



At 83, Ben Still Loves Hitting That Dusty Trail

By Linda Owen
Dallas, Texas

OVER THE YEARS, Ben Isgrig figures he's taken about 1,000 trail rides. He's ridden through rain, snow and bitter cold. His horse has turned up lame. A buggy wheel has cracked. One horse threw him into a barbed wire fence, breaking his shoulder.

"But I was mended in time for the next ride," Ben adds quickly. "Nothing's gonna keep me from going on a trail ride. Nothing!"

Now 83, the Columbus, Texas rancher has participated in every trail ride in the state for decades...in addition to numerous others elsewhere.

"It's like a ride into the past, whether it's for a weekend or weeks at a time," Ben explains. "It's meeting people and riding horses...it's sleeping 'round the campfire with your boots on."

The rides generally converge on cities hosting livestock shows and rodeos. The 200 or so riders travel 30 miles a day and camp in parks and pastures.

"We try not to hinder traffic," Ben says. "We keep our horses and wagons off the side of the road and travel mostly on farm roads. Sometimes, with the landowner's permission, we cut through the pastures, as early settlers did."

Ben likes that. It reminds him of his heritage. "When my mother was 11 years old, she drove a covered wagon from Kentucky to Texas," he says with

pride. "Nothing we do today can compare with that."

On one trail ride, Ben's had perfect attendance for 25 years. And a plaque commemorates his 40th year as an original rider of the Old Spanish Trail Ride, a weeklong 125-mile trek ending in San Antonio.

One of Ben's most memorable rides was in 1976, when he joined the cross-country Centennial Trail Ride as it passed through north Texas. He continued with the group to Philadelphia.

"I remember standing in front of the

Liberty Bell," he relates. "I couldn't move. I thought of my ancestors and what the land I had just ridden over meant to them."

Ben has loved horses ever since his father first swung him into a saddle at age 2. He was riding solo by the time he was 3.

"I was so fond of riding that Dad would laugh and say, 'I shouldn't have taught you to ride, son. We've got fences to mend!'"

In recent years, health problems have forced Ben to ride the trails in a wagon rather than on horseback. But he doesn't mind—the important thing is to get out and go.

"I'm not gonna stay home," he says with a grin. "Not when there's still a trail to ride."



HAPPY TRAILS are the only kind Ben Isgrig's known—he's participated in decades of trail rides in the state of Texas. When he's not on the trail, Ben tends to cattle on his 150-acre ranch along the Colorado River (top left). A few years back, he led the way as one of the directors of the Round Top Trail Ride (at top right). These days, he rides in a horse-drawn wagon (above).