WILD HORSE ROUNDUP AT YAHA TINDA by J. Fred Scott

James Frederick Scott (1892-1982) was born in Meaford, Ontario and came to Alberta in 1911. He served overseas in both world wars and was commanding officer of the Calgary Highlanders, He practiced law in Calgary where he was active in military and business circles. Col Scott prepared this article in 1967 as his own Centennial Project and placed it in the Glenbow Archives.

By Col. J.F. Scott

In 1917 Jack Clarke and I went to lunch at the Palliser Hotel in Calgary wehre we ran into Norman Luxton from Banff. I had been in a wartime air crash in Belgium and then caught fever, resulting in hospitalization and three months' sick leave in Canada. When Luxton found that I had spent of two years on the Jarboe Horse and Cattle Ranch near Blindloss, he invited me to join an expedition to the Yaha Tinda to catch wild horses.

"It'll settle your nerves and make a new man of you." he advised. "All you need is your bedroll and riding clothes. We leave from Morley in two days."

The Yaha Tinda was named by the Stoney Indians and means, Mountain Prairie." At that time it had been under federal lease to the Brewster family as a winter range for their saddle and pack horses during the off seasons from tourist work in the Banff Park. As told to me, there had been a change of government in Ottawa which led to the cancellation of Brewster's lease. They were given a limited time to remove their horses and a herd of cattle which they ran there. The cattle were sold to "Whispering Dave" McDougall, a rancher and brother of the Rev. John McDougall. This was a spooky herd of about one hundred, most of which had been raised inside the mountain range.

I was told that wild horses had existed in the Ghost River area long before the first settlers arrived and some of them undoubtedly found their way into the Yaha Tinda pocket. In addition, when the Brewsters obtained their lease in 1908, they brought in about 60 mares, two grey Percheron stallions, and a Standardbred stallion called "Equidor". This was the foundation of the Yaha Tinda herd. The entire purpose for our expedition was prompted by the demand to artillery horses in France, and the obvious supply available in the Yaha Tinda. The three partners who organized the hunt were Norman Luxton, Bill Logan, and Pat Bowlen. Together they paid the Brewsters $1,000 for the right to bring out all the wild horses that could be caught by year end. To Luxton the hunt was at once a challenge, an adventure, and a source of profit. Bill Logan lived on the Red Deer River at Wahpaypa Tinda (Sour Grass Prairie) at the outer entrance of the Yaha Tinda. He had an intimate knowledge of the rangeland inside the mountains and had earlier experience in bringing out horses to Morley. At his ranch he had some intermediate pasture and from his range cattle a good supply of meat for our party. Pat Bowlen owned the Bar C Ranch which was one of the few stopping places from Morley north to the Yaha Tinda and the necessity to use his supply of hay and his saddle horses and a very good rider named Eddie Row to go with us, made him a natural partner in the project.

I was at Morley on schedule and helped as the Stoney Indians in our party packed tents, food, equipment, and oats for the saddle horses. Here I had my first lesson in throwing and tying the diamond hitch, an indispensible education in the use of pack horses for the mountain trails. Inexperienced pack horses may wanted off the narrow trail and tangle against brush or trees until retrieved, so packing had to be well done.

To reach the Yaha Tinda, a new forestry trail ran north along the Ghost River from the Indian reserve for some 80 miles through virgin pine forests. It went through places where the light hardly penetrated and where the continual whisper of wind and moving treetops reached down to the narrow winding horse trail as it contoured around hills and along streams well stocked with trout. We formed quite a procession made up of pack horses dispersed with Indian riders, the participants in the business venture, and four experienced cowboys, John Hunter, a Stoney Indian rider, could do the interpreting. Our first day's trip was of necessity the shortest, which indeed suited me. Delays in packing the equipment, problems with fresh and partially broken pack horses, and some saddle horses which had to have a "buck" taken out of them, held up our start. Then there were interruptions on the trail when raw pack horses wandered off into the brush which in turn necessitated tightening their packs. After about fifteen miles we made camp at the Bar C Ranch. Here Jackie Fuller, a young chap from Banff, who had worked for Luxton, arranged to get an extra saddle horse for himself from Eddie Bowlen. It was a bay called "Dog".

We continued on our way and by the third night we had crossed the Red Deer River at Wahpaypah Tinda and stopped at Logan's. This was some ten miles east of the entrance where the Red Deer River breaks through Eagle Pass into the Yaha Tinda. Here we met Ed Thompson, known familiarly as "Boney" Thompson, who was hunting deer on the Clearwater at the time. He was an experienced rider with a background of earlier experiences in catching and bringing out horses from the Yaha Tinda range. Norman hired him with his big sorrel mare "Big Sis".

Each night we camped, we usually sat around the fires built near our tents where we heard stories of the early days as told by Harrison, Thompson, and Luxton, with added contributions from the Indians. Among the stories was one told by Harrison of the exceptional elk horns which he had cached, awaiting the day when elk hunting might become legal. These tales all left an indelible impression with me. I offered items from France and of submarine attacks on convoy crossings. The "Yip, yip, yip, yee, eye" – the coyotes' vesper – rolled down the river to fade in the distance. The next morning we went back across the river, through the Six Mile Flats, past Wild Horse Creek, and then picked our way some seven miles through solid timber down to the river with mountains on either side of us. We went through Eagle Pass and out into the wide plain of the YaHa Tinda. From there we followed the river some two miles across Bighorse (Bighorn) Creek below the falls, and on to Scalp Creek. We continued along Scalp Creek northwesterly and pitched our tents near the government ranger's cabin occupied by Howard Cane and his wife. There we found a useful barn and some small corrals. Each day the horses had become more settled down and our general efficiency improved. After we entered through Eagle Pass we began to see bands of horses. Most of these wasted no time in disappearing over the slopes or up one of the many streams that ran down to the plain. I marveled at the thick cover of grass which obviously could have supported a great number of cattle. Brewster's small herd of fairly good Herefords demonstrated how well finished the range cattle became on this grazing land.

A large holding corral was built against Scalp Creek where a perpendicular bank of about twelve feet from the creek bottom formed the eastern side, giving us about thirty acres or more of good grazing. An old fence which had existed there had to be repaired and passages to the creek had to be fenced. The main round corral had to be reconstructed under Thompson's direction, with several strong posts securely planted relatively close to the corral fence. An effective squeeze gate and several stalls in the adjoining log barn were built in. The squeeze was made by having a swinging gate which could close against an animal and

make him quite helpless while his tail or mane was being thinned, or for saddling or general veterinarian work. Much of the hillside and some of the lowlands wee covered with fallen timber from a forest fire which had swept through some years before. Some stark tree trunks still stood but most had fallen in a maze of bare logs. For several days the Indians were busy with crosscut saws and axes, while Jack Fuller and I dragged the logs into position with lariats tied to our saddle horns. The others were busily engaged erecting two snake fences running out at a wide angle from our main corral entrance toward the mountain base to the north and east.

After several days of hard work by everyone, we were ready for our first drive. Without binoculars we had spotted several large bands of horses, including some which were grazing above the timber on the mountain face where the fire had burned out the forest. The plan was to ride out in two parties to the ends of the wings and after dropping off a couple of Stoney Indians at the ends, to fan around several herds which occupied the bottom lands. Even with these herds there was a constant alertness, as evidenced by the fact that one member of the band was always on duty. When matters appeared satisfactory to this self-appointed guardian, he would begin to graze off toward the herd, whereupon some other members would become uneasy and would take up the outlook position. It was a beautiful sight to watch such alert sentries.

Our first day's drive was relatively uneventful and was so successful that it seemed to be all too easy. We had some thirty head in our corrals that night. Several of these had girth or saddle scars, indicating that they had left the tame herds. These were quickly added to our saddle string as we were continually under strength from injuries and over work. While the fencing continued, the cowboys commenced halter breaking and prepared for the removal of the captives to the railroad. Halter breaking was accomplished by tying a horse rather short to one of the posts inside the corral. One of the Indians, using a gunnysack, would fan the horse until he was no longer able to fight the tie. He then was put into the squeeze gate to have his mane and tail thinned to make him more attractive and saleable. When finished, he might have raw fetlocks and possibly be raw in places where the halter had cut in.

At different times in preceding years, attempts had been made to catch and take out some of the wild horses. The harsh methods used became apparent to me when, during a scouting ride, I came across the whitened bones of two horses. The rawhide neck straps with an attaching chain wound around a sapling showed how they had been tied together to be driven out. They had apparently broken away and had come to an unfortunate finish. In our first drive, we brought in only one pair of horses with their tails together with a rope after the neck pieces had broken. From Thompson's knowledge and experience, it had been decided to hobble the horses. A sheep-lined hobble was placed on one front fetlock and a short line ran to a rawhide halter. The danger in this was that in a few cases a grazing horse would move one foot over the hobble rope, resulting in both front feet being tied short to the halter. When this happened, any attempt to handle the horse would result in such a jerk on the neck that the vertebrae would be dislocated near the withers. This left a "kinked" neck which jerked up and down in a crazy manner, even after the halter had been disconnected.

After about a weeks' work with the first bunch of horses, arrangements were made for them to be taken out with the cattle herd. Among this group of horses was a splendid Percheron-type mare which had received a "kinked" neck. She was quite played out a few miles after going up the hill so we had to leave her at a small Indian shack and corral. When we returned the next morning, she was alive but the magpies had

eaten the flesh from part of her head and she had to be destroyed. No wonder the rancher hates the magpie. The rest of the horses were taken some twenty miles to the corrals at Logan's place and then they were driven down to Morley for the final breaking. There they were sold at $98 each to government buyers for services in France as artillery horses. Having disposed of the first group of horses, our attention was directed to an extension of this success. Our second drive took place further inside the mountain pass just beyond Scalp Creek. Here the mountains to the west ran down to the Red Deer River, opening up beyond a dry creek bottom whose sheer banks on its further side extended all the way south to the river. To the north and east of our camp the mountains were heavily wooded but higher up was fallen timber through which were well-worn game trails.

From our tents, we had observed a large herd of horses whose range lay above the timber and a plan was worked out for their capture. A draw among the riders gave me the job of making a wide approach and a climb above the herd. Below me, Indians were directed to various lateral game trails to turn the horses down and out into the open area where they could be herded down to the wings. There the best riders were stationed to drive them across the plain into the corral openings. I was positioned at the appointed time and from there I started one of the most amazing rides I ever made, shouting aloud as I dashed down through and over fallen timber. Immediately, a loud whistle of warning sounded out from the wild horse band and they were off! For a few minutes I feared they were going to out-flank me but luckily I was riding a well-known Brewster saddle horse named "Lally" which had been caught in the first run. He knew the country and how to deal with fallen timber. Although a gelding, he had been the leader of one of the bands we had captured earlier, holding his position probably from sheer meanness.

I barley managed to turn the herd and then went down the mountain after them as they followed a game trail. Soon they had quite outdistanced me and much of the drive was over when I finally came into the Yaha Tinda at the base of the mountains. Unexpectedly, however, I became involved in the final run. The bank had been turned across the plain by the riders, but had run into a muskeg where the original band of about twenty animals had split into three bands. One of them numbering seven went to the east, one of the same number ran to the west, and the remainder were temporarily held up in the bog lands in the centre. The eastern group had outdistanced the riders and as I came out of the woods I met them, white with lather, walking up the bottom slope. They were quite finished and it was no problem for me to haze them off to the east where the other riders joined me and we followed the snake fence straight into the corral area. Among these horses was a very beautiful sable brown mare. She had been leading a small remnant of a band and had earned her leadership by her speed and stamina. As we drive them along the snake fence, feeling quite sure we had them "in the bag", this animal made a determined effort to leap the log fence. She did not make a clean jump but hit the top log, turned over, and lay for some few moments outside the corral before rising to her feet. Thompson and I rode in with the rest of the band, changed to fresh mounts, and were soon following this mare along Scalp Creek hoping to turn her back. She reached the river where the bank was low and presently she crossed to the opposite bank where she came ashore. There she stopped and looked back as if to say, "Well, I'm staying in the mountain range," and she walked off into the trees.

After the first two relatively successful drives, our subsequent roundups produced disappointing results. A start would be made with a dozen horses and would wind up with two or three in the corral. At the same time, some dissention was developing among the riders. The reason the going was not so good in the outer valley was that many of the animals had withdrawn up the valleys and gorges. However, when we

crossed Scalp Creek we found a different type of animal. Further west across a deep dry creek bed and over a saddle of high ground lay an inner area where the horses had abundant pasture land in an area of about six square miles. It was obvious that the Percheron stallions had left their mark on this *Inner Tinda* whereas those in the *Outer Tinda* had shown more of the rating of the standard bred. In the inner area we found a predominantly better hunter type of animals, mostly grey in colour.

A plan was developed that seemed to be a good one. At a rather precarious crossing which the horses had picked down into a dry gulch, well camouflaged corrals were built among the trees in the bottom. These were left open so the animals could pass through, and a supply of oats was left there to encourage them. A good game trail led along the dry creek line from the timber edge. Jackie Fuller was stationed against the timber, almost on top of the rise which led over to the valley floor where the horses grazed. His job was to turn the band away from the trail that led into the wooded hills to the north. The other riders were up the Red Deer to the west under cover of timber and fanned out beyond the wild band. After we were all in position we moved forward and when Jackie looked over the rise to see if anything was developing, he saw a band of twenty-three hunter types with flowing manes and tails, running along the trail which crossed through the fallen timber. In order to try and turn them away from this trail and from moving off to the north, Jackie had to pull out and keep ahead of them. This he did through much difficult going and continually jumping over fallen logs. He just managed to turn them but in doing so he rode too fast and too close to the edge of the bank. I then saw his horse "Dog" stumble and end up at the bottom of the gulch with a broken leg. With their hazer gone, the wild horses continued down the top trail to the next crossing where Logan had been posted. His job was to direct them through the gulch into the corral traps which were ready in the timber. However, rather late in the execution of the plan, Logan noticed a lone pine tree at the top of the crossing and thought it might improve his situation if it were felled to cut off the trail. This thought was being translated into action when the band came on the scene. However, they came from the north, instead of from the west as he had expected, and arrived just as the tree was falling. The resulting confusion meant that instead of having one band of twenty-three horses, there suddenly were twenty-three bands of one each. The drive had been an utter failure.

During the ill-fated roundup, Thompson had seen the sable brown mare alone several times on the other side of the Red Deer River and he was determined to catch her. There was only one trail along the river on the other side which followed a relatively narrow fringe of timber at the base of a steep mountain. Accordingly, his plan for bringing her over to our side was simple. Two riders would cross by a ford which angled like a shelf and came out to the west of the area where the mare had been seen. Another rider would cross opposite the point where Scalp Creek joined the Red. Awaiting developments, we soon heard shouts from Thompson and saw the mare racing along the river trail until she saw the other rider blocking her way. The riverbank was five feet above the water level but she rushed straight out and launched herself into the swift mountain stream. By the time she had crossed, she was no problem for the other rider to control and she was left with no alternative than the corral. She was anything but docile and her bared teeth kept everyone on the corral fence. In the squeeze gate she was hobbled and then transferred to a specially constructed stall where she could not pull back against the rawhide halter. Thompson spent days gaining her confidence by watering, feeding, and continual handling. The normal procedure of breaking a range horse followed and when Thompson finally rode her, she had never been given an opportunity to buck.

The sable brown mare became widely known in the Cochrane area as "Mama Brewster". Some years later when Thomson was riding a spooky, unbroken horse, he was thrown and broke his pelvis. Lorrie Johnson then rode "Mama Brewster" at a steady lope for fifteen miles to get help from the Mount Royal Ranch. However, "Boney" Thompson had taken his last fall. At his funeral, "Mama Brewster" was lead behind his coffin with his cowboy boots reversed in the stirrups.

In our final drives at the Yaha Tinda there were a number of unfortunate incidents but finally, with a group of about thirty head and those of our original string which were left, we moved out to Logan's place beyond the park. I used that day to get fish and meat to take back to Calgary. The junction of the Red Deer and Panther rivers marked the eastern edge of the park, so when I shot a mule deer, I had to drag him a few feet east to be sure I was over the line. I then rode on to the falls on the Bighorn and in a short time I had sufficient rainbow trout, weighing from one to two pounds, to later fill two prune boxes packed with ice crystals. Such a box had contained twenty-five pounds of dried prunes which were a normal diet for a homesteader.

An unfortunate incident occurred on our first day of with the pack horses. I had found an exceptionally fine pair of elk antlers in the woods. As they were still attached to the skull, it was obvious that the animal had been illegally shot. These horns I managed to pack into camp. As our horses were traveling light, having no oats to take out, Thompson helped me to tie them over the pack of one of the horses. Possibly this animal was not too well trained or may have disliked being drivin out from the Yaha Tinda because at different times he would leave the trail, brushing the horns against saplings, or trees until they came loose. Then, they slipped from his back and, of course, they swung beneath him where they spooked him into running away. We finally caught up with him but he was in such bad shape where the elk antlers had gored him. We managed to clear away the broken pieces of horn and get the horse to Logan's, but he had been too badly injured and died there.

On the final day of our expedition, we started our drive from the Red Deer River up the long winding trail to the bench top. Snow had fallen and soon the path was packed and icy. My own equipment, the venison and fish, were all under canvas cover, securely tied with a diamond hitch. As it was a heavy load, I was using a large and somewhat clumsy pack horse. He lost his footing and, in a series of bounds, seemed destined for a final leap of some sixty feet into the Red Deer River. However, by real luck he ended up in a bunch of small pine trees on a kind of ledge. It took us about an hour, with several lariats tied together and two good saddle horses, to manage to steer and pull him safely back on the trail. As the day worn on, men and horses soon became well schooled to the trail and the rest of our return to Morley was without further incident.

I realize that some parts of our expedition may not make a pleasant story. I was a guest with no authority and I am not defending the methods which were used, nor am I being unduly critical, but I have merely provided a factual description of a roundup as it actually occurred.

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