

10. KENT STEVENS (1951 - 2003)

I had the privilege of working with many fine people during my Phantom Canyon years – none finer than Kent Stevens.

An old friend, Hugh Force, a construction supervisor, called me one day in 1979. He said that he had an exceptionally fine young carpenter working for him – Kent Stevens.

Hugh said he would hate to see Kent go, but he knew that Kent really wanted ranch work. Kent, a Fort Collins native, had had some ag training and ranch experience (it turned out that Kent had worked with Richard Borgmann¹ on the Double X ranch near Tie Siding one summer). Could I give him a job? I wouldn't be sorry.

I sure wasn't. Kent and I worked together for the next 12 years.

When the ranch operation really started to expand, Kent became the ranch foreman. If there was ever a problem in all those years, it was his natural modesty, a reticence sometimes when it came to telling other men what do. What mattered more than anything was that he was truly respected by the ranch hands who worked with him. He set a great example.

Kent brought care and thoughtfulness to his work. He was an excellent carpenter and mechanic and his instincts for craftsmanship were evident in everything he undertook.

He was loyal to a fault (working with me sure tested that quality). I trusted him implicitly. I could tell Kent anything and never think twice about his absolute confidence.

Kent's near-immaculate silver 1973 Ford pickup with a propane fuel conversion was in use on the ranch for all the years he worked with me. The other ranch hands had a running joke that Kent *"had replaced every part on his pickup except the lug nuts."*²

As soon as he started work, Kent moved into the north house on Rabbit Creek and started repairing the other house across the creek to the south.

That was the year that we had so much water come down the creek. The creek was way too high to ford with his pickup, so Kent would carry his tools and supplies over on horseback. There were a few days when his horse even had to swim a few strokes. That's why we built the big bridge across the creek later.

I only remember being on the outs with Kent one time, and that only lasted part of a day.

Jumping ahead in this history for a moment: The first time we ran cows on the George Creek Grazing Permit³ was in June of 1980. It was a last-minute deal engineered by Sandy Oskamp,⁴ wherein we bought some old Brackenbury cows and the 'V Bar Open A' brand from the 'Cherokee Meadows' speculator/developer to get the grazing permit.

We were very shorthanded and pinched for time. Neither Kent nor I had ever been on George Creek and we had only cryptic directions from Bob Webb (b. 1938), who had worked on the Brackenbury Ranch, more or less to the effect *"...when you get 'em (the cows and calves) across the creek (Sheep Creek), turn right when you see the blaze on that big ol' tree and head 'em up over the hill."*

On our cattle drive up the Cherokee Park Road, we cut 68 cow-calf pairs off from the main herd at Munz Lane⁵ and Kent and I pushed them down towards Sheep Creek while the main herd headed on towards Lyle Van Wanning's place. We planned to be back with the main herd in three or four hours.

We pushed the lead cow and some of her cohorts into the willows and across Sheep Creek. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to us (we figured this out later), as we turned back to urge the rest of the cows and calves into the creek, the lead cow had turned left in the willows and began a pinwheel movement. She and her followers emerged from the willows a hundred yards

or so down the creek, going in the opposite direction and then rejoined the tail end of the herd just starting into the willows.

So, round and round they went. Kent and I spent a goodish part of the day thrashing around with our horses in the creek and the willows and hollering, trying to bust the pinwheel. The cows were almost as confused as we were (they had never been to George Creek either).

Finally, in the late afternoon we got headed up the hill through timber and over to George Creek about dark (we never did find the tree with the blaze). We had shouted ourselves too hoarse to speak. But even if we could (speak), we weren't.

It turned out that we had packed nothing to eat and the only sustenance between us was a can of warm beer in my saddle bag – all shook up – which we split. That's enough to make anyone cranky, me for sure, and even Kent.

We finally got the herd pushed back where we thought they belonged and it was way after dark when we got back to the Cherokee Park Road.

Fortunately, as soon as we were able to speak again, we did. Lots more about Kent to follow...

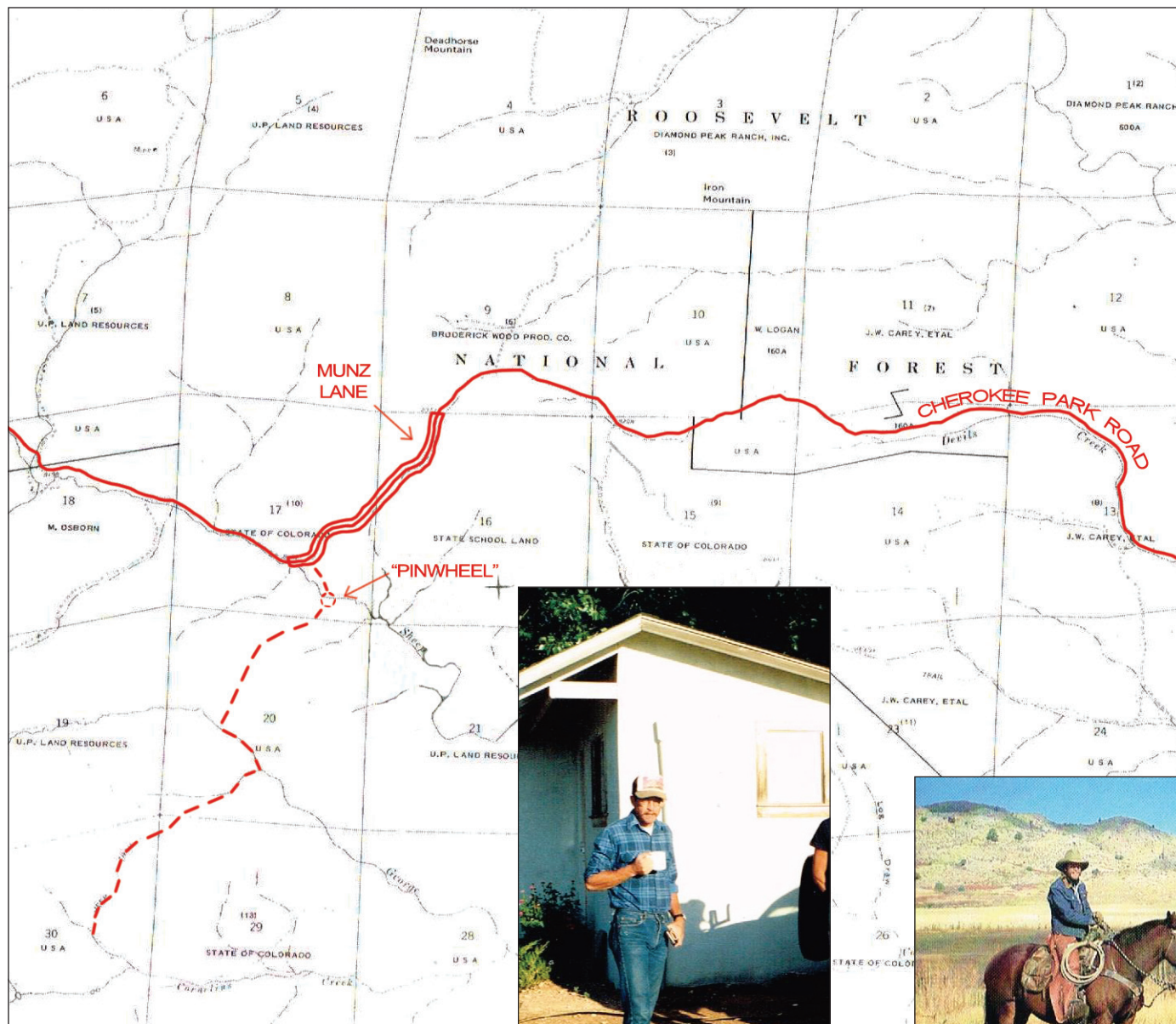
¹ More about Richard later.

² Over the years, I had seen farmhands and cowboys beat up their boss's pickups. So, in our operation, I required every ranch hand to supply his own pickup, tools, horse trailer and horse, which the ranch leased from them as part of their compensation package. The deal was that the ranch would pay for any repair parts needed, but each ranch hand had to be able to do all of their own mechanic work (an exception was made for auto machine shop work, like grinding valves, boring blocks or milling heads). The result was that we always had a decently maintained (and presentable) fleet of ranch vehicles.

³ More about the George Creek Permit later.

⁴ More about Sandy later.

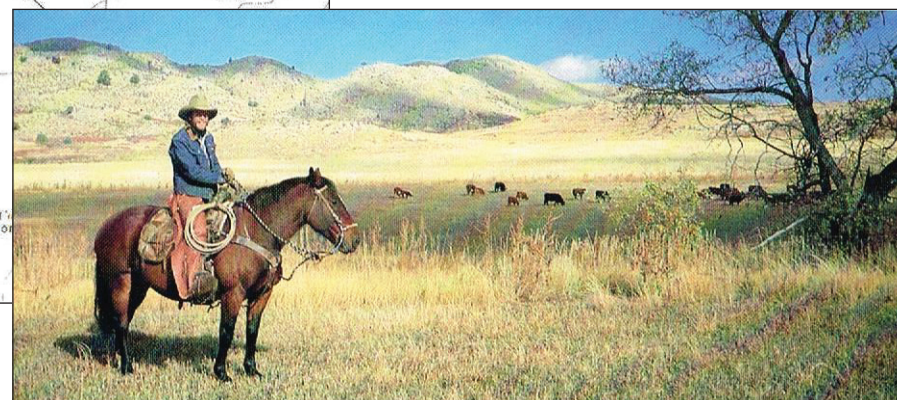
⁵ Named for the Munz family, who owned what is now the Upper Cherokee Park State Wildlife Area in the 1940s.



Siri, Andrea, Kent and Lacey Stevens at Waterfall Ranch, October 1986. Lacey and Andrea were born on the ranch.



Kent outside the "Turkey Shed" on Waterfall Ranch, October 1988.



Kent on Rabbit Creek 1984.