



A GLOSSARY OF COWBOY TERMS

all hands and the cook: A cattle-range phrase meaning everybody-the whole outfit, including the ornery cook.

amble: To go, to walk at an unhurried pace (a horseman disliked walking).

Arbuckle: A generic term for coffee, from a trade-name brand common at that time.

bad egg: Indicate a heartless, cruel murderer, often a rowdy or bully (also **badman**).

balling up: Referred to bunching up by cattle-at a river crossing or entrance to a corral.

bandanna: (from the Hindi *bandhnu*, via the Eastern US). The neckerchief of the cowman. Often of cotton, but preferably of silk, which was cool in the summer and warm in winter; bright colors and spots were favored.

bean-master: The cook. (also known as **belly cheater**, **biscuit-shooter**, **grub spoiler**, **hasher**)

bedding down: The act of cattle drovers bringing the herd to rest.

beef tea: Shallow water fouled by cattle.

big loop: The loop of a cow-thief's lasso, said to be so big that, when thrown, it landed on other men's cattle. (also **wide loop**)

bone orchard: A cemetery; boot hill.

brush-popper: A cowhand and horse accustomed to working cattle in brush-country (aka **brush-hand & brush-buster**).

build a smoke: To roll a cigarette. (aka **fill a blanket**)

churn-twister: A farmer, according to a cowboy.

dally: To take a turn around the saddlehorn with a lasso after the throw had been made-as opposed to the *hard-and-fast* method in which the rope-end was permanently fasten to the horn.

drag: The rear part of a driven herd of cattle, usually watched over by junior cowhands or for those who were being punished.

eating drag dust: To be humiliated.

fourflusher: A deceiver, a sham, a bluffer.

full of prunes: Spirited

grub pile: Cooked food; a meal.

gyp: Short for gypsum. Used as an abbreviation of **gyp water**-water that was undrinkable from being heavy with alkali.

hemp fever: Death by hanging.

hen fruit: Eggs

hoosegow: Used in the West to mean jail, though the original Spanish meant “courthouse”.

knothead: A brainless creature; an unskilled cowboy; an untaught or unteachable horse.

maverick: Unbranded stock; from Samuel A. Maverick, a lawyer who took a herd of longhorns in lieu of money and did not take the time to brand the stock as it increased...the unbranded cattle fell to other’s rope.

moss back: An old longhorn, skilled at avoiding a rope (so old that moss grows on its back).

Nebraska (or Kansas) brick: Squares of prairie turf that were used in the building of a **soddy**.

night-hawk: The night-guard for the horses of a trail-crew.

pack iron: To carry a revolver.

poke: A small sack or other container used to carry gold or money.

prairie butter: The fat and juices left after cooking meat, which would then be spread on bread.

prairie coal: Buffalo chips and later cow chips, used as fuel. (aka **surface coal**)

prairie strawberries: Beans

remuda: The saddle horses of a ranch or a trail-outfit.

salt horse: Nickname for corned beef.

sand: Sand is grit and *grit* is another word for guts or courage.

sell your saddle: So broke you had to sell your saddle...always the last thing a cowboy parted with; the all-time low.

slick-heeled: Said of a man not wearing spurs.

straight iron: A *running-iron* with which a brand was drawn free-hand (rather than stamped) on the hide of a cow or steer.

suicide gun: A gun that lacked the power to stop a man dead, notably the Colt .32.

tallyman: Also **tally hand**. A member of a cow-crew detailed to make a count of cows, to make the **tally**.

thirty and found: The going rate of pay for the old-timey cowboy...30 dollars a month plus board.

throw down on: To draw a gun and aim at a man.

tinhorn: Any man who was cheap and flashy; a fake; a dude.

waste a loop: To miss a throw with a rope.

wear the bustle wrong: Dry cowland humor for a lady's pregnancy.

