



*Lone Wolf*

oil on board, 1900, on loan to the C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana

## THE LEGENDARY WOLVES OF THE BASIN

Prior to settlement, wolves, like the wildlife they preyed upon, were abundant. As wildlife herds were depleted and livestock took over the range, the clash between the wolf and the rancher was inevitable. With a market for pelts and a bounty on wolves, the “wolfer” became a familiar figure on the plains. Indians disliked the wolfer because the poisoned baits and traps killed the Indians’ dogs and occasionally their ponies.

Some believe the bounty law resulted because the wolfers were inclined to spare the pups to be sure of a continuing livelihood. Cattlemen felt no such tenderness towards the pups. The bounty started out at \$1 in the 1880s and grew to \$15 by 1911.

Roping a wolf provided sport for the cowboys. When out of work in the winters, some cowboys took up trapping wolves.

Wolfers were replaced by the government trapper in the 1900s, and the wolf was virtually eliminated from the Basin by 1930. The last wolves of the Basin became legendary due to their prowess and cunning. Old Snowdrift and Lady Snowdrift prowled the Highwood Mountains while the White Wolf eluded many a pursuer south of Stanford in the Little Belt Mountains. The White Wolf is on display at the Basin Trading Post in Stanford. Rumors of wolves in Central Montana persist to this day.

