

Capturing Wild Horses

Upon the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada, in a harsh region embracing parts of Eureka, Nye, Lander, White Pine, and Elko counties, Nevada, lies the last wild-horse pasture in America. The place is a fit desert stronghold. The only railroad that crosses the State is a hundred miles away. It is three days' ride from one ranch to another. In this barren and nearly inaccessible territory the wild horse has made his last stand against captivity.

In Nevada to-day there are not less than fifty thousand wild horses. There may be one hundred thousand, for their habits are such as to make an exact count impossible. It is easy to believe that their ancestry goes back to the Arabian horses that strayed from the camp of Coronado in 1540, for they have the fine head, the slim legs, and the flowing mane and tail, characteristics of the Arabian stock. There are bays, albinos, chestnuts, red and blue roans, pintos sorrels, buckskins and milk whites. The mares average eight hundred pounds in weight, and the stallions frequently weigh three hundred pounds more than that; they stand from thirteen to fourteen hands high. Their endurance is phenomenal, and as for agility, the marks of their unshod hoofs are found at the summit of monumental boulder-piles, which

even a mountain goat might reasonably be expected to cut out of its itinerary. They keep to an elevation of from six to nine thousand feet, descending to the plains hardly at all. The water-holes are from twenty to fifty miles apart but when the faint of man is upon a drinking place, they will turn aside from it, even in midsummer, and wander on until instinct leads them to a spring that man has not defiled. In winter the water-holes may be solid ice, but the horses are not inconvenienced—they eat the snow. Bunch grass is their sustenance in summer; then the first frosts cure the white sage, and that becomes palatable; they paw through the snow to reach it, and keep fat throughout the winter. In extremity they gnaw at scrub pines and cedars, the sparse chaparral, grease wood and rabbit-brush, and with starvation ahead they eat the bitter-brush of the black sage.

When a man has once mastered them, these horses yield complete submission. They make wonderful saddle-animals, sometimes race-horses. They are not heavy enough for draught work, but many thousands of them are to-day drawing farm-wagons, buggies, and delivery wagons in the States of the Middle West. The average value of one of these horses, after it has been shipped to North Platte or Kansas City and slightly broken, is one hundred dollars. Men spend all winter planning campaigns against them in the hope of making big profits, and all summer in proving that most of these plans have flaws in them. Not infrequently the novice finds, at the end of the season, that the saddle-horses he has ruined in the chase outnumber the wild-horses in his corral.

Any good bronco-buster who perseveres on the trail, and awaits his opportunity, can get among a grazing band and rope his single-prize. But roping wild-horses one at a time—and not the best of the bunch—is not a profitable game. How to take the wild-horse in numbers—that has been the problem for two generations.

The man who seems to have been most successful in solving it is Charles ("Pete") Barnum, a native of South Dakota, who in six years—he is now thirty-two years of age—has shipped from Nevada to

Middle Western markets more than seven thousand splendid horses. Seven thousand head is probably two thousand less than he has caught, for about twenty-five per cent. are killed in the process of breaking. Mr. Barnum's story of his work—the most exciting outdoor trade in the West to-day—as given in his own language, runs much like this:

You may be riding along carefully among towering mountains when, quite suddenly, you come upon a band of wild horses feeding or standing half asleep in the shade of rocks or stunted trees. One of the band sees, hears or smells you, and instantly all are alert. If you rein in your horse and remain motionless, the wild stallion will advance towards you with extreme caution. At last he halts, throws up his head, emits a mighty snort, and instantly he is away at full speed, with his band at his heels. Down the mountain side they go, with never a trail to follow. They leap, scramble, tumble, crash through old dead timber, and when they strike a bit of good running ground, their hoof-beats come back to you like the roll of a drum. If they are pursued, the thick-necked, thin-legged, many-scarred stallion continues to lead. If no pursuer appears, the stallion drops to the rear, to be on the alert against surprise, and his place in

be half-a-mile across. Then a trained man would be sent to ride, walk and crawl until he had a bunch of wild horses between him and the corral. He would start the horses in a terrified run for the pass. A second rider would dart out from behind a rock or tree and lash his horse after them. Other men would join the chase, appearing suddenly as if from the ground itself, their object being to sweep the horses at top speed into the wings of the corral and straight down into its hidden gate. Do they race into the trap? Not always, nor nearly always. More often a sense that we cannot define warns them of danger. Over rocks, through pines, cedars, and mahoganies, even over mounted men they tear their way to liberty! The stockade corral was carefully hidden, the trails were not disturbed, yet they would not go that way. Our combined efforts were unavailing. The horses would not be caught.

Pursuing by Relays

When the country is sufficiently open and level, five or six experienced men, if well mounted and properly stationed, can sometimes keep a band of horses running in great circles, and, by relieving each other at regular intervals, they can in time wear out the wild horses and corral those

and turn away from the rider—turn back in the direction the rider wishes him to take. This is usually the vital moment of the chase. If the stallion can be turned, the capture of at least part of his band is almost assured. But experience or instinct has taught the wild leader not to turn. Seven out of ten bunches of wild horses will strive to go just the way you do not wish them to go, and all that one can do will not turn them. I have ridden neck and neck with these game old stallions; I have beaten them across the nose with my quirt until their faces were drenched with blood, only to have them slacken sufficiently to dodge behind my horse, and thence to continue on their contrary way.

Trapping with Tame Horses

Of the older methods of capturing wild horses the most successful is the parada. A number of gentle horses are driven to a section where wild ones abound, and are concealed in a natural runway. Sharp-eyed men scour the neighborhood for mustangs, and, having found a bunch, start them in the direction of the parada of gentle horses. Relays of men are stationed out of sight along the course that the wild horses are expected to follow, to keep them to the right direction.

At length the running band tears into the little valley where the gentle horses in small bunches are feeding and moving slowly about. The wild horses mix with them, and, in theory, at least, come to a halt. Suddenly men appear on all sides. The gentle horses are not excited, and this quiets the wild ones, so that the entire reinforced band may be driven away intact to a corral. Thousands of wild horses have been captured in this way, but in most parts of the wild-horse country the method is played out. The horses have grown wise. If they cannot evade the relays of riders, and go off in a new direction, they will dash into the parada, through it, and away, before the men hidden near at hand can stop them. Sometimes they excite the gentle horses and carry them off also. Or else, when the men begin to hem in the band, the wild ones, one at a time, will make a dash for liberty,

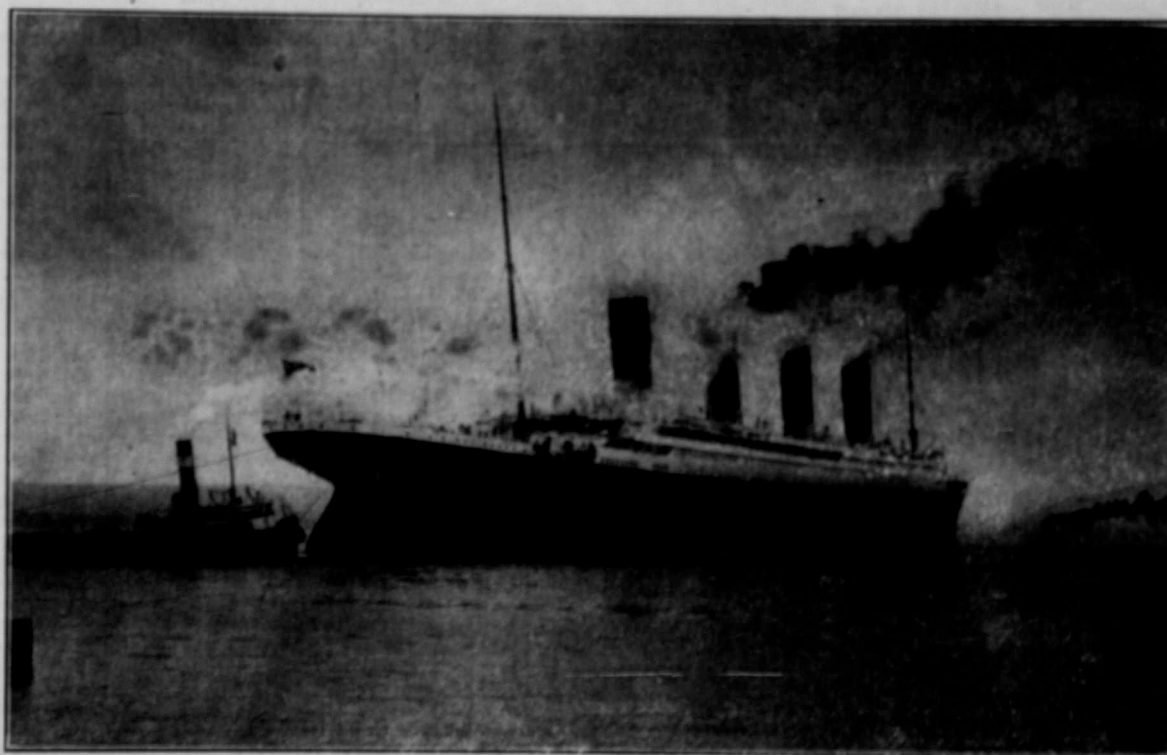
knowing full well that if they slip away singly they will not be pursued. Strangely, it is only the stallion that can be induced to return to a parada from which he has escaped. Often the stallion will dash to liberty outside the circle of men, but, if his mares are held, he will return to them if the men remain quiet. Horses that have escaped from a parada never forget the lesson. When pursued again, they will avoid any band of horses.

It has always been the weaker and poorer horses that were caught in the largest numbers; the cream of the herds—the strong, the fleet, the capable and crafty—escapes. The elimination of the poorer stock has improved the breed, and the standard is higher among these wild horses to-day than among domestic animals.

The Canvas Corral

We had long believed that if corrals could be erected quickly in passes much travelled by them, the horses could be caught and held. We wasted many months in erecting stockade corrals in different places, but the noise and disturbance—even the presence of mounted men upon the range—would cause the horses to forsake the range or refuse to run in the direction we wished. Timber is very

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CLOUDY AS SHE STARTED HER FIRST VOYAGE; DARKNESS AND DEATH AS SHE FINISHED
The great White Star Liner Titanic leaving Southampton on the journey that took her and 1,501 lives to the bottom of the Atlantic

the lead is taken by a crafty old mare. During long runs I have witnessed this change in leadership many times. Often it spells defeat for the "mustanger."

The Wild Horse's Wit

To catch the wild horse is a real problem. A man may have worked around the mustangs for years, may be an expert, fearless rider, a sure shot with the lariat, may know the range perfectly, may have schemed and toiled unrelentingly in arranging to take his captives, assisted by men of experience equal to his own, only to have a wily stallion or a sagacious old mare outwit him and escape.

Yet these mustangs are caught, not by twos and threes, or by scores, but by hundreds. I have made this my business for six or seven years. To many men the catching of these horses is a source of livelihood. They live among mustangs, they think mustangs, they measure in mustangs. I have worked from dawn until dark felling trees and dragging them to some mountain pass where I had previously watched long strings of mustangs file unsuspectingly back and forth to water or a favorite feeding ground. In such passes my men and I have erected strong stockade corrals, from the gates of which we could build long brush fences, or wings, so that the outer opening would

who do not give out during the run. The distances these horses will run when thus pursued by relays of riders are almost beyond belief. I have known instances where bands that had run twenty miles would take a spurt and outrun fresh horses. Bands that have been chased a few times discover that the pursuers are not after individuals, and the horses quickly learn to drop away from the band one at a time and escape. At length the pursuers find that they are trailing only one or two horses, and give up in disgust.

When a band is started, they will race away for a short distance, then halt and face about at the crest of the first ridge, like a line of soldiers. If they see the pursuer coming, they will snort, wheel about, and start on the long, long race. Immediately the mustanger begins his work. Should the horses start off in the direction of his trap, he will follow at such speed as to keep close to them without crowding them. Should the leader attempt to take a new direction, the mustanger must force his own horse up to the stallion and fight him for the "drags" and "tails" will follow their leader blindly. The mere appearance of the enemy at such close quarters means increased speed on the part of the mustangs, but the rider must show such speed and determination that the leader will acknowledge defeat