

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydow Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambrecht Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Jerome Rilke George  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Bebel Proust  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France  
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz  
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz  
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka  
Sachs Poe Liebermann Kock Korolenko  
de Sade Praetorius Mistral Zetkin



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# **The Boy Ranchers on the Trail**

Willard F. Baker

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# THE BOY RANCHERS ON THE TRAIL

## CHAPTER I

### THE ROUND-UP

"Come on, Nort! It's your turn to cut out the next one!"

"S'pose I make a mux of it, Bud!"

"Shucks! You won't do that! You've roped a calf before!"

"Yes, but not at a big round-up like this. If I make a fizzle the fellows will give me the laugh!"

"What if they do? Everybody knows you haven't been at it long, and you've got to make a start. Besides, anybody's likely to make a mistake. That's why they put rubbers on the ends of pencils. Ride in now and snake out the next one, Nort!"

"All right, Bud! Here goes!"

Blaze, the pony Nort Shannon was riding toward the bunch of cattle gathered at Diamond X ranch for the big, spring round-up, leaped forward at the sound of his master's voice, and in response to the little jerk of the reins and the clap of heels against his sides. Into the herd of milling, turning and twisting cattle the intelligent animal made his way, needing hardly any guidance from Nort. The lad, by a mere touch, corrected the course of Blaze slightly, and in a moment he was heading for a calf which bawled loudly.

"Get him, Nort!" cried a voice from among the cowboys looking on.

"Don't get me fussed, Dick!" Nort shouted back to his brother, who sat astride his pony near Bud Merkle. "It'll be your turn next!"

Into the herd he wormed his way on Blaze, dodging here and there, but with his eyes ever on the calf he hoped to cut out so it could be branded. Nort leaned forward in his saddle, and then his cousin and brother, eagerly watching from outside the herd, saw the boy rancher's hand shoot up.

Through the air the rope went, turning, twisting, writhing and uncoiling like a snake. In an instant it had flipped around the hind legs of a calf.

"Good!" yelled Dick.

"Even Babe couldn't 'a' done better!" complimented Bud, enthusiastically.

"'Tisn't over yet!" gasped Nort, for he had hard work ahead of him, and the dust raised by thousands of hoofs was choking. "Wait 'till I get it to the branding corral!"

He leaned over in his other stirrup, causing the lariat to pull taut and, the next instant the calf flopped on its side.

"Snake him out, Blaze!" cried Nort to his pony, and the animal turned and dragged the prostrate calf along over the ground, an operation not as cruel as it sounds as the surface was inches thick in soft dust, like flour.

"That's the boy, Nort!" called his cousin Bud. "I knew you could do it! Now then, Dick! Let's see how you'll make out!"

"I can't throw a rope as good as Nort," answered the stouter lad, as he urged his pony, Blackie, into the herd. "But here goes!"

Meanwhile Nort had dragged the calf he had cut out to the corral where the branding was going on. Two cowboys, stationed there for the purpose, leaped forward and threw the calf over on its side, for it had managed to struggle to its feet when Nort ceased dragging it. One man twisted a front leg of the struggling creature back in a hammerlock and knelt on its neck. The other took hold of the upper hind leg, and with this hold prevented the calf from sprawling along on the ground.

"Sit on him!" called Mr. Merkel, owner of Diamond X and other ranches. He was superintending the round-up of his herds and

those entrusted to Bud, Nort and Dick in the first business venture of the boy ranchers. "Sit on him!" yelled Bud's father.

Accordingly the men sat on the calf, thus, with the holds they had secured, keeping it under restraint with the least possible pain to the small creature.

"Branding iron!" sang out Slim Degnan, foreman of the ranch.

A little blaze was flickering on the ground, not far from where the calf Nort had cut out was thrown and held. In a moment the fire-tender had seized the branding iron, and, a second or two later, it was being pressed on the calf's flank.

The creature bawled loudly, and kicked out, thereby nearly throwing off the men who were sitting on it. But the branding was all over in a moment, and the men leaped up, releasing the animal.

The calf stood, dazed for the time being, after it had scrambled to its feet, and then trotted out of the corral, lashing its side with its little tail. Plainly branded on it now, never to be completely effaced, was the mark of the ownership of Mr. Merkel— an X inside a diamond.

"Next!" called the branders:

"Here comes Dick!" shouted Bud, as Nort rode up beside him. "And he got his calf!" "Good!" exclaimed the brother. "I guess we're learning the business!"

"Surest thing you know!" asserted the son of the owner of Diamond X. "I told you it wasn't so hard, and you've done the same thing before."

"But not at such a big round-up," remarked Nort, as he prepared to ride in again and cut out another calf.

"Yes, it is big," admitted Bud, as he made ready for his share in the affair— his task being the same as that of his cousins— to cut out the calves for branding purposes. "It sure is a big round-up."

It had been in progress for days. Twice a year on the big, western ranches, the cattle are driven in from the outlying ranges, to be tallied, inspected, marked and shipped away. The spring and fall round-ups are always busy seasons at any ranch.

During the times between round-ups the new calves attained their growth, but they needed to have branded into their hides the marks of their owners. Then, too, some yearlings escaped branding at times, either by remaining out of sight at the round-up, or in the attending confusion.

Unbranded calves who had partly attained their growth, were termed "mavericks," and when the herds of different owners mingled, there was, usually, a division of the mavericks, since it could not be accurately told who owned them.

The title maverick was derived from a stock man of that name, whose practice was to claim *all* unbranded calves in a herd. His cowboys would ride about, cutting out the unmarked animals, with the cool statement:

"That's a maverick," meaning that it belonged to their "boss."

And so the name has commonly become associated with any half-grown, unbranded calf.

Mr. Merkel was the owner of several ranches, Square M, Triangle B and Diamond X, not to mention Diamond X Second, or Flume Valley, of which his son Bud, and the latter's cousins, Norton and Richard Shannon, were the nominal proprietors.

The cattle from Flume Valley, or "Happy Valley" as Bud called it after the mystery of the underground water was solved, were in the round-up with the others from his father's ranches.

For days preceding the lively doings I have just described, the cowboys, called in from distant ranges, had driven the cattle toward the central assembling point—the corrals at Diamond X.

Slowly the longhorns, the shorthorns and cattle with no horns at all, had been "hazed" in from their feeding grounds toward Diamond X. The cow punchers had galloped hard all day, and they had ridden herd at night, to keep the animals from straying. At night this was not so hard, for the animals were glad to rest during the darkness.

But during the day there was always some steer—often more than one—that wanted to run away from the herd. As this might

start a stampede it was necessary to drive the "striker" back, and this was, often enough, a difficult task.

Bud, Nort and Dick had borne their share of this difficult round-up task, and now, when the thousand or more of steers, calves and mavericks had been gathered at Diamond X, the work of tallying them, branding those that were without marks and shipping away the best was well under way.

In and out of the herd rode the boy ranchers, doing their best alongside of more seasoned "punchers." Calves were cut out, thrown and branded, to be quickly released and again mingle with the herd.

"Oh, I'm Captain Jinks,  
Of the Horse Marines!"

One of the cowboys, wiping the dust and sweat from his face, with his big, red silk handkerchief, or, rather, neckerchief, started this song. It was taken up by half a score of loud voices.

"Yi-yippy!" came in stentorian tones from Yellin' Kid. "This is the life!"

But as, just then, his pony slipped and he missed the throw he made for a calf, it is doubtful if Yellin' Kid felt as gay as he sounded.

"Hot work; eh, boys?" asked Mr. Merkel, when Dick, Nort and Bud rode past to get drinks of water.

"But it's great, all the same!" answered Dick, with shining eyes—eyes that gleamed amid a face dark with the tan of the western sun and grimy with the dust of the western plains.

"Glad you like it!" commented the proprietor of Diamond X as he kept on with his tallying. "How they coming, Slim?" he asked his foreman.

"Couldn't be better! Old Buck Tooth is doing a heap sight more than I ever dreamed a Zuni could."

"Bud said that his old Indian helper was up to snuff!" commented Mr. Merkel. "I'm glad to know it. Heard anything from Double Z?" he asked, and there was an anxious note in his voice.

"No, Hank and his gang seem to have quieted down after what I told 'em!"

"Well, I hope he doesn't make trouble for Bud and the boys. They're going back to Happy Valley to-night." "So I understand. Oh, shucks! Don't worry about Hank! He's all talk — he and that blustery foreman of his, Ike Johnson!"

There had been a dispute between the cowboys of Diamond X and those of Double Z, a ranch owned by the notorious Hank Fisher, a few days before the round-up, the subject of dispute being the ownership of certain mavericks. It had ended with the triumph of Slim Degnan, foreman of Mr. Merkel's holdings.

And so the round-up went on, the heat, the dust, the noise and confusion increasing as calf after calf, maverick after maverick, was branded, and the steers to be shipped were cut out, to be hazed over to the railroad stock yards.

And yet, with all the seeming confusion, there was order and system in the work.

"Well, I guess this is the last," remarked Mr. Merkel to his son, as Bud, with his cousins, rode slowly up to the ranch house, when the final calf had been cut out and the tally made. "You boys going back after grub?"

"Yep," answered Bud, but there was no enthusiasm in his voice. He, like his cousins, was too tired. For the day had been a grueling one, with the heat and hard work.

"You sure did make out a whole lot better than I ever thought you would," said Mr. Merkel, as he rode along with his son and nephew's. "Putting water into that valley made a big difference."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Bud. "Our stock will lay over anything you will ship from any of your three ranches, Dad!"

"I wouldn't wonder but what you are right, Bud! Well, let's wash up and eat."

One by one the cowboys drifted in, some singing ranch songs in spite of their weariness. Bud and his cousins were through with their meal first, and, having persuaded his sister, Nell, to pack a

basket of doughnuts, pie and cheese for him, Bud signalled to his cousins to join him out at the pony corral.

"Let's get an early start back to Happy Valley," he urged. "It's a long enough ride, anyhow."

"You said it!" commented Nort.

"Well, there's one thing we don't have to worry about, and that is not finding any water running into the reservoir," added Dick, as he slipped in through the gate and caught one of his ponies— not Blackie, who was tired out from the round-up. Each cow puncher, including the boy ranchers, had several animals in his "string."

"No, I guess, since we solved the mystery of the water supply, we'll have no more trouble," agreed Bud.

The boy ranchers rode over the trail to their own camp—it was actually a camp, for permanent ranch buildings had not yet been erected in Happy Valley, though some were projected. Tents formed the abiding place of our heroes, and as they were only there during the summer months the canvas shelters served very well, indeed.

The moon rose, shining down from a starlit sky, as the rough but faithful and sturdy cow ponies ambled along. Now the boy ranchers would be down in some swale, or valley, and again topping one of the foothills which led to Buffalo Ridge or Snake Mountain, between which elevations lay Happy Valley, where the cattle of Diamond X Second were quartered.

"There she is—the old camp," murmured Dick, as they started down the slope which led to the collection of tents erected against the earthen and stone bank of the reservoir.

"And maybe I won't hit the hay!" exclaimed Bud, with a yawn. "We don't have to get up to-morrow until we're ready."

"Oh, boy!" cried Nort in delight.

They rode forward, and were almost at their camp when Bud, who had trotted ahead, pulled his pony to a sudden stop and cried out:

"Hold on there! Who are you and where are you going?"

At the same moment his cousins saw the moon gleaming on the .45 gun which Bud drew from his holster.

## CHAPTER II

### A CURIOUS INSTRUMENT

"What's the matter, Bud?" asked Dick, as he urged his animal forward in a jump, until he was beside his cousin,

"Some one's up there around the tunnel entrance," responded Bud Merkel. "I saw 'em dodge back out of the light." Then, raising his voice, he cried: "Come on, now! None of your tricks! I've got you covered!"

"I don't see any one," spoke Nort.

"They're there, all right," asserted Bud. "Come on, fellows," he exclaimed, "we'll have to look into this. There was trouble enough with getting water to stay in Happy Valley, without letting some Greaser in to queer the works again! Come on!"

He and his cousins rode their horses up the rather steep and winding trail that led from the bottom of the reservoir to the top, where a big iron pipe, sticking out under the mountain like the head of some great serpent, brought from the distant Pocut River a stream, without which it would have been impossible to raise cattle in the valley the boy ranchers claimed as particularly their own.

"Who you reckon it is?" asked Nort, as his pony scrambled up between the animals of Dick and Bud.

"Oh, some prowler that may have been rustling our grub while we were over at the round-up," was the answer.

"They couldn't get any cattle, for there aren't any to get," observed Dick. This was true, as all the animals had been driven from Happy Valley over to Diamond X. Later such as were not shipped away, and many of the calves and mavericks would be returned to fatten up and grow in readiness for the spring tallying.

"I don't just like this!" murmured Bud, as he again urged his pony forward. "Have your guns ready, fellows!"

And while they are thus riding toward the place where a strange tunnel pierced Snake Mountain, I shall take this opportunity to present, more formally than I have yet had a chance to do, my new readers to the boy ranchers. For that is what Bud Merkel, and Nort and Dick Shannon called themselves, being that, in fact.

Bud was a western lad, the son of Henry Merkel, who had been a ranchman all his mature years. He lived at Diamond X ranch, with his wife and daughter Nell. Some time before this present story opens Bud's cousins from the east had come to spend the summer with him, while their father and his wife made a trip to South America.

Nort and Dick, though "tenderfeet" at the beginning, had quickly fallen into the ways of the west, and in the first volume of this series, "The Boy Ranchers," I was privileged to tell you how they helped solve a mystery that revolved around Diamond X.

This mystery had to do with two college professors, and a strange, ancient animal. But it would not be fair to my new readers to disclose, here, all the secrets of that book.

So successful was the first summer which Nort and Dick spent at their uncle's ranch, that they were allowed to repeat it the following season. But this time there was a change. As related in the second volume, "The Boy Ranchers in Camp," Mr. Merkel had, by utilizing an ancient underground water-course beneath Snake Mountain, and by making a dam in Pocut River, brought water to a distant valley he owned.

This valley was originally called Buffalo Wallow, the source of the name being obvious. But once water was brought through the underground course, and piped to a reservoir, whence it could be distributed to drinking troughs for the cattle, and also used to irrigate the land, it enabled a fine crop of fodder to be grown. With the bringing of the water to Buffalo Wallow, or Flume Valley, as Bud called the place, it was possible to do what had never been done before—raise cattle there. Bud's father let him take this valley ranch as his own, and Nort and Dick were boy partners associated with

their western cousin, Mr. Shannon putting up part of the needed capital to make the start for his sons.

All would have gone well except for the mysterious stoppage of the flow of water, which stoppage, if continued, would mean disaster.

How the water fight at Diamond X Second (as the valley ranch was sometimes called) ended, and how the strange mystery was solved, is the story in the second volume, and I absolutely refuse to go into more details about it here. It would not be playing the game square.

At any rate the water was finally turned back into the underground tunnel, and then, in order to better guard this vital necessity, Mr. Merkel had the entrance to the tunnel boarded up— egress being possible only when heavy doors, at either end, were unlocked.

I might say that while the tunnel was the old water-course of a vanished river, the shaft under the mountain appeared, in ancient times, to have been used by the Aztecs, or some Mexican tribes, for hiding their store of gold away from the Spaniards. There were secret passages and rooms in the tunnel, to say nothing of hidden water gates.

Who had constructed these, and what actual use had been made of them was, of course, lost in the dim and ancient past. But that it was the Aztecs, or some allied race, was the statement of learned men who examined the tunnel.

After the water fight at Diamond X Second had terminated in favor of the boy ranchers, and great copper levers that operated the hidden water gates had been removed, the tunnel was boarded up, and was now seldom entered.

But now, as Bud and his cousins rode back from the big roundup, and the western lad had, as he thought, seen some one sneaking about the forbidden gate, there was a feeling of apprehension in the hearts of himself and cousins.

They had now reached the top level of the reservoir which held a storage supply of water. The reservoir was a great semi-circular

bank of earth and atones, wide enough on top for two to ride abreast.

"I don't see any one," remarked Nort, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom and shadows into which the face of the tunnel and the locked gate were thrown by the moonlight and clouds.

"Nor I," added Dick.

"Well, I saw some one!" insisted Bud. "It was a man, as sure as snakes, and he seemed to be trying to open the big gate."

This gate was made of heavy bolted planks and was set on hinges in a jamb of other planks and boards that closed the reservoir end of the tunnel water-course. A similar barrier and big door was at the Pocut River end.

"Well, if he was here, he seems to be gone," observed Nort "Maybe it was a sheep herder, Bud."

"Well, if any of that gentry think they can drive their flock over here, and water their woolies at my expense, they're mistaken," declared Bud with emphasis. "Sheep men have to be, I reckon, but they're out of place in a cow country. Hello, there!" he called, loudly. "Come on out and show yourself!"

But there was no answer, and the only sound, aside from the creaking of the damp saddle leathers, was the splashing of water as it flowed from the big pipe and into the reservoir.

"Guess he lit out," observed Bud, thrusting his gun back into the holster.

"Or else you didn't see him," chuckled Nort. "Maybe your eyes are full of dust, same as mine are, from that round-up."

"Oh, I saw somebody all right!" declared Bud. "Might 'a' been one of Buck Tooth's Indian friends making a call, but —"

He suddenly ceased speaking and leaned over in his saddle to gaze earnestly at something on the ground. It was something that glittered and shone in the mystic moonlight as Nort and Dick could see. "What's that?" inquired the latter.

In answer Bud slipped from his saddle and picked up the object which the moonlight had revealed.

"What in the world is this?" asked the boy rancher, as he held up a curious instrument. "Is this the start of another mystery!"

