

Twenty-Five-Mile days

Cattle are spread a long way out on ranches in northern Nevada.

By Carolyn Dufurrena

Merv Takacs worked for Squaw Valley Ranch off and on from 1978 until 2004, from 1981 on as cowboss. He trained a lot of cowboys in those decades on a place with an official-looking highway sign at the front gate that declares: "Squaw Valley Time Zone."

It seems like every cowboy in northern Nevada worked for Merv Takacs at one time or another. "You could tell what kind of a cowboy they were by how long they stuck it out, too," says T.J. Thompson, now manager of the Kings River Ranch in Humboldt County. TJ worked for Merv for several years, and eventually married his granddaughter Lacey. Somebody once asked Merv how they got all that done. He said, "We trotted." ■

COURTESY FILIUS TAKACS



Heeling at Coleman Creek, southeastern Oregon, 2009. Merv continued to help friends brand for the rest of his life.

Squaw Valley Job Interview, 1986

By Carolyn Dufurrena

"Unload your saddle," the cowboss said.

"We'll go around this fence."

The horse started bucking right away.

It seemed that every rock, bush, and rabbit set him off.

Meanwhile, they chatted.

"We've got nine thousand head of mother cows," the boss said.

"Two hundred and fifty horses to ride, and all I want 'em to do

Is trot.

In a straight line.

The 'colts' are green broke, between seven and nine.

You'll have fifteen of 'em to ride.

Then you can start on the five-year-olds.

"You'll work six-and-a-half days a week.

We ride ten, twelve, sometimes fifteen miles to get somewhere,

Work cows, brand, take 'em someplace else.

Come back, switch horses, go do something else.

Often it's twenty-five miles a day."

That horse bucked all afternoon, don't know how many miles.

At the end, the cowboy said,

"What the hell's wrong with this horse?"

"Oh, nothing," the boss grinned.

"He's just like that.

"And, by the way, you're hired."



COURTESY SHANNON BRENNAN

Cowboss Merv Takacs, left, and one of his cowboys, Glen Davison, meet at the Squaw Valley barn, ca. 1985.