

RANCH ENCOUNTERS

BOOT HILL™ Game Feature

by Bill Fawcett

Beyond the towns of the Old West were vast expanses of land controlled by the Ranches, many of which encompassed thousands of acres and constituted small societies in themselves. The cattle raised on these ranches were the economic basis for the West.

There is no question that the life of the ordinary cowboy was filled with arduous, backbreaking work. Still, there were plenty of opportunities for adventure for the cowhand and the owner of a small spread. With miles between each ranch and little possibility of help from the outside, the early big ranches were pretty much a law unto themselves. That is, most ranches had to take care of their own problems (an average ranch has from 6-36 cowhands depending on its size). They could not count on help from "nearby" ranchers who would arrive belatedly at best, or the nearest "law" commonly half a day's ride away.

For the sake of discussion we will use the J-Ranch (Jay Bar). The J- is a typical large cattle spread located in northern Texas in the years following official statehood. It covers several thousand acres of land (most of which are actually public lands) of varying quality — from grassy valleys to bare rock. The ranch has been using this "open range" for over 10 years, and understandably is very protective of the land. The nearest ranch is the Lazy K, a similar spread approximately nine miles east. The nearest town is Desolation, located about 17 miles east, or eight miles on the other side of the Lazy K. There are no real neighbors to the west, as the land is too dry and poor to support cattle.

The Oklahoma Indian territories are a three day ride to the north. 100 miles to the west will bring you to the New Mexico territory. To the south are a smattering of ranches, however, none are within 20 miles.

At the heart of every ranch is a complex of buildings that house the bulk of the hands, the owner and the cook. Often times, this was the only place where anyone passing through could stop for shelter or replenish supplies. Visitors were normally welcome at a ranch because they brought news of other areas,

and also broke the monotony of ranch life. Such groups as posses, Texas Rangers, and other ranchers might appear to gain assistance from the Rancher in tracking down criminals of all sorts.

Most ranches also had a series of line shacks that provided shelter and housing in bad weather for the hands who watched the cattle on distant pastures. Outlaws often used these shacks for a night or two of relative comfort, and for meeting points. The location of most shacks was common knowledge.

A character staying in one of these shacks would be likely to have a similar system of encounters as those in the main buildings. It is acceptable for anyone to use a line shack in times of disaster, but all food used must be replaced and the rancher told of your presence if possible.

%

Roll Encounter

- 1-5** Rustlers (detect a loss that occurred 1-3 days ago)
- 6-10** Rustlers (detect a loss from 1-6 days ago)
- 11-15** Rustlers (detect a loss from over a week earlier)
- 16-18** Settlers just passing through (from 1-6 armed men)
- 19-22** Settlers looking to homestead "your" range (1-6 men)
- 23-24** Posse in pursuit of bank robbers (3-12 members)
- 25-27** Posse (3-12 men) with prisoners (1-4) returning after a chase
- 28-30** Posse returning after a gunfight with 1-4 wounded, 50% chance that the outlaws are still loose
- 31-35** Traveling merchant (dry goods)
- 36** Itinerant Preacher
- 37-40** Unemployed cowboy (if no job offered, 20% chance he'll steal anything he can of value)
- 41-44** Outlaw on the run (30% chance of posse 2-24 hours behind)
- 45-48** Single lawman or Ranger pursuing an outlaw (20% chance the outlaw is hiding on the ranch)
- 49-50** Bounty Hunter (searching for a specific criminal 60%, passing through 40%)
- 51-53** Bounty Hunter with a prisoner (85% dead, 15% alive)
- 54-65** Indian Family traveling through (20% chance they kill a cow for food), 1-8 warriors
- 66-72** Indian tribe passing through (20% chance they will kill 2-8 cows for food) 12-48 warriors

- 73-75** War party of young braves returning from a raid (50% on another tribe, 50% on another ranch) 7-12 warriors
- 76-78** Large War party (as above) 14-34 members (4d6+10)
- 79-80** Cavalry Scouts (75% Indian, 25% white men), 1-4
- 81-82** Commancheros (out of New Mexico) 50% will attack the ranch, 50% will rustle 6-36 cattle, 5-20 riders.
- 83-85** Texas Rangers after small war party (1-4 rangers)
- 86-88** Texas Rangers after a larger raiding party (6-24 rangers)
- 89-90** Cavalry (patrol of 5-8 troopers and a sergeant)
- 91-92** Cavalry company of 25-30 (d6+24) sergeant and lieutenant
- 93-95** Neighboring rancher just visiting
- 96** Neighboring rancher following rustlers, 1-4 hands
- 97** Neighboring rancher following commancheros, 5-8 hands
- 98** Cattle Buyer setting up a sale
- 99** Cattle Buyer scouting the herds (make no deals yet)
- 100** Cattle becoming ill, hoof and mouth disease or the like

There is also the opportunity for employment at most ranches. If a character cannot find employment he is expected to continue on, or will be assumed to have other motives for being there.

Likelihood of a job being open:

- 1-40** No jobs
- 41-70** One job
- 71-90** Two jobs
- 91-100** 3-8 jobs

Type of job opening:

- 1-70** ordinary hand
- 71-80** head hand or foreman
- 81-85** cook, trail
- 86-90** blacksmith
- 91-94*** gunhand (squatters, rustlers, etc.)
- 95-98*** gunhand (guard payroll, bodyguard)
- 99*** surveyor
- 100*** Outlaw (rancher wants someone killed or something stolen)

* indicates temporary positions lasting 1-4 months

Skill Needed	Pay
Riding, roping	\$10/month
Experienced riding, roping,	\$30/month
Riding, Wagon driving	\$20/month
Cooking	\$20/month
Smithing	\$28/month
Gunhand (squatters, rustlers, etc.)	\$100/month
Gunhand (guard payroll, bodyguard)	\$50/month
Surveying	\$20/month