

Long Dust on the Desert

Edward M. Hanks, a buckaroo's tale, with excerpts from his book.

By Carolyn Dufurrena. Photos courtesy Ed Hanks Jr.

Edward M. Hanks left his home ranch near Fort Bidwell, Calif., in spring 1900. He was 18, one of 11 children, off to seek his fortune in Nevada with his cousin Frank Phillips. He ran mustangs and buckarooed on ranches in northern Nevada and Oregon in the first half of the last century, traveling back to Modoc County in between jobs.

Ed's travels brought him to the Hunter and Banks Ranch in Elko County in 1912. There were no fences. Thousands of cattle roamed on the ranges. He rode with the crew of some 25 bucka-

roos. Several local ladies, notable for their woolly chaps, white blouses and ties, helped ride as well. One of them, 15-year-old Ella Eddy, whose mother was the local schoolteacher hired by Hunter and Banks, entranced Ed since 1916.

Ed and Ella buckarooed together for several years and finally married in 1923. She was 22; he was 40. Their middle son, Ed Junior, now 92, remembers what it was like living the buckaroo life with his parents. "I was two years old when I started riding, in front of Mom's saddle. By the time I was six or seven, I rode a lot with the cowboy crew."

Ed Junior remembers one trip from the Horseshoe Ranch trailing 130 bulls 100 miles north to Lone Mountain. "It took three days, and there was only one bullfight. The first night we kept those bulls in a guard corral, and the next morning, though there was no break in the fence, we found one bull on the outside. We finally figured out that two of the others had

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Ella and piglet, ca. 1922-23, during the time that Ella was teaching school on the Hunter and Banks Ranch, shortly before she and Ed married.



Cowboys relax on a pile of tents and bedrolls, while the wagon goes in search of firewood. Camp gear is in boxes at right.

Chow time. This is probably at the Stampede Ranch, north of Red House. Thousands of cattle grazed in common across hundreds of square miles of unfenced land. Cowboy crews of 20 or more rode to gather the herds and bring them to the railroad for shipping. The Hunter and Banks operation included half a dozen smaller homesteads, which the company absorbed over time, including the Huntsman, Hadley, Horseshoe and Green Cabin places.





Skylined: the cowboy crew pauses for a photo. We suspect the riderless horse, which appears in most images, belongs to the photographer. Ed Hanks wrote in "A Long Dust on the Desert": "We had over 100 horses in the saddle horse herd. We had two men to wrangle them. In rounding up the horses to ship, a couple of us would go to the ridges to start the bands of horses down the trails. Several more men would go down near where we wanted to bunch the herds. This was very exciting and riding was fast. Dust clouds began to rise in all directions, and in a little while, the horses came in with streaming manes and tails, all kinds of horses, with a few antelope and deer among them for variety. They could be seen running near the rodeo ground, where riders would herd them into one bunch. It wasn't always easy to slow these beautiful, high-spirited animals down. The deer and antelope usually found their way out before the horses were bunched. When we got them all together we drove them to corrals, where we branded the colts and worked out the shippers to hold in a field until we got enough to make a drive to the railroad. We had to neck all the young colts to older saddle horses to hold them, as our wranglers would put them out on the hills where the grass was good at night. In June, the longest days of the year, we would be necking those horses together after dark."

Ella Hanks rode and roped with the cowboy crew. Her mother, Florence Eddy, had moved back to Elko from California and was hired by Hunter and Banks to teach school on the ranch after her miner husband died of consumption. Ella met buckaroo Ed Hanks when she was about 15 and they rode together for several years, until she "came of age." They were married in 1923. "After Dad and Mom had us three boys," says Ed Junior, "my grandmother quit teaching and joined our family so Mom could buckaroo."



Mustang trap west of the Simon's Place on Maggie Creek Ranch. One of Ed's first jobs in Nevada was running mustangs for the Taylor and Edson's Double Square Ranch north of Winnemucca. "They didn't know how many horses they had," Ed wrote. "They didn't have any way to count them, but they would gather at least a thousand to sell each fall, four years in age and up."



Ed Senior with Mag and Mollie. Ed ran the Horseshoe Ranch near Beowawe in the 1930s with a remuda of about 100 head of saddle and workhorses. He bought them "mostly from ranches north of Elko," where they ran outside, often joining bands of mustangs.

Five boys on Smokey. From front to back: Roland Hanks, the eldest of the three; Gordon Smailes, a friend from Elko, and his brother, Jack; Ed Hanks Junior, the littlest one, and his younger brother, George.

Ed Senior found Smokey near Gravelly Ford on the Horseshoe Ranch near Beowawe, suffering from a badly infected wire cut across his chest. He bought him for \$50 from a local Shoshone boy, Bill Buffalo, before Bill left for the Stewart Indian School in Carson City. Smokey weighed about 1,200 pounds and had a reputation as a buckler, but Ed doctored him back to health and Smokey became one of the family. Ed wrote: "He was a wonderful horse, good-natured and gentle. He liked water and could swim like a duck."



hooked him with their horns and thrown him over the fence. We found the place where he landed on the outside.” Ella was along on that trip too, cooking on the wagon. Her husband was approaching 60; Ed Junior was 10. (Jon Griggs, current manager of what is now Maggie Creek Ranch, says, “Those would have been three pretty long days.”)

The family buckarooed together for the next several years, moving from the Horseshoe Ranch to the range on Maggie Creek in the summers, living in tents. Ed Senior managed the outfit until 1943, when he retired from the back of a horse. He put up hay for the outfit for quite a few years after that but went to work supporting the war effort by guarding the Carlin tun-

nels for the Union Pacific Railroad (which ran through the headquarters of Hunter and Banks Ranch).

He wrote about the Horseshoe Ranch and his time at Hunter and Banks in his 1967 memoir, “A Long Dust on the Desert,” which is excerpted in *RANGE*’s newest book, “Tales From Out There.” He lived to be 92. Ed was inducted into the Buckaroo Hall of Fame in Winnemucca, Nev., in 2011. “A Long Dust on the Desert” can be purchased through that organization’s Facebook page. ■

Carolyn Dufurrena lives on an old Miller and Lux ranch in northwest Nevada. Ed Hanks stayed there on the way to his first job in Nevada.



Four heelers. Ella Banks, second from left, heeling with the girls while the buckaroos work the ground in 1916. Ed, in a white shirt, kneels behind the calf at left.



Three ladies in woolies with Ella Hanks on the right. “After Al Phillips was married, his wife, Bea, would ride with us sometimes,” Ed wrote. “She liked to have the Webber girls—Belle, Clara and Mabel—come out too. These girls were really good riders, as their father had trained them to help with his cattle. So they were riding with the cowboys at Stampede. Willie Davis was the cowboss and it was September 12th, and Bea and I had a birthday. Willie said to me, ‘If you can catch some of these chickens around here, you can have a chicken dinner.’ I hunted two dry sticks about four feet long. I would twirl them through the air at some likely looking young roosters, and it wasn’t long before I had some nice fryers ready to pick. Later on that day the women fried them and we had a fine chicken dinner. Mabel said, ‘Ed, if I was raising chickens, I wouldn’t want you to come around there.’ They all laughed at that.”