

Ben Masters, the “Mastermind” of *Unbranded*



In 2010, wildlife biologist, hunting guide, writer, photographer, and all-around fan of the American West Ben Masters and two friends completed a 2,000-mile ride along the Continental Divide. They were broke at the time and adopted some \$125 mustangs from the Bureau of Land Management to supplement their string of quarter horses. They were surprised to find the mustangs outperformed the domestic horses. Intrigued, Masters looked into the wild horse controversy and found a sad and complex situation: 50,000 unwanted

wild horses and burros living in government-leased pens and pastures, and in need of permanent homes.

And then Masters hatched an idea that would become *Unbranded*—an epic adventure to some, a hare-brained scheme to others, but definitely an amazing feat to all. The trip became the grist for the movie and for Masters’s book about the journey.

The idea was to adopt, train, and ride a string of wild mustangs 3,000 miles from Mexico to Canada across America’s backbone, the Rocky Mountains. Masters recruited riders Jonny Fitzsimons, Thomas Glover, and Ben Thamer to join him on his quest and brought Director Phillip Baribeau on board to guide the film’s production. Masters then inspired and persuaded organizations and individuals from around the world to join the *Unbranded* mission, which resulted in a successful Kickstarter campaign and crucial funding for the project. During the ride, Masters was charged with the mapping and logistics for sixteen horses, four Aggies, and three alternating cameramen traveling through unpredictable terrain with changing landowners, agencies, and restrictions.

A native Texan, Masters graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in wildlife biology. During college, he attended classes in the spring, led horseback rides in Yellowstone during the summer, guided Wyoming elk hunts in the fall, and managed the Jacalon Ranch in south Texas over the winter. Masters, who is CEO of Fin & Fur Films, LLC, is an accomplished photographer, an experienced horse trainer and packer, a dedicated conservationist, and main author of the book *Unbranded*.