

# Weekend Cowboys —

The plaintive "moo's" can be heard even before the moving brown mass slips into sight. Puffs of dust rise from the horizon and animal shapes gradually appear. Longer-legged animals with riders hug the edges of the herd, occasionally darting out after strays.

A temporary marriage of cattle, horses and men moves as one, closing the gap between freedom and the corral. An open gate funnels the suspicious cattle into captivity, and the horsemen dismount to check for brands on foot.

The women look up from their outdoor kitchen and see striding out of the dust—a couple of councilmen, a Bureau of Indian Affairs grounds-keeper, a race car driver, a construction contractor. All cowboys for the weekend, all equipped with other hats for the rest of the week.

North End cattlemen take their business seriously. It's strenuous, dirty work that can't always be confined to weekends and holidays. There are herds to move to seasonal ranges, calves to cut and brand, fences to repair, stock to take to market, alfalfa to be grown. It is a year-round responsibility.

But raising cattle is not the sole means of livelihood for any of the dozen or so North End stock owners. With about 350 head among them, ranching is not big business. They're lucky if they break even, and when all the hours of labor are counted, they have only marginal operations.

Then why do they do it? For Gene Greene, it's a "hobby," no doubt a welcome respite from the stresses of Tribal Council and the Natural Resources department. Greene married into the large cattle-owning Queahpama family, having grown up

with cattle of his own, and now shares his hobby with numerous relatives.

For the Calicas, farming and raising cattle are a "family tradition" that no one is about to give up, even though the scope of their operation has diminished in recent years.

For others there is the excuse to be outdoors in the fresh air, the machismo of cow-punching, an obligation to a grandparent or an heir, a status symbol, or a part-time job. North End cattleowners are a varied lot, from young, vigorous men to elderly women. But they are joined together by a common range, a scarcity of fences and the cattle's unwillingness to congregate according to brand.

This "undeclared association" of stock owners, as Greene describes it, may well appear dormant for much of the year. Some of the routine aspects of cattle-raising are solitary. Mowing and baling hay, feeding winterbound stock, pushing a wandering herd back into the summer range, repairing fences—these are behind-the-scenes chores that owners perform through-out the year to varying degrees. And "everybody has their own system," says Greene.

But when spring or fall rolls around, the cattle business becomes a community event like no other. Ride bosses Larry Calica and Levi Keo know from observing the cattle and talking casually with the owners when the right time is. Notices are posted and the community of cowboys comes alive, ready to launch a series of cooperative weekend campaigns.

It is round-up time. It is the weekend cowboy's moment of glory. The glamour and romance of running cattle, however buried in dust and blood, finally surfaces, when life

seems to imitate television or the rodeo. It is a time to sharpen riding and roping skills, to teach the youngsters a trick or two. Putting aside the concerns of everyday life, they enter a simple outdoor world of man, beast and sagebrush.

North Enders forego some of the modern amenities of big ranches, like motorcycles, calf tables, and antiseptics, in favor of time-honored tradition. Combing the sage and timber on horseback, they whoop and holler the cattle into ancient corrals at Log Springs, Red Lake or Hennon Flat and stage an old-time rodeo of sorts.

Selecting out a bull calf, an owner dispatches two riders to rope its neck and heels and stretch him out between taut ropes and straining horses. Then despite the calf's squealing and the mother's bellowing, any number of operations can be performed on the captive animal.

If it has horns, clip them off. If it's slick, burn a brand into its side. If its ears are intact, carve notches into them and pierce them with a plastic tag. And if it is still a bull, make sure it's a steer with deft swipes of a pocket knife.

Then to add insult to injury, practice tying the fatigued calf, and to make sure the animal has been utilized fully, seat a screaming boy on its back and let it prance back to its mother, dropping the fledgling rodeo star into the dust and manure.

When the branding fire is going, the leftover male organs make tasty treats for the hungry cowboys. But the women know that their men can't survive on the morsels alone, so they spread out a table of hot food and cold drinks and coax the sweating cattlemen from the corral. Resisting the urge for a nap, they're back at their work in moments, taking

# North End round-ups bring them together

advantage of every daylight hour. But the women linger around the food and visit, and the kids go off and kick up their heels, until it's time to share their fathers' seriousness about the work at hand. It is, after all, a family time—the gathering of brothers, sisters, cousins—and there is time for stories, memories and teasing.

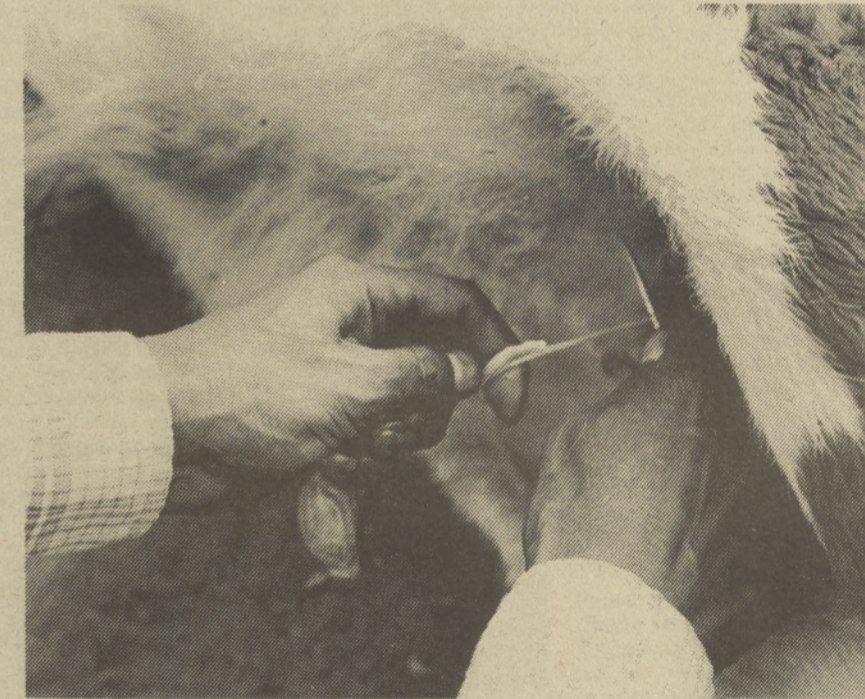
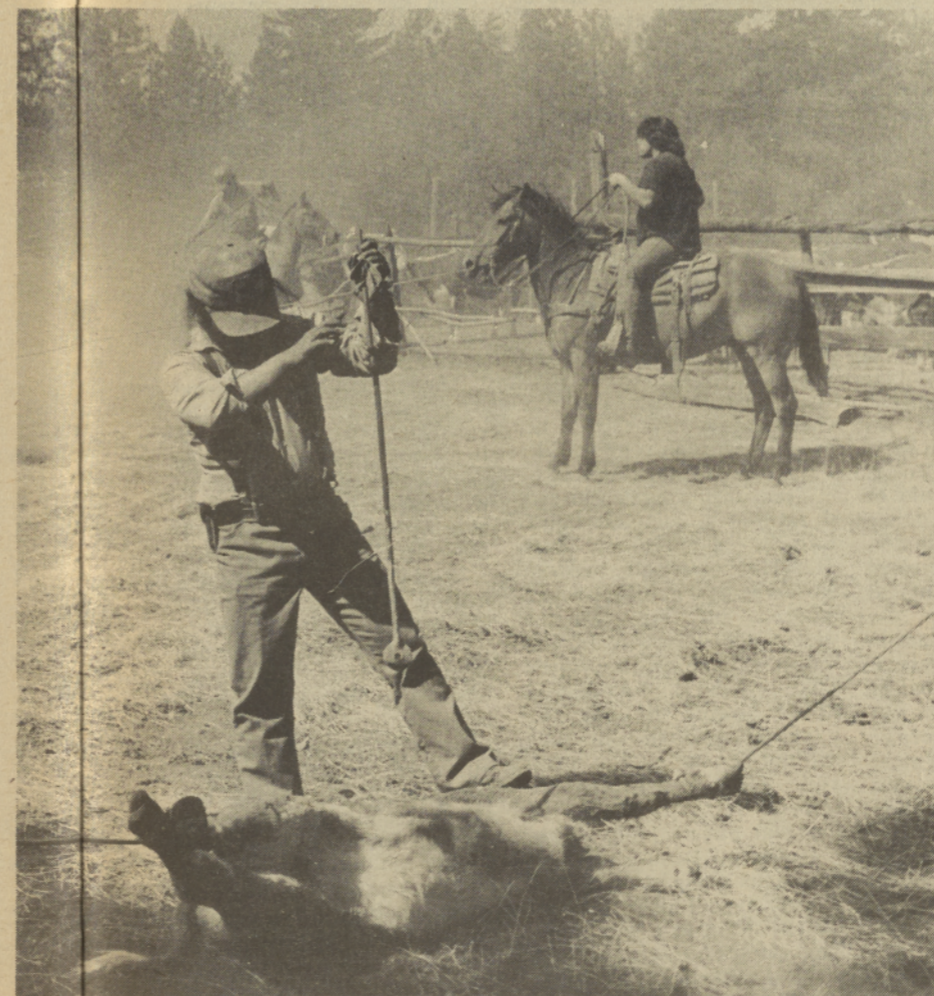
Laughing mixes with reprimands; dust, blood and sweat mingle on the skin and clothes; burning flesh and

manure fill the nostrils; and the cattle never stop protesting. By the time the sunlight wanes, muscles are sore, lungs are full, and the dirt is crusted on a permanent veneer. Bed is looking awfully good, and there is another day just like this one ahead.

By Monday, ready or not, the weekend cowboys are facing desks, a council table, and lawn mowers. But for at least one the weekend spills over into the week. A handful of culled cattle

must be taken to market and a new bull must be hauled in to increase productivity. It is a business, remember, and not just weekend recreation. But the dollar return is slim and the means looms much larger than the end.

They say that if you inherit cattle you might make it; if you buy into the business, forget it. But money or not, the hobby and tradition of cattle-raising persists—on the weekends—in the North End.



North End Ride Boss Levi Keo told his "dogies" to "git along" one fine spring day on a cattle ride in the Log Springs area (left). Mt. Hood provides a spectacular backdrop for reservation cattlemen, but appreciation of the scenery can be lost to hard work. Once in the corral the romance of the ride is over and the serious rodeoing really begins. Tom Begay, Gordon Scott, Jody Calica and Spencer Keo used a bit of "overkill" on a calf (top center). Larry Calica applied his family's brand to a calf's shoulder (bottom center). Fred Wallulatum cut notches in an ear (top right) and Patrick Mitchell turned a bull calf into a steer with quick flashes of a knife blade. All weekend cowboys, the North End cattlemen have different reasons for pursuing break-even operations, but they are an exercise in cooperation at round-up time. (Photos taken during spring and fall round-ups during the past two years)

Story and Photos by Cynthia Stowell