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Riding for the Brand: 150 Years of Cowden Ranching

Michael Pettit

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Folks all over West Texas and eastern New Mexico will tell you: Cowdens have been ranching here for as long as anyone can remember.

The Cowdens, in fact, have been at the forefront of the cattle business for 150 years. Arriving in Texas in the 1850s, Cowden men and women raised and trailed cattle, sought out water and better grazing land, tangled with Comanches—and helped extend the western line of Anglo settlement as they raised their families. They eventually moved to New Mexico, where they established the renowned JAL Ranch.

Award-winning writer Michael Pettit, a Cowden descendant and former rancher, offers a compelling portrait of this genuine American ranching family. *Riding for the Brand* spans six generations and two states to serve up a real slice of the Old West, complete with cowboys and Indians, cattle and buffalo, open range and barbed wire.

Pettit skillfully blends family saga with an urbanite's firsthand look at life on today's 50,000-acre Cowden Ranch, where the one dependable factor is the constant wind. *Riding for the Brand* traces the evolution of the Texas and New Mexico cattle business from the era of intimate ranching communities to today's oil-enriched or corporate operations. But it's also the story of one man's search for identity through his connections to a family, a place, and a way of life.

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