

HOW TO CATCH A WILD LONGHORN STEER

By CHARLES A. SIRINGO
Excerpted from *A Texas Cow Boy*
Printed in 1885

[Ed. note: Charles Siringo was one of the very first of the old time Texas cow hands to publish a book about the cattle drives of the Old West. Siringo was the real thing - punching cattle by the time he was twelve, working for the famous rancher "Shanghai" Pierce, and trailing cattle up the Chisholm Trail. In this passage, he explains how they round up some of the millions of wild longhorn cattle that made up the herds trailed north in the days following the Civil War.]

Breakfast being over we would saddle up our ponies, which had been staked out the night before, and strike out for a certain prairie may be three or four miles off - that is all but two or three men, just enough to bring the herd, previously gathered, on as soon as it became light enough to see. Arriving at the edge of the prairie we would dismount and wait for daylight.

At the first peep of day the cattle, which would be out in the prairie, quite a distance from the timber, would all turn their heads and commence grazing at a lively rate towards the nearest point of timber. Then we would ride around through the brush, so as not to be seen, until we got to the point of timber that they were steering for.

When it became light enough to see good, we would ride out, rope in hand, to meet them and apt as not one of the old-timers, may be a fifteen or twenty-year old steer, which were continuously on the lookout, would spy us before we got twenty yards from the timber. Then the fun would begin - the whole bunch, may be a thousand head, would stampede and come right towards us. They never were known to run in the opposite direction from the nearest point of timber. But with cattle raised on the prairies, it's the reverse, they will always leave the timber.

After coming in contact, every man would rope and tie down one of the finest animals in the bunch. Once in awhile some fellow would get more beef than he could manage; under those circumstances he would have to worry along until some other fellow got through with his job and came to his rescue.



If there was another prairie close by we would go to it and tie down a few more, but we would have to get there before sunup or they would all be in the brush. It was their habit to graze out into the little prairies at night-fall and go back to the brush by sunrise next morning.

Finally the herd which we had gathered before and which was already “broke in,” would arrive from camp, where we had been night-herding them and then we would drive it around to each one of the tied-down animals, letting him up so he couldn’t help from running right into the herd, where he would generally stay contented. Once in awhile though, we would strike an old steer that couldn’t be made to stay in the herd. Just as soon as he was untied and let up he would go right through the herd and strike for the brush, fighting his way. Under those circumstances we would have to sew up their eyes with a needle and thread. That would bring them to their milk, as they couldn’t see the timber.

I got into several scrapes on this trip, by being a new hand at the business. One time I was going at full speed and threw my rope onto a steer just as he got to the edge of the timber; I couldn’t stop my horse in time, therefore the steer went on one side of a tree and my horse on the other and the consequence was, my rope being tied hard and fast to the saddle-horn, we all landed up against the tree in a heap.

