

The Remuda

Equines of the ROs are tough and agile, able to succeed and survive on a rugged stretch of Arizona.

Words and photos by Kathy McCraine.

The O RO Ranch north of Prescott, Ariz., a.k.a. the ROs, is strictly a horseback outfit, known for its good equines. With 257,000 acres of Spanish land-grant country only a mountain goat would feel at home in, it's far too vast and rugged to be run any other way.

Horses that wear the RO brand have to be tough, agile and "cowy." The ranch keeps 30 broodmares that foal out on the range, where the colts adapt to the rocky terrain they will travel all their working lives. They're halter-broken as weanlings, then seldom touched by human hands again until they're broken to ride at three.

Young, unbroke geldings are called broncs whether they buck or

Big ranches like the O RO take pride in the quality of their remudas and put a lot of thought into breeding the kind of horses that excel at their jobs, whether it be making a big circle in rough country, or cutting out a wily, uncooperative bovine. Remuda horses become the cowboy's working partners on the range. Some are honest, and some play dirty tricks that test the rider's skill and patience. Regardless, a good hand accepts the string he's assigned and makes do.

In between the spring and fall works, most of the remuda is turned out on the range to graze and loaf around until time to "shoe up" for the next wagon. It's a well-deserved rest.



The remuda has learned to bunch up and stand quietly as the cowboys circle them with their ropes, while the wagon boss and jigger boss rope them out of the herd with houlihan loops for the day's work.

not, and once started well, they graduate to the 100-head remuda that goes out with the wagon twice a year. A remuda is defined as "a group of extra saddle horses kept as a supply of remounts." The word comes from the Spanish word *remudar*, to exchange. At the remuda, the wagon boss assigns eight horses to each cowboy, splitting each man's string between ground-covering "drive" horses for the long gathers in the morning, and more athletic "afternoon" horses for cow work like sorting or branding. If a cowboy has a reputation as a good bronc rider, he'll likely be assigned a spoiled horse or two.

Cowboys often get attached to their favorites. They'll give them names like Circus, Creature, Rockmasher, Tadpole and Lonesome, based on some physical trait or personality quirk. But be wary if Widowmaker or Snake wind up in your string! ■

Kathy McCraine is a rancher, writer and photographer from Prescott, Ariz. Her new book, "Cow Country Cooking: Recipes and Tales from Northern Arizona's Historic Ranches," will be available this fall at <www.kathymccraine.com>.



Four-wheelers and pickups will never replace horses on the ROs. ABOVE: Cowboys Joel Maloney, left, and Linc Bundy take the remuda from the cedar pens next to where the wagon is camped to a nearby dirt tank for a drink of water. INSET: Cowboys like longtime camp man Cisco Scott always have favorites in their string. BELOW: To catch horses for the day's work, cowboys on the O RO Ranch circle the herd with their ropes, each throwing the end of his rope to the man on his right. Then each cowboy calls out the name of the horse he wants, and the wagon boss or jigger boss (second in command) throws a houlihan loop over the horse's head and leads him out of the herd to the waiting cowboy. Travis Shipp watches Matt Bruton rope a cowboy's pick for the day. The mules are used by the camp men.

