

Modoc County Record  
Carlos Street  
Alturas, CA 96101

Attn: Rick

By Jean Bilodeaux

Blade was gathered by a helicopter chasing him and his band into a trap. He was transferred to a holding pen and there he died. BLM states that their wild horse gathers average less than one percent death rate. However this was not the case with Blade's herd. Fourteen percent of the Carter Reservoir wild horse herd died at, or shortly after their capture.

The Carter herd gather was relatively small compared to the more publicized Calico Complex gather that took place from Dec. to Feb. near Gerlach, Nev., south of Cedarville. As national attention focused on the round up it became a media event. People came from across the nation to view what was happening. Not all that came saw the glorious image of the West as portrayed on television. Many saw terrified horses run for miles across rocky or snow covered terrain, until they were exhausted. They saw horses with their legs broken during the capture. They saw heavily pregnant mares run until they aborted their foals. Two nursing foals, separated from their mothers, were run until their hooves fell off, eventually dying a painful death, alone.

Tally for the gather: 1,922 wild horses gathered, 40 horses dead, 30 foals aborted. No figures were available for deaths occurring during the weeks after the gather at the facility.

Before the Calico gather, retired BLM wild horse expert Bill Phillips warned the BLM, "I think the Calico complex wild horses should be gathered, but don't do it in February. The mares will abort their foals."

His advice was ignored, and 30 mares aborted their unborn foals.

As word spread about the inhumane treatment of the horses during the gathers, demonstrations were held from New York to Sacramento. Shortly after the demonstrations the BLM terminated the Calico gather stating they had miscounted the wild horses and were within their appropriate herd management levels. Another proposed gather was postponed.

Some ranchers see nothing wrong with these gathering techniques, perhaps the question might be posed, "Would you want BLM to gather your cattle in this manner?"

In July 1975 BLM used a water trap (a corral built around a water hole) to capture 80 wild horses. This practice was abandoned in Oct. 1976 when the agency started using helicopters.



A mare and her newly born foal with umbilical cord attached are run into a trap on the Devil's Garden. The mare bolted out of the trap at the last minute and the foal was captured, but not released to be with its mother. The contractor is paid for each horse or foal captured.

Three people who used to catch mustangs, when it was legal to do so, offer advice.

All agree, "Don't ever run them."

One mustanger related that it took several days to walk a herd into a trap. It made for less trauma for everyone involved, both horse and man. Then he'd teach the mustang to follow him, not halter break him, so the horse couldn't be stolen.

Another mustanger said, "We'd sneak up on them and rope 'em. We'd never run them, it's not a good idea. Besides the mustangs have more stamina than a saddle horse carrying a rider."

Another said they'd set snares to catch their front legs when the horses walked by. That way they couldn't run away, but care was taken to be as gentle as possible to not scare them. "You'd be surprised to know how little time it took to get them tamed."

Would gathers without helicopters work? Could modern day local cowboys be taught to use the old mustanger tricks?

Still overpopulation is a problem.

The "excess" wild horses are rounded up, removed from their range, the only homes they've ever known, and transported to long-term holding facilities in the mid-West. The American taxpayer is charged \$3.92 per day per horse to house these 'excess'

horses. This amounts to about \$27 million a year. In the wild horse's place on the range, cattle are being grazed for a price of about \$1.35 a month.

Perhaps one should ask why remove wild horses from the range at a cost of more than \$600 per head and then pay almost \$4 per head per day for 20 years, so cattle can graze on these same lands for less than five cents a day?



Horses are not the only animals on the range that can degrade the quality of water holes. Here cattle are coming in to drink on a land that has been fenced off to horses for approximately 8 years.

“You wait five to seven years between gathers. Most adoptions are of colts and horses under five years of age. If you gathered a few young ones each year, you wouldn't have the glut of unadoptable horses,” suggests Phillips as a means of lowering the number of unadoptable horses and to help solve the problem of overpopulation.

BLM has been using birth control implants on mares to decrease their fertility rates.

The Mustang Makeover, where trainers are allowed 100 days to train their mustang in a competition and then it is sold, is growing in popularity. However, it is being found that, as the old mustanger said, “teach them to follow and they won't be stolen,” the mustangs will bond to their trainer, but not necessarily to their new owners.

Blade is gone. Thousands of Blade's herd mates nationwide are gone. Wild horse herds are being zeroed out. At one time the carrier pigeons blackened our nation's skies, buffalo filled the American plains. Will Blade and his herd mates join the growing list of vanishing species of our historic past, valued too late, sacrificed in the name of "progress?"

This concludes a four part series touching on and exploring a very complex problem facing the wild horses near Cedarville and in the United States. No matter how you feel on the subject, I want you to remember one tough little mustang.

He wasn't 7, he was only 5.

He had a family.

He wasn't bothering anyone.

His name was Blade.



Blade

Websites for further information, to register your opinions or for petitions to sign:

[www.thecloudfoundation.org](http://www.thecloudfoundation.org)

[americanherds.blogspot.com](http://americanherds.blogspot.com)

[www.idausa.org](http://www.idausa.org)

[www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov](http://www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov)

or email your senator or congressman listed on page 2

More articles on wild horses in and near Modoc county will follow.