



WALT MARBLE, RIDING his paint horse Cowboy, kept the rope taut while he helped during the work day in a pasture west of Norcatour, neat the Nebraska

line. Cowboys and one cowgirl branded about 400 head of cattle that day.

— Herald staff photos by Carolyn Plotts



KEITH MANNIE USED a calf's hind leg to guide it out of the branding area. Matt Wilson and Karinda Bruber (in the background) waited for the next calf. Branded with the "W over W" brand, this little calf (below) was ready to be moved into another pen.



Ranchers do roundup to brand cattle herd the old-fashioned way

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Through 50 plus years of farming and ranching in northwest Kansas, Roger Wilson of Oberlin had never been part of a real, live cattle roundup.

That changed last month when several cowboys and a cowgirl showed up at the pasture north and west of Norcatour near the Nebraska line where Mr. Wilson and his son David run about 400 head of red and black Angus cows. At the feeding area for the pasture, known as the Wiggins Place, the cattle were gathered into pens and calves were separated from their mothers.

The elder Wilson wasn't even sure of the names of everyone who came out for the work day. The idea somehow came up for an old-fashioned roundup, he said, word got around, and when the day came, people just appeared.

"I think they just heard what we were doing and decided to show up," he said.

It wasn't exactly like an old-fashioned round-up. Cowboys hauled their horses to the pasture in trailers, and some even rode four-wheelers. Instead of an open fire, the branding irons were heated with a propane torch. But it was real enough.

The field was a frenzy of activity as two cowboys — using skills more often seen in a rodeo arena today — would ride into the holding pen, rope a calf by its hind legs, and drag it to the branding area.

As the calf passed through the gate, another cowboy slipped a metal head device over its neck. The head piece was attached to a rubber inner tube wired to the corner post. As the cowboy dragged the calf further into the pen, tension put on the inner tube rendered the calf immobile. Then other helpers went to work.

Karinda Gruber, a student at Colby Community College, and the only cowgirl on the crew, adminis-



ROGER WILSON (far right) held a spray gun that administered a long-lasting insecticide to a calf. Lance Braun watched the rope from atop his horse while Karinda Gruber gave shots and David Wilson castrated a calf.

tered three injections into the neck of each calf. Roger Wilson sprayed each one with a long-lasting insecticide while another cowboy placed a red-hot branding iron on the calf for about two seconds. Another tagged its ear, still another gave it one more injection; and if it was a bull calf, it was castrated.

All this took place in the span of less than two minutes. The calves were then sorted into pens as the next two were brought in for their

turn. Others helping with the roundup and branding included Matt Wilson, Keith Mannie, Walt Marble, Kyle Edgett, Lance Braun and 16-month-old Dali Braun.

"All in all, it was a good day," Mr. Wilson said. "We got done about 7:30, and nobody got hurt."

"Everybody worked pretty hard. Some of us had fun, and some of us were just plain tired."