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STIRRUP AND BOLAS G42

Stirrup

This beautifully carved wooden stirrup was used by a huaso - a horseman from Chile. The huaso is similar to the gaucho in Argentina, the vaquero in Mexico and cowboy in North America. Their job is to round up and herd cattle that graze over large areas. A huaso can also be involved in other areas of farming, such as looking after crops.

The pictures below show several Chilean huaso. The black and white picture on the right is from the beginning of the twentieth century, the black and white picture taken in a field is from the 1940s and the colour picture is from the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this recent picture, the left stirrup can be clearly seen.



Shaped like a shoe, the stirrup protects the foot from long, rough, spiky grasses. It also prevents injuries caused by bashing the feet against the sides of the corral, the Spanish name for an animal pen or enclosure.



This stirrup was for the left foot - how can you tell? Look at the decoration on the metalwork. It is on the left, so it would be facing outwards for everyone to see. It has been carved from just one large piece of wood. The marks from the chisel can be clearly seen inside.

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A leather strap would have been attached at the top to the metal bar and then this would have been suspended from the saddle. The huaso's saddle needs to be tough and comfortable, as he may have to ride for many days to round up the cattle. Layers of blankets and sheepskin not only make for a more comfortable ride, but also serve as a bedroll for sleeping out on the trail.

The huaso usually ride the Chilean horse, which is the oldest known breed in South America (shown on the right). It is strong, broad and muscular - perfect for the work it is needed for. Apparently, a horse weighing 370 kilograms can stop a charging bull weighing 500 kilograms!



Bolas

The gaucho is the name given to an Argentian, Uruguayian or South Brazilian cowboy (pictured on the right). The bolas is used by the gaucho to catch cattle or game. The balls are swung around the head to gather momentum and then released so that they fly through the air and tangle around the legs of the animal, making it fall down.



Similar bolas can be found in other parts of the world, but those used by gauchos are made of braided leather cords with wooden or leather balls on the ends. Normally, there are two or three balls, but some have up to nine. These must be difficult to throw.



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The leather bolas in the box is quite heavy. It is most likely that there are stones inside to give weight and help the bolas pick up speed in the air. The stones are usually covered in fresh leather that shrinks to cover the weight snugly as it dries.

Remember, the gaucho had to carry these heavy balls around with him. The picture on the right shows how they can be tied around the waist, ready to be used.



Some bolas are made of ivory or highly decorated, like those in the picture below.

