

The uniform of the range

Fully outfitted for work on the range, a cowboy was covered from head to foot in a protective costume that identified him as distinctly as a knight's armor identified its owner. But every item of dress had a useful purpose, from the broad-brimmed hat that kept sun and rain off his head to the spurs fastened to the backs of his boots. Even the cowboy's ornamental-looking bandanna had various functions—as a mask to keep out trail dust, as insulation against the desert sun when wadded up and stuck in a hat crown, even as a tourniquet in case of rattlesnake bite.

Beneath this glamorous but utilitarian garb, the cowhand was dressed like any other laborer. He normally wore long johns—unless it was too hot. His shirt was typically collarless and made of cotton or flannel. His woolen pants were sometimes fortified with buckskin

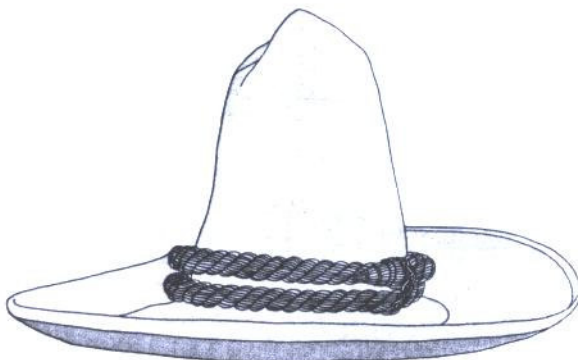
sewn over the seat and down the inner thighs to keep them from fraying where they rubbed against the saddle. He rarely used suspenders, since they chafed him, and just as rarely wore a belt unless, as in later days, he was a rodeo rider hankering to show off a fancy belt buckle won in the arena. As a practical measure his pants had to stay up by themselves and thus were bought to fit tight around the waist. Because it was inconvenient to carry anything in pants pockets while riding, the cowboy usually had on a vest with deep pockets where he kept his Bull Durham tobacco, and perhaps a tally book for keeping count of the cattle.

Attire varied according to region and a man's own taste. In the Southwest many ranch hands wore heavy canvas-like jackets to protect themselves from thorns; Northern cowboys had knee-

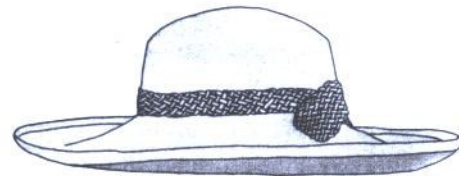
length, fur-lined overcoats. Some men wore buckskin gauntlets to protect their hands from rope burns or from blisters caused by the reins. Others, accepting these hazards, scorned gloves of any kind, claiming they robbed a man of a good feel on the rope.

There was one item, however, that everyone wore. That was the hat. Along with saddle and boots, the hat was the cowboy's proudest, most personal possession. Besides warding off everything from hailstones to low-lying branches, it could be used to fan a fire or to carry water. A cowboy so hated to be without his hat that Western etiquette allowed him to wear it even when he sat down to a meal indoors, or while he was hopping around the dance floor with a cattle-town belle in a saloon at trail's end. Sometimes he even wore his hat to bed (*pages 96-97*).

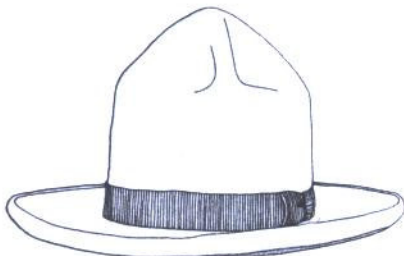
FOUR DISTINCTIVE STYLES IN COWBOY HEADGEAR



Sugar-loaf sombrero



Plainsman

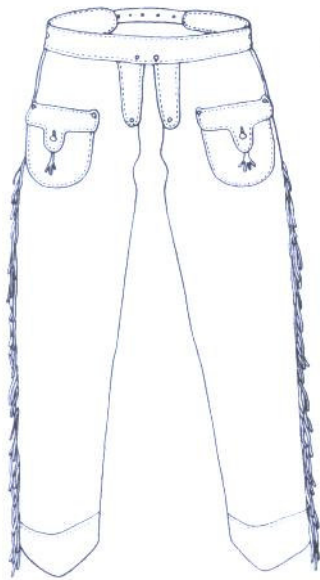


Montana peak

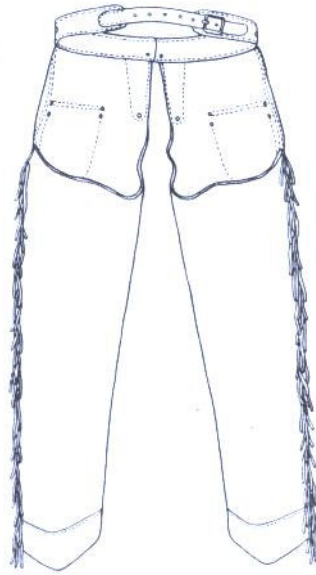


Texas

Though cowboys put everything from boaters to bowlers on their heads, most wore headgear like the types shown here. The sugar-loaf sombrero's broad brim and high peak offered good protection from the desert sun, while the low-crowned plainsman served well in windy regions. As important as functional features were such fine points of style as the Montana peak's four-sided crown or the star on this Texas hat.

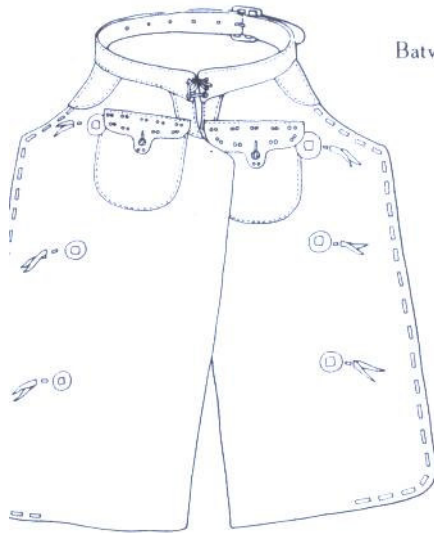


Shotguns



Before mounting up, a cowpuncher would often pull on a pair of chaps. These were seatless coverings first used by vaqueros who had to hunt cattle in heavy brush. Cowhands found they also gave good protection against rope burns, abrasions from corral poles and even horse bites.

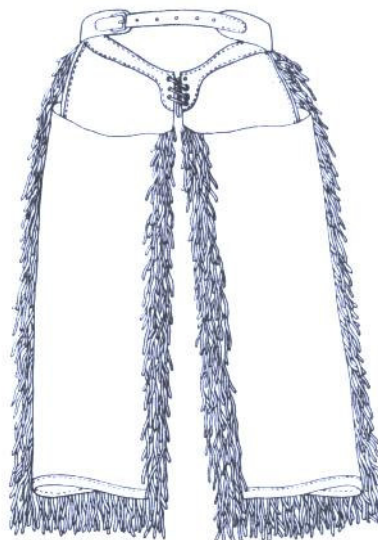
Chaps came in three basic styles, shown here in front (*far left*) and rear views. The earlier chaps were climb-in models called shotguns, because they resembled parallel tubes. Like later chaps, they buckled at the waist. Many riders came to prefer batwing chaps, with wrap-around leggings that fastened at the back and could be snapped on without removing boots and spurs. On the cold northern ranges cowboys pulled on woollies, wintertime chaps covered on the front with wool or sometimes with fur.



Batwings

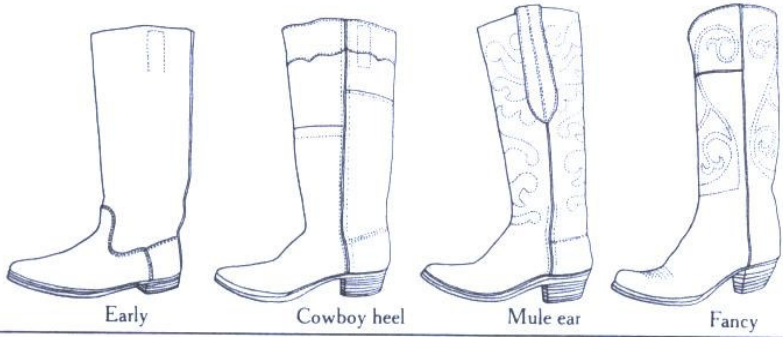


Woollies



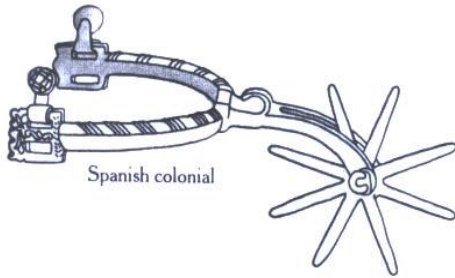
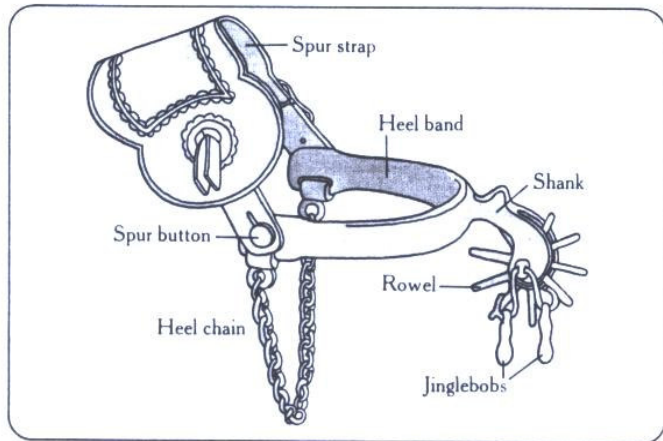
THE EVOLUTION OF THE COWBOY BOOT

Early cowhands wore flat-heeled, round-toed boots they brought home from the Civil War. In the 1860s the true cowboy boot appeared featuring a reinforced arch and higher heel. Later boots took on semi-functional frills, such as a more pointed toe and floppy grips called mule ears to make them easier to pull on. The fanciest boots, made after the mid-1880s, were of soft leather with decorative stitching, which some cowboys claimed gave a snugger fit.

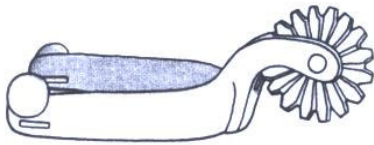


SPURS FOR RANGE WORK AND DISPLAY

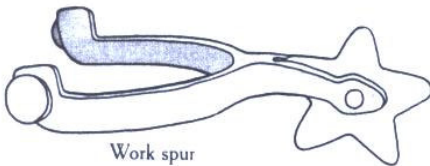
Highly practical, spurs were also a vital part of the cowboy's image, and he rarely took them off. The spur's heel band fit over the back of the boot, while the spur strap fastened across the instep. The heel chain not only kept the spur from riding up but, along with the jinglebobs, produced a sound that was music to any strutting cowboy's ears. Most Americans shunned Mexican spurs, with their spiky rowels, and used models like the OK, with rowels filed down to avoid scouring the pony's flanks. The plainest type was a work spur, with a gentle, star-shaped rowel. However, many cowboys also owned a pair of fancy silver spurs like those shown at lower right.



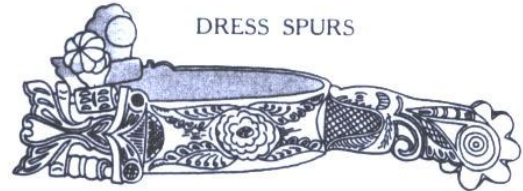
Spanish colonial



OK



Work spur



DRESS SPURS

