

Jim and Running Bear

Wild Horses

By Dwayne Sharpe

Jim lived on a ranch in the northwest. He raised cattle mostly along with a small herd of horses used running his ranch. He had a few ranch hands; cowboys that helped run the ranch. Jim was a quiet man who didn't talk much, but he was very smart in the ways of hunting, tracking, surviving, and taking care of animals.

Jim didn't have a lot of close friends, but those that knew him felt that he was honest and hard working. One of Jim's best friends was called Running Bear. Running Bear lived in an Indian village a few miles north of the ranch. About once a week, Jim and Running Bear would find time to do something together. Sometimes they would go hunting or fishing and other times find some other adventure.



It had been a long week for Jim, as some of the fences had to be mended. He was looking forward to a couple days off. But first, he had to hitch up the wagon and go into town for some supplies. The trip into town took awhile as it was a two hour ride in the wagon. He didn't go into town much because of this. He decided to swing by the Indian village and talk to his friend Running Bear and see if anyone there needed anything.

Jim arrived at the village just as the morning clouds were burning off. He saw Running Bear and waved him over. "Hey Running Bear!" said Jim. "I'm on my way into town and wanted to know if you needed anything."

Running Bear replied, "We could use some more blankets. We also have some corn and a couple of fox pelts to trade."



"Corn?" said Jim. "I thought you needed more food."

“A trading party from a tribe up north came and traded corn for one of our horses”, said Running Bear. “The horse was to be a gift from their chief to one of their braves that was marrying his daughter. Now we have too much corn.”

“Well, load it up and I will see what I can trade for it”, said Jim.

Running Bear and some other braves carried the corn in big burlap sacks and placed it in the wagon. “I should be back before nightfall”, said Jim. He then headed out towards town. Jim was a smart and fair trader. He would do his best to get as many blankets as possible for Running Bear’s people.

During his ride into town, Jim munched on a big red apple. He had three nice apple trees on his ranch and the apples were just ripening. He arrived in town just after noon. He pulled the wagon up in front of the trading post. He knew the man that owned the trading post and found him to be a fair man. His name was John. He took a couple ears of corn in with him to begin the trading. “Hello John”, Jim greeted.



John like Jim, but did not see him very often. He knew Jim owned a ranch east of town and that it was a long ride. “What da ya got there, Jim?”, asked John.

“Corn”, said Jim. “Bags of corn”. I’ll pick out some supplies while you look it over.”

John looked at the two ears Jim had brought in. It looked like white sweet corn. He then went out to the wagon and looked over the bags and began to unload them.

Jim needed some flour, beans, some more fence wire, a new pair of wire cutters, and some grease for the wagon wheels. He also needed a new work shirt. He then looked at the blankets.

John returned carrying the two fox pelts. “You didn’t talk about these! I just got a letter asking for some high quality fox skins.”



Jim said, “The fox skins and the corn came from the Indian village. They would like to trade for some blankets. Here is the stuff that I need.”

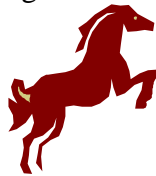
John thought a moment and then went over to the blanket stack and pulled out some blankets. "I can give ya six blankets for the corn and fox skins", said John.

Jim said, "That sounds fair. How much for the flour, wire, and other stuff?"

John and Jim dickered for a few minutes before agreeing to an amount. Then John said, "Did ya hear about the Army needing horses? They will pay \$20 for each good horse that's broken and \$15 for wild ones."

Jim was interested. He had caught horses for the Army before, but he didn't know that they wanted any now. "Thanks, I'll go see the sergeant." Jim settled his bill and John helped him load the wagon with the blankets and supplies. Jim then drove the wagon to the end of town by the blacksmith. John had told him that the sergeant was there.

Jim found the sergeant and talked to him about the horses. The sergeant needed six horses and agreed that if Jim could provide four of them, he would take them. He needed to bring the horses to the fort in the next few days. Jim turned the wagon around and headed back out of town toward the Indian village.



The sun was low in the sky when Jim arrived at the village. Running Bear came out to greet him. Jim handed the blankets to Running Bear, and then asked, "Do you want to go on a horse round-up? The army is paying good money for some horses."

Running Bear was always ready for an adventure and he replied, "Start early. Catch more".

Jim totally agreed and told Running Bear to meet him at the tall cactus at sun-up the next day. Jim drove the wagon back to the ranch and unloaded it. He then tended his chores with the horses and other livestock. He was looking forward to tomorrow's adventure.

The tall cactus was simply a meeting place near Jim's ranch. There were several different cactus plants all growing near each other. The tall one was a saguaro cactus surrounded by barrel cacti. Jim arrived early and admired the tall cactus. As Jim looked north, he could just make out a small cloud of dust. He knew Running Bear was coming.



When Running Bear arrived, they said their greetings. Then Jim said, "I think we might go out near Red Valley and see if we can spot some horses." Together they rode toward the east in the direction of the valley. It lay surrounded by desert, a hidden oasis. There was a water hole there and grass grew in the valley enough to maintain a small herd. Jim was packing extra ropes and water. It was going to be hot and hard work capturing mustangs.

Jim and Running Bear stopped to rest and have something to eat. Jim had some beef jerky which he shared with Running Bear. He then gave some water to the horses as the desert was quite hot. When Jim finished watering the horses, he stopped suddenly. He pulled out his gun and pointed it Running Bear and said, "Don't move!". Jim then fired twice. A diamond back rattlesnake had approached Running Bear and had coiled up ready to strike.

Running Bear turned to look at what Jim had shot. He then said, "Ah, Jim. Why couldn't you have done that before you gave that dried meat to me? We now have fresh meat!" Running Bear liked to joke with Jim, but was glad that Jim killed the snake. The sounds from the horses lapping up the water had hidden the sound of the rattler.



They both mounted up and rode towards the valley. After awhile, they arrived on the outskirts of the valley. They found a place in the shade overlooking the valley where they could spot any movement. Jim had his field glasses and looked over the valley. He spotted the water hole and looked for horses. He didn't see any. He handed the glasses to Running Bear.

Running Bear looked over the area and concentrated on a couple of trees on the far side where there was a small spring. He kept looking and then he saw movement. He almost shouted, "There, under the far trees!"

Jim took back the glasses and looked again. He waited and then finally saw what looked like horse legs. And then one of the mustangs came into full view. "Yes, it looks like there are two or three", said Jim.



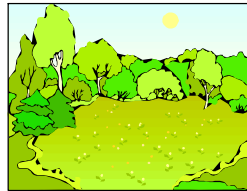
They decided to enter the valley from the east. That way they could drive the horses toward a very small box canyon at the end. They then mounted up and circled around. They knew that they only had one chance to do this as their own horses were tired from

the heat and the ride out here. Just before they entered the valley, they spread out. Jim took the south side and Running Bear took the north side. Then with a whoop and a holler, they took off down the valley making as much noise as they could. They wanted to scare the horses into running further down the valley and into the canyon.



There were nine horses in the herd; one was a stallion, their leader. He tried to lead the horses toward the south, but Jim yelled and swung his rope around his head scaring the other horses. Jim let the stallion go as it would not make a good army horse. The rest of the horses ran right into the box canyon where Jim and Running Bear had planned. Once here, they all rested.

It was late afternoon and the shadows were growing long. It was time to collect firewood and prepare a camp for the night. Running Bear walked his and Jim's horses down to the watering hole and let them drink their fill. He then hobbled them near the trees where the grass was growing.



Jim made the camp right in front of the canyon entrance. He knew that the mustangs would not come out near the campfire. It was as good as a fence. Running Bear returned and brought some more wood.



Running Bear said, "How many good horses you think there are?"

Jim replied, "There was at least one mare with a colt. We'll have to let them go. There was one that looked a little lame. That leaves five. I hope there are at least four good horses."

In the morning, Jim and Running Bear stretched rope across the canyon entrance and then entered the canyon with their spare ropes. The mustangs were very restless and scared. Jim looked them over carefully. Three horses would have to be released. That was the first task. Jim and Running Bear slowly separated the horses to the ones to be released

were near the canyon entrance. Running Bear lowered the ropes and Jim waved the horses out. Now there were five horses.

Jim worked with horses well. He talked to them in gentle tones. Soon he was able to determine that one of the horses was quite old. The army would not want him either. Jim and Running Bear repeated their movements from earlier and they released that horse. Next, Jim took the ropes and one by one, lassoed each horse. He let the rope hang while the horse got use to it.

Jim and Running Bear then had breakfast and then saddled up their horses and prepared for the ride to the fort. There, they would exchange the horses for the money they offered. However, the day was early and it was still a long ride to the fort. Jim rode into the canyon and grabbed two of the ropes that were tied to the mustangs. Running Bear was right behind him and made a pass for the other two ropes. Together they rode out of the canyon. At first, the mustangs refused to move, but with gentle tones and a pull on the ropes, the horses followed, as far back as the ropes would allow them to be.

The fort was about a half a days ride south of the canyon. Neither Jim nor Running Bear wanted to stop as the mustangs might get startled and try to run. As they approached the fort, the gates swung open and they rode in leading the horses.



Jim spotted the sergeant and said, “I’ve got some good horses here. They are wild and need to be corralled.”

The sergeant had two men take the ropes holding the horses and lead them off to a corral. “Good Job, Jim”, said the sergeant. “These horses will do just fine. I will get your payment.”

Jim asked Running Bear, “What are you going to do with your half of the money?”

Running Bear replied, “I need a new knife and more blankets for my village.”



The sergeant returned with the money and Jim and Running Bear rode out of the fort towards Jim’s ranch. On the ride they talked about their good fortune and of the good shot Jim had at the snake. Together they arrived at Jim’s ranch, but before Running Bear departed, they agreed that they would do something again in about a week.