

OUT ON THE RANGE

# The Sierra Bonita

*These Arizona cowboys are ready to roll. Words & photos © Scott Baxter.*



*Sierra Bonita Herefords.*

**H**enry C. Hooker arrived in Arizona in 1867 from California and was able to secure a number of contracts with the U.S. government to supply beef to both Indian agencies and the military.

Hooker established the Sierra Bonita Ranch in 1872. It has been run continuously since then by Henry's descendants. Today the ranch is owned by Jesse Hooker Davis, the great-great-great-grandson of Henry Hooker. He is the sixth generation to run the Sierra Bonita.

At one time the Sierra Bonita was the largest ranch in Arizona, running more than 20,000 head of cattle across 800 square miles. It is one of the oldest ranches in the state, and recently celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Although smaller in size today, the ranch is steeped in the traditions that the Hooker family brought to Sulphur Springs in southeastern Arizona. The patriarch was committed to raising and breeding quality livestock and worked hard to improve his cattle herds by introducing quality graded Hereford stock in the 1880s. Hooker was also known to breed exceptional horses, and at one time ran over 500 broodmares. Today, Jesse Davis still runs fine Hereford cattle and is actively working to expand his equine program where he is raising exceptional ranch horses.

Tradition and continuity abound on the Sierra Bonita. Jose Adame retired as foreman a few years ago. He worked both for



*Sierra Bonita spring works crew, from right to left: foreman Leslie Shannon, Rowdy Couzza, Cody Smith, rancher Jesse Davis, Phil Bigthumb, Preston Ellis, Jerry Chischillie, Dave Holl, Garrison Duke and Jacob Todd.*



*Garrison Duke on the drag at Box Springs, Jessie Corrals, Sierra Bonita Ranch.*



*Sierra Bonita foreman Leslie Shannon (left) discusses the sorting with cowboy Jacob Todd at Mud Springs, Joe Hooker Corrals.*



*Leslie Shannon rides amongst mother cows and calves at Mud Springs, Joe Hooker Corrals, Sierra Bonita Ranch.*



*Header Cody Smith and heeler Garrison Duke rope calves at Box Springs, Jessie Corrals, Sierra Bonita Ranch, to brand and doctor.*



*ABOVE: Crew lunch during the spring works at Box Springs, Jessie Corrals, is a long-held tradition at the Sierra Bonita. A bountiful meal is always served in the original adobe home following the morning's labor. Rancher Jesse Davis stands with his crew seated for lunch. BELOW: The original Hooker brand and irons. The Sierra Bonita is the oldest ranch in Arizona that is run by the same family, on the same land, using the original brand all from 1872.*

Davis' grandmother as well as Jesse himself, who had known Jose since he was a young boy. Jose passed away last fall, but spent more than 40 years at the Sierra Bonita. Today, Leslie Shannon is the foreman of this historic outfit.

Spring and fall works are extremely busy here. Davis brands all his calves, and he and Shannon run a tight, efficient crew. The original Hooker brand has been a constant since 1872. When speaking of his and his family's continued stewardship of the Sierra Bonita, Jesse Davis says: "Mother nature and what she provides or doesn't is truly the most significant factor in deciding on daily and long-term goals. Being flexible and fluid is paramount through all the cycles and having a lengthy history to fall back on certainly provides an abundance of security when understanding the limits of the ground we've been gifted to take care of. And that's just it...striving to make it better than when you received it." ■

*Scott T. Baxter's studio is on the historic Cattletrack Arts Compound in Scottsdale, Ariz. He is currently working on a multi-year documentary on the Sierra Bonita Ranch with rancher Jesse Davis. Baxter's work is in numerous museums and private collections and is in the permanent collections of the Phoenix Art Museum, Desert Caballeros Western Museum, Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport Museum, Taos Art Museum and the Scottsdale Public Art Program. His website is [scottbaxterphotographer.com](http://scottbaxterphotographer.com).*

