

An Old Island Ranch

by Dana Graves

Was up in Alaska, out Kodiak way~
With limited work and dwindling pay~
Two hundred dollars... I had to my name~
Stuck on Kodiak, the island of fame.
We barely had fare to get back to Seward~
There was something about this place we'd been lured.
I'd been here once, I'd seen it before~
I couldn't wait to get back for more.
Faced with embarrassment of calling back home~
Asking for help and quite possibly a loan.
We'd heard of a cattle ranch out to the west~
This sounded all right, it might suit us best.
A LCS landing craft became our new home~
For better than two weeks, we chose not to roam.
The boat was tied up a short walk from town~
Killed time and hung out for a trip westward bound.
The stories we heard in the galley at night~
Kept us hanging around for adventure's first flight.
It took so long to gather supplies~
We were starting to see through numerous lies.
I think deep down, we sensed something wrong~
But the urge for adventure was running too strong.
The day soon arrived when the weather was clear~
We both felt uneasy, killing time around here.
We loaded the plane and flew to the west~
A life of isolation would be our next test.
Loaded to the hilt with groceries and snooze~
We'd be flying in style in an old Grumman Goose.
Sitkalidak Island... touchdown... McCord Bay~
What we'd seen so far guaranteed that we'd stay.
What kind of cowboy would meet our bush plane?
What a place to survive in the Kodiak rain!
Out on a gravel bar, unruly and rough~
Wearing pink pedal pushers, contrasting with the tough.
His odd appearance could have scared us away~
But it wasn't enough, we were destined to stay.
Wearing clothes left behind that he'd found in the cabin~
By some other man's woman, not sure just what happened.
Long hair down his back and a handlebar mustache~
Eight months of growth, out here by himself.
A forty-four pistol made him look awfully mean~
Just like Charles Manson, with hair not so clean.
A Jordan Valley cowboy, "redneck," I suspect~
He was far from clean-cut with his manner and dress.
A rare trip to town with his hair all slicked back~

Bear grease on his mustache for girls he'd attract.
He rolled his own smokes from a Bull Durham sack~
He looked like a hippie and got a few laughs.
He'd been roping and cutting wild bulls by himself~
A difficult task without any help.
Took most of a month to catch us a horse~
They ran with the wind, in defiance, of course.
Stuck on this island with no skiff and no plane~
Month after month 'til it all seemed the same.
We had to think hard to remember the month~
A watch on our wrist didn't interest us much.
Who would have known, our clothes would rot off~
We sewed them with sealskin and gave it no thought.
Eleven months of growth, long hair down our backs~
We created from scratch, the items we lacked.
Our dogs went wild to live with the fox~
They found the steel trap in the school of hard knocks.
We traded some beef for two-month old mail~
We studied it close to sort out the tale.
Our grub ran low and forced us to hunt~
The beach was our source for whatever we'd want.
Number three-jet fuel to burn in our lamps~
Short days and long nights to read paperbacks.
Our outhouse was flushed by the tide every day~
The beach and the mountains positioned to stay.
The horse moved us quickly from creek-bed to beach~
We studied a tide-book for lessons it'd teach.
We each packed a hog-leg, inviting no lip~
A small disagreement and gunplay could hit.
A forty-four pistol and gear for the rain~
That's all we received for twelve months of pay.
In the middle of nowhere, remote from the rest~
Isolation's the reason I think I'm a mess.
I like open spaces without a big crowd~
Seclusion is precious wherever it's found.
There're times when this rat race makes me want to quit~
Head north to Alaska for time to forget.
So I get sentimental each time I look back~
When life was so simple on Sitkalidak.
We found high adventure when we took a chance~
Chasing wild cattle on an old island ranch.