Introducing 2012 Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame Inductee…

Vern E. ‘Bud’ Cheff, Sr. (1915 - 2011)

Vern Edmond Cheff Sr. (Bud) was born April 2, 1915, the fourth of fourteen children, on his parent’s sheep and cattle ranch near Ronan, Montana, on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Bud was of French and Indian descent. He spoke only French and Indian until he started school, then he had to learn to speak English. Bud married his school sweetheart on June 10th, 1933. Together they raised seven children, Viola Lietz (deceased), Bud Jr., Kenny, Buck, Mick, Roxena Sanders, and Happy. Bud died at home on his beloved ranch June 27, 2011, at the age of 96. He lived alone after losing his wife, Adelle in 1999, taking care of himself until the last two weeks of his life.

Bud learned many tricks in breaking horses from his old Indian friends. His mentor was Eneas Conko, a full-blood Kalispell Indian who had rode for the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show in his youth. He taught Bud many tricks in roping and horsemanship, as well as hunting and mountain lore. Bud in turn, shared his wealth of knowledge with his sons and anyone that wanted to learn, and there were hundreds that did. He took great pleasure in teaching others, especially the youth. He loved sharing his life and history with the school tour groups that visited the Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana. He was still helping with the tours within a couple months before his death, and the kids loved him. Bud had a special way with horses and cows. He could be riding through a herd of cows and point at a cow, and tell you "She's out of old Crooked Horn, a good cow; always brings a calf in. And that one's grandma was the red line back cow. She raised some good calves." He might say, "See that filly, she must be out of that standard bred stud. You can bet she can run!" Or, "See how that horse picks its feet up? It will be a tough horse, but hard riding. It will beat you to death in a long day's ride." He was always looking, and noticed every thing about the livestock. Bud raised hundreds of horses in his lifetime. There were usually between 100 and 200 head on the ranch. In 2011 the count was about 180. He probably cut or castrated a thousand horse colts in his life, as he cut all of his own, and neighbors always had him cut theirs. In the early years when there weren’t a lot of fences the horses could range over a big area and would often be mixed with other horses. Many of them were wild, unbranded, and there would often be a very undesirable stud with them. Bud always carried some loose salt, and medicine in his saddlebags for doctoring the livestock if need be when out checking stock. A number of times he would rope these wild stallions and cut them, and turn them loose again. As a young man he and a couple of cowboy friends ran and caught wild horses in the Camas wild horse plains area. He also rode in the local rodeos. As a small boy he watched the great Nez Perce Jackson Sundown ride. Jackson's daughter was a neighbor and a friend of the family. Bud started breaking horses for pay at the age of 15, and broke many hundreds in his life time. This included not only saddle horses, but work teams and pack mules. He
broke his last colt at the age of 93. He was still using teams for ranch work until the mid 1950's and hated to switch to a tractor. He always said it was the horse that won the west, they are wonderful animals.

You could say Bud spent his whole life on a horse. He started riding as a small child and was still riding at the age of 95. He is quoted in saying, "I wore out a lot of good horses in my life." Bud was a true Montana cowboy in every respect. He could not only ride or handle any kind of a horse and knew how to doctor a sick or injured cow, pull a calf, or dig a post hole. He had a special, calming way of handling both horses and cows; he could get them do things that most people could not. His horse was taken care of, and the livestock all fed before he would think of his own needs. Bud worked as a outfitter and guide all of his life, as well as owning a cattle and horse ranch.

In 2010 he was honored by the Forest Service and Montana Outfitters Association. They presented him with a plaque for being the oldest outfitter, and having the longest continuous operating outfitting business in Montana, from 1932 to the present. His son Mick and family continue to run the business and ranch. With the help of his wife Adelle, Bud wrote two books. The first book, "Indian Trails and Grizzly Tales" was a book on his life, and how he benefited, being part of both Indian and white cultures. He was invited to speak at a number of schools and universities about his life and the changing west. There have been countless newspaper and magazine stories written about him, including a four month series in Outdoor Life. He was a real Montana historical treasure. It was easy to see how much he was loved and respected when close to 1,000 people came to show their respects at his funeral. The last words he spoke were "Open the gate and turn that last horse loose."

References:
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