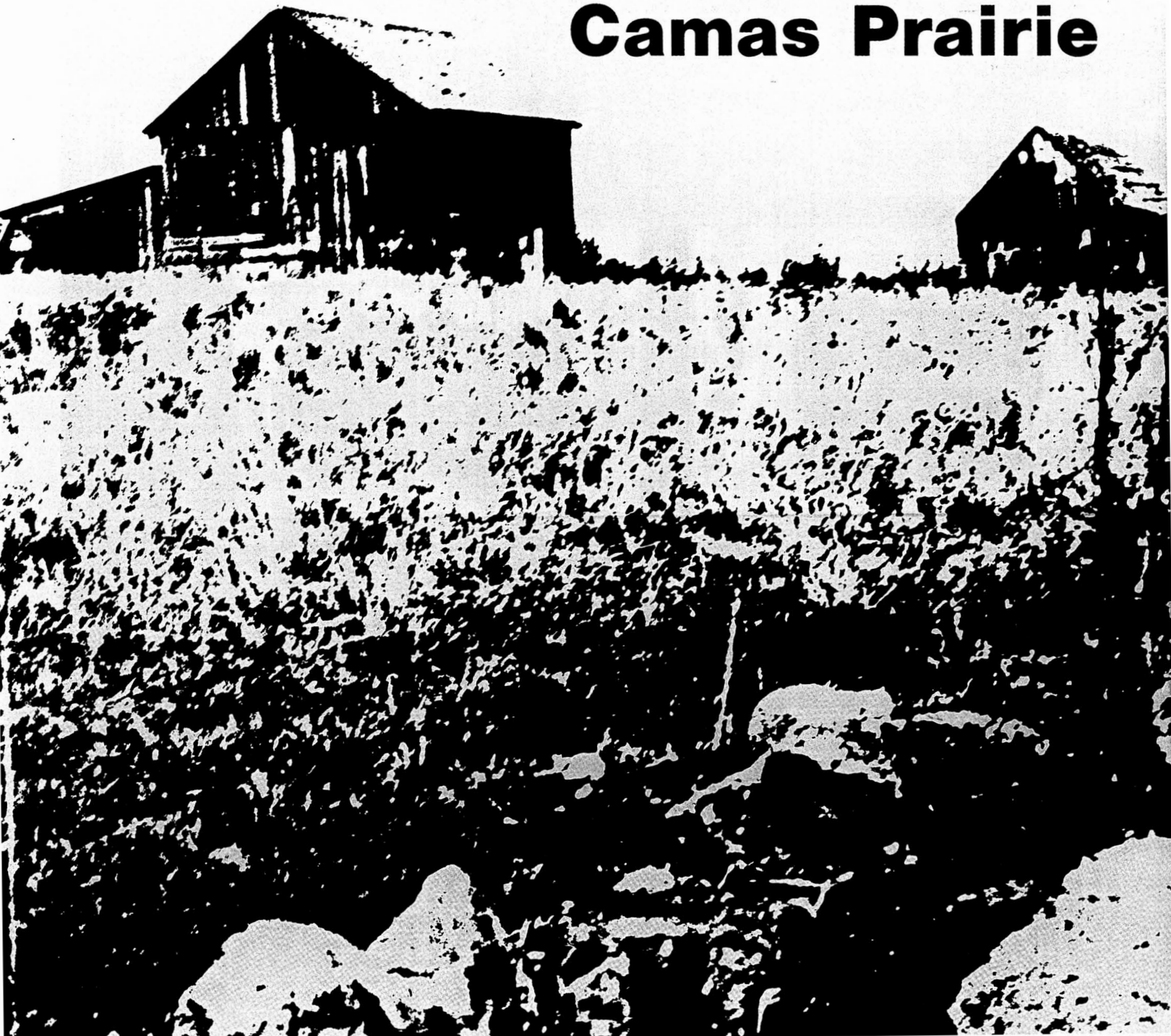


*"this snow life"*

**...On the  
Camas Prairie**





**P**art of the Nez Perce culture there in the Great Northwest includes gathering camas from the meadows where the plant has grown in a rather isolated fashion.

Over the years and decades ago, in fact, the Nez Perce tribe became known by their neighbors as "kouse" eaters, "kouse" a term from some tribe's language describing the camas bulb or lily. Some species are known as death camas of the *Zigadenus* family and are not to be harvested but are rather listed as dangerous to both livestock and man.

Author Merridee Smith of Arlington, Tx., found the Camas Prairie of Idaho anything but poisonous, however, in her visit to four Angus breeders for whom this area in the Idaho panhandle is home. Her four-part treatment of a distinct region and a neighborly approach to raising Angus is the first in a periodic feature on special enclaves where the breed is a way of life—"this Angus life."

## Angus complete the picture on pasture or canvas

by Merridee Smith

**“Y**ou can still see the Indian women out gathering Camas root in the spring,” Dan Hazelbaker says, describing how the prairie surrounding the towns of Grangeville and Cottonwood got its name. “At one time, the prairie was covered with Camas which is what probably attracted the Indians to the area.”

But where Camas will grow, so will crops, and today the prairie is shared with the Nez Perce Indians by a contingent of farmers who harvest wheat, barley and rape (an oil seed) from the fertile soil of the prairie. It is also home to a handful of successful Angus breeders including Dan and Peggy Hazelbaker who operate Hazelbaker 44 Ranch.

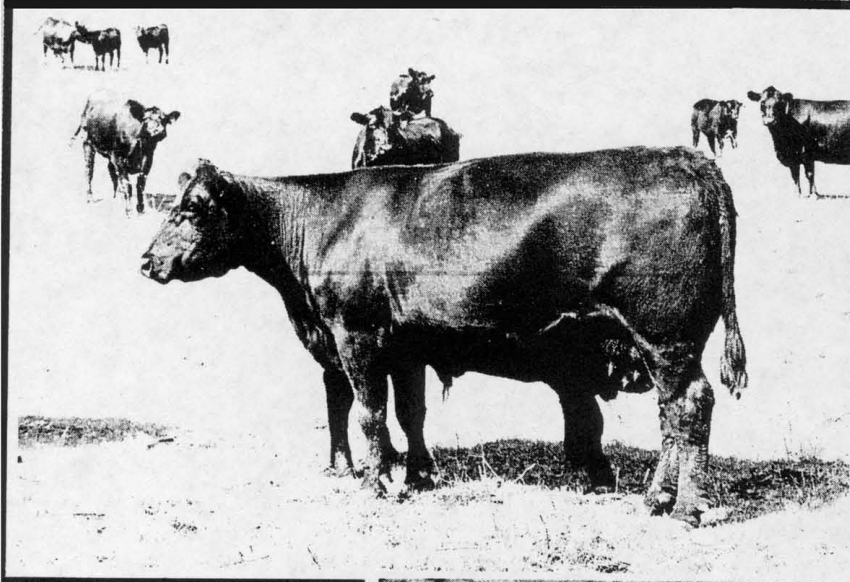
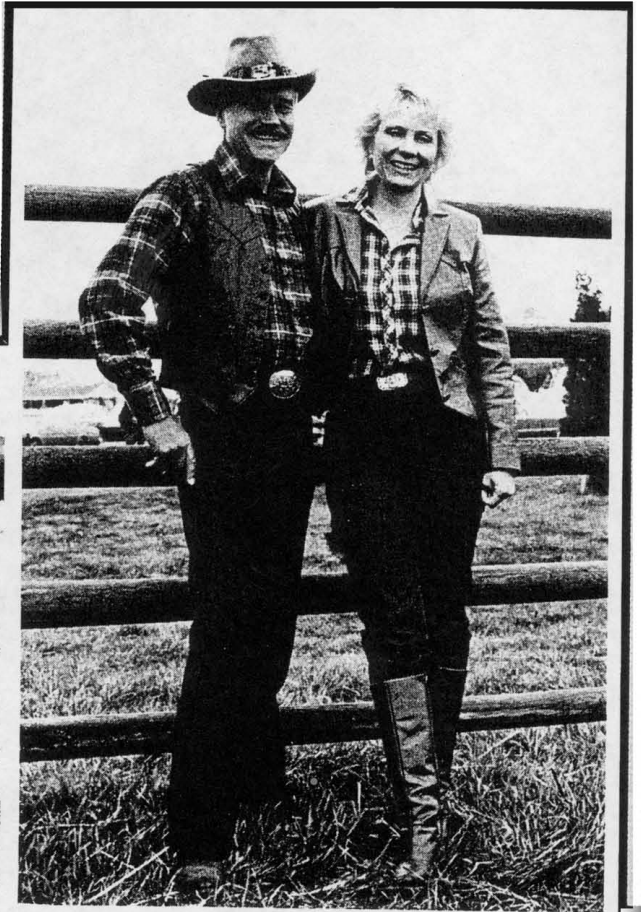
The Hazelbakers were both born and raised on the prairie, and for the past 23 years have reared a family and bred Angus cattle there.

In 1955 Dan purchased his first registered Angus heifer from the neighboring Holthaus brothers as a prelude to the registered herd he and Peggy now own. “In those days,” Dan recalls, “Angus cattle were looked down upon by local stockmen.

“They were known as ‘littleangus,’” Dan said, “and rightly so... the trend was to breed small cattle.”

Looking back, Dan realizes he was lucky not to have become

*Dan and Peggy Hazelbaker*



*Top Pathfinder cow at Hazelbaker 44 Ranch is this coming 8-year-old with six calves to her credit indexing an average of 112. She's H44R Emulous Blackbird Mary by Biffles Emulous 0100.*



*According to Dan Hazelbaker—born and raised on Camas Prairie—the Nez Perce Indians came to the area in search of Camas root. Today, it's home to farmers and Angus breeders including Hazelbaker and his wife, Peggy.*

**“Producers know they can come to us for heifer bulls. That’s our market and we know it.”**



heavily involved in the registered cattle until later.

“When things started to change, an awful lot of people had to get out of the business because they couldn’t find cattle that fit the new ideals,” he said.

When the decision was made to begin an aggressive registered breeding program, the couple selected cattle that represented increased frame size.

“Canadian-bred cattle emerged as some of the really big cattle of the time,” Dan remembers, “and one of our first purchases was Claymarr Blackbird 45 with an own daughter of Canadian Colossal at side. The cow was bigger than anything else we had seen.

“Our goal was to build a cow herd based on maternal traits with plenty of size and scale,” Dan said. “Through the ‘45’ cow family, we were able to achieve those objectives and today a majority of our females trace back to her.”

In the early ‘70s, when the Hazelbaker’s purebred program became a reality, one management tool that was irreplaceable was artificial insemination. This enabled the Hazelbakers to utilize top bulls such as Colossal and Great Northern, another cornerstone of their program that would have been unavailable otherwise.

These two bulls were followed with bulls from the Emulous Mon Reposa lines, and today the 44 Ranch herd is a general blend of these well-known bloodlines.

**S**ince the early days, the Hazelbakers have cut back in numbers and are concentrating on getting the most out of their 45 cows.

Particular emphasis is placed on maternal traits in an effort to produce an animal with maternal strength. Cattle are strictly selected for milking ability, fertility, calving ease and mothering ability. Dan and Peggy never hesitate to cull an animal that does not meet their standards in each of these areas.

As one would imagine, a few cow families have proven themselves to be superior maternal performers and through the years females from these lines have been kept back as replacements. Many of the cows in the herd today are

descendants of their Colossal daughters and the Hazelbakers may in fact own one of the few remaining daughters of the great bull, Blackbird Mary Anne.

“I know that the first law of cattle breeding says never get attached to a cow,” Dan says, “but the old girl has a good calf every year and I really don’t think we can ever part with her. She’s like one of the family.”

While Mary Anne may not break any records for hip height, it’s easy to see what was so impressive about females of her kind. Even today, one has to admire the tremendous length of body and fleshing ability this *grande dame* of the Angus breed possesses.

In the Hazelbakers’ quest for top maternal trait sires, the American Angus Association’s sire summary has been a very useful tool.

“Peggy is the researcher of the family,” Dan says, “and I’m on the labor side. She does all the pedigree work, selects our potential herd sires and handles the book work. She is very thorough, sometimes going back six generations to see if a bull is backed by maternal performers.”

Like any Angus breeder, the Hazelbakers are interested in providing commercial and purebred segments with a bull that fits their needs.

Each year, a small group of Hazelbaker-bred bulls are sold into the commercial market. Dan said they have had good response from buyers who are looking for calving ease bulls and bulls that can sire quality commercial replacement females.

“Our buyers want 75-80 lb. birth weight bulls so we castrate any bull calf over 90 lb.,” Dan says, in response to birth weight selection, “and we have the performance information on hand for those customers interested in looking it over.”

“We have established a strong repeat buyer market because producers know they can come to us for heifer bulls. That’s our market and we know it,” he said.

Like many Angus enthusiasts, the Hazelbakers find that their livelihood and recreation overlap. Peggy Hazelbaker is a perfect example of this. While her interest

in art may have begun earlier in life than her interest in Angus cattle, today she combines them both by producing paintings and sculptures which depict her favorite subject—Angus cattle.

Peggy's studio is a small extension off the Hazelbakers' living room which is surrounded by glass. It's here that she spends many hours working on the ranch records and her paintings and sculptures. The view affords her the chance to capture Angus families at their best and it also

lets her keep an eye on things, especially during calving.

Several Northwest Angus breeders possess Peggy originals. They have been used as gifts and prizes for several Angus functions. Her work has also graced the cover of the *Western States Angus News* and she has displayed both her oils and her sculpted pieces in Reno during the Western National Angus Futurity.

Through Peggy's work, many Hazelbaker cows have gained true immortality.

## Fifty years lends perspective to the business

**V**ic and Rich Holthaus have an anniversary coming up. The year 1986 will mark their 50th year in the Angus business.

During those 50 years Vic and Rich have seen many changes occur. They've ridden out the highs and lows of both the cattle and farming business (they harvest crops from 700 acres), watched frame size move from large to small and back again and witnessed great advance through artificial insemination and embryo transfer.

The result? Two men, who through hard work and progressive attitudes, have built a cow herd worthy of those 50 years.

"I watched cows get too small," Vic says, "and perhaps today our cattle are too big. I know that when you start weaning heifers over 700 pounds and bulls that are even heavier they are reaching that point. The industry doesn't need extremes anymore. Angus cattle are known for maternal ability, easy fleshing, calving ease and carcass quality. We don't need to be breeding these qualities out of our cattle."

Nonetheless, the 70-head cow herd that the brothers maintain can be accurately described as a "very high quality group of modern females." It's safe to say that each and every animal could withstand tough competition and come out on top.

Through A.I. the HB herd is utilizing some of the top sires on today's market. An interest in HAR Bang 1774, the 1985 Denver grand champion was purchased prior to his Denver victory, while Wrangler, Pine Drive Big Sky, Greenbrae Chairman and PS Power Drive are also included on their bull roster.

While Pine Drive and Bang progeny have been particular favorites, both brothers were highly impressed with Power Drive.

"I saw him (Power Drive) in Reno during the show," Rich recalls. "He is a bull with red meat—what I call a cowman's bull. I think the breed needs more like him."

Cattle marketing is the biggest challenge that the brothers face because as they admit "we are not in cattle country."

"This is farming country," Vic said, "and most of the people that buy bulls are only interested in one



thing—getting their cows bred. They really don't care if they are registered, performance tested or out of a champion bull. Those things just don't matter to them which is why they won't pay to get quality bulls."

Consequently, only a select few bulls are kept intact each year. The remainder are steered and shipped to market as heavy weaners. This puts more pressure on the females to bring a premium price when sold. To accomplish this, every two years the Holthaus brothers team up with the Eckert brothers, Hazelbakers and Camas Prairie Angus to host a joint sale called Prairie Progress.

In this event each operation contributes 15-20 head of heifer calves, bred heifers and pairs. Since the beginning, the sale has been well attended and cattle have sold into a wide area of the United States.

But while this gives the Holthaus brothers a place to market their quality females, they also offer cattle private treaty.

Admittedly, they are located off the beaten path, so the show ring has played an important role in



*"The grass up here just seems to be stronger. Once the calves are turned out they just seem to take off." —Rich Holthaus, Holthaus Brothers*

*"I've seen cattle get too small and perhaps today they are getting too big. We need to get back to the basics and remember why Angus cattle are popular." —Vic Holthaus*



*Rich Holthaus examines a calving book as he talks about the bulls they used in the 1985 breeding season. "We're looking forward to our Power Drive calves," he says. "The bull impressed us with his volume, muscle and overall frame."*

keeping their name in front of the Angus public. The brothers themselves do not participate directly in this effort but instead their cattle are campaigned by professional showmen. HB cattle have been successful at Reno (Western National Angus Futurity), Denver, Portland (Pacific International), Spokane and other regional events.

"We don't have the time or the know-how to fit and show cattle ourselves," Rich said, "but we realize a few of the calves we have each year could be competitive so we've let others take them out for us."

While the brothers may profess to little knowledge about fitting and showing, after visiting with the two, one has no doubt that they could certainly do a successful job of just about anything, providing time was available.

But the brothers are more than just experienced and knowledgeable cattlemen. They are also involved in a farming operation and under the supervision of Vic, who can add lumberjack to his list of talents, have logged a large tract of timber ground that also serves as summer pasture for the cow herd.

It's here in "God's living room" as Vic calls it, that one might sight an elk or two, and on occasion even a whole herd as they graze the timber-rimmed pastures. This is also where the Holthaus calves get that little something extra that can't be acquired from genetics but results in a big healthy calf at weaning.

"Our cattle suffer during the winter," Rich admits, "because we just don't have a good spot for them to calve. Each year we fight the mud that comes with having cattle on the prairie. But once the cattle go to the timber, the calves just take off."

"It stays cool here in the summer," Vic explains the benefits, "the flies aren't bad and the grass just seems to have more strength."

On weight day those benefits pay off with extra pounds. In the show ring they figure as extra inches, and to the Holthaus brothers, all these things add up to 50 years of cattle breeding on the Camas Prairie.