

OUT ON THE RANGE
Throwing a Loop

Buckaroo traditions in California. Words and photo © Aimee Koepke.





Spring is a busy time of year all across the West and ranchers in Likely, Calif., are no different. As grass begins to grow, it's time for neighbors to gather together to brand calves before turning them out on pasture or high-country leased ground in the surrounding mountains.

Buckaroo tradition is still alive in Modoc County's lush South Fork Valley at the western edge of the Great Basin, and there is plenty of work to do. Close to 5,000 calves must be branded. Ropes and reatas settle around the necks of long-eared calves, which will be headed and heeled and

dragged to the wood fire. Many of these ranchers run their livestock in common and all calves will be doctored, marked and branded, then returned to their mothers before their trip to new country.

James Koepke, shown here at McGarva Ranch, has cowboied from Canada to Arizona and is currently working for fourth-generation rancher Billy Flournoy at Likely Land and Livestock.

Summer is looking good. ■

Aimee Koepke works part-time on the ranch.