# Working the Land, Creating a Life

## *The Early Years at Bobcat Ridge*





City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program

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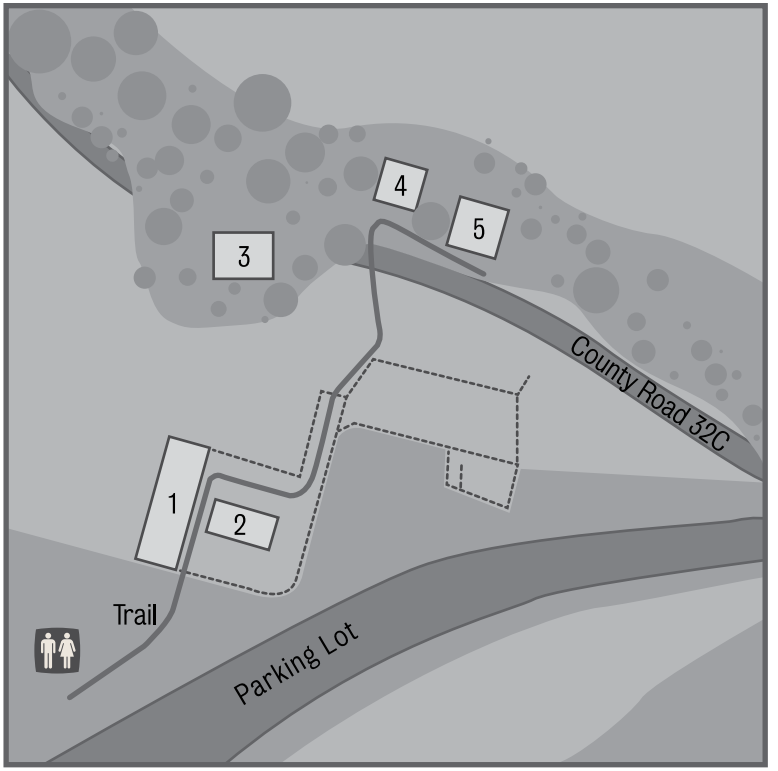


### Homestead Site Map

1. Calving Shed
2. Hay Shed
3. Hyatt Ranch House – (Not Open to the Public)
4. Chicken House
5. Pioneer Barn
6. Kitchen/Smith Cabin*
7. Stone Circle**

## How to Use This Booklet

This booklet is a guide to the historic structures at Bobcat Ridge and also tells a larger story of pioneer life in the area. The building descriptions are easy to find—just look for the small photos and numbers in the margins. The numbers correspond to the map above.

*Not shown on this map. Please see Bobcat Ridge brochure for location.

**Not shown on this map. See inside back cover for location description.

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## Introduction

Step back in time as you stroll around this historic farm. The buildings tell a story of pioneer settlement, farming, and cattle ranching dating from the 1880s through the late 20th century. Several families owned and worked the land here, with ranching replacing farming by the mid-1940s. These families built new structures and fixed up the old ones, but hard work remained constant.

Descendants of several pioneer families at Bobcat Ridge still live in the area. Meet some of the local families, in order of their arrival:

| 1860s | 1870s | 1880s | 1890s | 1900s | 1920s | 1950s | 1960s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Milner<br>Smith | Buffum | Hyatt | Spence | Cline<br>Kitchen<br>Nicodemus<br>Griffing<br>Roseberry | Branstner | Tigges | Pulliam<br>Thompson |

Courtesy of Bruce Spence

John H. and Alice Spence, 1939.

Courtesy of Ginny Pulliam

D.R. and Ginny Pulliam, 1967.

## Cattle Ranching—An Indoor-Outdoor Operation

Hunter Spence, son of local pioneers, transformed this farm into a cattle ranch. Hunter owned the land from 1938 until 1957. He built these simple structures in the 1940s—corrals, cattle chute, hay shed, and calving shed. Hunter's sons, John and Bruce, were too young at the time to help with construction. But like all ranch families, the boys pitched in with chores as they grew older.

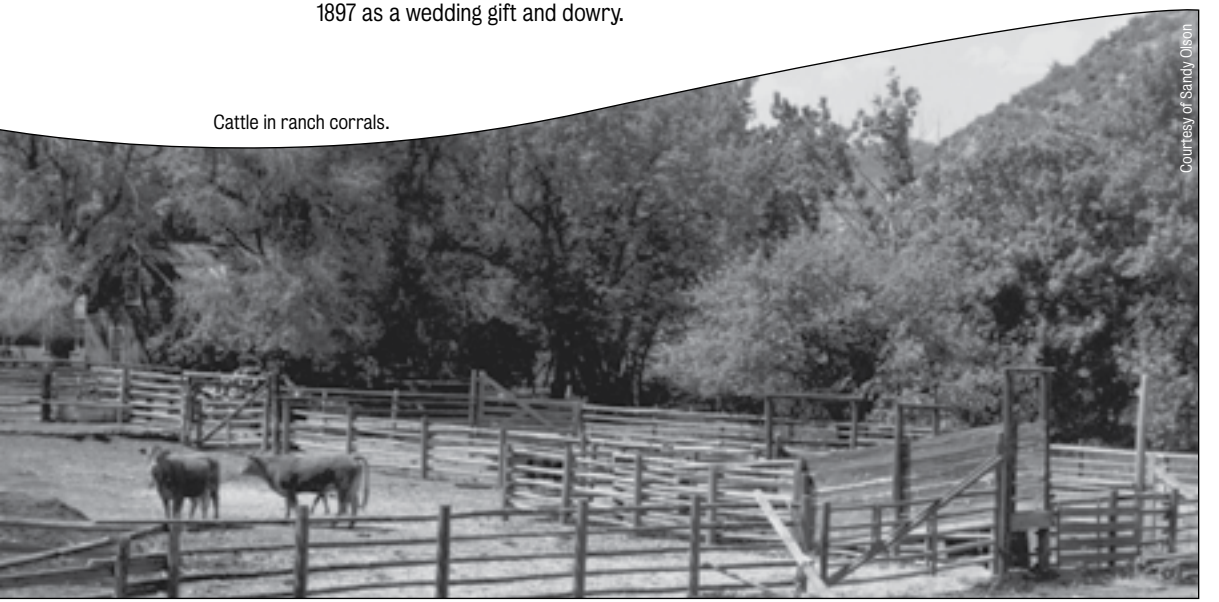
Cattle ranching continued here for more than half a century under ownership by the Spence, Tigges, and Pulliam families. When the City of Fort Collins purchased the property in 2003, Bobcat Ridge became a natural area for the public to enjoy.

**True Tales**

John H. Spence, Hunter's father, earned a teaching certificate in Ohio before moving to Colorado in 1894 as a bicycle racer. He was only "allowed" to court and then marry Alice Smith by going back into teaching—a respectable job! (Alice was the daughter of Sarah Milner Smith, the area's first public school teacher.)

John H. Spence pieced together most of the smaller parcels that make up Bobcat Ridge Natural Area today, including 240 acres received from the Smith family in 1897 as a wedding gift and dowry.

Cattle in ranch corrals.



Courtesy of Sandy Olson

## ① *Calving Shed—mid- to late 1940s*

Feel free to peek into the window openings, but please do not enter the building.

Hunter Spence ran a cow-calf operation. In Colorado's climate, shelter for calving during the chill of winter and early spring was essential. This simple structure is finished with board and batten walls, and has a shed roof (single sloping plane) with exposed rafters.

Several of the corrals have been removed to make way for the parking lot, but this building is otherwise unmodified.


Calving Shed
built 1940s

## ② *Hay Shed—mid- to late 1940s*

Cattle need hay all year round—and ranchers must keep that hay dry. This rectangular open structure with a metal-covered roof provided overhead protection from weather while allowing easy access to the hay. The raised wooden cattle chute on the east side made the job of loading and off-loading stock easier.

Today the hay shed still provides shelter—to groups gathering for guided tours.


Hay Shed
built 1940s

Calves inside the calving shed.

Courtesy of Sandy Olson

## Moving West for a New Life

Imagine homesteading . . . You construct a house and barn without a local home improvement store, and make a life from what you can grow and gather yourself. That's what thousands of Americans did in the late 1800s—including Hamilton ("Ham") and Olive ("Ollie" Rosebrook) Hyatt, the first to homestead this piece of land.

The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged pioneer settlement all across the West by granting "homestead patents" to tracts of land. Under this act, settlers had to live on, or "prove-up," the land for five years, farming it and building a home. After that, the land was theirs—for free.

**True Tales**

Many pioneer families in this area came from Missouri, including the Rosebrooks, Roseberrys, Carters, and Hyatts. One of the canyons south of Bobcat Ridge is even named Missouri Canyon.

Courtesy of Jim Sayre

Lewis C. and Nancy Roseberry family, circa 1896.

Courtesy of Bruce Spence

Hunter and Estes Spence with sons Bruce and John, circa 1946.

***Leaving Behind the Pains of War***

According to Gerald Spence (Hunter's brother), many settlers to this area of Colorado came from the South and East after the Civil War: "people who had lost everything. . . . The war was over and what they wanted more than anything else was peace, an opportunity to start life over again and forget the past."

**True Tales**

Originally from Missouri, Ham Hyatt worked as a teamster (hauling wagons with a horse team) before settling here. He had even hauled freight as far as California a couple of times.

Long timbers were hard to come by. For the calving shed and hay shed, Hunter Spence used shorter logs bolted together.

Courtesy of Sue Kenney

## Begin with a House, a Barn, and a Chicken Coop

Just beyond the calving shed is the original house built by Hamilton and Olive Hyatt around 1896. Ham arrived in Colorado in 1872 at the age of 24. He obtained several homesteading patents for land in the area between 1890 and 1906, including the land occupied by the ranch house, pioneer barn and chicken house. The earliest structures here date from around that time. He built his house a few years before the land was officially owned, as was the custom under the Homestead Act of 1862.

③ ***Hyatt Ranch House—circa 1896***

The house is used as a ranger residence today and is not open to the public. Please respect the occupants' privacy and view the building from the trail.


Courtesy of Tantarika Historical Associates, Inc.

Hyatt Ranch House built circa 1896

The original house was typical of the late 19th century pioneer era: a side-gabled wood-framed structure on a stone foundation. Ham later added a modest T-shaped expansion to the rear. The second floor, a single long room, must have served as a dormitory for the nine Hyatt children. Sarah Milner Smith, Gerald Spence's grandmother, would wrap a hot brick in flannel and place it at the foot of the bed under a wool-filled comforter to keep each child warm. Perhaps Ollie Hyatt treated her nine children the same way—a cozy thought!

Over time, various owners and tenants made changes to the house and used the space in different ways. In 1948, Hunter Spence added a bathroom (replacing the outhouse), utility room, and cellar to the rear. He divided the upstairs space into two rooms for his boys, and lined the cellar stairs with stone from a nearby abandoned homestead.

In 2007-08 the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program extensively remodeled and modernized the house, which now serves as an office and private residence for the Bobcat Ridge Natural Area ranger.

Courtesy of Larimer County Assessor's Office

Hyatt ranch house before recent modernization, 1981.

**True Tales**

After marrying in 1907, Roy Hyatt and Jessie Roseberry lived with Roy's family in the ranch house. This practice was common at the time—young couples often needed a few years to get enough cash together for a place of their own.

Now, cross the road and take the trail to the chicken house and pioneer barn. These buildings have not been stabilized, so please do not enter them.

Courtesy of Sue Kenney

Chicken House built circa 1888

### 4 *Chicken House—circa 1888*

This small log building may be the oldest structure remaining at the homestead. Hamilton Hyatt built it in about 1888 when he first settled his family here. With nine children born between 1881 and 1901, the Hyatts must have needed a constant supply of eggs and poultry!

Constructed of hewn squared log walls with dovetail notching at the corners, the chicken house features a large four-paned window. Such windows are typical of coops from this period—intended to capture winter sunlight when the sun is low, gaining warmth for the chickens. A tenant in the mid-1920s widened the window to allow more light in for the brooders (hens sitting on eggs). He also lined the coop with paper for insulation.

On pioneer farms such as this one, the children were expected to help care for the chickens. Gerald Spence describes this chore:

> *Eggs had to be gathered every evening and that was a chore which I enjoyed. We called it "picking eggs." When I was a small boy, it was something of a challenge. During July and August, there would be broody hens that wanted to hatch some chicks sitting on the nests and these old biddies were ready to fight to protect their eggs. They would sit tight over their eggs and peck at any moving object that came within reach. We always wore hats or caps, so I would shove my hat or cap over the hen's forepart and get the eggs from under her.*

Courtesy of Sue Kenney

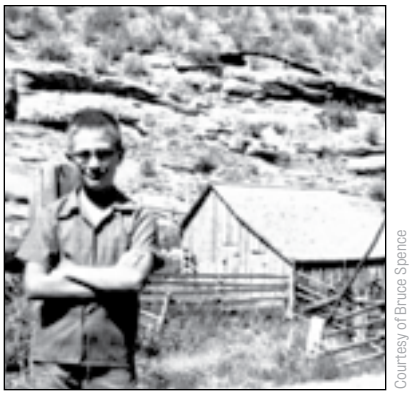
Pioneer Barn built circa late 1800s

### 5 *Pioneer Barn—late 1800s*

Ham Hyatt built this small barn in the late 1800s. The wood post and beam structure has no foundation and is open on the south side. Notice how the pitch posts are inside the building, sheltered from weathering. Perhaps that's why the pioneer barn remains in such good condition today.

**True Tales**

Hunter Spence tells a story about the time his brother Roland discovered how the Hyatt family survived the big snow of 1913. Ham hadn't put up enough wood for the winter. "He's chopping up the poles off his corral and that's what they're using for firewood. . . . About half the poles on the place were chopped up before bare ground showed up."



Courtesy of Bruce Spence

Bruce Spence at the pioneer barn, 1956.

## Pioneer Life: Work, Weather, and Water
### Late 1800s through mid-1900s

***Living Off the Land***

In pioneer days, shops were rare and far away, and few settlers had much money to spend anyway. Families lived off the land. People worked long hours at farming and ranching, which provided most of their food and a little cash for basic supplies like flour, coffee, sugar and spices. It also bought clothing such as jeans, because mothers couldn't make everything with their sewing machines.

Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society, #CHS-B1032

Pioneer women with a horse-drawn hay rake.

Would there be enough water for crops and livestock? For many settlers in the Bobcat Ridge area, this was a constant concern. Much of the land here is steep and rocky, and dependable water is generally found only in the main valleys. Over time, settlers constructed canals and diversions to get irrigation water to thirsty fields and livestock.

Gerald Spence recalls: "There was no end of work to do on the ranch—some interesting, some easy, some hard and some quite boring." Feed the chickens, milk the cows, brand the cattle, weed the garden, plant, harvest, stack hay, gather eggs, take the cattle out to pasture, bring the cattle back in, help with calving—work was never ending!

**True Tales**

Gerald Spence and his brother Roland tell stories of bee honey hunting. The boys would locate at least one bee tree every summer. Once the cold came, they'd help their father, John, harvest the honey. Sometimes, they'd get a hundred pounds of honey from a single tree! Their mother, Alice, became quite skilled at straining the honey to rid it of wood particles and bee bread (a pollen mixture stored away by bees to feed their young). What a treat during a time when store-bought sugar was rare!

Courtesy of Bruce Spence

Buckhorn Church Sunday School picnic on Buckhorn Creek, circa 1940.

It wasn't easy to keep parishable foods from spoiling. Gerald Spence remebers:

> *In the winter, families cut ice on [Buffum] Creek and stored it in an icehouse . . . a frame building studded with 2 x 8 timbers, covered on the outside with rough pine boards and well battened. . . . This gave hollow walls that were then filled with dry sawdust in the icehouse, an excellent insulator. In the dead of winter ice was cut on the creek and packed in sawdust to the icehouse, where it would keep for a year. The supply was replenished every year.*

### *Chores and More Chores*

It took great physical effort and time for pioneer families to heat their houses and stay warm. Wood-burning stoves were the only source of heat—and these required plenty of dry wood and constant tending. Families often harvested dead wood from forest fires to feed their heating and cooking stoves.

Courtesy of Carol Griffing McKenzie

The whole family helps out on a farm. Here, children tend the rabbits. Looks like a fun chore!

Gerald Spence, born in 1900, lived with his family just up the road from the Hyatt house. He recalls life there in the early years:

> *We had no running water . . . in the house and our well was about two hundred yards away. Father carried our drinking water from the well, a large bucketful every day, but water for other purposes was hauled to the back door in two fifty-gallon oaken whiskey barrels. The kitchen stove had a built-in water heating reservoir which furnished enough hot water for baths . . . and for dishes, but not enough for laundry. . . . We had no sewer service—no one did—so all household residue had to be gotten rid of manually. A swill bucket in the kitchen received all the dishwater and any solid food refuse that the dog and cats wouldn't eat. Almost daily, this was carried to the pigs down by the barn.*

### *The Challenge of Staying Healthy*

Health care in the late 1800s and early 1900s was not dependable. Even when country doctors were available, they did not always have the necessary medicines and knowledge. Family members generally treated sick loved ones themselves, using home remedies and tender loving care. The most prevalent health problems were pneumonia, "summer sickness" from tainted food, polio, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and the great leveler—the Spanish influenza attack that swept the country in 1917. Childbirth also claimed the lives of many women and infants.

Typhoid was common and killed a high percentage of the people who contracted it in the days before antibiotics. Gerald and Hunter Spence and their father, John, all got typhoid after drinking from a communal cup at a spring near their home. Yet all of them lived through it. In those days, it took a hardy constitution—and a little luck—to survive diseases routinely treated today.

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## *Kitchen/Smith Cabin—1917*

The historic Kitchen/Smith cabin is located at the north end of Bobcat Ridge Natural Area. To reach it, retrace your steps past the calving shed. Take the paved trail to the shelter, and then go north on the Valley Loop Trail for 1.3 miles.


Courtesy of Pennie Stutzman

Kitchen/Smith Cabin built 1917

This cabin was built by Ed Kitchen in 1917 with the help of the Smith brothers, Edward and Eugene, who owned the land here. Hunter Spence tells how Ed Kitchen negotiated with the Smith brothers (Hunter's uncles) to get the cabin built:

*None of that [land] was broken up, up there, and Ed and my uncles made a deal. They'd build a house up there if Ed would get the timber. Now there'd been a forest fire on Spruce Mountain, which is the next one west over there, see, and scads dead timber still standing, and they made a deal with Ed if he would haul the logs down, they'd help him build it. Ed Kitchen and my Uncle Ed Smith built that house up there and they also built a log barn which is gone.* (Note: To "break up" the land is to get it ready for agriculture by removing rocks and turning over the soil.)

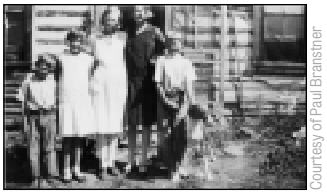
Courtesy of Pennie Stutzman

This barn and covered stable once stood near the Kitchen/Smith cabin but have long since disappeared.

Built on a stone foundation, this structure retains its original walls, but the hipped roof (four-sided with slopes on all sides) has been restored with wood shingles and tin segmental ridge caps. The interior ceiling was once finished with tongue-and-groove beadboard. The logs have saddle-notched corners (a system of interlocking round logs). While saddle-notch construction was easy to build, it was not very weather-tight. The logs met only at one edge of their circumference—brrr! The spaces between the logs were chinked with material such as small stones, sticks, or wedges of wood. Then mud or clay mixed with a filler (straw, sand, or animal hair) was cemented on top of the chinking.

**True Tales**

Milton Griffing remembers the cabin as a "two-story" house. A partial loft in the high ceiling provided a sleeping area for himself and brother Lloy. The boys reached it by climbing a ladder attached to the wall. Let's hope they were awake before descending in the morning!



Courtesy of Paul Branstner

Branstner children outside the cabin, circa 1930.

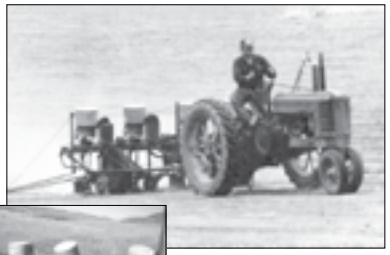
Three children were born in this cabin: Virginia "Sue" Kitchen in 1919, Mary Delores Griffing in 1929, and David Griffing in 1932. (Mary Del and her mother, Linda Griffing, are pictured on the sign here.)

Milton Griffing, who lived here as a boy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, tells of those times:

> *We had a big garden, chickens, pigs and milk cows. Mother canned vegetables and fruit and we dried fruit from Frank Gardner [Milton's uncle] and Gene Smith's orchards. In those years we had no money, but we ate well. . . . It was marginal cropland, marginal stock land. The lower end had more water but the upper end didn't have enough water to be really good irrigation. Poor crops and low prices drove us out.*

Years ago, all water needed for cooking, washing and bathing had to be carried. Milton Griffing tells how the wells at the cabin went "clear dry" in the fall of 1932, so the family moved out. A new pump and well were installed by Natural Areas Program staff. *Note: This water is not suitable for drinking.*

Check out the old farm equipment behind the cabin. These implements date from the first half of the 20th century and were mostly operated with horse power.



Courtesy of Scott Smith

This corn planter was modified for use with a tractor.

This hay raker (left) helped farmers move mown hay into rows for easier baling. At one time, it surely was a "New Idea"!

This press wheel (right) was used for planting grains. Look closely to see the gauge for millet, flax, wheat, rye, oats, and barley.

Photos here courtesy of Sue Kenney, except as noted.

This ditcher (top left in photo) helped with digging channels for irrigation. A plow is also shown (bottom right in photo).

This wheat thresher is a more modern device, pulled by a tractor.

In 2008, the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program re-chinked and restored portions of the cabin and added a new floor surface (partially funded by the D.R. and Virginia Pulliam Charitable Trust). Today, schoolchildren learn about pioneer life here, and all visitors can enjoy resting and picnicking near this old home.

## Before the Pioneers—Native American Inhabitants

The farmers and ranchers here were not the first people to live on this land. For many generations before the arrival of pioneers, the foothills surrounding Bobcat Ridge Natural Area were home to Native Americans, including the Ute, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Lakota, Pawnee, and other Plains Indian tribes. These were nomadic hunter-gathers who tracked bison, deer, and antelope across the plains and mountains of Colorado. The historic presence of Native Americans in the area is known through tribal oral traditions and pioneer accounts, as well as the artifacts and cultural features left behind.

⑦ ***Stone Circle***

One visible example of Native American presence at Bobcat Ridge is the stone circle along the Power Line Trail between the two legs of the Valley Loop Trail. This stone circle measures about 14 feet in diameter, and may have served to anchor the edges of hide-covered tipis.

Feel free to visit the circle and enjoy the nearby interpretive sign. Be sure to leave everything undisturbed so that others may also enjoy discovering the past.


Courtesy of Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Management Plan, 2005

Stone Circle

## End of an Era

As you have explored the cultural history of Bobcat Ridge, we hope you have gained appreciation of early life in this area. The Native Americans who first lived here and the pioneer families who settled here later left their marks on this corner of Colorado. May their memories live on in the places they built, loved, and left behind.

**Feel free to take this booklet with you—or return it to the brochure holder for others to enjoy. Thank you.**



*Content and Design by ECOS Communications: Boulder, Colorado*

CITY OF FORT COLLINS

# Bobcat Ridge

## NATURAL AREA





The primary source of historical information for this booklet is *Pieces of the Past: The Story of Bobcat Ridge Natural Area,* researched and compiled by Carol Tunner. This more complete history is available online at fcgov.com/naturalareas/bobcat.php or call 970-416-2815.

*The City of Fort Collins gratefully acknowledges the D.R. and Virginia Pulliam Trust for funding this booklet and the interpretive signs associated with homesteading at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area.*

**Bobcat Ridge Natural Area is protected by law. Do not take any objects from this site. Thanks for helping to keep this area meaningful for all, now and into the future.**

**fcgov.com/naturalareas**
Natural Areas Program Office **970-416-2815**
Bobcat Ridge Rangers **970-416-2147**
Life-threatening emergency **911**
For a guided history walk **970-416-2480**

**May 2009**

City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program

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