



## Badlands and Riverbreaks

*Cowboying in South Dakota.  
Words and photographs © Jean Laughton.*

**T**he first ranch south of the tiny town of Belvidere, S.D., is Lyle O'Bryan's Quarter Circle XL Ranch. It was once the Thode Ranch, home to the TL Cattle Company starting back in the late 1880s, and where Earl Thode, World Champion All Around Cowboy 1929, grew up. Lyle has been there since 1962, taking up where the cowboys from the past left off.



*Bringing our cattle from the north pasture across the White River to the shipping corrals on Lyle O'Bryan's Quarter Circle XL Ranch, 2005.*

Approaching 75, he is a tough ol' cowboy. I dropped the "d" because old does not describe Lyle, who still breaks horses, cowboys, pitches hay and does everything else it takes to run his ranch. He loves this way of life and figures he has to get through the feeding in the winter and the fencing and haying in the summer so he can get to the work that he loves best—cowboying. Lyle is happiest on horseback.

When Lyle was three years old, his buddy and neighbor Frank Whipple walked into the O'Bryan house with his spurs and new chaps on. He let Lyle spin the rowels on his spurs. That was it. Lyle was hooked. After a couple of winters cowboying in Oklahoma as a teen, he settled in working for Baxter Berry on the old Double X Ranch, which is south of Lyle's place.

Lyle often rides on the Double X. He "neighbors" with its managers, Chris and Diana



*A foggy shipping day on the Brunsch Ranch, near Norris, South Dakota, in 2005. Scott Bauman is sorting cattle in the foreground, with help from Scott Kaltenbach on the bald-face, Stanton Anderson, Frank Carlson, and Lyle O'Bryan on Stringy. Longtime ranch woman, Lucille Brunsch, age 90, still lives on the ranch which is now run by her son Jack.*

Elwood. Neighboring is one of the unique qualities of ranching in this area. Neighbors trade labor with each other to help out during the busy times of the year working cattle, vaccinating, shipping and branding. It makes for a tight ranching community and helps to keep the ranches running economically. The ranches that Lyle neighbors with are Badure, Willard, Fortune, Devries, Anderson, Brunsch and Fox.

I hope that these photographs depict the timelessness of both the land and the cowboying done in South Dakota. ■

*Jean Laughton has been cowboying on Lyle O'Bryan's Quarter Circle XL Ranch since 2003. She has also been photographing ranch work from horseback for her "My Ranching Life" series. You can read her story and see more of her photographs at [www.jeanlaughton.com](http://www.jeanlaughton.com).*



*Lyle O'Bryan, at age 72, works my colt Henry on the Quarter Circle XL Ranch in 2006. This was just before I got on him for his first ride.*