

HORSEBACK ADVENTURES: 4 RIDES OF A LIFETIME

The International Magazine of Stock Horse Culture

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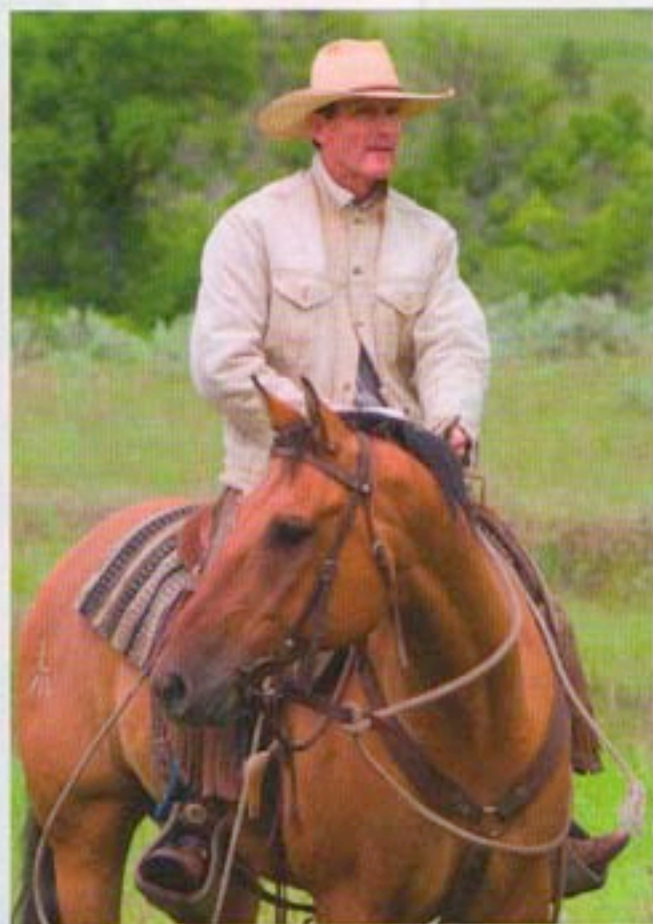
Champion Trainer Kory Pounds
and Cutting Prospect Tom Holt

Ride for the Padlock Brand

One of Wyoming's most celebrated ranches opens its gates to guests for the first time, giving visitors the chance to ride and work beside some of the West's best cowboys.



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY DE GALARD



Jesse Ballantyne enjoys meeting guests from around the world and sharing with them his experience as a horseman and cowboy.



“DON'T LOSE THAT COW!”

Tom Angle shouts to Charlie Killeen, who darts after the renegade critter and disappears around a bend. Tom rides to the scene, but by the time he arrives Charlie is nowhere to be found. Minutes pass. Just as Tom begins contemplating riding ahead to look for him, Charlie reappears, topping a ridge and still trailing his cow, which rejoins the herd being pushed by a group of cowboys.

“Good job,” Tom says, prompting a military salute from Charlie, who returns to his position, riding flank.

Charlie is from Ireland. His wife once asked him, out of the blue, “If you knew you were dying, what would you like to do before?”



Charlie Killeen (left), from Ireland, and Wyoming cowboy Tom Angle move cows across a Padlock Ranch pasture.

"I'd like to go to Montana," Charlie replied, "and see it from horseback."

For Charlie's 50th birthday, his wife gave him a fall vacation on the Padlock Ranch. Charlie brought his longtime friend Dermitt along for the adventure. At home in Ireland, Charlie is a police officer and Dermitt is a builder. At the Padlock, though, they became cowboys.

FOUNDED BY HOMER AND MILDRED SCOTT in 1943, and encompassing 500,000 acres, a third of it on the Crow Reservation, the Padlock straddles the Montana-Wyoming state line. It's flanked to the west by the majestic Big Horn Mountains, to the east by wide-open, rolling plains. Last summer, the ranch known

throughout the West as a traditional working outfit, opened its doors to paying guests for the first time.

"We're sharing a legacy developed by the Scott family," says Les Nunn, the ranch's guest-relations manager. "We want people to experience a real working-ranch vacation. The idea is to have the guests participate in daily ranch work, and the authenticity of our cowboys makes the experience unique. Guests learn about horsemanship and stockmanship the traditional way."

Whether Padlock guests choose the comfort of a spacious lodge or the more rustic experience of a cow camp, they arrive knowing they might put in long days as short-term working cowboys. Right from the start, they're reminded the Padlock is no dude ranch.



Above: The comfortable Padlock lodge was built two years ago. **Right:** Padlock cowboy Clint Hokseergen slowly urges cattle toward a gate. The day's job involves gathering cattle to be pregnancy checked. **Below right:** Matt Miller, manager of the ranch's Bar V unit, enjoys teaching guests about ranching culture and traditions.

The outfit prides itself on its cavvy of good ranch horses. With around 11,000 head of cattle to work, the Padlock horses work with a purpose, and become solid, reliable mounts—good travelers, equipped with cow sense and handy in a corral or in open country. The ranch does its best to accommodate novice riders, but the experience is best suited for guests who can handle horses and cover country at a long trot.

"You're expected to groom and saddle your own horse," Tom says, "but we're also here to help you."

IT'S STILL DARK as Tom lays out the day's plan, which involves gathering 500 yearlings and moving them across the ranch's "Clark pasture" for pregnancy testing. Matt Miller, who oversees the Bar V unit, and three other cowboys—Nick Donker, Clint Hokseergen and Jesse Ballantyne—will lend a hand, as will Charlie, Dermitt and I.

The sun is barely creeping over a ridge when we leave the barn to make our circle. Soon, we start climbing, following a narrow trail on the side of a steep canyon. On top, the trail opens up to a vast plateau. With Matt in the lead, we hit a long trot. We must gather the cattle before heat and flies drive them into thick brush.

After a couple of miles, we locate the cattle, spread widely over hills and draws. Matt decides to divide his crew into three groups. He sends Tom ahead with three riders, ensuring they'll be in position to turn the herd uphill. The other groups will gather two timber-covered hills.

Charlie, Nick and I go with Matt. Despite having grown up

in the Great Basin, where ranching traditions run deep, Matt tells me he welcomes the new challenge of working with guests.

"I'm tickled to see folks are willing to try something different," he says.

As he rides, he offers instructions on how we'll gather the hill, and shares some of the finer points of cowboy etiquette: staying in your circle, never riding in front of the cow boss, waiting for the rider who closes the gate.

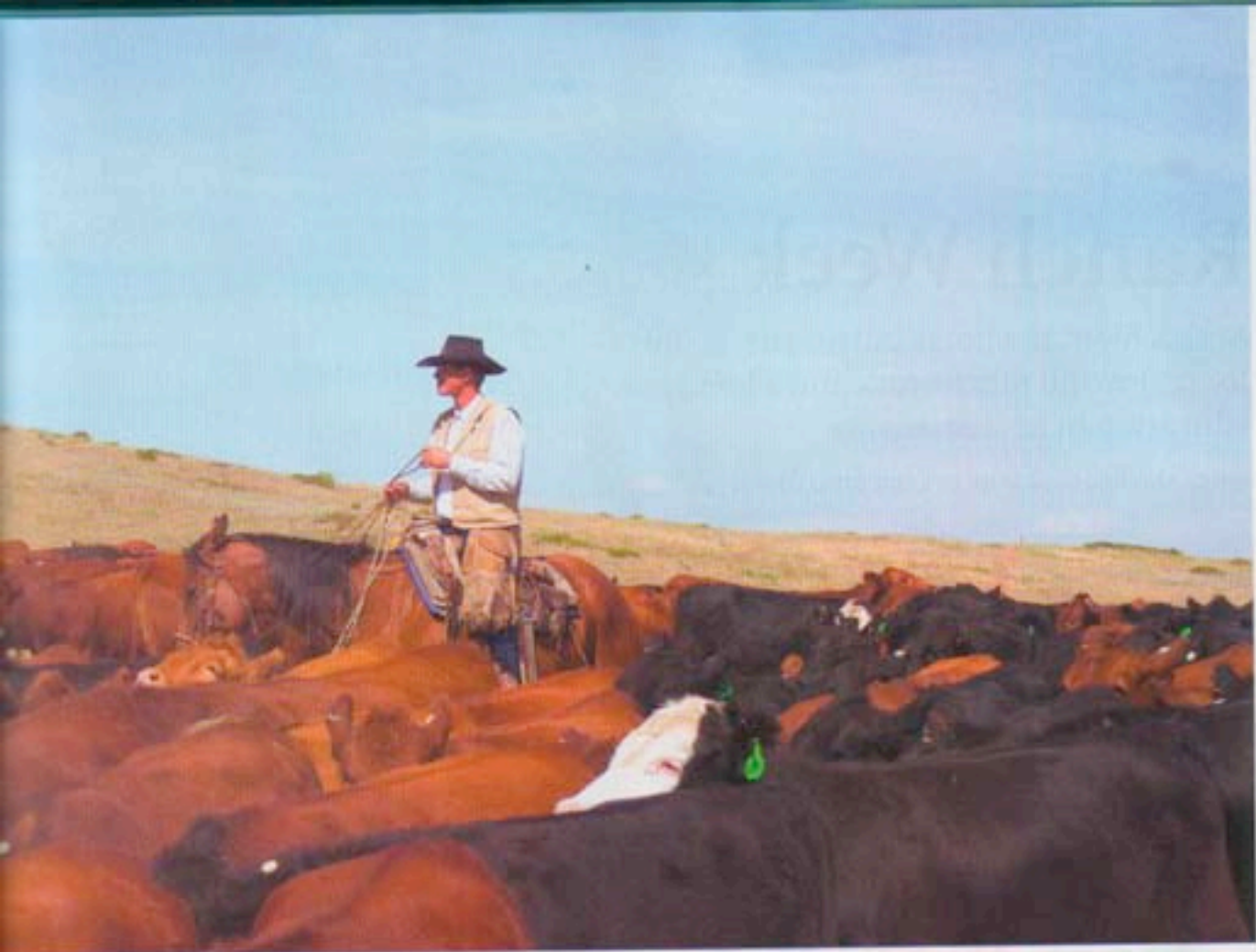
Matt pushes a small bunch of cows uphill. When the cows reach my level, I take over and continue driving them uphill until Charlie takes over. Positioned at the hilltop, Nick is there to meet the herd, and the bunch pours over the crest at a trot.

When I reach the top, I admire the endless view. The golden Montana grasslands, dry after the summer heat, stretch to the horizon. A doe and her fawn gracefully bounce away behind some trees.

Half a mile away, I can make out Nick and Clint still working their way across the other hill. Small bunches of cattle they've gathered converge into one big herd that stretches for a mile at the bottom of a canyon lined by a creek and thick brush.

The third group of riders, headed by Tom, includes Jesse and Dermitt. As they see the herd approaching, they move into position to turn the cattle uphill. Jesse has been cowboying for 40 years and has ridden for the Padlock on and off for 18. A skilled hand, an accomplished horseman and a talented musician, he's well respected among the crew.

Jesse is, first and foremost, a cowboy, with a special affinity for working with horses. Working with guests, he has the opportunity



to share his knowledge and experience, and help novices improve both their horsemanship and cowboying skills. Taking guests along for a day's work, he says, adds interest to the job.

"My home is the West, and I like to share it with people whose homes are elsewhere," Jesse explains. "I enjoy helping people better understand the world of ranching and the working cowboy. It's a privilege."

As the temperature rises, the cattle become harder to move. The long line of cattle, flanked by riders, slowly meanders across the range. As the herd goes through a gate leading to the next pasture, Matt and Tom take a count. Once the last cow is through the gate, Tom dismounts to close it. As he takes hold of the fence post lying on the ground, his horse steps between the barbed-wire strands. The veteran ranch horse remains calm, though, allowing Tom to free him. Charlie and Dermitt watch the incident in awe.

After the gate, it's all downhill to the ranch. By the time we reach the corrals, where the herd will be tested, it's midday. We tie our horses at the barn and head for the lodge to enjoy a tasty lunch. Later that evening, we watch a glorious sunset from the lodge's deck and reminisce about the day's highlights.

"For years, I wanted to know how cowboys gathered cattle," Charlie says. "Now I know." 🐾

Guy de Galard is a Wyoming writer and photographer.

