

EMPIRE RANCH ROUNDUP A HUGE SUCCESS



More than 2,500 people traveled to Sonoita, Arizona, on Saturday, Nov. 2, and enjoyed a perfect autumn day at the Empire Ranch Roundup within the Las Ciénegas National Conservation Area. The event, hosted by the Empire Ranch Foundation (ERF), was so packed with entertainment and activities, it was impossible to do and see it all.

The day kicked off in the main arena with the B Troop 4th U.S. Cavalry (Memorial) Military

Riders and our National Anthem, followed by their performance in the field arena.

Cowboy Conversations began with the Living History of Buffalo Bill with Dane Johnson as Buffalo Bill. In the main arena, the [Balderrama Family Dancing Horses of Rio Rico](#) thrilled the crowd with their amazingly agile horses. Pedro Balderrama Sr. also sang to the crowd while on horseback.

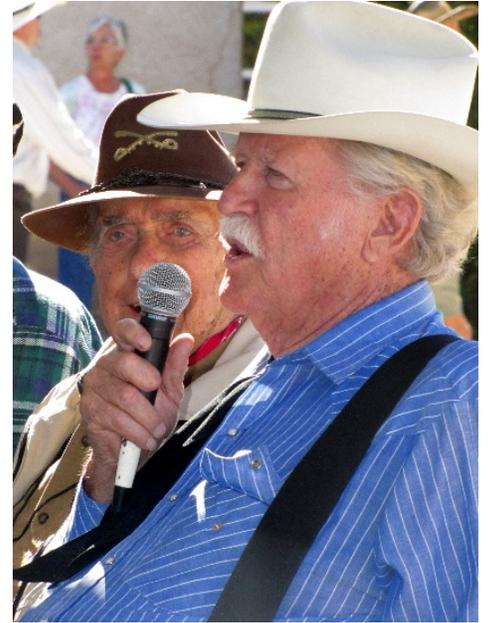
Concurrent living history presentations at 11:00 focused on real-life experiences at the Empire Ranch. These included Norman Hinman describing the Life of a 1953 Empire Cowboy, Gerald Korte relating his Working Cowboy Life on the Empire in the 1940s, and Van Fowers sharing The Edward Vail Story.



Musical entertainment began at 11:45 with the [Way Out West](#) band, who played several sets of western music throughout the day. Back at the main arena, Joel Eliot, Brian Baldwin, Dave Kay demonstrated cattle handling and horsemanship. Later the Mariachi Apaches from Nogales High School performed dressed in elegant costumes.

Midway through the day, another set of oral histories was presented: Cowboying in the Old Days by Eddie Gardner, the History of Cordage & Horsehair Ropemaking by Jesus Garcia, and Texas Sheriff John Slaughter by John Larkin.

Laughter was in the air during the Arizona Western Movies talk. The three presenters – [Bob Shelton](#), Don Collier, and Steve “Bunker” DeFrance – had a piece of the action back in the day. Shelton created Old Tucson from the abandoned film set of the movie Arizona and made it a huge tourism success. He also hosted the production of hundreds of films and television series, acting in many. “There was a time when I had John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Lee Marvin and Burt Lancaster all working on films at Old Tucson at the same time.” [Don Collier](#), a fellow actor and personal friend of Shelton, is well known for his roles in the long-running TV western The High Chaparral as well as The Young Riders, Gunsmoke, Bonanza, and Little House on the Prairie. Empire Ranch Foundation Board member [Bunker DeFrance](#) acted in some of the same productions and also worked as a stunt man. They three men held the audience’s attention with their witty stories about working with actors such as John Wayne.



Meanwhile, another group had taken over the main arena. The Tombstone Ghost Riders demonstrated their marksmanship, shooting balloons at full gallop. The action was noisy but the excitement was palpable and the bleachers full.

Throughout the day, horse-drawn wagons provided rides between the parking area and the ranch headquarters.

Many artisans were on hand. [David Valenzuela](#) demonstrated his carving techniques and had many colorful Yaqui masks for sale. Leatherwork included jackets, vest, belts and more.



Western wear and tack included handmade hats, chaps, and saddles.



One of the highlights of this and every Empire Ranch Roundup is the opportunity to see and learn about the many western skills that are still a big part of ranch life. Ben Claridge demonstrated leather carving; Byrd Moss explained the process of etching copper and silver that he uses to make bit and spurs. Dick Schorr showed how leather reatas are made while kids helped Jesus Garcia make yucca fiber ropes. Casey Abbs showcased his blacksmithing; Chris Schragger and David Yubeta helped visitors make adobe bricks. Shane Lyman from the Coronado National Forest's Nogales Ranger District and three his kids did a horse/mule packing demonstration. ERF Board member Bill Schock did a branding demo, where kids got to "brand" a block of wood to take home. Lydia Martinez made tortillas and farrier John Russell illustrated horseshoeing. Dean Fish displayed some of his ranch tools.





Displays included Tucson Rodeo Parade historic wagons, historic branding irons from the Amerind Foundation, Guns of the Old West, and the Empire Ranch Foundation's new "Cowboy Life Exhibit."

Western authors were also on hand to sell and sign their books. The Vail Preservation Society ran the Territorial Kitchen.

Kids enjoyed the S&N Ranch's miniature horses and Steve Boice Jabez's Horse'n Around Rescue Ranch horses. They also gathered at the Kid's Corral where they could adopt and decorate their very own stick horses.



The final set of Cowboy Conversations included Vail Family Vignettes by Susan Vail Hoffman and The Gunfight at the OK Corral by Scott Dyke. Winners of the silent auction's fabulous items were announced. The yummy barbecue beef and Dutch oven cobbler were all gone.

[Janice Deardorff](#) played her final set as friends said goodbye to head home with memories of an excellent day at the Ranch.

Many more photos can be found at [Southern Arizona Guide](#) and the Empire Ranch Foundation's [Facebook](#) page.

