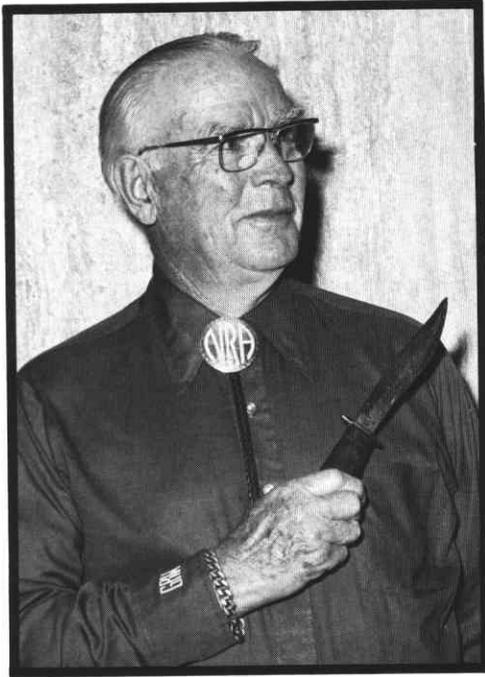


A Tale of Ben Lilley and His Knife

by George R. Whittington



STATE OF TEXAS

COUNTY OF POTTER:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This knife was carried and used by the late Ben Lilley.

I, G. R. Whittington, in 1928 went with my father, J. O. Whittington, on an inspection trip to the G.O.S. Ranch near Silver City, New Mexico, to see if he wanted to purchase the ranch.

When we arrived at the ranch, we were met by a Mr. Victor Culberson, manager and part owner of the G.O.S. We were shown to our rooms and told to come to the dining hall as lunch (dinner to a ranch hand) would be served.

While we were eating, a tall, blue-eyed man with ragged clothes, a long white beard and long hair came in. Mr. Culberson said, "Ben, sit down and have something to eat." The man replied that he would rather eat out of doors; so he generously filled his plate and took a half-dozen or so large sour dough biscuits, went out and ate under a large tree. The man was Ben Lilley.

While Mr. Culberson was showing my father over the ranch, a job that took several days as most of it had to be done on horseback due to the rugged terrain, I stayed at the headquarters most of the time and by so doing became very well acquainted with Ben Lilley. Being fascinated by his hunting stories, I helped him in every way I could to get him to tell his stories.

One morning a cowboy came in and reported finding a calf killed by a mountain lion about ten miles from the headquarters. Ben Lilley immediately caught and saddled his riding mule and with the cowhand and me started for the kill with his gun and four dogs, which he chained to the horn of his saddle.

We rode for about two hours to get the sight of the kill and the further we went, the rougher and more rugged became the terrain. When we reached the spot of the kill, the carcass was gone, having been carried off by the lion. Ben Lilley, after examining the sight very closely, said the calf had been killed by a large male lion.

He then unchained three of the dogs, but kept the fourth chained to his saddle. The dogs followed the trail for about a quarter of a mile before finding the carcass covered with brush. Here Ben Lilley again examined the carcass and the surroundings, said, "The lion had not been gone long and was close by." I asked him how he knew and he said because very little of the calf had been eaten.

He then unchained the fourth dog, which seemed to be his favorite, and in a relatively short time this dog bayed and Ben said he had found the trail, and the chase was on.

As the terrain was so rough and heavily timbered one couldn't ride, Ben Lilley told me to take his mule back to the ranch, and with his gun took off in a run following the dogs. He and his dogs came in to the ranch the next afternoon with the skin, skull and some meat from a large male lion.

As my father's inspection was over a day or so later and we were preparing to leave, Ben Lilley said to me, "I hate to see you go as you have been a great deal of help to me." I told him I hated to go as I had had a very enjoyable time, but as my father was leaving, I had to go.

Ben Lilley then pulled the knife he was carrying in a scabbard at his belt and said, "Keep this to remember me by. You have been a good helper."

Mr. Culberson then said, "Son, you have really been complimented. Ben gives knives he makes away, but when he gives you the one he has carried and used, it's a real compliment and you should be very proud."

This knife is the one used by Ben Lilley and given to me in 1928.

(signed) G. R. Whittington

THE STATE OF TEXAS:

COUNTY OF POTTER:

Subscribed and sworn to before me at Amarillo, Texas this 13th day of February, A.D., 1976.

(signed) Barta Lee Masters
Notary Public in and for
Potter County, Texas