Tyin Ten Knots in the Devil's Tail

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(Gail Gardner)

Way high up in the Sierry Peaks
Where the yellow-jack pines grow tall,
Old Buster Jiggs and Sandy Bob
Had a round-up camp last fall.

Well they took along their running irons
Maybe a dog or two,
And they 'lowed thy'd brand every long-eared calf
That came within their view.

Now every little long-eared dogie
That didn't push up by day,
Got his long ears whittled and his old hide scorched
In a most artistic way.

One fine day, says Buster Jiggs,
As he throws his seago down,
"I'm tired of cowpiography*
And I think I'm a goin' into town."

Well they saddled up, and they hit a lope
For it warn't no sight of a ride,
And them was the days that a good cow-punch
Could oil up his insides.

Well they started in at Kentucky Bar,
At the head of Whisky Row,
And they wound her up at the Depot House
About forty drinks below.

Well they sets 'em up and they turns around
And they started in the other way,
And to tell the God-forsaken truth
Them boys got drunk that day.

They was on their way, goin' back to camp
A-packin' that awful load,
When who should they meet but the Devil himself
Come a-traipsin' down the road.

He says, "You ornery cowboy skunks
You better go hunt for your holes,
'Cause I've come up from Hell's rim rock
Just to gather in your souls.

"The Devil be damned," says Buster Jiggs,
"Us boys is a little bit tight;
But you don't go gatherin' no cowboys' souls
Without one helluva fight."

Now Buster Jiggs could ride like hell
And throw a lasso, too,
So he threw it over the Devil's horns
And he took his dallies true.

Now Sandy Bob was a reata man
With his gut-line coiled up neat;
But he shook her out and he builds a loop
And he roped the Devils hind feet.

Well they stretches him out and they tails him down
While the running-irons were getting hot,
And they cropped and swallow-forked his ears
And they branded him up a lot.

Well they trimmed his horns way down to his head
Tied ten knots in his tail for a joke,
Then they went off and left him there
Tied up to a little pin oak.

Now when you're high in the Sierry Peaks
And you hear one hell of a wail,
Well you know it's just the Devil himself
Yellin' 'bout them knots in his tail.

* According to Utah Phillips, this was originally cow-pyrography
(or branding). I defer. RG

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