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RANGE is an award-winning quarterly devoted to the issues that threaten the West, its people, lifestyles, lands and wildlife. No stranger to controversy, RANGE is a leading forum for opposing viewpoints in the search for solutions that will halt the depletion of a national resource—the American cowboy.

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## Up Front

*Vaya con Dios, viejo.*

By C.J. Hadley

Jack Neil Swanson was born Feb. 4, 1927, in Duluth Minn. His dad was a backwoods guide, his mother a successful ballerina. Moving often during the Depression, they arrived in California when Jack was four and it wasn't long before he started drawing the cowboys and horses that he'd seen on the dirt roads on the way out West.

At age 15, he was working on ranches in the oaks and grasslands of central California. He rode with vaqueros, Spanish horsemen who taught him well. His mentor was Frank Martinez, head horse breaker for the mighty Miller & Lux outfit in the lower San Joaquin. Jack's time with the old vaquero at the Buttonwillow horse camp "was unforgettable and priceless."

Jack broke and shod horses from the Mojave Desert to the Tehachapis. He savored the freedom of the work. When he was old enough, he joined the Navy, and after the war attended California College of Arts and Crafts on the G.I. Bill. That didn't work, so Jack took to the trail with his quarter horse, Amigo, and

made some money running match races.

He rode into Carmel in 1949, and he and the horse shared a stall at Hodges stable near the Carmel Mission. He broke horses and worked as a farrier, but he still had an intense desire to paint.

Jack learned from horsemen and artists, storytellers and whiskey drinkers. He enrolled in the Carmel Art Institute and met Sally Flint there. He gave her his prize horse, Maryanna, on their first date in 1950. Three months later they were married.

In 1956, Jack and Sally moved two kids, two goats and a cage full of chickens to 10 acres in Cachagua Valley near Carmel. "It was like the Grapes of Wrath." Together they built the Whiffle Tree Ranch, trading art for lumber, and pounding every nail themselves. Jimmy Cagney already owned a painting of Jack's and helped him dig a well. Their three children, Kristin, Wendy and later Nicolaus (aka Cash), were all horseback before they could walk.

For 64 years, Jack and Sally were together. And every year Jack's loop got bigger. He traveled with a horse to ranches in eastern Oregon and to Nevada's high desert ranges, and he cowboyled with the buckaroos.

In 1991, Jack was wandering the Great Basin with horse and trailer, and stopped at Wayne Hage's 790,000-acre Pine Creek Ranch in central Nevada. Wayne welcomed him, even though he didn't know who Jack was. They talked. They ate together. They drank whiskey.

They rode up Table Mountain (where the feds had confiscated more than 100 of Hage's cattle at gunpoint). Soon after, Jack painted "Stewards of the Range," auctioned off the original, and offered high-quality prints to aid financially with the precedent-setting, property rights case, Hage v. United States. (Check p. 82 and "Special Info: News on the Hage case" at [www.rangemagazine.com](http://www.rangemagazine.com).)

A few years ago, on one of his rideabouts, he stopped by my Nevada office. Soon after, he donated (and signed) limited-edition prints of four of his favorite paintings to help RANGE and Range Conservation Foundation (p. 5).

Jack invited me to his studio last September "to stay for a while," but didn't feel well enough for company. "Come down in a couple of weeks," he said. "I have a new painting on my easel and I think it's my best yet."

Jack died at Whiffle Tree Ranch on Sept. 17, 2014.

Vaya con Dios, viejo. ■



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*J.N. Swanson and his work are as unforgettable and priceless as his mentor vaquero. He understood horses and landscapes, "even crawling under sagebrush to sketch the roots," Jack told Ben Ramsey. "You have to intimately know a horse. You have to have been bucked off and look at it from the belly up." In 1967, Jack became one of the first members (and a hall of famer) of the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America. His paintings have been exhibited in major museums, the California governor's mansion, and are in numerous private and corporate collections throughout the world. Ronald Reagan loved Jack's work and hung one of his paintings in the White House while he was president. Actors Sam Elliott, James Arness and Rhonda Fleming all bought originals.*