

Home on the Range

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WHILE ON DUTY with the Air Force in Texas, I met a Texan who seemed to be an up-to-date version of the old cowhand. I was on my way to see a friend who lived about sixty miles outside of Dallas. I was using the tried and true method of travel called hitch-hiking and found myself all alone on the outskirts of Dallas at about midnight.

After I had waited for what seemed like days, an old Chevrolet came to a stop beside me.

"Where yuh headed, Soldier?" greeted me as the door of the car swung open. I told him, and was informed that he was headed for a rodeo about twenty-five miles from my destination. Our conversation followed what seems to be an age-old pattern: "Where you stationed? Where you from? How do you like Texas? I've had this car for quite a while, but she gets me where I want to go." This fellow was dressed in what seems to be the uniform of the western people. He had the inevitable worn Levi's, blue denim shirt, high-heeled and pointed toe boots, a plaid Mackinaw, and a nondescript light Stetson.

As we approached the town in which he was supposed to stop, he decided he would like to have a cup of coffee. There was not the faintest sign of a place in which a cup of coffee would be forthcoming; so he decided to go on to the next town to get one. Unfortunately, there was no place open there either. After this became apparent to my friend, he stopped in a filling station (also closed) and made a rather profound statement.

"I came all the way down here to git a cup o' coffee, and I'm gonna have one!" I didn't know quite what to expect after this, but I was soon enlightened. He rummaged around in the trunk of his car and produced a small one-burner "Coleman Camp Stove," a beat-up coffee pot, and a sack of coffee. Armed with this, he came around to the front of the car, lit up his stove, went around the filling station in search of water, and finally came back with his coffee pot full. At this stage of the game, another car stopped, and I was on my way again. As I left, I looked back once more and if one used just a little imagination, there sat, plus one hundred and fifty years, the original, trail-riding cow puncher by his camp fire, waiting for his coffee to heat. I have often wondered how that coffee tasted.