

# Experiences on Mission Creek Angus Ranch

Anita Hays

Although I may have been "broadcasting when I should have been tuning in" when I agreed to give a paper in Calgary at the 1982 annual meeting of the Society for Range Management, I honestly do have a few credentials. I am an Idaho Section member of SRM and for 22 years have been a partner in Mission Creek Angus Ranch and before that was a partner in the Tower Angus Ranch at Salmon, Ida. I spent two-thirds of my life married to one man—and almost the same amount of time with cows it seems.

I was a city gal who married a high school coach and former professional athlete who used to say ruefully that as a kid he just couldn't wait to get away from the family ranch in South Dakota but after college and an athletic career kept dreaming of a ranch of his own.

As for me, I had to learn *everything* about cows when we moved to Idaho from the Midwest. Learn I did, and not just paper work for a purebred herd, but calving, feeding, doctoring, fencing, putting up hay, irrigating, chasing, swearing, and even some aviation about the ranch: "pilot here" and "pilot there"—with a pitchfork of course!!

I have raked hundred of miles of windrows of hay in past years because we've always had a cooperative ranch on which we work in shifts—when I get tired of working outdoors I can always shift to indoor chores! I do not now run the swather, baler, or harrow bed stackers, since the grandkids grew up in time to spare me that, thank goodness! Even yet I can manage any of the tractors and bull dozers, pickups, cattle and grain trucks and cars. But *pull starter* gasoline engines are my sworn enemies, anathemas or whatever ya call'em—be they lawn mower, chain saw, garden tractor, snowmobile or my three wheeler! I do have an electric chain saw, but not enough extension cord to get too far from buildings and there aren't any wild "current bushes" in north Idaho.

I said I learned—evidently well enough, since I was elected Idaho Cowbelle president. One year, the Idaho Cattle Feeders named me "Cattlemoan of the Year." Besides, I am a member of a number of other cattle organizations: American National Cowbells, American Angus Association, National Angus Auxiliary, and the Idaho Cattlemen's Association. Further, I am a charter member of the 5-year old National Cattlemen's Association.

My husband did not awaken one Sunday morning a little over a year ago, but it has been gratifying to carry on the ranch with second and third generation cattlemen who are also second and third generation high school coaches. We



Registered Aberdeen Angus calf on the Mission Creek Angus Ranch, Bill and Mary; George and Lisa; and Anita Hays.

laughingly say that I babysit with a cowherd while they are at school—one 80 miles away and the other 150. Some babysitting job! There are 18 grandchildren and five great grandkids, and I have a grandmother bracelet to prove it.

Mission Creek Angus Ranch is located 17 miles north of Bonners Ferry, Ida., just north of the 48th degree and 55th minute parallel of latitude, within 5 miles of the 49th parallel of latitude or International Border between Canada and the United States. The ranch lies on the eastern bench land above the Kootenai River Valley of the Purcell Trench, where the annual rainfall is 24 inches. Most hay and grain acreages are at approximately 2,200 feet elevation. Our pasture and grazing lands are up to 2,800 feet and are quite heavily timbered with second growth trees. In fact until the price dropped we harvested a million board feet of logs a year over the past 5 years and completed the clearing of such areas for hay and pasture.

**The ranch consists of 1,500 acres** of private land. We do not lease any National Forest nor BLM land. We have four different types of hay production: dry land alfalfa; irrigated alfalfa with Manchar smooth brome and timothy; irrigated mountain meadows that were top drilled with alfalfa, orchard grass, brome, timothy, red clover, and white Dutch clover; and a sub-irrigated, higher altitude 40 acres planted to alsike clover with brome, timothy, and orchard grass.

The improved pastures are mountain meadow type, similar in location and growth to the second type of hay fields. Starting this summer we are going to use those hay fields as irrigated pastures, on rotation, with clipping if necessary. We have sufficient alfalfa and grain acreages for winter feeding and these meadow fields are small, scattered, and rough and hard on machinery. It is a self sufficient ranch for feed and pasture for our herd.

The author is from Bonner's Ferry, Idaho.

*Editor's Note:* This article is based on a talk the author made at the 1982 Calgary meeting. Hope the change from verbal to written didn't cause it to lose its punch. It was an outstanding presentation.



Registered Aberdeen Angus cows and calves, picture taken in March, 1982.

My husband was a graduate of North Dakota State University at Fargo, (of course way back then in 1929 it was NDAC), and every time we were out-of-doors he would identify the species around us for me—I didn't realize at the time that I should have been paying attention. So I have had to go through the manuals we have around and when I came to one that I recalled him speaking of (or I thought sounded familiar) I listed it and then checked with our County Extension Agent to see if it were "known to this area" to be sure I had not listed one that doesn't grow on this continent. Oh, I can identify them with a manual in hand, but I put that in the same category as cooking recipes. I can't even make baking powder biscuits without a recipe—I'm not about to clutter up my mind with such information when I know where I can find it when I need it.

We experience very little trouble with poisonous plants. One time we suspected tall buttercup might have caused a death. There is some water hemlock along the waterways, and sometimes leaves are eaten off, but apparently the cattle have not yet ever pulled up and eaten any of the rootstalks. We have some larkspur and death camas. As to plants with teratogenic agents, once on our present ranch a year ago, and 30 years ago in the Salmon area, we had calves with crooked legs which we blamed on pregnant cows eating perennial lupine pods at 30 to 40 days into pregnancy. A real shocker 2 years ago was a 900-pound bull calf in a dry lot that managed to get his head under a fence to eat rhubarb shoots early in the spring. He laid down, took a deep breath, and died.

**Ours is primarily a cow-calf set up:** we usually winter 125 purebred Angus brood cows, carry over 15 to 20 replacement heifers to take care of attrition and cull out, select 5 to 10 bull calves (Missionaries we call'em) for sale as yearlings or 2-year olds, and maintain 5 mature bulls in the sire battery.

Mature bulls receive 2 gallons of rolled oats and barley,

while growing stuff get one gallon per day; we do not use concentrates or additives. We could be accused of raising cattle much as we did 15 years ago, but we must do *some* things right—the first 10 steers that we marketed last fall averaged 574 pounds right off grass and milk in late October! The wrong thing was the price of 52 cents.

New-born calves are weighed, ear tagged, given a shot of vitamin A and D and one of Bovine Selenium since we are in a borderline low selenium area. Late day feeding has worked well for us, since 75% of our calves are born during the daytime. A neighbor feeds after 6:00 pm and claims a 90% day-time calving.

This year's calving season has already begun. (Written in February) I wrecked a fingernail yesterday before catching the plane to Calgary. I might have farm implement hands or animal husbandry hands, or the especially colorful nails with black or green tattoo ink where the white is supposed to be, but never do I have dishpan hands! One thing nice: February stars are brilliant, and it is interesting trying to locate the various winter constellations and planets, as well as viewing the full moon, known as the snow moon, or hunger moon, or wolf moon.

I do read SRM publications when I find time, and certainly say "Amen" to E. William Anderson on page 250, December 1981 issue of *Rangelands*: "It is apparent that some researchers are equating 'livestock grazing' with 'severe utilization'!" I assure that the ranchers I know are concerned about range management whether on private or public lands. Because if you cannot raise a "critter" on good feed, you certainly can not raise one on poor feed.

**We co-exist with many varieties of wildlife** (from some crazy snowmobilers on!). Our two small lakes have trout and perch and wild ducks and geese. Of these, the divers such as the goldeneye seem to raise larger broods than the tippers—evidently the eagles, hawks and owls take many mallard ducklings. There are lots and lots of white tail deer, an occasional muley, a small herd of elk, and almost every year a cow moose and calf inhabit the marshy ends of the lakes. Also there are black, brown and cream colored bears; once, a grizzly! Add bobcats, grouse and wild turkeys, cougar, fox, wolf. We hold an uneasy truce with the many coyotes about. When they start dining on live calf meat we start shooting coyotes! As to the white tail deer, even Fish and Game per-



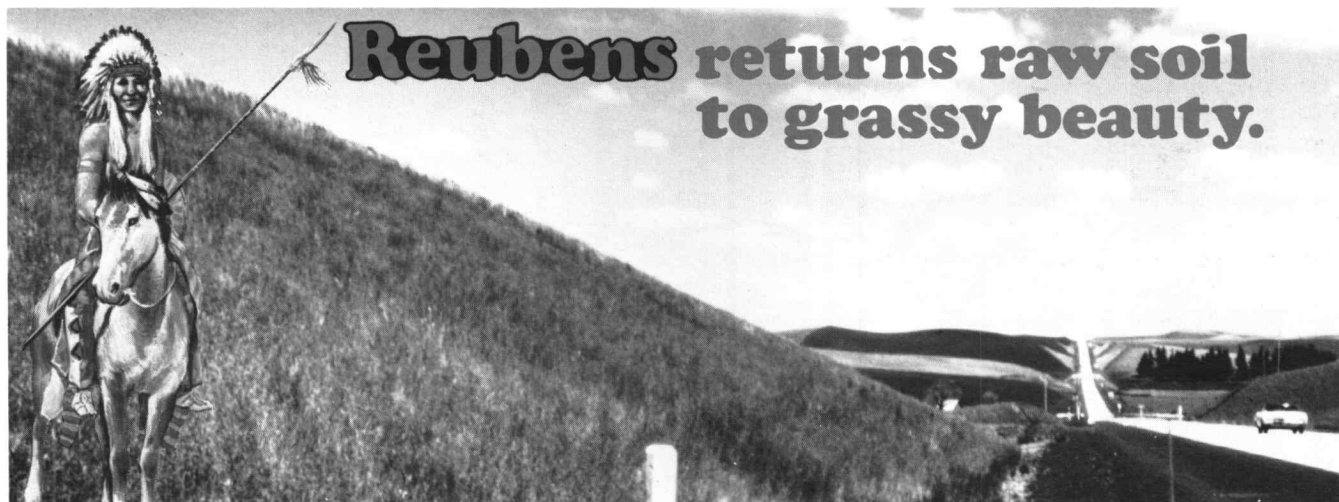
Posed calf with cast on hind leg rides the inner tube toboggan. Note the license plate reads, BLKOW.

sonnel have counted 150 head on one 40-acre field of alfalfa. Every day when I take my late afternoon check-up, I disturb 25 to 40 white tails feeding right amongst the cattle. So, I agree with the philosophy of Jerry Holechek (page 251, *JRM* for May 1981) that land uses other than domestic livestock—such as wild life and recreation—*can* lead also to resource destruction.

Ranching experiences—we'd be here a mighty long time if ever I got started: from mistaking the rump of a black bear for that of an Angus heifer, to pouring molasses on an orphan calf to keep the new foster mother so busy for a while she forgets that there is a stranger staying for lunch! At times exasperation rather than necessity is the mother of invention. For example, the lashing of a rug over the top of a truck tire inner tube for a soft, easily-towed toboggan for new calves that need to be moved, since, invariably, if you pick a calf up in your arms the mother loses track of it at once. But with the calf sliding along at ground level the cow marches along pronto. Then there is rescuing a calf that broke through the ice, or splinting the leg of a calf. Better I write a book than go into it all!

**I am involved in many interesting beef-related activities.**

An important one is Beef Promotion, based on the fact a steer is not all steak! The contributions of the beef industry go far beyond the dinner table because of the myriad by-products, edible and inedible. The greatest of the by-products are the more than 100 individual pharmaceuticals. One example, insulin from the pancreas of 26 cattle keeps one of our 1¼ million diabetics alive for one year. Another interest involves uses of leather—especially the calfskin tanned with the hair—and beef bone jewelry. I put together a style show called "Kreations from the Cow Korral" which weaves agriculture, conservation, humor and fashion into fun for all. The garments and accessories are brought by me and I emcee the affair using local people for models. If you ever need something a little different for a program let me know and we'll see if something can be worked out if there are no conflicts in schedule. I have presented the show for Farm Wife Forum in Milwaukie, Farm Fest Bicentennial in Minnesota, World Angus Forum in Kansas City, National Association of Soil Conservation Districts (NACD) in Denver, National Cattlemen's and American National Cowbelles Associations in Las Vegas and three in Canada. I cannot recall how many at state cattlemen's meetings. So you see, my life is not all work and drudgery.



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