

OUT ON THE RANGE

Branding

The Mother Lode still grows on the hills of California.

Words & photos by Larry Angier.

The spring tradition of doctoring, marking and branding the cattle continues in the heart of the Mother Lode in Amador and Calaveras counties in California. Immigrants from Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France and England came to seek their fortunes during California's Gold Rush in the mid-19th century, but found instead riches in the grasses covering the





Jared Garvette teaches his son how to safely adjust the ropes on a calf after it is secured in the Wooster corrals in Salt Spring Valley. Three and four generations work together as the elders pass down their skills and work ethic to their children and grandchildren.

At the Ellis Ranch, an old homestead, the Dell'Orto and Wooster families use the old corral to rope and brand cattle as the low winter sun casts long shadows. The photographer appears behind the fence in this unique perspective as he controls a small drone with camera attached for a different point of view of the action.



Seven-year-old Blake White after a hard first round of mutton bustin' at the 76th Amador County Fair, July 2014, in Plymouth. Blake is the sixth generation and made it to the finals of the competition this night.

Tom Wooster hands Elliot Joses a horn iron at the Guttinger Corral as the smoke lingers on a cool winter morning.



hills, grasses that would sustain and grow cattle to feed the miners.

Their descendants still graze cattle on those sustainable grasses, though today nearly all the gold mines beneath the hills are gone. What remains are the families helping one another during late winter and early spring branding at ranches that have been handed down through the generations. ■

Larry Angier says: "As I got to know these cowboys it dawned on me what a treasure they are to my community. They help to keep it open, rural and productive. Many of their parents and grandparents welcomed my parents when they first came to the Mother Lode in the late 1940s. Their friendship continues to be handed down through the generations." For more of Larry's work see angier-fox.photoshelter.com.



The cow dogs love to help herd the cattle and one cowboy with a few dogs can do the work of many. But once the calves are in the corral, the dogs are always in the way. However, it doesn't stop them from watching and enjoying the action as the cowboys rope and brand.



Coleman Kassik stands for a portrait with his new cow dog puppy Susie at the Busi Ranch. Coleman's grandparents welcomed my parents and were their friends in the mid-20th century, a hundred years after his first settled here.