




Bud and Temple Abernathy made their first ride in 1909 from Frederick, Oklahoma to Santa Fe, New Mexico - alone. They were nine and five years old



The women along the way found Temple Abernathy particularly enchanting



Bud Abernathy



The Astonishing Adventures of the Abernathy Boys

Tom Moates

This is a true story.

Bud and Temple Abernathy made three Long Rides on horseback unaccompanied by adults in the early 1900s, and were so young it is necessary to preface this article with - this is a true story.

Beginning in 1909 at the tender ages of five and eight, the boys made six journeys, three of which were made by the brothers alone on horses, and each of the six were epic by any standards, and all were made within a four year period. Their accomplishments are factual and well documented. Their fame spread nationwide and grew so extensive they spent months at a time in the headlines of major and minor newspapers. The Abernathy boys were rock stars and household names to most Americans of that age, easily as recognizable at that time as Teddy Roosevelt and Buffalo Bill.

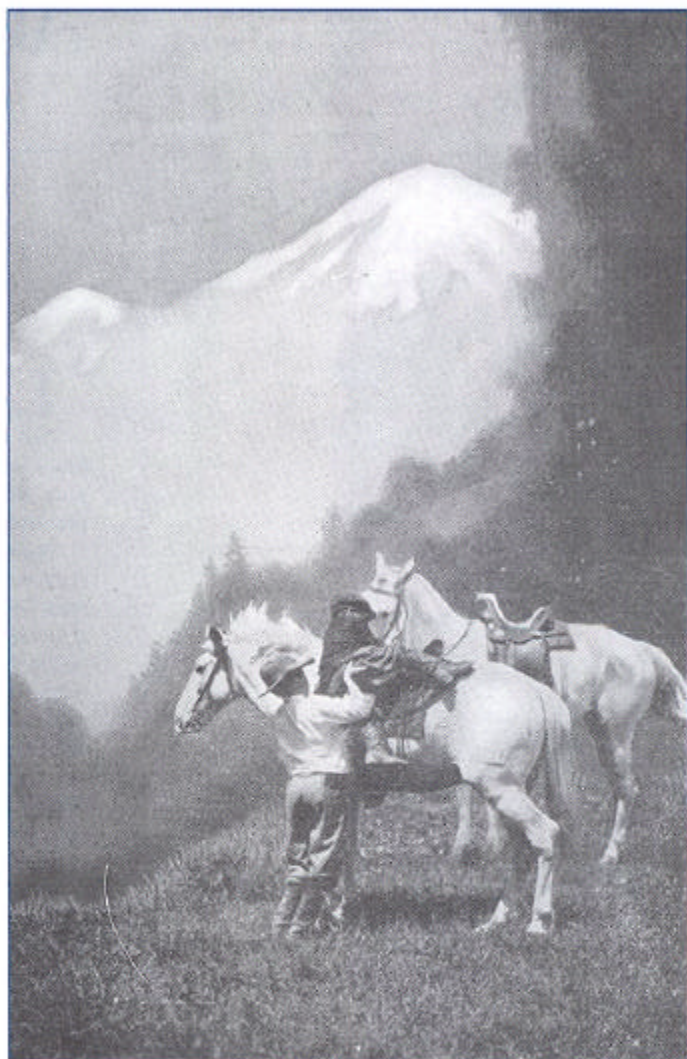
In the long history of Long Riders, these two hold a particularly special place in the ranks of the Long Riders' Guild. This international organization is comprised of equestrian explorers, all who have made continuous horseback journeys of 1,000 miles or more, and is the authority on equestrian travel (the LRG now has Members in 38 countries, and these equestrian Argonauts have logged expeditions on every continent except Antarctica, and is recognized as having the largest repository of equestrian travel knowledge ever assembled in history).

The acclaim for the Abernathy boys is held first for their achievements, which alone are extraordinary and unsurpassed even before their ages are considered. In fact, The LRG officially states that their third long equestrian journey was, "THE North American-USA ride of the 20th century. No human being, man nor woman, has ever come close to doing what those tykes did on that ride."

These boys took their first Long Ride horseback during a summer break from school in the Oklahoma Territory in 1909 for something to do besides hanging around the family ranch. They talked their father (a marshal in the area and the only parent, their mother had died some time earlier) into allowing them to ride their horses, an Arab named Sam Bass and a Shetland Pony cross named Geronimo, 1,200 miles round trip from Frederick, Oklahoma up into New Mexico to Santa Fe and back. This they accomplished alone, and had many incredible adventures including being chased while on their horses by a wild/crazed "jackass," enduring terrible weather, encountering a savage pack of wolves in the night, and coming across camps of Native Americans with whom they had trouble communicating. Despite the many obstacles they faced, their tenacity held firm and the journey proved a success. Rather than quench their thirst for adventure, however, as their father had hoped, it only fueled the boys on all the more.

The following summer, after a great deal of diplomacy with their father, they were off once more. This time, journeying all the way to New York City from Oklahoma on horseback, again unaccompanied by adults. A film, *The Grand Ride of the Abernathy Boys* recently was released about this trip by the Independent Film Project of Oklahoma University (www.abernathyboysmovie.com). Their fame spread far and wide by this time, and an avalanche of newspaper stories were written about them as they progressed.

"Temple...invariably runs away whenever he sees a woman coming toward him," reported the New York Times on June 13, 1910, shortly after their arrival in New York City at the end of their second Long Ride. "The elevator



Bud helps tiny Temple into the saddle against a breathtaking backdrop of mountains.



The horses watch over the two little boys as they take an afternoon nap.

proved his refuge last evening, and if any of the guests at the hotel paused to ask him a question even, he would make a quick exit to the elevator. 'I'm tired of folks asking me questions,' he said to a reporter with whom he struck up a friendly acquaintance, 'and I'm not going to let anybody take my picture anymore. I want to be with my papa, and I want to have some fun.'

Bud and Temple complained about people pestering them with "Kodaks," and they even enforced a "no kissing" rule to keep the crowds of zealous ladies at bay by this time.

"Abernathy Boys put Ban on Kissing, Fearless Youngsters, Who Have Ridden Here from Oklahoma, Mobbed by Women," read the headline in the New York Times on June 12, 1910. It reported, "It seems that Temple has steadfastly refused to allow himself to be kissed by women ever since he set out on the long journey overland, and the only woman who succeeded in getting a kiss from him lives in Washington. But it was a bargain on the lad's part, for he sold the kiss for a quarter. ...Louis [Bud] showed just as much embarrassment as his younger brother when several women insisted upon kissing him, and tried his best to escape, but finally had to submit, to the

extreme disgust of Temple, who was now perched upon a chair near by."

As they approached the east coast, souvenir hunters stole Temple's Navajo saddle blanket and would rip out tail hairs from their horses.

Upon the boys' arrival in Washington, D. C., a month earlier, on May 28, 1910, the New York Times stated, "After riding on horseback most of the way across the continent to meet Col. Roosevelt on his arrival at New York, Louis and Temple Abernathy, aged nine and six respectively, sons of Jack Abernathy of Oklahoma, the wolf catcher and friend of the former President, arrived here to-night. They rode in from Frederick, Md., today, a distance of fifty-seven miles. Temple dropped off to sleep the minute his head touched the pillow. While the little fellow was curled up restfully, Louis talked of their trip. 'Temple and I,' he said, 'want to see some of the animals Mr. Roosevelt sent from Africa, and to-morrow we will go over to the Smithsonian Institution to see if we can have a look at some of them.' When asked what he intended to say to Mr. Roosevelt when he met him in New York, Louis replied that it 'would depend on what Mr. Roosevelt said to them,' and that 'he could not cross that fence until he came to it.' President Taft will receive the

"HELLO, DAD!" CAPT. ABERNATHY'S

Long-Distance Riders Rep
Long-Distance Wire fr
Near Baltimore.

OVERFED ON THE

Famous Wolf Catcher Thinks
Suffered from Kindness on
Way from Oklahoma.

Capt. "Jack" Abernathy's lat
hung out to all corners yesterda
Hotel Breslin. The friends who
in for a call on the cowboy St
Oklahoma warmly congratulated
nowned wolf catcher on being th
of two such sturdy young trav
Louis and Temple Abernathy, n
now nearing this city on a horse
all the way from Oklahoma City.

Capt. Abernathy idolizes his b
whenever a caller would ask hi
how he showed Col. Roosevelt to
and kill a wolf with his bare h
would take a sure trail to the
dearest to his heart and talk a
youngsters instead. He was s
scared over the report from B
that one of the boys was "ill,"
fears were allayed when he suc
getting in touch with them over
distance telephone last night.

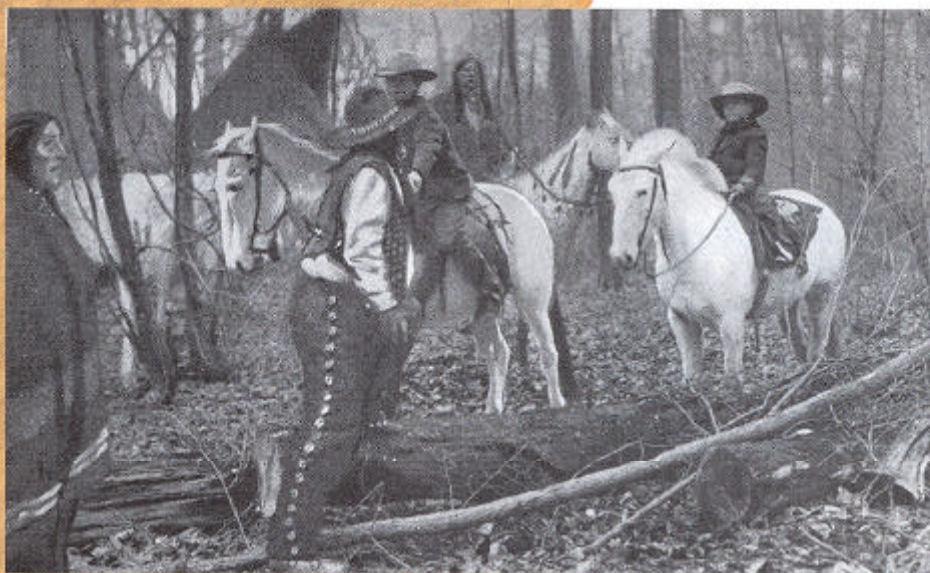
"Hello! Is that you, Louis?"
over the telephone. Louis is 9 a
ple 6 years old.

"Hello, Dad; it's me," replied
voice, emanating from a point n
timore.

"Are you all right?" asked th
"We're all right," came the
"only Temple had a pain under
Sam and Willie, the horses, are
too. We'll be in New York on F
may be not till Saturday mornin
bye, dad."

"The only trouble with my boy
Capt. Abernathy later, "is that t
such big appetites. Riding in the
all day gives them a regular saw-n
tite. I reckon the folks on the w
been stuffing them too much. Th
right now, though, and we will
good trim when Col. Roosevelt ge

As Capt. Abernathy was taki
group of friends in the hotel lo
Benjamin Le Fevre, ex-Minister
varia, came up and greeted him
been reading about your boys."
General, "and you ought to be
proud of them. I'm 72 years ol
just ended up a trip around the
I know something about trave
must be strong



The Abernathy boys visit an Indian camp.

ABERNATHY BOYS PUT BAN ON KISSING

**Fearless Youngsters, Who Have
Ridden Here from Oklahoma,
Mobbed by Women.**

INSPECT "THE WHITE" WAY

**Surrounded by Mounted Police, They
Have a Triumphant March to
Their Broadway Hotel.**

Wearing grins as broad as their hats, Louis and Temple Abernathy, the young sons of "Jack" Abernathy, finished the last lap of their horseback ride from Oklahoma City, Okla., at 6:30 o'clock last evening, when they dismounted from their broncos at the door of the Hotel Breslin amid the applause of several thousand

little travelers. When the boys arrived in Washington they rode up and down Pennsylvania Avenue for some time looking for a 'wagon yard' where they might 'tie up' the horses. Not finding such a convenience in the National capital, they finally stopped at one of the best hotels and their horses were taken to a near-by livery. The boys will remain here several days.

Bud and Temple experienced no shortage of adventures on this trip included meeting Wilbur Wright and getting an offer to ride in his newfangled "aeroplane," being received at the White House in Washington, D.C. by President Taft himself, and finally meeting up with an old family friend they knew in New York City, Teddy Roosevelt. They rode their two traveling companions from this trip, Sam Bass and a red and white Pinto pony named Wiley Haynes, just behind the ex-president in a parade celebrating Roosevelt, down 5th Avenue with a million people lining the streets looking on.

With this 2,000 - mile horseback journey now complete, Bud and Temple returned home on a different mode of

Bud and Temple never neglected to say their prayers every night before going to bed.



transportation. The boys bought a 1 cylinder used car called a Wildcat. After three hours of driving lessons, they headed out of New York and drove all the way back to Oklahoma.

Even with all the amazing adventures to this point, the Abernathy Boys' equestrian magnum opus would yet unfold in the summer of 1911. Now superstars across the country for their earlier feats, a challenge was put to them. Two businessmen agreed to pay them \$10,000 if they could ride horses from New York to San Francisco in 60 days. The boys' father, Jack Abernathy, believed they could do it, and O-K'ed them to go. Conditions of the wager stated they must only eat and sleep outside, and the boys agreed, but stated they would not ride on Sundays, sticking to their regular Christian day of rest even with the carrot of such a purse dangling before their eyes.

The day was August 11, 1911. Bud and Temple, now ages 11 and 7 respectively, and hardened from 3,200 miles in the saddle on long journeys, set out from the Big Apple on their veteran mounts, Sam Bass and Wylie Haynes, for the west coast. The boys, now riding to cross the continent at a swiftness never



Temple (left) and Bud Abernathy



More than a million people lined the streets of Manhattan to watch Bud and Temple proudly ride their faithful mounts, Sam Bass and Wylie Haynes, down Fifth Avenue, just behind Teddy Roosevelt's carriage and in front of the Rough Riders.

before achieved, kept up a hectic pace of around 60 miles a day. This allowed for none of the sightseeing and fun of the other two trips, even though crowds of people came out to see them and many invitations for diversions were extended. The hectic pace made the third Long Ride a grueling undertaking that lacked the capricious encounters of the former.

Many extreme difficulties were overcome by the Abernathy Boys on this trip, the rule that they must only sleep outside certainly adding to the brutal nature of such a trip, but the lowest point of all their journeys occurred after leaving Cheyenne, Wyoming. There, Sam Bass got into a field of alfalfa, gorged himself, foundered and died. Even in the shadow of this heart-

wrenching setback, the young boys were determined to continue. They purchased another horse, Big Black, for Bud and set out again to finish the journey.

Wylie Haynes didn't take well to the newcomer. Losing Sam Bass put the boys behind schedule to achieve the goal of making San Francisco in just 60 days. Even with such brutal challenges as crossing the Great Salt Lake Basin in blistering heat to make the mountains on the far side and falling ill with food poisoning from a bad can of tomatoes, they closed in on their destination shattering all previous records.

In the Sierra Madres, they encountered sleet, slowing them yet again. Still, the resolute duo pressed through and then pushed hard for the coast. Bud and Temple Abernathy made the trans-continental ride in 62 days, missing the money by just 48 hours, but setting a record that still stands to this day. Regardless, they said they didn't mind losing the bet because they knew they still had achieved an amazing feat.

The Abernathy boys made their last long-distance ride in June, 1913, driving a custom designed, two-seat, twin-engine Indian motorcycle from their Cross Roads Ranch to New York City. This time they returned to Oklahoma by train.

Temple grew up to be an oilman, and Bud became a lawyer. Both settled and raised families in north Texas. However, it was in Tillman County, OK, that the remarkable Abernathy brothers - the youngest long riders - began and ended their greatest adventures.



A Statue honoring the incredible accomplishments of the Abernathy Boys is located on the lawn of Tillman County Courthouse, Frederick, OK.

Family member Miles Abernathy chronicled the adventures of the first two rides. He spent some time fishing with the boys, and in 1910, penned the stories as they were recounted to him. This book, *Ride the Wind*, was long out of print, but a copy was discovered by the Long Riders' Guild, and they have re-published the work through their publishing arm, Horse Travel Books (horsetravelbooks.com). Also available are two other books written about these amazing little Long Riders: *Bad and Me* by Alma Abernathy, Temple's widow, and *The Remarkable Ride of the Abernathy Boys* by Robert B. Jackson. ¶

Thanks to the Long Riders Guild for the photos and illustrations that accompany this article.

TALKS BY ABERNATHY BOYS

After a Luncheon They Start for Oklahoma by Auto, Louis Driving

The Abernathy boys, who have things about their own way in New York during the weeks which elapsed since they rode in here on horse back from Oklahoma, started from Times Square across the country yesterday in an automobile, which Louis will drive to their Oklahoma home. They had the best of a luncheon which was given them in the College Room of the Hotel Astor just before they started.

Times Square was crowded with spectators early in the afternoon to see the boys off. "Temp" was hugging close two large photographs of himself and brother, which had been taken at luncheon and developed and printed before the boys were ready to go. They stood about as big as himself and he hid behind them to avoid the gaze of the crowd.

A car bearing Jack Abernathy, father, preceded them out of New York and they were escorted by other cars in which friends were riding.

It was about 2:30 when Louis started his auto down Broadway. As he came around the ropes and headed north and "Temp" waved their hats and shouted "good-bye, everybody." Previously they had shaken hands with everybody who could get near enough.

The luncheon upstairs was attended by about forty friends of the boys and father, and Louis, who is 9 years old, made a speech. This embarrassed him first, but he got away with it.

"Mr. Toastmaster and gentlemen," said, "as I go back I am glad of the things I am glad that I have done. I set out to do"—here he paused for a little time—"glad to have had such good time here, and glad to be going to see my five little sisters. I am East to meet Col. Roosevelt and I like him."

Then "Temp," who is 6, was called upon. He was anything but embarrassed. His father helped him to stand on a chair.

"Mr. Toastmaster and gentlemen," said, "I'm glad I'm going back to my sisters. Thank you for the time you have given me. I liked City Island and I liked Col. Roosevelt."

In the morning the boys had been called to City Hall to say good-bye to Mayor Gaynor.

The New York Times

Published: July 7, 1910

Copyright © The New York Times