

ROSS, ELIZABETH

WILD HORSES:

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June 8, 1937

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WILD HORSES

In one of the most isolated sections of a rugged region of hills and hollows, near Barber, Oklahoma, lies what old-time residents referred to as a "blind hollow." It terminated in a steep hill, which even the sure-footed deer could not negotiate. Entry was through a narrow opening. Within, between high walls of stone, lay a spacious valley in which grew grass and wild peas in great quantity. There were dense thickets, clumps of trees, open stretches, and a small stream of water. Besides the deer and turkeys which found shelter in the hollow there were also wild hogs and wild horses. The latter was sometimes sought by men who desired to obtain animals for their own use or to be tamed and sold.

One of the older citizens recalled some time since of going to the hollow to pick out and catch wild horses, for there were some swift and hardy animals down in the wilds.

Wonder was sometimes expressed as to when the wild horses originated. No one ever definitely

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answered the questions, but the majority of the older people thought that horses which wandered to the remote and lonely regions at the beginning of the Civil war period were the progenitors of the rather considerable number which populated the hollow during the period of the 1870's and to the early eighties.. Anyway, there were some beautiful horses of good stock in the out-of-the-way section, as well as others of inferior breed, small but active ponies, some were black, some sorrel, bay or chestnut brown, while a number were spotted or "paint" horses and ponies.

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The horses were as wild as deer, but some were captured. A stout wall of logs and brush was built across the entrance to the hollow and the horses couldn't get to the outside.

The old men once related that the wildest of the horses after capture soon became gentle, responding readily to good treatment, but the smaller animals, the ponies, sometimes proved very obstreperous, probably being mixed with mustang stock.

In the period when the wild horses were numerous

there were some panthers which had lairs in the bluffs and along the lower Caney creek. The sinister squalls of these animals were heard in the silence of night by the horse hunters in their camp near the Illinois river. And occasionally leaves and grass piled into small mounds were found. Upon investigation the hunters found the partly devoured carcass of a deer beneath each pile of grass and leaves, the "work of panthers", it was asserted.

In course of time the number of wild horses was greatly reduced and as the more remote sections were gradually invaded by settlers the animals practically disappeared, but occasionally the statement is made that a few wild horses yet wander among the deep and lonely valleys down the river.