



# Witte Where You Are

## Facts About Ropes & Brands



### Brands & Branding Irons

All brands were registered for use to show livestock ownership and for control (taxes, sales, theft, etc). The Mesta, a Spanish brand association controlled brands during the Spanish and Mexican era. After the Texas revolution in 1836 Counties recorded brands in the Republic and into statehood era and on until today. No regulated registration means the brand ownership is not enforceable by legal authorities. Brands in Texas are county registration, unlike some states like Wyoming where the registration is statewide. In Texas brands must be registered in each county in which they are used..

### Ropes

Ropes are important ranching tools and if they are not used correctly they won't get the job done. Not all ropes are the same and not for doing the same work. In other words, a horsehair rope is not for throwing to catch livestock like cattle or horses.

- A **mecate** is the horsehair rope used by the Vaquero in Ropes and Brands (link to WWYA video). A mecate is for making a lead headstall for a horse for training reins when combined with a rawhide bosal: a rawhide nose band.
- A **cabresto or cabresta** is a horsehair rope made into a full halter or bridle (the term is regional and from Extremadura, Spain and is also used in Portugal). A cabresta is basically the same as a mecate in length and construction, but it is used differently.
- **Horsehair ropes** come in different sized diameters and are usually 30'-40' long. Maguey ropes don't work well to rope heavy stock like cattle or horses and they hold loops correctly

for tossing from horseback. A specially made loop for the end of a rope called a honda cannot be attached to make a proper loop on a horsehair rope.

- **Maguey** and hemp and rawhide ropes are use for throwing to catch livestock- cattle and horses, and both have separate or tied hondas on one end. Ropes in pre-Civil War (pre-fenced) Texas were usually 50' - 80' long. Later in the 1800s they were usually shorter- 35' - 50' which they still are today. The four small (1/4") strings used to braid a rawhide rope are cut from a full cowhide with a single spiral cut starting in the center of the hide. Only master rawhide braiders had the skills to braid an 80' rawhide rope. Jut the braiding process could take over a week and use 4 or more full cowhides cut into strings.

### Rope Care

Ropes were important tools and required care and proper handling. Bugs of various types would eat horsehair ropes so it was important to check them for the critters. Rats and other varmints would eat any kind of rope so finely made ropes were often stored in sealed containers like a wood barrel or a large metal can. Rawhide ropes had to be treated with tallow or sheep's fat to stay pliable and to prevent rotting. Hemp and maguey ropes as well as horsehair ropes had to be kept dry to prevent rotting. The fibers on all the ropes could swell from the damp and cause permanent damage. All ropes have a directional twist- either right or left and are coiled the proper direction and stored in that manner.

