite their amazement, they had moved quickly to open the gate and Bob had led the horses in.

The next morning, the sun awakened him even before the first arc of its roundness showed over the horizon. He saddled his horse and rode off, following the tracks he had discovered the previous evening. He followed them west until he was certain they were leading him to the Pecos River. He smiled. He knew the horses would come to that river to drink every day. Mustangs never went too far from water.

