

Frank Coggins tells an interesting story of the Ya Ha Tinda ranch when he worked at the ranch as a wrangler during the 1950's. The "Government ranch" was run by the Banff National Park Wardens operating in a remote outpost type frontier along the Red Deer river in the central Alberta foothills. The ranch was a year round, essentially self sustaining operation. It was used to breed, train, and utilize horses for haying, skidding logs for firewood, as well as monitoring hunting activities, both on and nearby the ranch. The main purpose of the YHT ranch horse was to develop dependable, useable horses for backcountry patrol by the warden service in the National Parks of western Canada.

Clarence Long had horses, and maintained a trap line one mile east of the ranch. Parks government horses wintered at the ranch and were ridden and driven back and forth to Banff every spring and fall for use by the

warden service in Banff and adjacent National Parks. Cliff and Nellie Murphy were ranch managers during the 1920's, 30's, and early 1940's. Cliff was a Banff National Park Warden, and his "silent partner" Nellie tells of many harrowing adventures, herding horses over snow choked summits, and through raging spring run off creeks and river crossings. Their adventures during the Depression of the 1930's included supply trips to the Sundre area by wagon, along primitive trails, swimming horses and wagons, to cross the Red Deer River several times, camping along the way, both coming and going on a ten day long trip. Life on the very isolated ranch was primitive, and life threatening at times. Predators roamed the "home place" yard, and nearby horse grazing fields, while fierce weather storms were common, at any time of year. The doctor was some 60 miles away in Sundre, or a fifty+ mile ride to Banff via the old Cascade trail, so happenings such as blood poisoning or

something worse, had to be dealt with on the ranch by reference to a simple first aid manual or personal practical knowledge.

Most other summertime emergencies were dealt with, if possible, by a long ride to Banff.

These folks were true pioneers, who lived a dangerous, primitive lifestyle.

Life at the ranch was one of quiet isolation most of the time, but visitors did occasionally drop by. Primitive road (a dirt/ mud, very rough trail) access eventually changed everything. By the early 40's, vehicles could reach the ranch from the east. The Cascade "fire prevention" road from Banff was built in the early 40's but only reached Cuthead cabin. A combination road, trail eventually reached the ranch headquarters buildings by the 1950's.

Many other horses were brought to the ranch by outfitters, stock contractors, and private ranches fairly near the ranch. Horses were

bought, sold, and traded under the direction of the ranch foreman. Numerous “stud” horses of various breeds over many decades, were used to attempt to develop sound, sensible, and dependable horses for use by many inexperienced riders in the warden service. Teams of heavy horses were used to cultivate hayfields, and gather ranch hay for winter use. Horses also hauled firewood tress from the ranch lands to heat the ranch buildings. Some quiet and older saddle and pack horses were even trained to haul awkward (lumber, wood stoves etc) to outlying cabins in several warden districts of the National Parks.

In 1955 stock contractor Joe Barget of the 3J bucking string visited the YHT ranch en route from Sundre to Caroline and the James River. Painted Saint was a three year old Bay horse, with some white and a black tail and mane, was among his string. Painted Saint had yet to be ridden. Frank Coggins decided he

would try, and was promptly bucked off. Frank was determined to ride the horse after numerous tries at the ranch, so he accompanied Joe to the James River area. Frank did not give up on the horse even though being bucked off the horse every morning. After several days of trying, he finally rode up the James River and across the big meadow to Eagle lake (directly east of the YHT ranch). Frank said the horse was a smooth, nice ride once ridden. Frank claims he was one of very few bronc riders to ride the horse, even for just 10 seconds when used for many years pro rodeo completion.

Painted Saint was never owned by Parks Canada, but was one of the more interesting visitors to the YHT ranch. The point here is that the YHT ranch, despite its isolated location, is a very dynamic and unique place used to train Park horses for over one hundred years. Painted Saint was used by stock contractor, Harry Vold for many years

on the Pro Rodeo circuit, and at age 20, died in a trailer wreck when returning from the National Finals Rodeo.

Rod Wallace

Retired National Park Warden

