

Buckaroo Bookshelf

Here are 28 classic cowboy-, horseman- and horsemanship-themed books to add to your winter reading list or Western bookshelf.

IN HIS LATEST NOVEL *Some Horses*, writer Tom McGuane describes a person's admiration for horses.

"Those who love horses are impelled by an ever-receding vision, some enchanted transformation through which the horse and the rider become a third, much greater thing."

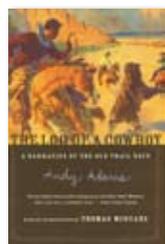
McGuane has a way of composing words about horses like a melody, and his books take readers to a world of which they want to be a part.

There are scores of such great books about horses and horsemanship, cowboys and vaqueros, that invite you to explore a different time and place or the magical relationship between horsemen and their horses. In this era of digital downloads, wireless delivery and Kindles (a device that displays downloaded media), there are still

places where bookshelves filled with dusty volumes lure you into learning about Western heritage the old-fashioned way.

This month, I've compiled a list of books that have entertained, enlightened and inspired generations of horsemen. I'd never attempt to decide which, if any, of these titles are the best cowboy, vaquero or horsemanship books ever written. However, I will say that each of these books holds an important place in the hearts and on the bookshelves of people who love the West.

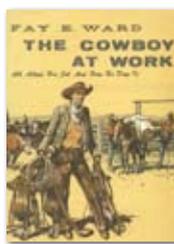
Many of the titles are out of print, but with a little searching you can acquire most of them. They are the foundation for the library of many who live in the West and ride today, and the enduring value these works continue to give is a gift that can be passed on to new generations.



LOG OF A COWBOY (1903),
by Andy Adams

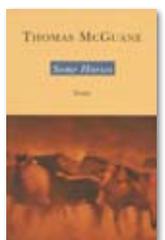
A classic chronicle of a cowboy who lived before the open range was fenced, when wild cattle roamed free. Adams' description of cowboying

and ranching is a lasting contribution to the vernacular of time past.



THE COWBOY AT WORK: ALL ABOUT HIS JOB AND HOW HE DOES IT (1958),
by Fay Ward

Ward's ode to the cowboy's work ethic could be the best book ever written on the working cowboy. Ward worked the grub line for more than 40 years on ranches from Canada to Mexico. This book is so complete and simply written that many a young cowpuncher still considers it de rigueur for proper training.



SOME HORSES (1999),
by Thomas McGuane

One of the finest collections of stories ever written about horses and the people who enjoy them. McGuane's deep and contagious passion

for his subject touches even those who wouldn't know which end of a horse to feed.



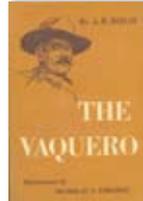
WE POINTED THEM NORTH (1939), E.C. "Teddy Blue" Abbott and Helene Huntington Smith

Abbott's story is a window into the 1880s, a time of a "wild and happy cowboy who knew 'em all—the harlots and the high-rollers, the Cheyenne and the Sioux, the cussin' and the cattle." Smith said of writing the book with Abbott, "I just kept out of the way of his words."



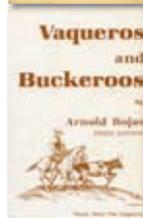
LAST BUCKAROO (1995),
by Mackey Hedges

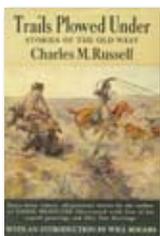
Hedges still works for cowboy wages and lives the words of his book's dedication. There, he writes that he knows the only future fate holds for a cowboy like him is a dirty bedroll and a worn-out saddle. But it's a lifestyle he loves to the core.



CALIFORNIA VAQUERO (1953); LORE OF THE CALIFORNIA VAQUERO (1958); LAST OF THE VAQUEROS (1960); THE VAQUERO (1964); BITS, BITING AND SPANISH HORSES (1970); THESE WERE THE VAQUEROS (1974); VAQUEROS AND BUCKAROO (1979), by Arnold Rojas

One can't separate any of the individual titles that ultimately made up Vaqueros and Buckaroos, the 1979 compilation of Arnold "Chief" Rojas' writings. Rojas is, unquestionably, the most important chronicler of the life and lore of the vaquero, and his books tell the tales like no others. A voracious reader, he never progressed past a third-grade education, yet in Rojas vaqueros found their voice.

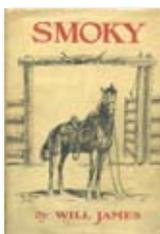




TRAILS PLOWED UNDER (1927), by Charles M. Russell

“He savied the cow, the grass, the blizzard, the drought, the wolf, the young puncher in love

with his own shadow, the old waddie remembering rides and thirsts of far away and long ago,” wrote author J. Frank Dobie of the authenticity of this watershed Russell work.



SMOKY THE COW HORSE (1926), by Will James

James’ first book, this is the story of a horse’s life in the heart of cowboy country. An early

winner of a John Newberry Medal, this book started James’ career as one of the world’s most popular Western writers and artists. The work was also made into several motion pictures.



COWBOY POETRY: A GATHERING (1985), edited by Hal Cannon

This little volume jump-started a cultural movement celebrated at the first annual National Cowboy

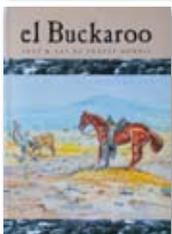
Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, in 1985.



EL VAQUERO (1989), EL BUCKAROO (1995), by Ernie Morris

These two books are considered indispensable sources for information about the horses, gear and their subjects’ ways. Throughout, Morris offers memories of the ones he rode with and who

preceded him. Both books are lavishly and lovingly illustrated by the author.



THINK HARMONY WITH HORSES (1978), by Ray Hunt, TRUE UNITY (1987), by Tom Dorrance, GROUNDWORK (1997), by Buck Brannaman

These three books started a horsemanship revolution

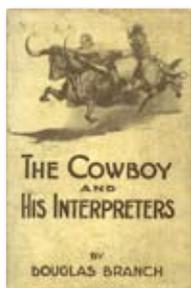
that’s still evolving today. The enlightened insight on training handed down from Dorrance to Hunt to Brannaman continues to inspire horsemen and -women worldwide.



THEY SADDLE THE WEST (1975), by Lee Rice and Glenn Vernam

This often-quoted and revered book deals with the most influential saddlemakers. A precise and elegant work, it

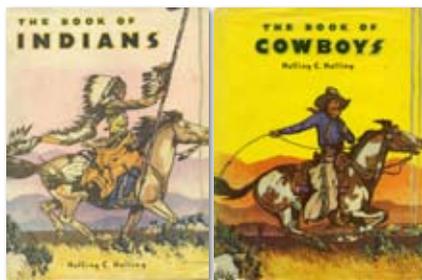
contains some of the most useful information about saddlery and craftsmen you never knew you needed to know. Though the book is rare, it’s worth the search.



THE COWBOY AND HIS INTERPRETERS (1926), Douglas Branch

This book took the cowboy seriously during an era of pulp novels and one-reel motion pictures.

Illustrated by three of the best Western artists—Will James, Charles M. Russell and Joe De Yong—the author showed the real life of the cowboy rather than “the golden and romantic haze of the cowboy in fiction, on the stage and in the cinema.”



THE BOOK OF THE INDIANS (1935), THE BOOK OF THE COWBOYS (1936), by Hollings C. Hollings

These companion books by H.C. and Lucille Hollings are considered children’s classics. Published in the mid-1930s, a time when kids still dreamed of heading West to work on a ranch, the two volumes are filled with charming stories about the lives of cowboys and American Indians.

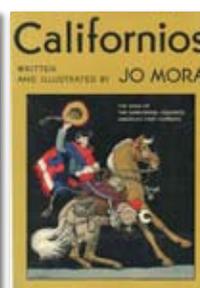
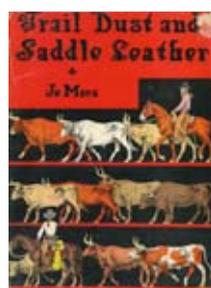


NORTH AMERICAN COWBOY: AN ALBUM (1983), by Jay Dusard; AFTER BARBED WIRE (1985), by Kurt Markus



Both of these masterpieces helped create a stylistic renaissance in cowboy photography.

Both photographers rode with their subjects and participated in the work. Each book is a timeless pictorial compilation based on the respect and friendship the photographers felt for the cowboys and buckaroos who rode ahead of them.



TRAIL DUST AND SADDLE LEATHER (1946), CALIFORNIOS (1949), by Jo Mora

In Ed Ainsworth’s classic *The Cowboy in Art*, Mora is described as an American original, just like the cowboys he depicts in his two masterpieces. Mora died in 1947, but his words and artwork live on today as the benchmark they were when he first created them. 🐾

Bill Reynolds is the author of The Art of the Western Saddle and co-author of The Faraway Horses and Believe: A Horseman’s Journey, both collaborations with Buck Brannaman. Reynolds lives in California’s Santa Ynez Valley. Send comments on this story to edit@westernhorseman.com.