

PORTRAIT OF THE WEST



WAYNE WORD WORDS AND PHOTO BY KATHY MCCRAINE

There is a mystique about the 257,000-acre ORO Ranch north of Prescott, Ariz. Manager Wayne Word feels it, and so does almost every cowboy who ever worked there.

"Maybe it's because they realize they are working for one of the last true western ranches," Wayne says. "It's still run the way it was 75 years ago—horseback." The ranch was originally founded by the Greene Cattle Company in 1936. The Baca Float #5, an old Spanish land grant, comprises 100,000 acres of it.

To visit the ROs is to take a giant step back in time. The old mule-drawn wagon from earlier days now rests peacefully under a stand of oak trees at headquarters, but its replacement, a World War II 6x6 Army truck, still goes out spring and fall with a crew of about 10 cowboys who sleep under the stars in tepees for months on end.

"It would be hard to modernize this ranch because of the rough,

brushy country," Wayne says. "You don't just trailer out there."

Wayne has been running the ranch since 1993, a period of severe drought that has forced him to cut the cowherd from 5,000 mother cows and yearlings to around 3,000. Prior to this job, he graduated from Sul Ross State University and managed a number of smaller ranches and a feedlot. He'd rather be horseback than shuffling papers, but the job demands that he juggle book work, range management, livestock operations, and personnel.

At age 64, he says, "I figured on staying 20 years and retiring at 67, but I don't know... I wonder how hard it's going to be to retire if it means moving to town." ■

Kathy McCraine is RANGE's "Southwest Connection," ranching near Prescott, Ariz.