

A Southern Ranch

By: Yossel Ayarzagoitia Riesenfeld

The sun isn't up yet, and high above the land, the moon still gleams in the dark skies. But lights are on this place. Another day is starting on the ranch.

Ranches are places that raise livestock. Horses, cows, sheep, and goats are livestock. This ranch raises cows, or cattle. Ranch hands help look after the livestock and the ranch.

Ranch hands no longer take cattle up long trails. Ranch hands may drive pickup trucks. But they are still much like ranch hands long ago.

Ranch hands still ride horses and use lassos. They still care for sick animals. Ranch hands still watch herds of cattle. If cattle go the wrong way, ranch hands must lead them the right way. In summer, if herds eat all the grass in one place, ranch hands take to another place. In winter, ranch hands feed herds hay and grain.

Roundups take place in spring and fall. Ranch hands go out in the fields and look for cows. This is not an easy job. Cows might be standing under a tree or grazing at the bottom of a hill.

After getting eight or ten cows, ranch hands must keep them together and keep them walking. Cows might run off. Ranch hands must chase them and bring them back. Ranch hands need well trained horses for this work. These horses can be steered by just a touch, and they know cows!

Sometimes cattle dogs help keep the cows together too. Ranch hands bring small bunches of cows to the same spot. Nine or ten become forty or fifty. Then ranch hands bring those bigger bunches to another spot. In time, the herd might number 600 more. Keeping this big herd together is hard. Some ranch hands ride "point" or in front. Some ride "swing," or on each side. Some ride "drag," or in back. That is a dusty job!

Ranch hands take the herd to the ranch. Those cows that are being sold are loaded on trucks and shipped off. The rest will be sent back to graze on more grass. Roundup has ended. After so much time on horseback, weary ranch hands can rest. They eat and talk and laugh. Then it's back to work on the ranch.