

Story of a Cowboy

(Milton Burge was 88 years old when interviewed at his home in Yakima in February 1951. He started as a cowboy working for his father, Andy Burge, in 1872. He was 9 years old at that time.)

It was Uncle Sam's range and no red tape attached in the days when I was riding the range. We lived along the creeks and raised cattle. We didn't dream that someday big ditches and reservoirs would be put in. Even when the Sunnyside project was started I thought it would glut the country with alfalfa hay.

The Cowboy

The cowboys of the 70s and early 80s in the Yakima valley wore bandanas to keep off the sun and dirt. They had stetson hats and some wore buckskin pants. We didn't have chaps at first-- they came into use later. The best pair of chaps I had were made in Cheyenne and I wore them in the 80s. We'd buy a good share of our clothing in the towns on Puget Sound ~~when~~ after we'd driven our cattle over the Cascade mountains to the coast for markets.

We had whips in the 70s that were about 12 feet long and were used to flog the cattle along. They could split a hide. Some of them came from stores and were made of leather, except for a wooden handle and a buckskin end, while others were homemade of buckskin with not-too-long handles. Blacksnakes that had no handles at all were also in use. These whips went out of style because they made the cattle too wild. We'd crack them and they'd pop like a six-shooter. So we got rid of them and used our rawhide ropes as whips.

We carried guns sometimes. We wore them quite a lot after the Perkins were killed in 1878. I had a Colt revolver that I carried strapped under one arm. That was the best way in the mountains, for the rain fell frequently and the gun would get wet if it wasn't

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covered. Riders on the lower Yakima range usually carried their guns in their saddles. We'd hunt in the mountains if we ran across any game. I know one fellow who shot 16 grouse with 17 shots. You'd drive 16 days now to find 16 grouse.

We had songs we'd sing to the cattle on the drives but I forget now what they were.

The cowboys patronized the saloons. Yakima City had about three, including Al Churchill's and Adkin's.

Racing was one of the biggest amusements in those days, when people didn't have much else to do. Yakima City had two racetracks in the 70s-- a half-mile track on the west side of town and a mile one a short distance up the Ahtanum road. I remember that at one race on this latter track Moses Bollman lost Centennial hall in a horse race in 1877 to John Polly. Polly bet \$1,000 against the hall. I was taken out of the one-room log cabin on the Wenas that year to help work with Polly's horse, Alice O'Neal, in preparing for the race. The horse ~~haxhaxen~~ was called Alice at first but later became Alice O'Neal. It was frosty weather-- I remember my hands became so cold I thought they'd freeze. I was out of school about two weeks to help in the training. The horse Alice O'Neal ran against Tom Murray, belonging to a Mr. Pendleton, and it was a half -mile race, I believe.

Races drew quite a crowd in those days and people bet money and sometimes horses and cattle. My father bet a cow on the outcome of the Tilden-Hayes presidential election.

The Indians held races at several places on the reservation where they had good flat land. They bet blankets, trinkets and such.

The Range

The range was good in the 70s, bunch grass mostly and high

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The Wenas people put up more hay than the cattlemen in most other places. They cut wild hay and timothy, and most of them kept their stock on the Wenas range year 'round. Snow was deeper there than in the lower country but because of the stockpile of hay the Wenas residents didn't have such heavy losses. At our ranch, however, we didn't have enough hay.

Ranches in the Wenas ~~were~~ had fences of poles strung along in zigzag fashion. George Taylor, who lived at Selah, used cottonwood to make his fences.

My father and I had our cattle on the Wenas during the summer and at ~~Cold creek~~ the mouth of Cold creek on the Columbia river during the winter. We moved the cattle back up into the mountains about the middle of April when the grass started turning good. We took part in the roundup on the Columbia range with the other settlers. It took about six weeks. The range was about 60 miles across from Johnson canyon -- near Vantage ferry-- to the mouth of the Yakima river. ~~For~~ We used to meet lots of times at the place where Prosser is now located near the falls. There was nothing on the river banks then, when we gathered for the roundup. We had no wagons on the roundups -- or the drives-- in the early 70s, just pack horses to tote around the grub and bedding. Later a chuckwagon was used on the range during the roundup.

We'd roundup the cattle and drive them to the nearest corral. I remember we branded many at Snipes mountain, at Charles Splawn's place on the Moxee and at the Rattlesnake corral. We also branded the animals right on the range if we were too far from a corral. Bringing our 150 to 200 head of cattle ^(had more cattle later) back to the Wenas, we'd come through the Roza valley and usually cross the Yakima river at the mouth of Wenas creek or at Taylor's place two miles below the

Wenas. Taylor and George Hull had big corrals ~~where~~ where we could put up our horses for the night. It would take about two days to drive the cattle to our neighborhood from Cold creek.

I recall some of the other stockmen of those days. Harry Burbank, who came in 1870 and built a cabin in 1871 in Burbank canyon, branded || on the right side. David Longmire branded an L, John Clemans used JC, George Taylor branded with a T, A.M. Miller used an M brand, and "Uncle" Tom Pierce used X. Some folks thought Pierce was associated with Taylor, but I don't believe so. George Hull, also on the Wenas, had an H on the ~~scout~~ shoulders of his cattle and seven dots on the hips. My father's brand was A. Snipes used an S, and his horse brand was a horse's head, I think. I don't know how many ranches he had and I only met him once, when I was small. I did work with his men quite a bit. Billy Splawn was another cattleman of that time, and a great leader.

The only stampede I remember on on the Columbia range was once when approximately 1,000 cattle went on a rampage and tore out one whole side of the ~~in~~ Rattlesnake corral. I don't recall what caused it. The corral, about 1½ miles from the spring, was made of drift logs from the Columbia river.

There were other ranges in the 70s too. Kittitas valley was a summer range called "Cow heaven." Cattle were driven there by the thousands because it had lots of water and grass. It was lost to the cattlemen when settlers moved in and fenced the land.

The Cowiche was quite a horse range at one time.

Larry, Dandy and Dixie were the names of cow horses I used in riding the range. Like most other cowboys, I thought a lot of my saddle horses.

Drives

Taking cattle to market, I went mostly over the Naches pass. I drove for myself and my dad, and sometimes for George Taylor, maybe 100 to 150 cattle at a time. I usually went on just one drive a year, although I recall taking two bunches over in 1878.

The biggest share of the Wenas settlers took their cattle over the Naches pass during the season when it wasn't plugged by snow. It was a much-used route, although the Snoqualmie pass, of course, was more popular. Jack Splawn used the Snoqualmie pass.

After cutting out the steers we wanted on the Wenas, we'd start the drive up over the hump. We had about three or four men on a drive, including myself and my father. A.M. Miller would sometimes sometimes drive cattle with ours on the eight or nine day trip to the coast towns. Our destination was ordinarily to Hardaway 'hambers' place at Olympia.

We'd take along a couple of packhorses. We had flour, bacon and beef and we ate lots of beans and potatoes on the drives. When we wanted fresh meat we'd kill a beef. That was true on roundups as well as on the drives. Dried apples was about the only kind of fruit we had then. We had no baking powder, so we had to use sourdough. We'd have an open burlap bag ~~with flour~~ containing flour, in which we'd stick the sourdough to keep it. Later we used Crescent baking powder. Everybody knew how to cook, and all took their turns cooking. We had no water bags or canteens on trips. We'd wait until we reached water to drink. That held for the ~~wix~~ lower range, too, where water was scarcer than in the mountains.

The cattle were pretty easy to herd. The trail was narrow and because of the many rocks, trees and bluffs that were all along the way the ~~xxxx~~ animals couldn't scatter out. They didn't want

to wander off in the dark woods anyway. The West side cattle didn't mind the timber, but steers raised on the open range of ~~central~~ central Washington didn't like it. Because they ~~were easy~~ wouldn't wander off the trail they were easy to hold at night and we didn't have to post guards. We slept on the grounds, sometimes placing fir boughs under our blankets so it would be softer.

We used a corral this ~~side~~ side of Crow creek on some drives. A fellow had cut log poles and fixed a corral. It was there only a short time, however. The places we usually picked on the trail for camping were narrow spots where the cattle couldn't get by us when we were sleeping.

Feed was pretty good on the Naches pass cattle route to the summit. From there on it was a little rough. The cattle and horses had to go without anything to eat for two nights and three days. They lost weight on that part of the drive. They were able to find grass at Bear prairie, a camping place near the mouth of Green river.

The Green was a fairly rough stream. We never quite had to swim over, but it was hard fording. We had to ford the Green 17 times, and also forded the Naches river several times before ~~re~~ reaching the pass and the Green.

Rain was sometimes bad in the mountains.

We'd take our cattle to the Hardaway Chambers pasture six or seven miles from Olympia ^{on} most trips and leave them there. The cattle were weighed there and when Chambers wanted a few to kill he'd cut them out and driven them to the slaughter house in town. I remember that he had well-trained dogs. They'd drive sheep he'd bought in the direction of Olympia. These sheep were largely from the West side. I don't remember any sheep making the journey over the Naches

pass. The route for sheep from central Washington was generally over Snoqualmie.

We'd sometimes come right back from Olympia, while on other occasions we'd stay around for a short vacation.

I took part in a drive of 400 to 600 cattle to White Bluffs one year. It was 1879, if I'm not mistaken. We had every size and kind ~~at~~ in that drive. We drove them into the Columbia river at White Bluffs and Indians in canoes guided them across to the other shore. It took about four canoes. It's a long way across the Columbia at White Bluffs. If a horse was to swim it there he'd be puffing when he came out like he ran a mile.

I don't recall who owned the cattle, but I know that Lang & Ryan, an outfit that had first come to the Northwest in 1875 buying cattle, took them at the river. Part of the Lang & Ryan men came to our side of the river to look over the herd as it passed. Their saddles and bridles and horses were all branded L.R. They were a big outfit. They took the cattle back to Wyoming by way of the Blue mountains, I believe. They bought mostly in Oregon and made several drives.

I never made any drives to The Dalles.

The longest drive I went on was in 1884 from Harney, Ore. John Clemans and I wanted a bunch of steers and they were reasonable in Harney that year. We bought 500 steers from ~~Eng~~ Bob Gilmore and Henry Blackwell and brought them back. It took a month for us to reach the Wenas, coming back through Kansas City on John Day, then by way of Birch creek, Bear valley, Hamilton and Monument, Barker's mill and ferrying across at Arlington. We came down through Bickleton and the Satus, night herding. We sold 100 head of cattle at the I.D.

ranch to George Olney and drove the rest to the Wenas. Cleman owned most of them.

It was a hard trip, with rain and snow aggravating the situation. The toughest was at Monument, just before reaching Barker's mill. Rain was pouring down and I and another man were riding in the fore part of the night. He got discouraged.

"We can't hold them," he said and went to bed, leaving me with 500 steers.

The water was bouncing off the ground and off my slicker. I couldn't hold the herd alone so I put them on the road and started driving them in the direction of the Columbia. That's the only way I could have done it. The cattle had been on the trail quite a spell by then, and were broken in so they moved along well.

The way we worked on other nights was to nightherd the cattle. One cowboy would ride along a side of the herd 'til he met the other man coming up from the other side and then they'd turn around, go back and meet at the other end of the herd.

We had four drives on that trip, plus a cook and small messwagon. The cook and wagon, supplied by Gilmore and Blackwell, came as far as Arlington on the river. We weighed the cattle at Arlington and paid for them there. They averaged 1,250 pounds and cost us 2.6¢ a pound. Gilmore and Blackwell were a day ahead of us with a band of cattle for Portland.

I rode in a drive to the railhead in 1884 for Isaac Lockwood. Two outfits, Lockwood and Snipes, held their roundup together, and took cattle to a place near Kennewick to load them on the train.

I'm the last one left who helped round up the big outlaw steer with the other cattle in that roundup at White Bluffs. We manage

to force the outlaw in a corral after he'd been caught in a big band of steers and couldn't fight out. Frank Sharkey shot the animal. It belonged to Lockwood. The big set of horns from that old outlaw are now in the possession of The Daughters of the Pioneers.

Snipes loaded his cattle separate from the Lockwood in the drive to the NP that year. We split from his bunch near the Horn. I remember Geddis also sold cattle and loaded them on the NP the same year. That drive was a hard one. We rode all day and half the night. By gosh, we got thirsty. I took the lead out of a bullet and sucked on it. It helped cut the thirst. The young calves would give out and we'd cut their throats and leave them. The buyer didn't like that. I was working on the outside during the drive, gathering the strays.

On our way from the corral at Rattlesnake springs? to the Lockwood ranch three or four miles below the Horn we had to swim the herd across the Yakima river once. We'd drive a bunch of cattle out into the stream, pushing them as far as we could, and Indians in canoes would take them the rest of the way. We "nightherded" those 1,700 cattle on the drive, with part of the cowboys working the forepart of the night and the rest on duty during the after part. I received \$2.50 a day and board working for Lockwood for that brief spell.

I went over the Snoqualmie pass in 1886 with horses. I took them to Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia selling them along the way to anyone who'd buy. That was my last drive across the mountains. The railroad killed the cattle and horse drives, besides knocking out the freighters and stages. I believe I went over the Snoqualmie with George Taylor's cattle one time.

Horses

We had about 400 head of cattle just before the tough winter of 1880-81 and lost 80 to 85 per cent of them.

I went into the horse business then because horses winter better than cattle. It was pretty good for a while. I had a fair number of horses, also bought out Tom Pierce. I finally had more than 200 head. They'd spend the winter around Moxee, Bird Springs and Black Rock and in the summer we'd bring them to the Wenas. I sold ~~horses~~ some horses to Charles Newell after the coming of the railroad. They were shipped to Buffalo, N.Y., he told me. I also drove 22 horses to Walla Walla in 1901.

Billy Splawn was another cattleman who went into the horse business heavily after the bad winter.

Earliest Days

My father went into the cattle business here in 1872. He had driven a band of horses to the Yakima valley over the Naches pass in 1871 and left them with Charley Eaton, who lived near the present airport. Eaton took care of them during the winter of 1871-2 after my father had returned to our home 17 miles south of Tacoma, where we raised cattle, sheep and horses. Eaton and my father were friends. They had been volunteers during the Indian war of 1855-6.

In 1872 we left our home on Muck creek with saddle and pack horses and struck out for Portland. We went from there to The Dalles, where my father bought a plow. We packed the plow on horses down the Satus trail. The old stage and freight road from The Dalles to the Yakima valley wasn't built then.

My father bought a squatter's right from Dan Sinclair on the Naches river above where the powerhouse is now situated for a horse

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and \$100. He started to plow it but didn't like the looks of the soil
There was no irrigation either. He went back his \$100 from Dan but le
him keep the horse and then we went up the Wenas to the John
Clemans place, put in some grain there and moved further up the Wenas
creek the same year ti about two miles below the present Coffin ranch.
My dad put in a crop--oats and wheat-- and we cut poles and fenced
the place. We had two yokes of oxen.

Billy Candle drove our 150 to 200 head of cattle over Snquualmie
pass the same year.

I worked for my dad from 1872 to 1884