

WILL ROGERS

Childhood adventures with an Oklahoma legend

BY CAROLYN ESTES

CHAPTER 5: *Down to the swimming hole*

Will and Frank watched the herd 'til it was out of sight, then asked permission to take a ride. "I don't mind, but Mr. Rogers has the final say," Pa said.

Mr. Rogers nodded his head and told the boys to be home before dark.

Will and Frank turned their horses south and kicked them into a gallop.

As they traveled across the rolling prairie they kept a sharp eye out for wildlife. They did not want to hunt it, just ride their horses as fast as the wind chasing it.

After chasing a few jack rabbits the two boys soon tired of the hunt.

"Let's go take a swim," Will said.

"I'll beat you there," Frank said as he kicked his horse into a full run. Will was right behind.

They pulled up their horses next to their favorite swimming hole on the Verdigris River. They gave their horses a drink before looping the reins around a tree branch. They pulled off their boots, jeans and shirts and jumped into the cool water.

"Let's get our horses and let them swim with us," Frank said.

Both boys scrambled up the bank, unsaddled their horses and rode them into the water.

When the horses got into the deep part of the river the boys slid off their backs and hung on to their tails, letting the horses pull them along through the water.

"Let's race to see if my horse can outswim yours," challenged Will.

"I bet mine will win," Frank called back.

The race was on. Both boys encouraged their horses

to swim faster. It was soon clear that Will's horse was going to win this time.

"My horse might not swim as fast as yours, but he can cut a calf out of the herd quicker than yours," laughed Frank.

"Yup, that he can, but I'll be working on that," Will said. "Let's dry off and go on another ride."

The boys let their horses graze on the fresh grass while they dried off and put on their clothes.

Once the boys saddled up, they turned their horses to the west.

"Let's go see where those railroad guys have been poking round," Will said.

"Yup, maybe we will see where they are marking," Frank said.

After they traveled a few miles they saw a group of men measuring the land and placing markers in the dirt. As the boys rode closer some of the men looked their way and waved.

"Hey boys," said one of the men. "How do you think this spot looks for a new town?" he asked.

Will and Frank looked at each other not knowing what to say.

"Don't know," Frank said.

"Don't know much about towns," Will added.

The men turned back to their work while the boys rode off.

"I've got to go home and tell Pa about this," Will said.

"Me, too," Frank said.

They quickly turned their horses toward their homes.



CHAPTER 5 - 6.4375x10.5

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Photo courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITY

1. Read an editorial in your newspaper.
2. Pretend that you are now the editor of a newspaper during the time when the railroad was planning to cross Indian Territory. Write an editorial about your feelings.

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER SIX

Unwelcome strangers

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