

Butch Cassidy and the Long Riders – by CuChullaine O'Reilly, FRGS

A Forgotten Historical Connection

Thanks to Hollywood, the names "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" are as familiar as "Batman and Robin."

But what about "Butch Cassidy and Roger Pocock"?

What if I told you that instead of celebrating robbery and murder, we could instead be talking about exploration and courage? What if you discovered that Cassidy and Pocock were involved in the creation, and riding, of the most incredible equestrian trail, and journey, in North American history?

Would that intrigue you? Would you wonder why pop culture celebrates Cassidy but ignores Pocock?

ROGER POCOCK – ECLIPSED HERO

Hidden inside the little words "Roger Pocock", is a man whose life was so big that it ran the length of the notorious Outlaw Trail, splashed over into the creation of a citizen's militia that is still flourishing and left behind one of the most important equestrian legacies of the early 20th century. However, you may be asking yourself, if that's so then why have I never heard of him?

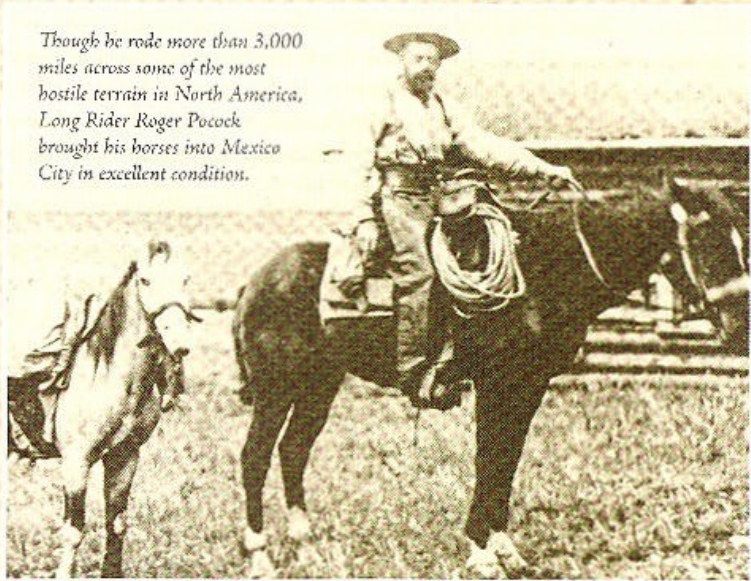
Blame it on Hollywood, if you like, or take into consideration Pocock's own modesty. For though he survived more true-life adventures than any celluloid hero, this English Long Rider's life has lain in the shadows for too long.

The only man to ride the entire length of the Outlaw trail left England in the late 1880s and joined the newly formed Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, commonly known as the Mounties. There he fought beside and learned frontier lore from the freedom-loving Mounties, those masters of horses and wilderness skills, whose many virtues influenced Pocock for the rest of his life.

Like many Long Riders before, and after, him, Pocock was inspired to take to the saddle because of the accomplishments of another equestrian traveller. In this case, it was the astonishing ride done in 1889 by the Cossack, Lieutenant Dmitri Peshkov, who had ridden his Yakut pony, Seriy, 5,500 miles across Siberia to the Czar's palace at St. Petersburg. That journey across snow-covered Russia had lasted 193 days and turned the tough Cossack into a national hero.

From his adopted home in Canada, Pocock realized that Peshkov's journey had set an unrivaled record for travel on a road. But another standard might be met. The Mountie-turned-Long Rider might attempt to make the most dangerous equestrian journey ever ridden over what he casually called "difficult ground." In fact, Pocock was determined to find and ride the shadowy Outlaw Trail that supposedly ran across three countries.

Though he rode more than 3,000 miles across some of the most hostile terrain in North America, Long Rider Roger Pocock brought his horses into Mexico City in excellent condition.



THE AMERICAN ROBIN HOOD

Enter Butch Cassidy.

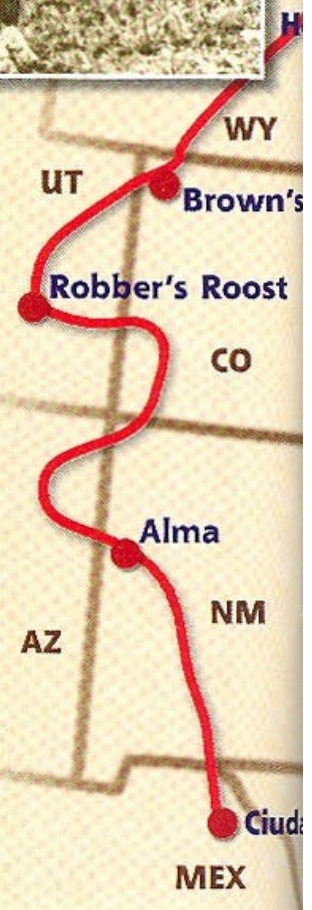
One of most notorious outlaws of the Old West, Cassidy was the gregarious leader of a loose confederation of criminals known as the Wild Bunch. During the late 19th century the group, including Cassidy's handsome confederate, the Sundance Kid, plundered banks, robbed trains and killed citizens across a vast expanse of the still raw American frontier. Even though Hollywood popularized their exploits in the 1969 film starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, depicting them more as mischievous schoolboys than larcenous misfits, both men willingly rode and robbed alongside notorious murderers such as Kid Curry.

Thus, there was a very real danger involved in approaching this band of armed scoundrels. Moreover, they were known to inhabit a series of remote hideouts designed to discourage all but the bravest horsemen from venturing too near.

Yet that's exactly what Roger Pocock did in 1899: he mounted his horse and sought them out. Did I mention he was unarmed?

THE OUTLAW TRAIL

There were a number of important trails that helped define the creation of the United States: The Trail of Tears was the route the Cherokee Indians were forced to walk when they were compelled to move from Georgia to Oklahoma in the 1830s. The Oregon Trail was the wagon road used by pioneers travelling from Missouri to Oregon in



the 1840s. The Chisholm Trail was used during the 1870s to drive cattle overland from the Texas plains to the railhead in Kansas.

Then there was the Outlaw Trail.

While pedestrians, wagons and cattle moved across America via these acceptable and well-established routes, a shadowy equestrian path reached from a series of outlaw-inhabited Canadian caves, south through the most inhospitable regions of the American west, and terminated more than 3,000 miles away in the rough and tumble republic of Mexico. Several things have set this murky thoroughfare apart from its socially acceptable cousins.

One, it was never properly mapped, nor did any one individual ever apparently know all of its myriad parts. It was a threat. Nevertheless, it was also regularly travelled, and not by well-intentioned members of either American or Canadian society. This brings us to point two. The Outlaw Trail was employed, enjoyed and inhabited by desperadoes whose primary purpose was to delay detection and avoid arrest. Unlike the pioneers whose Oregon Trail ran from east to west and can still be seen today, the Outlaw Trail was the domain of bad men who took their geographic secrets to the grave. Finally, unlike the other historic arteries coursing through the country, the Outlaw Trail was the only one specifically meant for equestrian travellers. It was so rugged, extreme, dangerous, life-threatening and remote that pedestrians, oxen, wagons, cattle, women, children, any and all of the elements that defined normal 19th century American travel, were discouraged from ever using it.

It was, in a word, a track that desperate men on bold horses undertook when presented with situations requiring extreme measures.

FINDING THE WILD BUNCH

With the Rocky Mountains on his right, Pocock set out on June 28, 1899. He was mounted on a sturdy Canadian range horse, and he led two tough pack ponies. Pocock wasn't attempting to break any speed records. In fact, realizing the harsh nature of the country ahead, he just wanted to survive. His aim was to be the first person ever to ride from Canada into the heart of Mexico along the hazardous trail frequented by Cassidy and his cohorts. Half journalist, half equestrian explorer, the ever-observant Pocock kept careful notes as he rode, recording in his diary how he was befriended by Blackfoot Indians, welcomed by ranchers, and dined with solitary settlers.

As he ventured further southward, the real challenge became more apparent when the lone horseman began trying to discover how he could locate and penetrate into Cassidy's outlaw stronghold. As Pocock discovered, saying that you're going to ride up to Robber's Roost is one thing; accomplishing it quite another.

"I cross-examined men whom I knew to be robbers, and they lied cheerfully to throw me off the scent," Pocock recalled in a series of reports he filed with a London paper. Next, he recalled seeking answers from "honest men who spoke in low undertones, for they did so at the risk of their lives."

Things got worse when he reached the remote village of Montecello, Utah and asked for a guide. Believing him to be

a wanted man on the run, the villagers shunned him as an outlaw.

"No man dared to help me, nor dare I hazard men's lives by telling how I finally got the facts which are now published for the first time," he later wrote. Therefore, armed only with his trusty Kodak camera, the intrepid Englishman rode into the wilderness in search of Cassidy. Pocock was, however, aware of the danger he was riding in to.

"I have been fourteen years on the frontier and know the west from the Bering Strait to Mexico. Working and living with desperadoes, I have, in times past been once nearly marooned on a desert island, once nearly lynched as a spy and once nearly shot in a gunfight. I ought to know outlaws by this time."

THE ROBBERS ROOST

Pocock doesn't say what he expected to find when he rode into Cassidy's hideout but the traveller did record how the temptation to aggrandize the outlaws was already well established by the American media. According to a New York newspaper of the time, Cassidy's "Robber's Roost" was a stronghold consisting of a fortified cave equipped with machine guns, guarded by sentries and only approached by one trail. This stronghold fantasy also supposedly had a grand piano, electric lights and telephones.

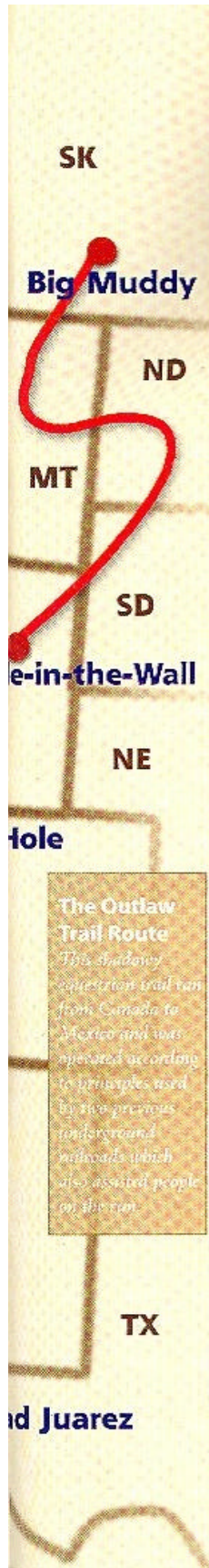
What Pocock found was a far cry from the exaggerated claims made by New York hacks. The Long Rider discovered instead a simple log house, some corrals, a spring of water and a pasture for the outlaw's horses. The surrounding cliffs served as a fence to keep stolen cattle in and the law out.

"Imagination is the soul of journalism," Pocock noted. Consequently, when he reported the exaggerations to Cassidy and his gang, he observed their bemused reaction. "I have talked to the outlaws and seen their hard mouths twist into an ugly grin over these inventions."

Even if Pocock didn't find a grand piano in a cave, what he confirmed was the existence of an equestrian travel system which has never been properly understood or documented.

One of the most important principles of living in pre-20th century America was that if you ran into trouble, you could always pull up, change your name, and head west towards safety and anonymity. The frontier thus served as a hazy safety valve for settled people who embraced civilized procedures. But as the 19th century drew to a close, the once lawless expanse which had provided shelter to America's bad men had shrunk to a shadow of its former blood-soaked dimensions. Judge Parker, the "Hanging Judge", had conquered the lawless Oklahoma Territory. Texas cow towns that once boasted of their saloons were now overrun with churches. Montana was full of miners. The Dakotas were swarming with farmers. Where could a man go after a killing or a robbery? The only part of the untamed west left to flee to was a narrow corridor of desert and mountains running from Canada to Mexico.

Moreover, society had changed as well. Early lawbreakers could count on finding refuge with friendly locals. As the law grew stronger, finding help became more difficult. It was one thing to give a man a meal and put him up for a night in your remote cabin; something different to hide him for weeks.



The Outlaw Trail Route
This shadowy equestrian trail ran from Canada to Mexico and was operated according to principles used by two previous underground railroads which also assisted people on the run.



Long rider Lewis Jones, who was reported to have been murdered by two American bandits.

DID BUTCH CASSIDY MURDER A LONG RIDER?

There are a number of mysteries surrounding Butch Cassidy, most notably the on-going debate about whether the notorious outlaw survived a Bolivian police ambush.

Yet there is another blood-soaked legend attached to Cassidy, one that flies in the face of his reputation as being an American Robin Hood who never killed anyone during the commission of his crimes. The one exception to this rule indicated that Butch Cassidy and his trusted friend, the Sundance Kid, murdered a Welsh Long Rider named Lewis Jones.

The victim was a brave Long Rider whose equestrian explorations of Patagonia and Argentina had been a source of local pride. Now he lay dead, slain by two "American bandits."

Could Cassidy have broken his taboo and slain Jones?

Read the details about this mystery by looking online at www.imcowgirl.com for the complete story.

Get Long Rider Roger Pocock Adventure Books!

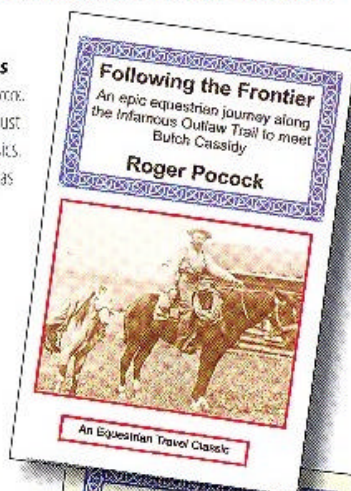
FOLLOWING THE FRONTIER

AN EPIC EQUESTRIAN JOURNEY ALONG THE INFAMOUS OUTLAW TRAIL TO MEET BUTCH CASSIDY — by Roger Pocock

Roger Pocock was an Englishman whose tales of wanderlust and equestrian adventure were nineteenth century travel classics. "Following the Frontier" is considered his best work describing as it does his early adventures in North America. Although the autobiographical account reads like fiction, it is in fact only the first half of his remarkable life.

Pocock begins his tale by explaining how he came to join the Canadian Mounties in 1885. Pocock went on to become one of the nineteenth century's most influential equestrian travelers.

Although considered one of the finest writers of the nineteenth century, Pocock's story is more than just a literary adventure. It takes the reader into backwoods, along forbidden paths, and into the den of danger!



HORSES

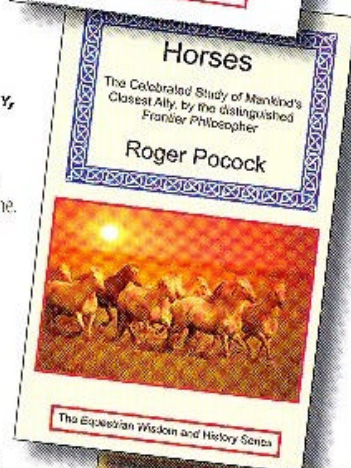
THE CELEBRATED STUDY OF MANKIND'S CLOSEST ALLY, BY THE DISTINGUISHED FRONTIER PHILOSOPHER

— by Roger Pocock

A lifelong student of equine behavior, Pocock set out to document the wisdom of his age into a book unique for its time. "Horses" was penned by Pocock while he was serving with the British army, stationed behind the trenches during the First World War.

With bombs bursting overhead, Pocock poured onto these pages the things his equine friends had taught him. "If one thinks of a horse as a little child, one cannot go far wrong." "When my horse forges his manners, I examine my conduct to find where I am to blame."

Here then is a true "lost masterpiece" of equestrian study, penned by one of the most unique men ever to mount a horse or lift a pen.



OUTRIDER OF EMPIRE

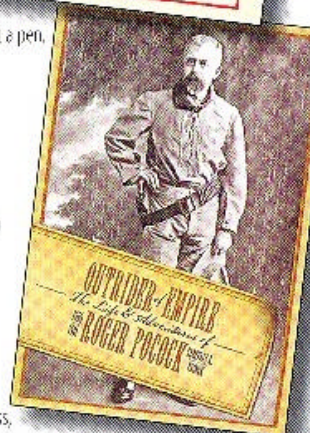
THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ROGER POCOCK

— by Geoffrey Pocock

In his book, *Outrider of Empire* — *The Life and Adventures of Roger Pocock*, author Geoffrey Pocock has accomplished several things, some of them unintentional but all of them exciting. Though not actually related, the author's curiosity led him to study the life of his famous namesake.

This groundbreaking investigation into Roger Pocock's life reveals not just a man of action but an unparalleled equestrian scholar and a trusted comrade in arms whose unpretentious style of life and leadership left a legacy of respect.

Outrider of Empire is available via the University of Alberta Press, your local bookshop or via Barnes & Noble on-line.



FOLLOWING THE FRONTIER AND HORSES ARE AVAILABLE FROM HORSE TRAVEL BOOKS

WWW.HORSETRAVELBOOKS.COM

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