



California State Parks

Video Transcript



Will Rogers: American

Yes, he was probably the most popular and loved American in his day. He is lost to us now, but his keen humor; his kindness, philosophy and heart-warming presence will never be lost. In his boyhood when he first resolved never to capitalize on his fathers position. The rope had taken Will around the world as a rodeo performer. It was to take Betty and Will farther than either dreamed. Rogers was always roping. These are some of the earliest slow motion pictures the scenes are from *The Ropin' Fools*, a film he himself produced to preserve a picture record of his tricks. It was made he said to show you young ropers what I could do when I was your age.

Even in his later years Will Rogers could rope and tie a goat in 8 seconds.

Catch the rider by the waist without going over his head – a perfect roll back.

After the ocean wave and a Texas skip a clean straight roll into a 4 foot catch.

He makes this one right on the nose.

Out to the end of a 50-foot rope.

Now the rope goes out behind the horse, and rolls all the way around, to catch the forefeet from the opposite side.

It's a figure eight, notice the rope cross, as the horse steps into it, then precise timing for a perfect catch.

Another variation of the figure eight getting both horse and rider, seldom seen today.

One hand throwing two ropes, in two places, that's accuracy. Now three ropes two for the horse and one for the rider.

Yes, Will Rogers was undoubtedly the worlds greatest roper. In his early vaudeville act he never spoke at all but later in New York he began to describe his tricks, the audience laughed. Will expanded his remarks and in no time he was making penetrating comments on topics of the day. This immediately took him into musical comedy, and here he is on the rooftop of Zigfeld's new Amsterdam theater high above New York's 42nd Street. These are early pictures of his costume and act, but the boy from Oologah little realized that he was at the start of his career. Now it's the Zeigfeld Follies, he's still twirling that loop, but the rope and the familiar chewing gum has become only a background for his witty comments on timely topics. By 1918

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the man with the magic rope had been claimed by Hollywood to make silent pictures. The family moved to California, he built a roping corral, that rope was still writing this story. As a motion picture star he held all box office records for 1933. He was tops in radio, his charity performances innumerable, his benefit tours raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for relief during the depths of the depression, but he was perhaps best known for his newspaper column Will Rogers Remarks which appeared on the front page of over 500 papers. It was the most widely read daily column in all history, a pungent paragraph of homely comment and penetrating wit. To gather this information for this column he flew all over the world. He was commercial aviation's biggest booster. In 1931 he happened to be in earthquake-stricken Nicaragua and quickly offered his help.

ROGERS: And from many hands invited to come down here and give you a hardy welcome and we like you to be here during those days. I'll come down, you better not invite me if you don't want me

NARRATOR: In tribute to his services five Nicaraguan Will Rogers stamps were printed, a circumstance doubly remarkable because the series honored both an American and a private citizen. Whenever possible he took Mrs. Rogers with him on his adventurous jaunts across the world. Arriving in New York from Europe he described one air journey.

ROGERS: I had a 10,000 mile flight from Penang right above Singapore clear into London or clear into Paris on one plane, I was 11 days on one plane. I had a wonderful trip you know, and Mrs. Rogers flew with me, she flew to Paris, London and around, she would make little flights - but no big ones. Mr. Hoover, now listen, don't let 'em knock Mr. Hoover too much, just let him go see some of these other countries and come back. He looks good after you've been over there brother

NARRATOR: But good as America looked there was a depression and Will Rogers was deeply disturbed by such want in the midst of plenty.

ROGERS: There's not a product that you could name that we haven't got more of it than any country ever had on the face of this earth, and yet we've got people starving. We'll hold the distinction of being the only nation in the history of the world to make it to the poor house in a automobile. This was the opening for national drive for unemployment relief, made when transcontinental broadcasts were so rare that newsreels photographed them, notice he uses no script.

I know that this subject is very dear to Mr. Hoover's heart, I know that he'd rather see the problem of unemployment solved as he would all the other problems before him combined. If every town and every city will get out and raise their quota what they need for this winter, that would make him a very happy man and happiness hasn't been a steady diet with our president. I thank you, good night

NARRATOR: When Franklin D. Roosevelt campaigned in California in 1932 he was introduced to an audience in typical Rogers style.

ROGERS: Governor this wonderful crowd is due to your drawing power, you're the biggest thing that's been in this stadium since Babe Didrikson. We must have some 80 or 90 thousand

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people here tonight, that's the most people ever paid to see a politician. This introduction hasn't been very flowering, but remember you're only a candidate. As the President I'll do right by you

NARRATOR: After Roosevelt's election, Rogers made a trip around the world. Interviewed by Japanese reporters his words were strangely prophetic.

ROGERS: Mr. Roosevelt told me when I come over here, now Will, don't you, uh, don't you go over there and jump on Japan. You just keep them from jumping on us

NARRATOR: Rogers was one of the few who firmly backed General Billy Mitchell's losing fight for a strong American Air Force. Here the two men are after a flight together. Rogers said bluntly that for the next war America had better learn to fly or learn to dig! Rogers and Mitchell two great champions of American Aviation.

ROGERS: Kinda gather from you that you doubt I was born. Course out in our country if you walked up and appear before anybody in person than we take it as fairly positive proof that you must have been born. We just kind of trust in that way

INTERVIEWER: But it seems strange that you have no official record?

ROGERS: Well strange yes, we're so far out of town I guess them ol' timers by the time they went to town to get a birth certificate you could raise another child

INTERVIEWER: But you are an American citizen?

ROGERS: Well, I think I am, folks Indian. Both mother and father had Cherokee in their blood in them born and raised in the Indian Territory. Course I'm not one of these Americans whose ancestors come over on the Mayflower, but eh, we met them at the boat when they landed. It's always been to the everlasting discredit of the Indian race that we ever let them land. What, it's the only thing I blame the Indians for, the biggest bonehead they ever pulled ...

NARRATOR: Today the Santa Monica Ranch he so greatly loved has been transformed into another Will Rogers memorial. Here are the earthly treasures he cherished, among them a statue of Will on horseback, typically lifelike. That twirling rope has spun out his destiny, but Will Rogers motion picture star, philosopher, newspaper columnist has left an immortal heritage. But of all things he wanted to be best remembered for his famous line, which summed up his life.

ROGERS: I never met a man I didn't like

Running Time: 11 minutes
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