

Chapter 24

Horses and Riders

Fred Darge completed many paintings of horses and riders and as art collectors we should be grateful. They were scenes that he was comfortable producing. There are a number of these paintings that amply demonstrate the tremendous talents of this determined artist and what he accomplished by the very early 1940s. The difference in his works of 1936 to just before going in the Army in 1942 is remarkable. He was on his way to becoming a no-questions-asked serious and accomplished producer of fine arts.



Elephant Mountain, 12" x 18", Oil on Canvas Board, Circa 1940, Collection of Konrad Shields.

Elephant Mountain, in the far background, is now a Wildlife Management Area (WMA) consisting of 23,147 acres managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The property was gifted through private donation in 1985 for the purpose of conservation and development of desert bighorn sheep and large game animals, wildlife-oriented research and other compatible recreational uses including public hunting. Desert bighorn sheep have been established on the area. Other wildlife species present include desert mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyotes, scaled quail, rattlesnakes, whiptail lizards and spadefoot toads.



Going Home – Elephant Mountain, 24" x 32", Oil on Canvas, Circa 1940's, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. McKee III

Elephant Mountain is located 26 miles south of Alpine, in Brewster County. The most prominent feature of the WMA is its elevation of 6,225 feet above sea level which extends from the northern to southern property boundaries. The top of the mountain covers 2,200 acres and is never opened to the public to prevent disturbance to the desert bighorn sheep herd. ¹ What an interesting painting! Fred always seems to know where to set up his easel and what to paint.



Cowboy and Pack Horse, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas, Circa Late 1930's, Collection of the Bryan Museum, Galveston, Texas

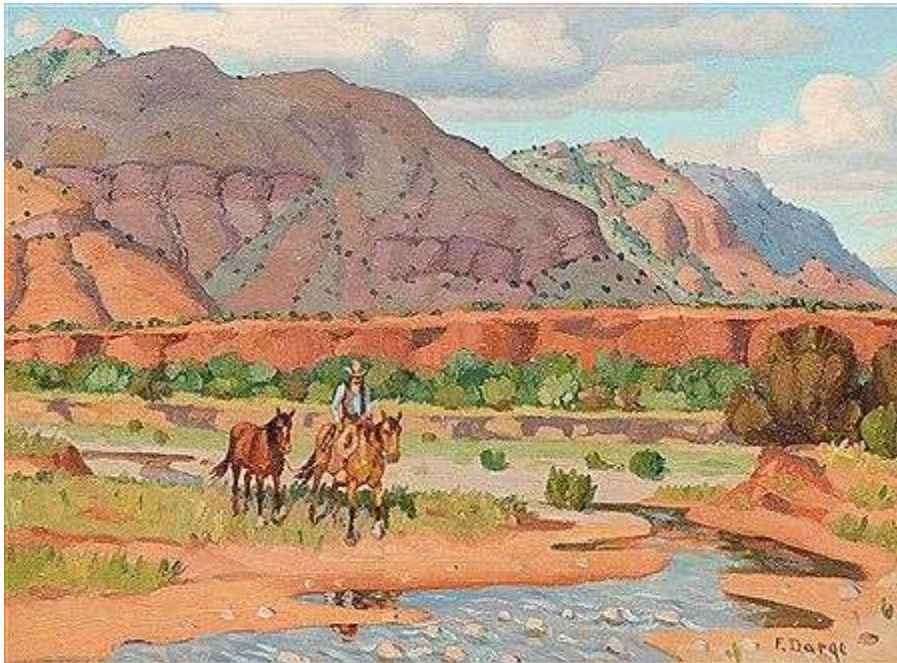
When the Bryan Museum, J.P. and Mary Jon Bryan, acquired this impressive painting for The Visions of the West Collection, they hit the proverbial home run. This is another one of Fred Darge's masterfully executed artworks completed in the late 1930s. It is simple, but spellbinding with the Chisos Mountains in the far background done late in the day with the beginning of dusk reflected in the clouds. This same rider has appeared in other paintings. Please refer back to Chapter 17 titled *Chuck Wagons* and the 24" x 32" painting titled *The Round Up*. He is the cook stooped down washing out a pan in front of the chuck wagon. Darge has obviously taken a liking to this colorful and picturesque cowhand that he has used in a number of his paintings.

Notice the lechuguilla plants with their tall stems on either side of the rider. They are found only in the Chihuahuan Desert where the Big Bend is located.



Going Home Big Bend Country Texas, 24" x 32", Oil on Canvas, Courtesy of Heritage Auctions 2007.

Darge painted quite a number of scenes depicting horse and riders with packhorse in tow both coming and going. It would lead one to believe they have always been popular with his art collectors.



Rider and Stray Horse, Palo Duro Canyon, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Circa 1950's, Courtesy of Vogt Galleries Texas 2018.

The Palo Duro Canyon is just like the Big Bend, you never get tired of viewing the great scenery.



Cowboy and Horse on Hilltop, 19.5" x 24", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of Heritage Auctions 2014

Cowboy and Horse on Hilltop is an interesting painting for several reasons. This broad panoramic view presents the vastness of the geography looking north towards Marathon. The roads below in the right-hand corner are what the National Park Service put in that lead up to the basin that go through the former Wilson Ranch. The horse and rider are situated on a high bluff overlooking what used to be part of the ranch. Notice that Tom Mix hat.



Going Home, Burnham Chisos Ranch, 24" x 32", Oil on Canvas, Circa Late 1930's, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. McKee III

Once again, notice those high crown, broad brimmed hats that Hollywood movie actor Tom Mix made so popular in the era of the cowboy movies.



Horsemen with Pack Horses, Big Bend, 22" x 32", Oil on Canvas, Circa 1936, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Art



Evening Shadows, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Circa Late 1930's, Collection of Sharon and Marshall Meece



The Decent, Big Bend Texas, 24" x 32", Oil on Canvas, Collection of Sarah and Keith Evans

Look carefully. Can you find the ranch house with the wind mill and barn along with the road leading to the headquarters? If you do not see it, look under the last horse's neck! Once again, Fred Darge put it all together to make another memorable painting of horses and riders in the Big Bend.