Ranching

He has no problem saddling up and, once he climbs on board, ten-year-old Cole Heits can ride with the best of them. He’s known to be a “good hand” and he helped with the cattle rounds on his Aunt Nicole’s ranch. “Finding help” is a system neighbors use to help each other without an exchange of money.

By age ten many sons of ranchers are full-fledged cowboys. Cole helped gather, sort, and rope cattle on branding day. He started riding by himself at age three.

“It was fun, really really fun, I got to rope for the 3rd time in the branding pen. I was a little hot and dusty.” Cole Heits

The tuition of Eastern Montana is closely tied to ranch life. Ranching traditions and ranch hands are passed down through generations.

After a hard day’s work, five-year-old Riley Jones holds on to her father’s rough hand. The little girl was seated on a horse by age two. At four years old she was a self-sufficient rider. Her mother and father taught her the basic skills of horsemanship, the health requirements of livestock, and above all, how to care for the land.

Handsewing boots Ryan and Nicole Jones wear out their boots working on a ranch about twelve miles from Miles City. It’s not unusual for ranchland in Eastern Montana to be passed down from one generation to the next. The Jones ranch has been in the family since the early 1970s. Nicole Jones says that learning to care for the land is not something you learn from a book, nor from a single season. It takes years of experience.