

The Films of Charles Belden

In these two important productions, Charles Belden documented various aspects of life in the Big Horn Basin during the 1920s and 1930s and recorded the everyday activities of the men and women who lived and worked at the Pitchfork Ranch. Belden was in a unique position to do so. In 1912, he married Frances Phelps whose family owned the ranch where he would live until the early 1940s. He co-managed the ranch beginning in 1922. During these years, Belden took thousands of critically acclaimed photographs to promote the Pitchfork. Many of these images were published in magazines, including *National Geographic*, and in major newspapers. Hundreds of his photographs are permanently exhibited at the Belden Museum, a part of Meeteetse Museums.

The first film, titled “Life on the Pitchfork Ranch in the 1930s,” begins with the Big Horn Canyon River Expedition of 1929, which features Carl Dunrud and others rafting the very wild Big Horn River. Also featured is the Big Horn River flood at Greybull, Wyoming. In addition, Belden’s film captures sheep shearing activities on the Pitchfork, plus the packing of the fleeces in bags, hauling the bagged wool by truck to the railroad, and sheep herding. Belden also shows young antelope being captured as part of a program to repopulate areas throughout the western United States with antelope from the Pitchfork. “Life on the Pitchfork Ranch” lasts approximately 18 minutes and is in black and white.

The second film from the 1930s features more activities from the Pitchfork, including sheep herding and shearing, cattle branding, and the breaking of horses. Viewers will also see the “Big House” on the Pitchfork, the original Pitchfork ranch house, and scenes from 1926, including the Cody Stampede, the Train Station and Inn at Cody, Meeteetse, the Pitchfork Post Office, the mining town of Kirwin, and the Timber Creek Dude Ranch. This film is in color and lasts approximately 45 minutes.