

AMERICAN WILD HORSES

When the Spaniards came to America they brought the first horses to the continent, says a writer in *Our Dumb Animals*. The animals escaped and were left behind by the Spaniards to become the parent stock of future herds of wild horses that ranged the plains from Mexico to as far north as Saskatchewan and possibly further.

Horses from early American settlers escaped time to time or were run off by the wild horse bands and added to the blood. Indian tribes caught them in numbers and re-domesticated them, using them as a means of transportation which they had never known before the advent of the Spaniards. Indeed, it was the possession of horses that made the plains Indian tribes possible, and later made roaming warriors of them, for they never traveled far before they had horses.

Some tribes became horse breeders and turned out fine stock; the Comanches of Texas were almost like Arabs in this matter, and the Cheyenne tribes of Wyoming gained fame as producers of the famous "pinto" or "painted" (spotted) horses of the plains.

Brands of wild horses could be found almost anywhere where feed and water conditions were favorable, as late as the 80's. Two such bands ranged in the sand hills of Nebraska between the Platte and Niobrara rivers, the habitat of one band being around the head of Dismal river and the range of the other band being along the Loup river.

Wild horse herds were always led (and strictly herded into individual bands) by individual stallions who looked after their charges with almost human intelligence, leading them to feed and water and guarding them from danger of every sort. These stallions would fight each other and any wild enemy such as the grizzly bear, with all the wild ferocity of a tiger. They would even attack man if he was afoot and alone, as many an Indian or white horse-hunter can testify.

The two stallion leaders of these Nebraska sand-hill herds were well known up and down the plains for a number of years and every device and plan was tried to "get" them. One was a coal-black trotter with long sweeping mane and tail—as beautiful an animal as ever ran free under the sky. The other was a bay pacer with cream mane and tail that swept the ground and gave him a comet-like appearance while running at full speed. Two finer horse never lived, I verily believe.

Indians tried to "walk them down" by keeping them moving slowly all the time, without a chance to feed or get to water, but they never could get either one. Cow-men tried encircling the herds and "roping" them many times. This method resulted in the capture of the bay stallion on the head of the

Middle Loup about 1885.

The black stallion was "creased" by a rifle shot through the top of the neck by a single hunter who thus captured the big fellow a year or so after the bay was caught. The black was captured miles to the northwest of his old range in the sage brush desert of Wyoming after nearly all his band had been captured by cowboys on regular organized horse hunts that often resulted in the capture of a whole herd at once.

The horse was the unit of value in trade among all the plains Indians; the man who owned "many horses" was rich—he who owned none was poor. A wife was valued by a certain number of horses, the more desirable the wife the greater the number of horses she would bring to her father when marriage day came around. Next to the buffalo, the horse was the most valuable of all plains animals to the Indian tribes.

Indians had always used dogs for pack animals up to the time they got horses from the increase of the Spanish herds, so it is only natural perhaps to find the Sioux calling the horse *Shunkstonka*, literally "big-dog" because they could pack all their stuff on his back just as they always had packed it for transportation on dogs before.

The Blackfeet took a somewhat different view of the animal and called it *Pono-kom-i-ta*, which means elk-dog or more nearly "like-elk-like-dog," undoubtedly this name was selected because, in size, the horse was "like-the-elk" but without his big horns and, because, they could pack their belongings on the horse, he was "like-the-dog" who had always been their pack animal before. Therefore the name "elk-dog" as above.

The Crow Indians who lived in the Yellowstone river country called the horse *e-cheta*. Just what this name means I never learned but it is likely somewhat similar to the others.

The last wild-horse herds that I know of were ranging in Washington and Oregon, but they were captured several years ago and as far as I know the real wild horse of the plains is gone forever now, the nearest approach today being the ranch horses which still run the open range here and there.

FUN OF DENTISTRY

Wild and disheveled, watery of eye and trembling of limb, he burst into the dentist's consulting-room and addressed the dentist in gasping tones:

"Do you give gas here?"

"Yes," replied the dentist.

"Does it put a man to sleep?"

"Of course."

"Nothing would wake him?"

"Nothing. But—"

"Wait a bit: you could break his jaw or black his eye without him feeling it?"

"My dear sir, of course, I—"

"It lasts about half a minute, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

With a wild whoop of joy and relief the excited man threw off his coat and waistcoat.

"Now," he yelled, as he tugged at his shirt, "get yer gas-engine ready. I want you to pull a porous-plaster off my back."