



Wyoming

A GUIDE TO RODEOS IN
THE COWBOY STATE

forever west



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FOREWORD



Gene Bryan,
Team Wyoming Cowboy
Program Coordinator

By Gene Bryan

Wyoming claims two nicknames: “The Equality State” and “The Cowboy State.” Our reputation for equality recognizes “firsts” such as Wyoming becoming the first state to grant women the right to vote in 1869.

Wyomingites, however, often hang our hats on our reputation as “The Cowboy State” because cowboys and ranching are such an indelible part of our lives. While fur trading, railroad construction and mining are intertwined with our state’s history, ranching, cowboys and rodeos tend to take center stage.

Our cowboy and rodeo heritage dates back to the cattle drives of the 1850s and ‘60s when ranch hands moving large herds of Longhorn cattle from Texas challenged each other to competitions in roping and bronc riding. Today, our 10-day Cheyenne Frontier Days is considered “The Daddy of ‘Em All” and has never missed a performance since 1897 — despite world wars, inclement weather, and economic depression and recessions.

We are proud of our cowboy and rodeo heritage, and the fact that spectators can attend a rodeo somewhere within our state every night during the season. The Cody Nite Rodeo, for example, is in its 77th year. Cody is the “Rodeo Capital of the World” and home to the Cody Stampede, which began in 1919.

We are also proud of our numerous world champions; from early steer roper King Merritt to bareback riders Kelly Timberman and Chris LeDoux and, most recently, team roper Jhett Johnson. Joe Alexander won five consecutive world bareback riding titles and Dusty Tuckness is a second-generation world champion bullfighter.

Wyoming claims about a half million people so we are unlikely to ever attract a professional sports team. Rodeo is our best shot at competing in the big leagues – and we have competed successfully for many years.

As you travel our state, you’ll see signs of our commitment to our cowboy heritage, including the bucking horse and rider symbol on our license plates and the helmets for our University of Wyoming football team. Cowboys and rodeos are everywhere – from Cheyenne and Cody to Evanston and Sheridan.

My favorite rodeo event is saddle bronc riding because it’s a classic event; however, what I really enjoy is the honesty and integrity of rodeo and the great people always ready to lend a hand. It’s not uncommon for contestants to share horses or for bull riders to complete their rides and climb on the chutes to help the next contestant.

Rodeo doesn’t get any better than what you’ll find in Wyoming. Grab a seat and enjoy the ride!



GRASSLANDS, CATTLE AND
COWBOYS



A Vast Prairie

The word Wyoming derives from an American Indian word meaning “a wide prairie place.”

The state was once part of the Great American Desert, with hundreds of square miles along the Oregon Trail where people passed but never settled. This began to change in the 1850s when cattlemen realized the vast grasslands could support grazing animals through summer and winter.

Following the Civil War, Texas ranchers – cut off from eastern and southern areas of the U.S. during the war – began moving large herds of cattle from the overgrazed lands of the southwest to the open range and “free grazing lands” of the Wyoming and Montana Territories.

A typical drive included about 2,500 Longhorn cows, 50 to 60 horses, four mules and a chuck wagon. Most cattle drives also included a dozen cowboys and a trail boss who guided the four- to six-month journeys.

Wyoming Agriculture

Wyoming is 11th in the nation in the total land devoted to farms and ranches throughout the state. The state is first in the nation in the average size of these holdings.



The Cattle Boom

While ranching in Wyoming began in the 1850s, the cattle industry gained momentum with the arrival of the railroad. Cattle prices soared during the 1870s as demand for beef grew on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1876, England imported 1,732 tons of fresh beef. Refrigerated rail cars and ships helped push this figure to 30,000 tons just two years later, with 80 percent of the beef coming from America.

The U.S. government's demand for beef elevated prices while individuals and investment companies from England, Scotland and the eastern U.S. flocked to Wyoming to establish large ranches. The years between 1870 and 1880 saw nearly 265,000 cows arrive in Wyoming from Texas and Oregon.

So much money poured into Cheyenne — home to many cattle barons — that some claimed it was the wealthiest city in the world. Cheyenne was home to eight millionaires among its 3,000 residents in 1880. The town celebrated by building an opera house in 1882 and was one of the first U.S. cities to install electric streetlights.

Wyoming became the 44th state on July 10, 1890.

Sundance Kid

Henry Longbaugh was nicknamed “Sundance Kid” after he served prison time between 1887 and 1889 for stealing a horse in Sundance, Wyoming. He later met Butch Cassidy and joined the notorious Wild Bunch. The gang was known to stay at The Occidental Hotel in Buffalo, Wyoming and is rumored to have used the Outlaw Cave in nearby Kaycee as a hideout.



The Cowboy Life

Wyoming cattlemen adopted the Texas system of cattle ranching by turning their herds loose on the vast unfenced grasslands that were part of the public domain. Cattle foraged and wandered hundreds of miles across open range, with no one to watch over or feed them – even when snow and ice covered the high altitude plains.

Cattlemen kept track of their herds by holding two roundups each year – one in the spring to brand the livestock with an identifying mark and the other in the fall to ship cattle to market. While Hollywood films romanticize cowboy life, Wyoming cowboys spent endless hours in the saddle, riding countless miles during the two- and three-month roundups to search for cows and calves and drive them to a central location.

Cowboys are often thought of as young Caucasian males when in reality, about one-third of early Wyoming cowboys were of American Indian, Mexican or black descent. Texan Bill Pickett was a famous black cowboy, the son of a slave and later a rodeo star.

Cowboy wages remained minimal during the 30 years following the Civil War, and only a few top hands enjoyed year-round employment. Many cowboys faced the harsh winters and depended on the “grub line,” a ranch that provided them a place to stay but no wages.

Cowboy numbers began to decline as cattle prices slid and ranches suffered a devastating blow when a summer drought followed by an especially harsh winter claimed as many as 25 percent of the stock in 1887. Many ranches also built fences to confine their cattle and streamline their operations, which required fewer cowboys to maintain.



Bucking Horse and Rider Symbol

Wyoming reinforced its commitment to cowboy heritage by officially adopting a cowboy on a bucking horse as the state's symbol. Which led to some calling Wyoming "The Cowboy State." First Sergeant George M. Ostrom originally drew the symbol as an insignia for the Wyoming National Guard in France and Germany during World War I. The insignia was adopted by the U.S. Army and has represented Wyoming troops in action since.



Some believe the bucking horse represented in the symbol is the legendary rodeo horse "Steamboat," who tossed cowboys from his back in the early 1900s and was considered unrideable. There has been a great deal of dispute as to who the man on the bucking horse is, which adds to the mystique of this iconic symbol.

Wyoming's unique license plate featuring the bucking horse and rider debuted in 1936, the same year the state trademarked the symbol. The cowboy and bucking bronco emblem also appears on Wyoming's state quarter and the University of Wyoming logo.

Steamboat

The renowned bucking horse, Steamboat, was born in Wyoming in 1896. He got his name from a head injury that caused him to breathe with a whistle.

He first came to Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1902 and many cowboys hoped they could avoid riding the jet-black horse as they vied for World Championship titles in the ensuing years.



“Buffalo Bill” Cody

William F. Cody shot 4,280 bison in 18 months to supply meat for the Kansas Pacific Railroad to feed construction crews, thus earning his name “Buffalo Bill.” Cody was an army scout, producer of his famous Wild West show and, during the winters, an actor in east coast theaters.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show

Many cowboy jobs were seasonal, which prompted some cowboys to sign on to exhibit their skills in wild-west performances such as “Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show,” a circus-like pageant celebrating life in the Old West.

William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody staged his first Wild West event over the Fourth of July in his hometown of North Platte, Nebraska in 1882. As part of the event, he offered cash prizes for roping, shooting, riding and bronc busting.

Cody was hoping for 100 participants but attracted nearly 1,000, which launched his Wild West show. The handsome, boastful Cody took his popular show to the Eastern U.S. and Europe, with performances drawing as many as 41,000 spectators.

Stars of the “Wild West”

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show featured stars such as sharpshooter Annie Oakley, the first “King of the Cowboys” Buck Taylor and Sitting Bull, who appeared for one season.



RODEO TERMS



Rodeo – a Spanish word for round up – traces its roots to the 16th century when the Spanish conquistadors and Spanish-Mexican settlers introduced cattle and horses to the American Southwest. Many young men seeking jobs were attracted by the independence and adventure associated with herding cattle. Their skills – including riding, roping and branding – eventually became the basis for competitive rodeo events.

As communities grew, social occasions such as the Fourth of July gave cowboys an opportunity to challenge the skills of cowboys from neighboring ranches. Local contests quickly transitioned into annual events, with more types of competition and attractions added.

The earliest rodeo recorded was in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1842.

Rodeo's Governing Body

Rodeos became more structured in the early 1900s as Wild West shows began to disappear. The Rodeo Association of America (RAA) was formed as a governing body in 1929. Today, the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) serves as rodeo's governing body and holds the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas each year. In addition, the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) supports female rodeo athletes.



Rodeo Events and Terms

Rodeo is a fun, thrilling and even heart-stopping sport with contestants competing in various events. Rodeos generally follow a set order of events alternating timed and roughstock competitions to best utilize each side of the competition ring. Following are descriptions of the events in the order they are held.

Bareback Riding

This event is judged on the performance of both the bucking horse and rider. The cowboy has a single handhold and must ride for eight seconds. He must have both spurs touching the horse's shoulder as the animal jumps from the chute. This is called "marking out" and cowboys who fail to "mark out" face disqualification.

During the ride, the cowboy pulls his knees up as the bronc bucks, rolling his spurs up the horse's shoulders. He straightens his legs as the horse descends and returns his spurs to the point over the horse's shoulders as he prepares for the next jump.

The Toughest Ride

Bareback riders suffer more abuse and typically have more injuries and long-term damage than other rodeo cowboys.



Steer Wrestling

A successful steer wrestler combines strength with leverage for this timed competition. The steer wrestler is on horseback and remains behind a barrier to give the steer a head start. Steer wrestlers or “bulldoggers” who leave too quickly receive a 10-second penalty, called “breaking the barrier.” A “hazer” – another cowboy on horseback – stays on the opposite side of the steer to keep him running in a straight line. When the bulldogger’s horse draws even with the steer, the cowboy eases down the horse’s right side and grabs the steer by the horns.

Once he has the horns, he digs his heels into the dirt to slow the steer. He then turns the steer, lifts up the animal’s right horn and pushes down with his left hand to try to tip over the steer. Contestants who fail to bring the steer to a stop or change the direction of the steer’s body before the throw are disqualified. The clock stops when the steer is on his side with all four legs pointing the same direction.

Team Roping

As the only team event at professional rodeos, successful team roping requires a high level of coordination between two cowboys – a header and a heeler – as well as their horses. Similar to tie-down roping, an event held later in the rodeo, team roping begins with the steer getting a head start before the riders give chase.

The header pursues the steer, with the heeler close behind, to rope the steer around both horns, one horn or the neck. Once this “catch” is made, the header turns the steer to expose the animal’s hind legs to the heeler. The heeler works to rope both legs and the clock is stopped when the ropes are no longer slack and the horses face each other.

The team receives a 10-second penalty if they do not give the calf a proper head start. Additionally, if the heeler only ropes one leg, the team is assessed a five-second penalty.



Saddle Bronc Riding

This classic rodeo event started during the early days of the Old West when cowboys tried to decide who had the best style when riding an untrained horse. Today's saddle bronc riders begin each ride with their feet over the bronc's shoulder, or "marked out" to give the horse the advantage and ride for eight seconds.

Riders who synchronize spurring with the horse's bucking motion receive higher scores. Scoring is also based on the cowboy's control throughout the ride, the length of his spurring strokes and how hard the horse bucks.

Disqualification results if the rider is bucked off, his foot comes out of the stirrup, he drops the rein or fails to have his feet in proper "mark out" position at the start of the ride. Riders are also disqualified if he touches the horse, themselves or the equipment with their free hand.

Tie-down Roping

Calves were roped on early ranches for branding and to administer medication. Tie-down roping today involves teamwork between horse and rider, with the calf getting a head start before horse and rider give chase. The cowboy receives a 10-second penalty if he does not give the calf a proper head start.

The cowboy's horse comes to a stop as soon as the cowboy ropes the calf around the neck, effectively holding the animal. The rider dismounts and runs to the calf, flips him on his side and ties any three legs together using a "piggy string" the cowboy carries with his teeth.

Once the cowboy completes the tie, he throws his hands in the air to signal the judges. He then remounts his horse and allows the rope to become slack. The contestant is disqualified if the calf kicks loose within six seconds.



Barrel Racing

The cowgirl and her horse enter the arena at full speed, triggering an electronic eye that starts the clock. Horse and rider run a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels before they gallop from the arena, tripping the clock to stop as they exit.

Contestants may touch or even move a barrel during the run but receive a 5-second penalty for overturning a barrel. This event is timed and cowgirls strive for the fastest time.

Bull Riding

Riders compete aboard a bull weighing a ton or more and must remain seated for eight seconds. Similar to bareback riding, cowboys have a single handhold and try to stay forward or “over his hand” to avoid being whipped forward when the bull bucks. Judges watch for good body position and consider factors such as use of the free arm and the cowboy’s ability to match the moves of the bull.

Four judges evaluate each ride, and 50 percent of the score is based on the contestant with the other 50 percent on the bull’s performance. A rider faces disqualification if he touches the bull, himself or the equipment with his free hand or gets bucked off.

All-Around Cowboy

Cowboys that participate in two or more events at the rodeo are eligible for recognition as the All-Around Cowboy Champion. The PRCA world all-around champion is named at the National Finals Rodeo each year and is considered the most versatile athlete in professional rodeo.



Bullfighting – More Than Clowning Around

You can't miss bullfighters with their face paint, baggy pants and entertaining antics. They're talented and funny, but their main job is to save cowboys' lives.

Bullfighters are sometimes referred to as rodeo clowns and spring into action any time a bull throws a cowboy and the angry animal's attention must be diverted away from the rider.

These athletes understand the psychology behind bullfighting and study the individual animals and the cowboys who ride them. Bullfighters are able to prevent threatening situations from becoming dangerous – often without the audience realizing the risk involved. It's all part of their job.

For more on rodeo events and scoring, check out the Rodeo Rules Made Simple videos created by Cheyenne Frontier Days at www.cfdrodeo.com/rodeo-101/.

The videos include:

- Bull Riding
- Saddle Bronc Riding
- Bareback Riding
- Steer Wrestling
- Steer Roping
- Team Roping
- Tie-Down Roping
- Barrel Racing
- Wild Horse Race



Rodeo Stock

Rodeo animals – horses and cattle – are valuable stock worth tens of thousands of dollars. In many instances, these animals come from ranches that have earned reputations for their proven performance.

Rodeo animals provide a tremendous challenge for even the most seasoned riders. The ranches where these animals are raised and cared for take great pride in their stock, with the animals receiving the attention they need to perform at top levels every time they enter the chute.

The PRCA recognizes top rodeo stock with awards such as the “Bucking Horse of the Year” and the “World Champion Bull.”

Team Wyoming Rodeo Program

As “The Cowboy State,” Wyoming sponsors professional cowboys and cowgirls as part of “Team Wyoming.” The team, which includes professional and collegiate athletes, reinforces the continuation of the sport while also promoting Wyoming and its cowboy heritage.

Team Wyoming includes PRCA and WPRA members who have qualified for or participated in the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas within the past five years. Team members must enter and compete throughout the season with the goal to win a world title. They must also be Wyoming residents or natives and maintain a part-time Wyoming residence.

The Wyoming Legislature funds Team Wyoming, and team members are part of the Wyoming brand, which is evident in the “Wyoming” logo they wear on their clothing.

You'll see team members at various events, greeting fans and working with the media. Members of Team Wyoming are counted among the world's top rodeo competitors. We are proud to have them on our team and wish them the best!

A young boy wearing a white cowboy hat and a red, white, and blue American flag shirt is seen from the back, looking out over a large, blurred crowd of people at a rodeo event. The scene is set in a large arena with a red railing in the foreground.

**RODEO EVENTS THROUGHOUT
THE COWBOY STATE**



The First Frontier Day

Cheyenne was still struggling financially after the end of the cattle boom when Frederick Angier, a travelling passenger agent for the Union Pacific Railroad, had an idea to “bring a train load of people from Denver for the day with money in their pockets!” The event would be held somewhere on the Union Pacific line so the railroad could bring people from great distances to participate.

The town formed a committee of influential businessmen to plan the event. Committee members envisioned a day to celebrate the Pony Express, stagecoach holdups, horse races and cowboy sports. The first Frontier Day was held September 23, 1897.

Cowboys rode to town leading their best buckers because each contestant had to supply his own “worst one.” Union Pacific offered an excursion rate of one cent per mile to bring revelers from Denver.

At noon, troops at Fort Russell fired every cannon they could find and steeple bells chimed. Residents and visitors fired guns and 30 minutes later, crowds rushed to fill the seats in the fairgrounds grandstand.

Women waved their handkerchiefs and cowboys from as far as 100 miles away competed in steer and bronco busting and cowpony races. The first Frontier Day lasted about six hours and attracted about 4,000 people.



Frontier Days Grows and Expands

The first Frontier Day was so successful that the event expanded to two days in 1898. No one seemed to mind the chilly temperatures on September 5, when “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders” arrived in Cheyenne for the second Frontier Days.

The Spanish-American War seemed far away as more than 6,000 spectators crowded around to watch events such as wild horse races, cowboy sports and the first steer roping contest.

Frontier Days gained more momentum and excitement each year as new events were added. A timeline for some of these events follows:

- 1899** Ladies’ cowpony races with a local ranch woman winning a \$45 saddle
- 1903** President Theodore Roosevelt attended
- 1906** Sioux Indians made their first Frontier Days appearance
- 1910** Barnum & Bailey Circus came to town during Frontier Days; the Cheyenne Auto Club sponsored automobile and motorcycle races
- 1920s** Ladies’ relay race and trick riding offered fierce competition
- 1930s** Miss Frontier competition was held to ease the pinch of the Great Depression
- 1942** The U.S. War Department indicated Frontier Days would “assist the war effort.” Military units marched in parades and conducted drills and thousands of troops received free admission to watch their first rodeo
- 1980s** Performances by country music stars such as Reba McEntire, Willie Nelson, Randy Travis and The Judds boosted Frontier Days attendance



Frontier Days Today

Cheyenne Frontier Days is considered the “Daddy of ‘Em All” attracting more than a quarter million visitors each year. The 10-day festival is held every July and offers gripping PRCA rodeo action and world championship bull riding coupled with western entertainment, parades, food and nightly concerts. For event details and a schedule, visit www.cfdrodeo.com.

The show goes on...

Frontier Days has never missed a performance since the event began in 1897 – despite challenges such as inclement weather, world wars and economic depressions.

Cody Stampede Rodeo and Cody Nite Rodeo

Frontier Days is only one of numerous opportunities to attend world-class rodeo in Wyoming. Cody holds the title as the “Rodeo Capital of the World,” with the Cody Stampede Rodeo held every summer since 1919. The event began as a tribute to “Buffalo Bill” Cody and his celebration of the “Old West.”

The Cody Stampede Rodeo has been held over the Fourth of July since 1920, with the Cody Nite Rodeo added in 1938. The Cody Nite Rodeo is the longest running and only nightly rodeo in the world, offering action every night from the beginning of June to the end of August.

Gates for the Cody Nite Rodeo open nightly at 7 p.m., with the competitions kicking off at 8 p.m. Spectators will want to arrive early for events such as junior barrel racing, a chance to meet the bullfighters and



Sheridan WYO Rodeo

The Sheridan WYO Rodeo represents a major stop for cowboys and cowgirls competing on the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) and Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) circuits. Held each July, the Sheridan Wyo Rodeo began in 1931 and has offered thrills and fun since.

Pre-rodeo competition begins with World Championship Indian Relay Races, with a parade, rodeo performances, art exhibitions, an American Indian powwow, pageants and carnival following. The Sheridan WYO Rodeo is known for its exceptional animal athletes including "hoodlum horses" and "skyrocketing steers."

Pine Bluffs Summer Rodeo

If you're visiting Cheyenne, you will want to attend the Pine Bluffs Summer Rodeo Series just 40 miles east. This family event is held on specified Fridays in May, June and July and features barrel racing - including a pee wee division, roping, steer riding, novice and open bull riding and bareback and saddle bronc riding.



National High School Finals Rodeo

Many Wyoming children can ride a horse before they can walk. So, it's no surprise the state also hosts the national championship rodeos for high school and college athletes.

The National High School Finals Rodeo (NHSFR) calls Rock Springs, Wyoming home and includes many Wyoming cowboys and cowgirls along with participants from across the country.

Held each July, the NHSFR includes a range of rodeo events – from bareback riding and barrel racing to calf roping and saddle bronc riding – with a queen contest and educational workshops.

College National Finals Rodeo

College cowboys and cowgirls compete in the College National Finals Rodeo (CNFR), in Casper, Wyoming in June. The National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA) crowns champions in events such as saddle bronc and bareback riding, bull riding, tie-down roping and breakaway roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing and goat tying.

More than 400 cowboys and cowgirls from over 100 universities participate. These contestants ride and rope all year long in NIRA's eleven regions for a chance to compete at the CNFR.



THE COWBOY EXPERIENCE AND MORE



Beyond rodeo and cowboy activities, Wyoming offers visitors unmatched opportunities to experience a true taste of Forever West. Below is just a sampling of the adventures that await you beyond rodeos.

Guest, Dude and Working Ranches

You can live the cowboy life – to your preferred degree – at a Wyoming guest, dude or working ranch. Whether you want to explore the rugged wilderness on horseback, join an authentic cattle drive, or try fly fishing in a rushing Wyoming river, we have the right ranch for you.

You'll enjoy accommodations that range from rustic to luxurious and meals sometimes served with the ranch's wranglers. Many ranches offer activities that include archery, square dancing and bicycling, to float and raft trips or excursions to nearby parks and recreation areas.

For more about ranch experiences available throughout the state, visit Wyoming's Dude Ranch Association at www.wyomingdra.com.

National parks, Monuments and Historic Sites

Wyoming is home to Yellowstone National Park – and Old Faithful – the nation's first national park established by the U.S. government in 1872. The state is also home to the first national monument, Devils Tower, and the first national forest, Shoshone National Forest. These icons of the U.S. national park system and forest service are joined by Grand Teton National Park, Fossil Butte National Monument and numerous other recreation areas, state parks and historic sites. The sights, sounds and experiences found in The Cowboy State are sure to leave you breathless.

Visit www.wyomingtourism.org to plan your next vacation.