



## BUFFALO BILL— PONY EXPRESS RIDER

*The exciting exploits of Colonel William Cody—more popularly known as Buffalo Bill—are world-famous. But none of them could be more thrilling than his early escapades as a Pony Express Rider, some of which are retold in this article.*

THE Pony Express Service of the Wild West has been aptly described as "the most romantic mail service in the world," and in the summer of 1923 the 63rd anniversary of the first ride by John Fry was celebrated. For one week men rode over the old trails on pony-back at the usual pace of fifteen miles an hour.

### Deeds of "Derring-do"

Before Buffalo Bill—Colonel William Cody—won his great fame as a scout, he was a Pony

Express Rider, carrying Uncle Sam's mails over a run of seventy-five miles, from Red Buttes to Three Crossings, having to ford the North Platte River where it was half a mile wide, en route. Some of his deeds of "derring-do," while so engaged, read like fiction.

On one occasion he found that the "rider" to Three Crossings, to whom he had to hand over the mails, had been killed by outlaws. So he went over the dead man's section—another 85 miles on top of his own 75—then rode back to Red Buttes without a rest,

covering a distance in all of 320 miles.

The Express Company presented him with a purse of gold for the feat, and made him their "boss" rider.

Another time, learning that some road agents were "laying" for his mail, which contained a big sum of money, Buffalo Bill concealed the real mail under his saddle and carried a bogus one openly. In a lonely spot, just as he anticipated, two masked men barred his way with pointed revolvers. He feigned compliance with their order to hand over his pouches, then suddenly flung the bogus bag in the face of one man, rode full tilt at the other, bowling him over, and at the same time, fired at the bandit who had "received" the pouches. His bullet flew straight to its mark, breaking the arm of the robber. Galloping on, Buffalo Bill duly delivered the real mail at the end of his section.

#### A Dash for Life!

On a third occasion he rode up to a midway "station"—where riders changed their horses—just after a party of Indians had captured it and murdered the two station-masters. He had to ride for his life, hotly pursued by the Redskins.

When he reached the North Platte River, which he had to cross, the Indians were hot on his heels. But his tired pony was still game, and he plunged it down the steep bank of the river into the water, with Redskin arrows flying after him. To ease his horse, Buffalo Bill slipped from the saddle and swam beside it, and reached the opposite bank in safety. But as he remounted, a glance behind told him that the Indians were still in pursuit, and the hectic chase continued, with his pony now almost exhausted.

A chief, being well mounted, began to overtake him. Buffalo Bill wheeled about and fired, shooting the chief dead. The slain Indian's horse galloped on, and, as it was fresh and his own mount so jaded, Buffalo Bill seized its bridle and hurriedly transferred his mailbags to its back. Another Indian came tearing up, but young Cody shot him dead ere he could come to close quarters. Mounting the chief's horse, and abandoning

his own pony, the daring young Express Rider eventually outdistanced his other pursuers.

#### Buffalo Bill—"Post-girl!"

In another adventure he came upon a stage coach, its six horses, in pairs, racing along as fast as they would go, with mounted Indians pursuing and shooting at the inside passengers. Buffalo Bill saw that the driver lay dead on the box-seat, so, heading for the flying coach, thereby laying himself open to the Redskins' shots, he galloped alongside the coach-box, and, with the horses still going at top speed, clambered from the saddle on to it, with his mailbags slung round his neck. Grasping the reins, he drove the six horses with such skill that the Indians had to relinquish the chase. His own pony kept ahead, and was waiting for him at the next station.

For this dashing achievement Cody was made a driver of the Overland Mail-coach. But prior to that event, and while still a Pony Express Rider, he is said to have captured, single-handed, a notorious road agent known as "The Cavalier" on account of his Claude Duval-like courtesy to women. This man continually held up the Express Riders, and was dreaded along the whole route.

Buffalo Bill dressed up as a post-girl, and so met with the outlaw. They entered into conversation, and Buffalo Bill bamboozled the fellow into agreeing to elope on a future occasion when the mail contained the money for the company's paymaster. The disguised Cody then asked "The Cavalier" to dismount and tighten "her" saddle-girths. The outlaw alighted, and immediately the supposed girl covered him with a revolver, forced him to toss aside his weapons and then walk ahead to the next station.

The Pony Express Riders covered a distance of 2,000 miles in all, the trail crossing Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, and California. St. Joseph, in Missouri, was the start of the trans-continental railway, and Sacramento, in the heart of the goldfields, where it finished.

"Day or night," Buffalo Bill himself wrote, "in sunshine or in storm, the brave rider must speed on. Nearly 2,000 miles in eight days must be made!"

