

Frank Scardo, 85; rancher, forester, and rescue expert

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OAKLAND — The two bulls running loose through Mahwah and Ramsey one winter day in 1979 had a few things going for them: youth, strength, and speed.

Frank Scardo, the man called to round them up, had some attributes of his own: a way with a lasso, for starters, and more than a little experience in the art of hog-tying.

By the end of the day, the bulls were back in their owner's pen, and Mr. Scardo was reminiscing about his days growing up on his father's 300 acres in Oakland. Rancher and rodeo rider, later a forest service fire warden and wilderness search-and-rescue expert, Mr. Scardo was one of Bergen County's last true outdoorsmen.

Mr. Scardo died Thursday at home after a long illness. He was 85.

"We were the dudes, the cowboys from Jersey," Mr. Scardo said at the time of the bull roundup.

"We" referred to himself and two brothers, Anthony and Vince. In the 1930s, the three had turned their father's Franklin Avenue farm into a dude ranch, complete with 200 wild horses imported from Nevada. Together, the boys tamed some of the horses and sold the others to rodeos, where they did some riding themselves.

An injury suffered during World War II put an end to Frank's rodeo career. He turned instead to forestry, eventually becoming a state section chief for wilderness areas in most of North Jersey. In 1950, he and a group of other

foresters formed New Jersey Forest Service Search and Rescue, and he remained active with the group until he grew ill.

"What's good about this kind of work is when you're lucky enough to find them alive," Mr. Scardo said in an interview with The Record. "We've found a lot of people in caves and trees and some airplane accident survivors."

When he retired as a forest warden, he joined the Bergen County chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, investigating reports of cruelty and checking for violations.

"He was interested in plants and animals," said a friend, Bonnie LoBue. "And he certainly loved to tell stories, and we loved to hear them, over and over again."

Even as Bergen County lost its rural nature — all but a small parcel of his family's land became a housing development — Mr. Scardo believed any preservation was worth the effort.

"I still do cleanups with the kids in town," he said in the interview. "I got a whole gang of them together to clean up the litter on Skyline Drive from Oakland to Ringwood. When we were done, it looked so clean, like I remembered it as a kid."

Mr. Scardo was a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Roman Catholic Church in his hometown.

Survivors include a son, Frank G.; two daughters, Lena J. Scardo and Sharon M. Bender; a sister; and two grandsons.

Funeral services will be at 9 this morning at Oakland Memorial Home, followed by a 9:30 Mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help.