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Pre-Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

Twenty-first century cowboys

Cowboys have always had a romantic image. When people ﬁrst watched Hollywood ﬁlms, being a cowboy wasn’t a job. It was a life of adventure, freedom, horses. It was a classic symbol of the United States of America. In reality, the real American cowboys have lived and worked here in the west and south-west of the United States for over three centuries, long before Hollywood. The adventure and romance have disappeared but the hard work and long hours are the same as they’ve always been.

No one knows how many cowboys are still working. Maybe between ten and ﬁfty thousand. It’s also difﬁcult to deﬁne a twenty-ﬁrst century cowboy. Surely it can’t be the big cattle owners who do business with a seventy-billion dollar beef industry? These modern ranches use the latest technology and employ accountants. But even some of the old traditional cattle ranches make more money nowadays by offering holidays to tourists; people come and stay for a holiday and live the cowboy’s life (or a Hollywood version of it).

But even with technology and Hollywood romance, real cowboys still do the same job they have done for years. The cattle still need to walk across huge plains and eat grass many miles from the ranch. And so cowboys ride on horses to bring them home. Cowboys work in the middle of nowhere, in a place where you can’t make a phone call because mobile phones don’t work. Like the cowboys of the past, twenty-ﬁrst century cowboys still get up early on freezing cold mornings and make breakfast over an open ﬁre. There is no Monday to Friday, weekends off or paid holidays.

So why do men – because it is usually men – choose this life? Pat Crisswell had a good job with the government. He made good money but he didn’t like the city. He wanted to do something different. So one day, he gave up his job and moved to a ranch in Texas, earning much less as a cowboy. He remembers his work colleagues in the city on the day he left. They all thought Pat was crazy. But he wanted job satisfaction more than money.

Two brothers – Tyrel and Blaine Tucker – have lived on ranches and worked with cows since they were children. Their mother had a ranch in Wyoming. Last winter, they looked after 2,300 cows. Every day from December until April, they rode across nearly 100,000 acres of land with only the cattle, the horses, and each other for company. Eighteen-year-old Tyrel Tucker says, ‘It was fun. You get to be by yourself.’

Blaine has a large moustache and Tyrel is growing his. They wear traditional cowboy clothes with the famous hat and boots. You could do the same job in a baseball cap and a truck but Tyrel and Blaine prefer the traditional cowboy culture: ‘It’s a real life about you, your horse and the open country.’

symbol (n) /ˈsɪmbl/ something that represents a society, country or type of life

cattle (n) /ˈkaetl/ cows

ranch (n) /ra:ntʃ/ large farm for cattle, horses or sheep

plain (n) /pleɪn/ grassy areas of open land

good money /gʊd ˈmʌni/ expression meaning ‘a lot of money’ or ‘well-paid’

acre (n) /ˈeɪkə(r)/ measurement of land

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