

## **The Ballad of the Wild Briones Steer**

By Taylor York (Part 1) and Marshall Ralph (Part 2) Tune: "Wild Colonial Boy"

Upon the Mendocino coast where wild azaleas grow,  
Where rushing waters, pure and cold, in pristine rivers flow,  
Where Joe Briones' cattle roamed in meadows low and high,  
Where giant fir and redwoods grew toward the clear, blue sky.

'Twas on Gualala's northern fork in 1899  
That Joe Briones roped the bull, so young and strong and fine.  
He used his knife to tame the bull with cut so deep and dear.  
And so was born a famous name, the Wild Briones Steer.

But when the branding iron was drawn from out the fiery pit,  
To further torture now the former bull would not submit.  
And with a mighty effort then, he broke the ropes that bound,  
And Joe Briones' ass was thrown upon the bloody ground.

Toward the stream, the bleeding steer his wild career he took,  
And at the ford to freedom lunged without a backward look.  
He entered then a great domain of bear and boar and deer,  
And thus began the saga of the Wild Briones Steer.

For many years thereafter did the steer range far and wide.  
The whole Gualala watershed was his to roam and hide.  
He foraged on the hills above, the thickets hid him well.  
He wintered near the river though his fears did not dispell.

He grew to full adulthood, and his horns grew high and wide.  
And lean and strong the muscles rippled underneath his hide.  
The cowboys and the hunters often sighted from afar,  
The statuesque magnificence of Joe Briones' steer.

The Wild Briones Steer became a thing of fame and fable,  
And bets were made and money laid upon the barroom table,  
The hunters and the cowboys all had sworn from year to year,  
That one of them would hunt and kill the Wild Briones Steer.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen eight on Switchville's timbered grounds,  
At dawn the cowboys gathered with their horses and their hounds.  
With rifles in their scabbards near the waters deep and clear,  
They vowed to track and hunt and kill the Wild Briones Steer.

The Piper brothers, Matt and Frank, were there Jack Inman, too.  
Doc Hitchcock and the Lowery boys comprised the goodly crew.

And off they rode as morning light revealed that fateful day,  
When hunters with their proud intent would bring the steer to bay.

The flat of Pete Kineal was where the steer was jumped at first.  
The Wild Briones Steer had traveled there to ease his thirst.  
The hounds were at his heels as he made his headlong rush  
Along the river bank and through the wild azelea brush.

The baying of the hounds resounded through the morning air,  
And stopping now, he turned to face his fierce tormenters there.  
The hounds attacked from front and rear, retreating then in haste,  
Avoiding now the danger of the mighty horns they faced.

Doc Hitchcock was the first to ride upon the savage scene.  
As expert as a marksman, then, his fame had always been.  
The rifle rose, the shot was fired, and as befits his art,  
The bullet struck the fighting steer and cut his mighty heart.

The Wild Briones Steer was drawn and quartered on the spot.  
The hunters shared as hunters do, and each received his lot.  
The trophy horns were mounted by Penn Gillmore by and by,  
And there they hang upon the wall to witness if I lie.

### **The Dining Epilog – What Became of the Meat?**

But now I must report the fate of this wild storied beast;  
Our hunters hauled him home in cuts and washed up for the feast.  
'Tis said that Mrs. Hitchcock gave her loin to Mrs. Frank  
Whose husband was no hunter, but he owned Eureka's bank.

Some chops received by Lowery survived a burly chew,  
The Lowery brothers side by side, those famous eaters two,  
Their jaws commenced to crush and grind like stamp mills gone deranged,  
But the wild steer's sturdy fibers remained almost unchanged.

The Lowerys spat the chops back out, resilient on the plate.  
They called for Worcestershire and salt, horseradish from the grate.  
They chewed, and chewed and chewed again, until the crowds had passed.  
The wild Briones steer, as meat, did cut them down at last.

The legendary steer's tough flesh fought its hunters to the walls.  
Tooth by tooth it vanquished them, in payment for its balls.  
The Piper Brothers sobbed with loss, their jaws destroyed with toil,  
Their cutlets still too tough to chew, despite the olive oil.

Only one dish in every ten passed through its destined course,  
(Joe Gillmore said his tenderloin resembled wild horse!)  
The Wild Briones Steer had furnished meat so tough and rare,  
That it only could be vanquished by cuisine as light as air.

It fell to Mrs. Lowery to devise the recipe.  
She buckled on her apron and her French *esprit!*  
She blessed the beast magnificent, and damned Briones' lads.  
In spirit she wound *le cordon bleu* around his missing 'nads.

She took the brisket and the shank, all that she could find.  
A chewed-on Porterhouse or two, a loss no one would mind.  
She splashed in olive oil and started up the job.  
And she browned it in a cast-iron pan upon the wood-fired hob.

She found some fine wild onion close by Garcia Creek.  
Herbs she gathered on the hill, fennel, bay and leek,  
She packed them in a cheesecloth bag, round and fully fat,  
With some scary-looking mushrooms that she'd tested on the cat.

She sent boys to gather mussels at Iverson's famous beach,  
She scraped their beards and put them in a chardonnay to leach.  
And finally she tipped the jug of Sebastiani's best,  
A hearty measure for the pot. (The cook drank all the rest.)

For hours and hours the meat it braised upon the patient fire,  
Mrs. Lowery stood by the pot long past when others tired.  
For five whole days the dish was cooked, and basted every hour.  
On Sunday the exhausted chef commingled fat and flour.

She rolled out balls of *beurre manie* to thicken up the sauce,  
And splashed in wine to compensate evaporative loss,  
The meat came out, the *beurre* went in, the sauce received a stir,  
The hunters cried for pot roast, and the cat began to purr.

At last the hunters and the steer received conjunction there,  
The dish was carved and served at last on porcelain so fair.  
The diners' cries of pleasure echoed through the redwood grove,  
While Mrs. Lowery snored at peace, passed out behind the stove.

O noble beast, O bovine wild! Your virtues now live forth  
In Mendicino's humans (from Point Arena north).  
The flesh of Joe Briones' steer still lives among us all,  
His horns screwed fast upon a board, a song to mourn his balls.  
(*repeat last verse solemnly.*)