

West Custer County Library District Local History Collection
Oral History Collection

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Garitson, W. P.

February-March 1967

Interviewed by Arlie Riggs

Billy Garitson moved from the San Luis Valley to the Wet Mountain Valley in 1906. They often traveled across Mosca Pass, which had been a toll road until it was washed out in 1948, and drove 125 head of cattle over the washed out road. He completed his first trip over Mosca Pass in 1906, when he was 21 years old. In 1906, they brought the cattle straight across the San Luis valley and stayed the night at the A.B. & Durkee ranch. The next day, September 18th, they crossed the Great Sand Dunes and started up Mosca Pass where they found three feet of snow and nothing for the cattle to eat. For almost a week or two, the cattle didn't get anything to eat and a couple died.

He and the cattle stayed in the Wet Mountain Valley where his father bought land. In 1917 and 1918, just after the first World War, homesteaders started arriving and fencing off property. Over the years, he and his father bought property and ended up with around 2800 acres. He married in March of 1910.

Every year, during the first week in October, they had a roundup. They started over on Mosca pass and moved to the top of the Greenhorn Mountain. It took about six weeks and 16-17 men. He could identify his own cattle because they had his brand. During the roundup, they were branding big calves and sometimes, they would be branding two- and three-year-old calves that hadn't be rounded up in previous years. They branded them, earmarked them, and then each man took his cattle to his ranch.

He told of meeting Ulysses Herard, who he met in 1906. Ulysses was building a railroad over North Pass for a mining outfit. Ulysses was quite a character. He couldn't hear and he carried an old cow horn he had hollowed out. He had cattle that he brought to the Wet Mountain Valley in the summer, and then turned them loose in the Sand Hills (Sand Dunes) in the winter. This was a difficult part of the transcript since I was never sure who Ulysses was and why the interviewer kept asking about him.