

A Conversation with Rod & Cindy Hoagland  
Owners of Calderwood Ranch  
Fields, Oregon

by  
Ellen Waterston

During the 1980s, folk art festivals were organized statewide by the Oregon Arts Commission. Their purpose was to highlight the art, music and food unique to each region and honor the “culture keepers,” the individuals or groups that formed the cultural communities where the folk arts or crafts originated.

In their heyday, high desert folklife festivals might have included old-time fiddle music, a mariachi ensemble, cowboy poetry readings, storytelling, Native American drum circles, Mexican folklorico dancing and, a Basque favorite, the Mitxikoak. There were often demonstrations of saddle making, whittling, and charro roping skills alongside displays of Native American woven berry baskets, and braided rawhide and horsehair reins. Don't forget the high desert culinary specialties, such as Rocky Mountain oysters, huckleberry jam, beef and fish jerky, frybread and chorizo stew. The richness of cultures and traditions in this vast part of the state is as startling and impressive as the geography itself. Now relocated to the University of Oregon campus, and renamed the [Oregon Folklife Network](#), Oregon's cultural traditions and tradition-bearers continue to be celebrated.

1978

**CENTRAL OREGON FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL**



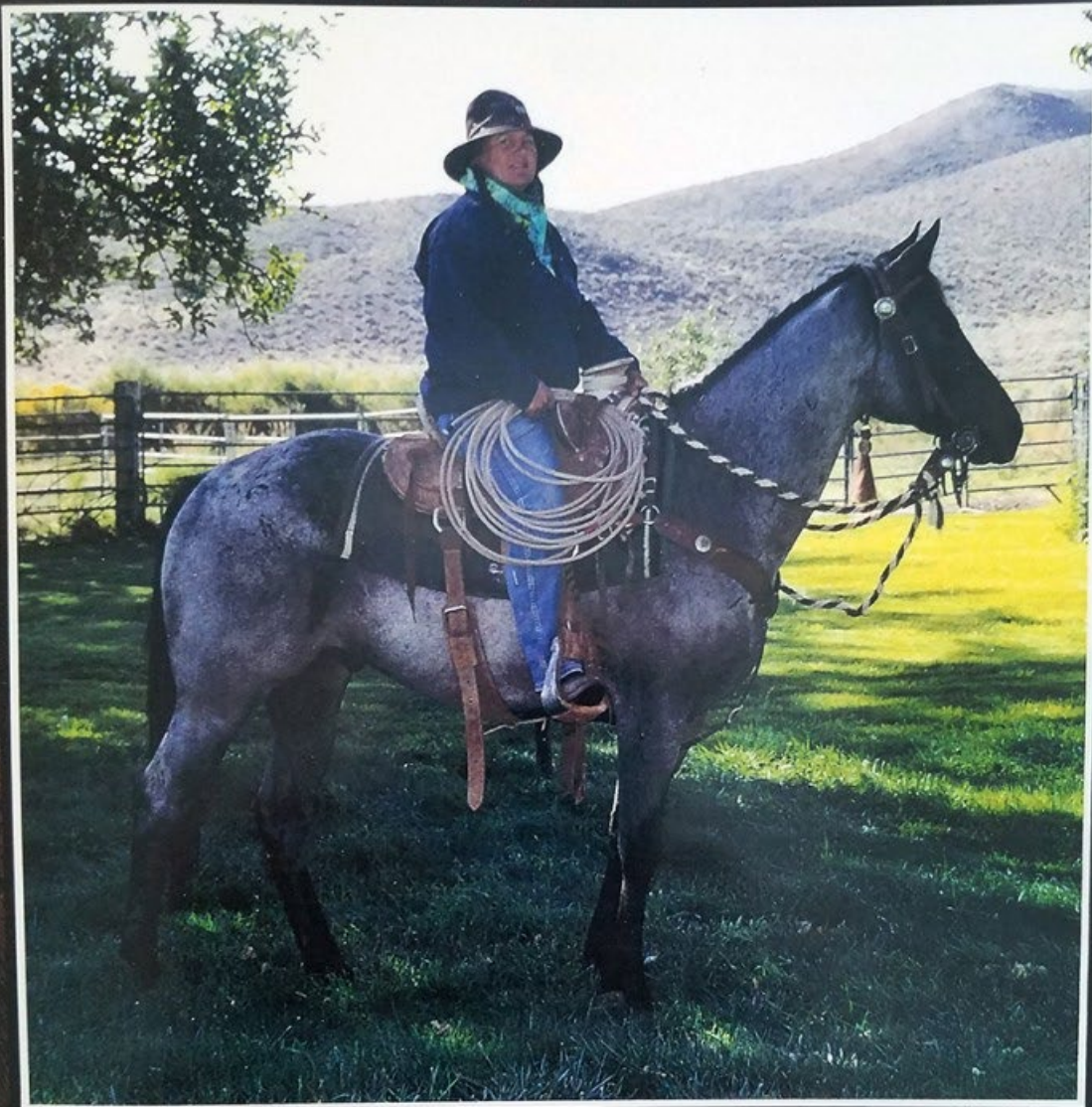
Cover of 1978 Oregon Arts Commission catalogue. The commission was renamed Oregon Folklife Network.

In the high and dry of southeastern Oregon, culture keepers who still actively practice long-established traditions are becoming more precious than gold. They are persisting, despite motorbikes or four-wheelers replacing horses on working ranches, overseas-made goods making their way into rural mailboxes, and younger generations eschewing old customs as they leave small towns, ranches and reservations for larger communities.

Two prized keepers of high desert culture live a dozen or so miles up the road from Fields, Oregon on their gem of a cattle and horse ranch. The main house sits on the far edge of a spring-fed meadow, framed by bitter, sage and rabbit brush, and a scattering of juniper and ponderosa. A dramatic upland canyon serves as backdrop. In addition to running their livestock operation, Cindy and Rod Hoagland have what amounts to a second fulltime job—keeping up with the demand for Rod’s tooled leather craftwork and Cindy’s plaited rawhide.

Cindy Holloway Hoagland grew up in and around Fields. The landmark Holloway Mountain is named after her homesteading ancestors. “I’m fourth generation,” says Cindy. “My grandmother was the first schoolteacher this end of Harney County.” As Cindy recounts in her autobiography, “Buckaroo Gal”, she was always by her father’s side. Much of her knowledge of and respect for the old ways of doing things she learned from him—such as building fence secured by rock jacks in the rocky desert soil. He taught her to ride as a small fry, fueling a lifelong love of horses. By her own account, she has “broke, saddled, schooled and rode hundreds of horses.” Rod jokes that when he proposed to Cindy, the idea of an engagement ring was quickly replaced with her request for a filly. The couple would become known for their handsome blue roan quarter horses. Another gift from her father was teaching Cindy to handle a rope. She quickly earned the reputation in the region as the girl who could, under any circumstance, finesse her long loop gently around the head of a horse, mother cow, or the heels of a calf.





# Buckaroo Gal

By Cindy Hoagland

Cindy is pictured on one of their prize blue roan quarter horses on the cover of her 2022 memoir.

“Old (cowboying) traditions here then,” Cindy recalls. “Certain rules you lived by. Do something wrong and you end up holding rodear. Holding rodear’s the worst job. I didn’t want to hold rodear all day.” The word rodear, of Spanish origin, is one more example of the rich language and associated folkloric practices that are part and parcel of the history of buckarooing. It describes the act of keeping cattle gathered in a bunch and calm while riders move through and, in the case of a branding, rope the calves and bring them to the fire. Roping, not holding rodear, was what Cindy had come to do, so she made sure her loop hit its mark every time.

While visiting Rod and Cindy, I was given a home tour. Every room of their house is a tribute to adventure, creative passion or family history and tradition. Take the living room, for example. Enter and you’re off on a high desert safari—animal pelts (beaver, muskrat, coyote) are draped over the back of the sofa and armchairs, walls display taxidermied cougar, mountain sheep, and elk racks spanning four feet or more. The assemblage is testament to old ways and days when hunting and trapping were more commonplace than controversial. Cindy recalls going with her father to trap the abundance of game. “He had to make a living is what it amounted to. Coyote and bobcat pelts were sold at a premium in those days.” The couple’s favorite trapping story? “I caught a mink once at Trout Creek,” recounts Rod. “Cindy was excited for a mink coat. ‘Will take awhile,’ I said. ‘Took 30 years to catch one!’”





Cindy moves cattle in the mountains.

At the same time young Cindy was learning to trap from her father, Rod was cutting classes at high school to head for the creeks and marshes with government trappers. “I grew up over the hill in Orovada,” says Rod. The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) hired him “to trap beavers for damage control. Beaver dams and so on. The biologists would show me where to go. Then came riparian zones...” He shrugs, a “go figure” look on his face.

Orovada is a census-designated ranching community between Winnemucca and McDermitt, Nevada. In addition to a school and post office, it had a bar owned by Rod’s father. Rod recalls the travelling buckaroos he learned his cowboying skills from and who, most evenings, would head for the bar. When his Dad got tired of serving them, “he’d lock up the drunk cowboys in the back room and let them play pool. I remember them singing and having a good time.” According to Rod, there were still travelling buckaroos in southeastern Oregon and northern Nevada into the 1970s, but not anymore.



Rod brings a calf to the branding fire.

The last stop on the home tour was the outbuilding they've turned into their workshop and studio. Here Cindy painstakingly braids her reins, hackamores, and ropes from cow hide and Rod stamps, carves and embosses leather saddles, fenders, belts, chaps, and quirts, often incorporating Cindy's braiding into the handle. "I've been braiding since I was 30," says Cindy. "Word's got out. Now everybody wants a set of handmade rawhide reins. I go from cowhide to finished product. Soak, prime, tenderize, scrape, cut, and pull strings. Some reins take three weeks."





Cindy works on rawhide reins in her workshop.

Rod claims he and Cindy have the best of all worlds. In addition to their braiding and leather work, they get to “do a little hunting, a little trapping, a little team roping, have a little batch of cows, a couple of colts still left to mess with.” But it’s more than that. They both agree what makes them happy is to know and love a place, to stay put and give back to a place they treasure. Rod knows plenty about giving to and working collaboratively in community, having been with Harney County Electric for nearly 50 years, a member of the Harney County school board for half that time and counting, and on countless committees. For Rod, the management model for private and public lands in southeastern Oregon is the [Malheur National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Frenchglen where multiple use has been successfully implemented. That, and the willingness to engage in “a collaborative-type process” as demonstrated by Harney County’s [High Desert Partnership](#). “Don’t lock anyone out.” He wants to trust the motives of the Oregon Desert Land Trust (ODLT). They both do. They want to trust that ODLT shares their goals of preserving the lands and lifestyle they love and will respect their historical knowledge and stewardship of natural resources. “There’s a little apprehension,” confesses Rod. “We want to grow old and die here. I hope we can. Might get gobbled up by the bigger guys.” Cindy agrees.



“It’s the land, the sagebrush, the fresh air.” Assuming Cindy has finished her thought, I gather up my things, get up to go. But she continues. “There are other pretty places but there’s too many people you have to wade through to get there.” I nod in agreement and zip up my jacket. “We went to Italy one year.” “Wait, what?” I ask, sitting back down. “You went to Italy?”

Rod takes in a there’s-a-story-here breath. He explains he has a friend in Montana who operates a “ranch academy” that organizes groups to teach cowboying skills across the globe. He’d invited Rod and Cindy to help stage a rodeo in Italy, given their impressive combination of skills. Rod’s review? “Never try and teach an Italian to rope.” And besides that, Rod continues, “they only had two old cows. Roped and roped the same two. One cow got on the fight, stabbed the other with its horn. Here came the owner ringing a tiny bell. Ding. Ding. Cows trotted right into the trailer.” As for Cindy? “At an Italian rodeo, the cowboys make a grand entrance a million times, say whatever they say over and over. I studied Italian for a year. Learned how to tell them to slow down, that’s it.” After that experience, the couple admits they are more into staycations. “Things have changed a lot,” admits Cindy, “but this is still one of the better places on Earth as far as I’m concerned.”

*Photos provided by the Hoaglands*

*-Interview from 2022*