

PORTRAIT OF THE WEST

Pete Berry, cowboy for hire in Havre, Montana. Words & photo by Todd Klassy.



Cowboys can be ranchers, but not all ranchers are cowboys. Even the children of ranchers can be cowboys too. But most cowboys are hired hands who travel the countryside working on many different ranches over their lifetimes and helping ranchers work their cattle and tend to their horses. Pete Berry of Havre, Mont., is one of them...a cowboy for hire.

Although he first worked on his family ranch for decades near Reed Point, Mont., and still has a small ranch all to himself west and north of the Milk River near the small town of Havre, Pete has spent the better part of the last 20 years working on other ranches. That started soon after his father sold the family outfit in 1998.

"It's what I had to do," 63-year-old Pete says. "Being a cowboy is a great way of life. I can't imagine doing anything else."

Pete first saddled up when he was just eight years old. "It was a little Welsh pony my father bought me." Soon after, the young cowboy graduated to quarter horses and began roping cattle from the saddle and training colts.

Though he has worked on ranches all over Montana and South Dakota, Pete has spent most of his time recently on ranches in north-central Montana where the land is large, the weather is extreme, and the people are sparse.

"I fell in love with the Bears Paw Mountains," Pete says. "I don't think there's a better piece of cow country anywhere in the United States." ■

Todd Klassy is an award-winning farm and ranch photographer who lives in Bainville, Mont. You can see more of his photos at www.toddklassy.com.