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he horses are blowing softly at the head of Arastas Creek. They rest. And during the morning stillness, only the pleasant creak of saddle leather can be heard as someone shifts position.

Then—"Did y' hear that?" An elk whistles . . . somewhere, from one of the many timbered ridges that break right and left and tumble off into the river far below.

The sun's rising over the Madison Range and its peaks: No Man, The Wedge, Echo, Dutchman's, Sawtooth Ridge, the Sphinx. The morning light bathes a web of irrigation lines far away, silver filagrees on fields of gold and emerald velvet.



*Kevin Schulz represents the fifth generation. He's a scion of a family who began ranching across the Beaverhead's ranges in the early 1900s and who revere Montana as a matriarch.*

"That's Bear Creek Ranch," one of the party says. "Most of their water is gravity flow. Quite a development."

Little streams of Angus cattle flowing together now. By mid-morning the gather will be complete, and a river of black bodies will flow up, up to higher ranges still, up and against the forces of gravity, their natures, and maternal instincts. Calves turn back, seeking where they last suckled, thinking "Mom" will be there. Riders spur after and cuss them back to the drag.

But the cows move on, not without complaint. A whip snaps through the forest of pine, spruce, fir, cracking just like your old favorite .22 and finally it's

open country and bedlam. The sun's higher, and the bawling no less lusty as the herd's held for mothering up. Riders take turns watching the process while others go to lunch. It's been six to seven hours in the saddle and more to come.

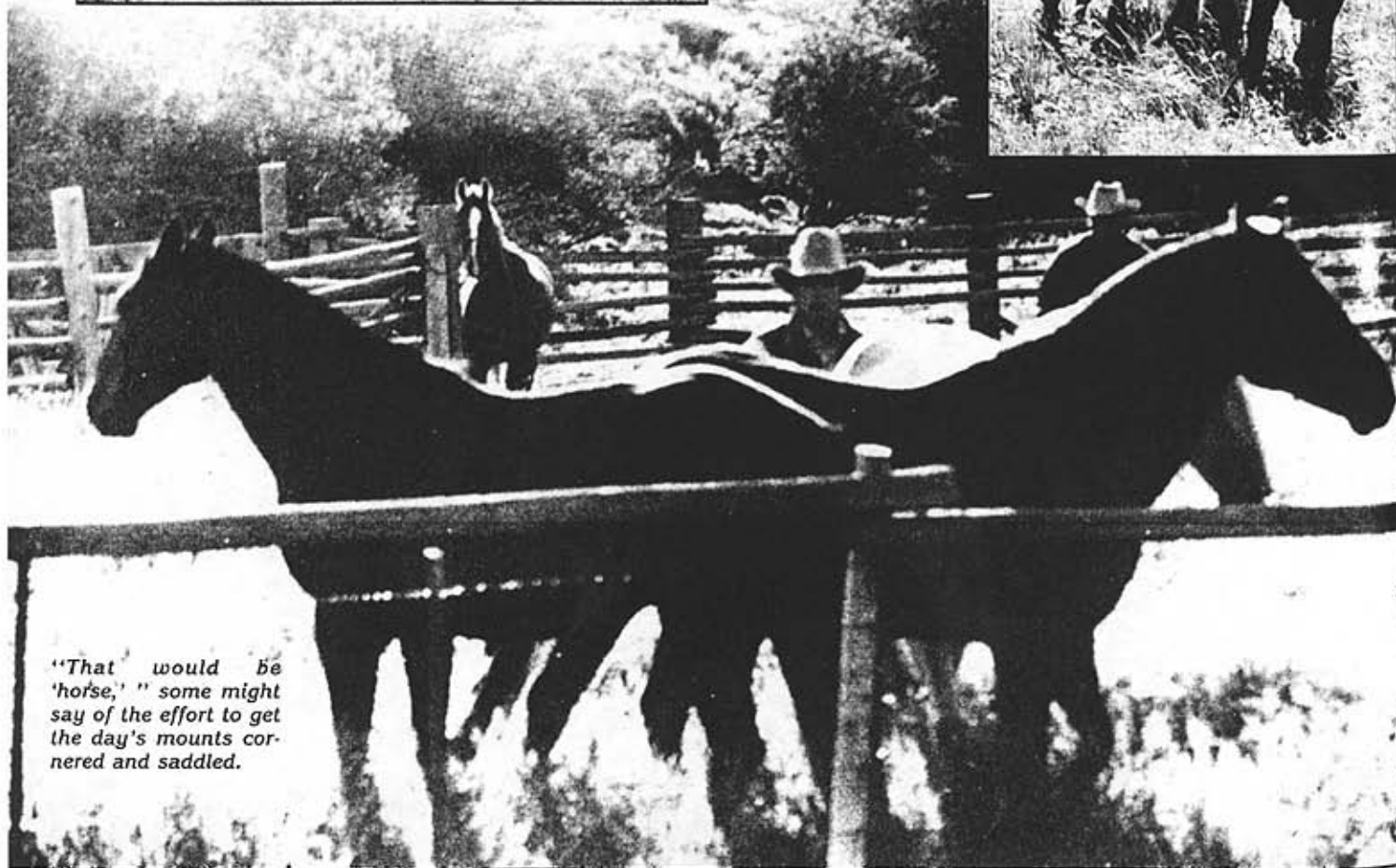
Angus cattle work here. This is where they produce. The elevation might average 6,900 feet. The season is short but riotous in grass if there's any decent moisture at all. It's been a good year, and this particular "factory" should meet its quota.

Angus by the hundreds, yes, even the thousands make this their summer home, this Beaverhead



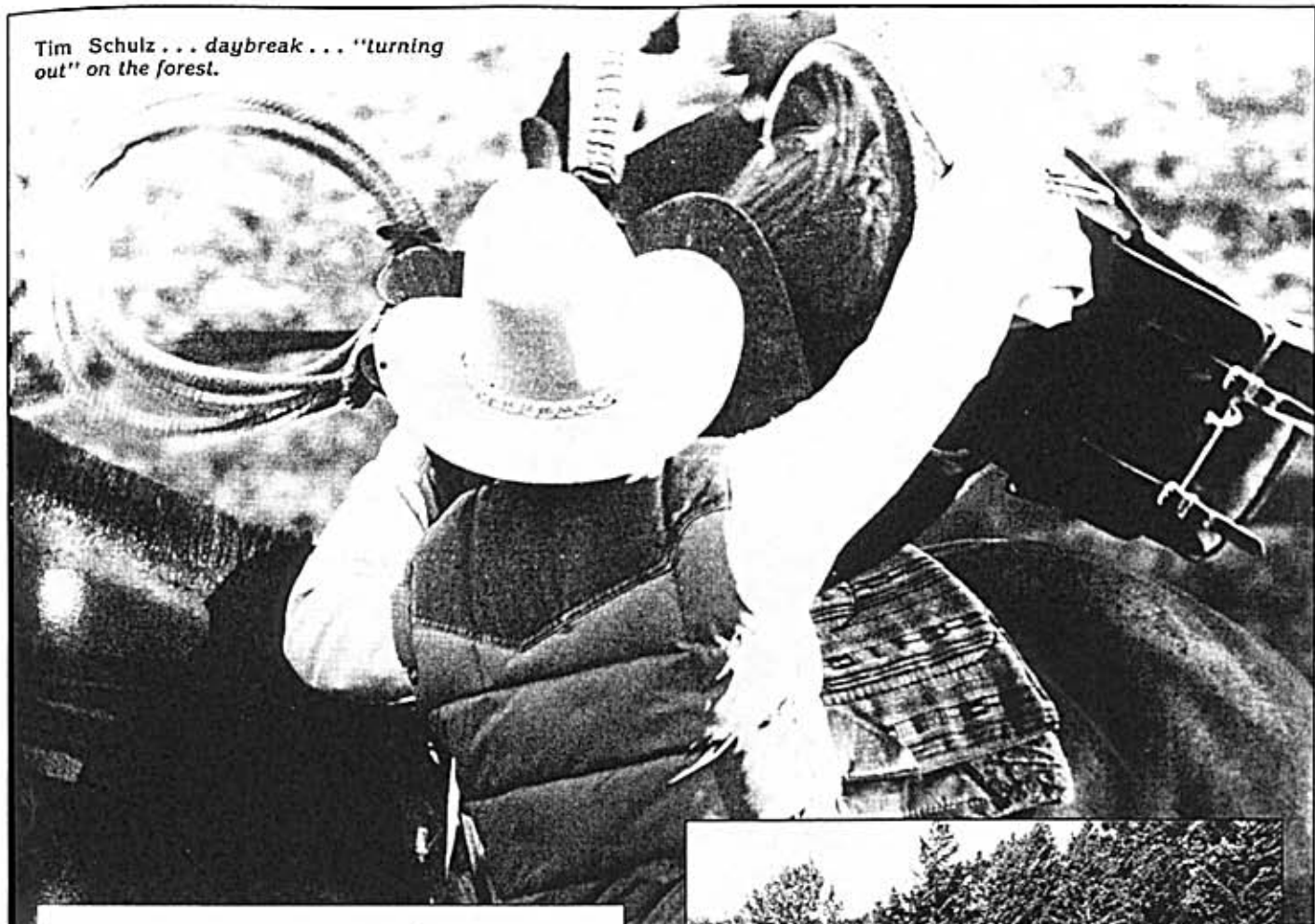
*With a herd and drive of this size, there's bound to be one needing a shot of Combiotic.*

*In keeping with a drover's tradition, the Schulzes use whips, both for the noise and the occasional stinging rebuff to a bunch quitter's attempt.*



*"That would be 'horse,' " some might say of the effort to get the day's mounts cornered and saddled.*

Tim Schulz... daybreak... "turning out" on the forest.



"There's one big bonus about black cattle—and over the years we've seen this range get blacker and blacker. That ol' black is going to get to the top of the hill. Black cows reach out and cover the range to get the job done.

"There's a lot of things to look at in these troubled times. That little ol' 1,100-pound cow, if she brings you in a 650-pound calf, she's done you a job." —Russ Schulz, Schulz Brothers Angus Ranch, Sheridan, Mt.



David Schulz: "We used to keep a man up here at the cow camp through the summer. This year, we decided we'd go it alone. Why not have some of the fun from this thing?"

National Forest. Your road atlas might show its southeast corner tacked on to the Idaho border. And if you've ever been to West Yellowstone, think of it as just over the ridge in about the 9:30 position. It's a big piece of Montana real estate encompassing some 2.2 million acres. Sixty-five permittees run anywhere from 25 to 700 head here apiece. Vergil Lindsay, District Ranger, Ennis, Mt., is their benevolent overseer.

"Our biggest headache here is larkspur," he says when asked about predators and problems. "Very seldom do we have any trouble with bear or cougar." Larkspur, Lindsay explains, can be a serious threat to

*Making memories; Mom's cinnamon rolls are the highlight.*



*Mrs. David Schulz, Kathy Woods, and Mardy Schulz lay out the meal.*



*Russ and Norman Schulz. The Cross Over Bar is the registered Angus brand.*

cattle, though sheep seem unaffected when grazing it.

"Over in the Ruby (the Ruby River drainage on the Beaverhead's west side), we have a band of sheep we call the 'poison' band. They run ahead of the cows to nibble off the larkspur and make it unpalatable for the cattle. The sheep will work on the flower head and the leaves, too. They seem to really relish it, and they just keep it clipped off and make it dry up so it's unattractive to the cows. It's a revival of sorts. I'm told years ago they used to do that by chance."

Rancher Russ Schulz confirms the practice: "I wish we had more sheep up here at times. This dual usage really worked to our benefit on the larkspur."

Lindsay notes another reversion back to the old ways when discussing salting the range. Packhorses are the mode of conveyance, mostly.

"Years ago, when the 4x4 truck came along, they started to use them some but then went back to packing. Over on the West Fork allotment, they all pack their salt in. They prefer it because they don't want those vehicles tearing up the range. Some of the smaller outfits gripe some about the restrictions, but I would say it's pretty well accepted to pack it in."

Salt, of course, is one method of achieving range coverage and distribution. Range managers, especially from the head office, are death on stomping grounds and under-utilized areas. Russ Schulz credits the black cow with promoting good relations between the rancher and forest service personnel.

"We have a 50-percent utilization requirement with this permit. Black cows reach out and cover the range. They help us stay on the good side of the forest service folks."

Though some permittees might chafe a bit over the regulations and restrictions imposed by the "Jolly Green Giant," most comply in a spirit of husbandry. Angus breeder Bob Sitz:

"It's always been to our advantage to participate

in the range improvement program. We have two permits and they're each fenced in four pastures. We use three pastures a year and rest one."

"Pastures" up here can take in a fair territory, several 640-acre sections as an example. And though the country is rugged and demanding, the ecology is fragile. The damage created by several hundred mis-managed cows can leave scars for a decade or more.

Russ Schulz can attest to the wisdom of rotation, cross fencing, water distribution, and development. "In the past 35 years, we have doubled the carrying capacity on the same range. From the first of the formed operation, my grandfather ran approximately 400 head of brood cows. In 1979, when my father passed away, the herd numbered 600 head." Now, the Schulzes send nearly 850 head to these summer pastures.

"Our steers come in weighing 575. We're striving for 600-pound calves, and this may be the year for it. Your years have a lot to do with it up here. These folks with irrigated pastures can control it; every year is pretty much the same for them. But we're limited."

Tempering the effect of weather has been important to a quite different Angus operation across the Madison Valley at Bear Creek Angus Ranch, Cameron, Mt. Manager Jeff Bricker has maximized the impact of water rights from Bear Creek and Indian Creek, magnifying hay and pasture production through heavy investment in sprinkler irrigation. Bear Creek no longer maintains a public lands range program.

"Three years ago, our carrying capacity was supposedly 300 cows the year around. We've got 625 on here this year. It looks like we could carry 750 easily. Fencing and rotation of pastures have made this a little more efficient, too.

"We've improved over 200 acres. It started out at about 40 acres to the cow. We had it down to 11 acres to the cow the last time we worked it. I would imagine now we're down to about six. It's too expensive to go out and buy land. You might as well

improve what you've got."

Jeff hopes to triple the hay tonnage of last year by harvesting almost a green chop alfalfa and grass mix and bagging it in plastic. If it works, he could be storing close to 4,500 tons for next winter.

Grass becomes the passion. Whether it's raised under intensive management or by letting nature take its course, Angus on the Beaverhead, Angus traversing the ridges of the Gravelly Range, or Angus grazing under the spray of mountain-fed sprinkler systems make a powerful contribution to the economies of Ennis, Sheridan, Harrison, Virginia City. The strength of these communities comes from these hills.

The afternoon skies turn threatening, and soon the light becomes a gloomy blue and flat. Lightning to the west, the north, the southwest. It rains but not torrentially. The heifers from the Sitz herd find the water tank and can be left. Antelope jump from the sage, now pungent from the passing shower. Their white rumps bob along and away from the danger they sense. Someone guesses the buck's trophy potential.

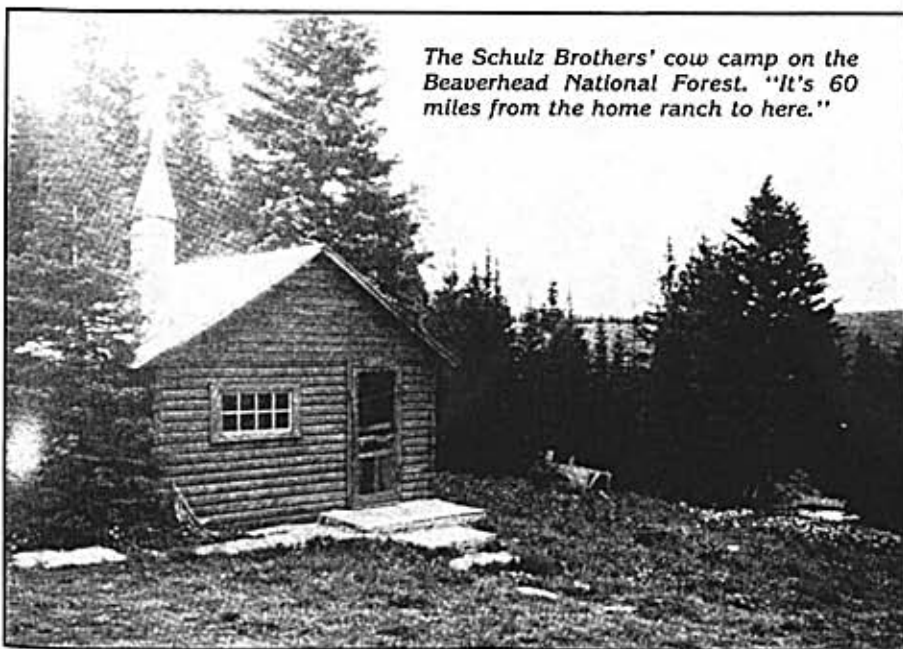
The horses jog freely; the topics are the grass, weather, storms. "We lost five in one shot up here to lightning. We lost three in the same spot another year, so we decided we'd put the salt some place else," Bob Sitz remembers. "We had about two feet of snow right here, but they travel through that all right. Now, if we get a half inch of rain here this afternoon, we'll see just how greasy that road can get."

Bad roads, tempestuous weather, and sheer distance are just some of the struggles endured to get this grass.

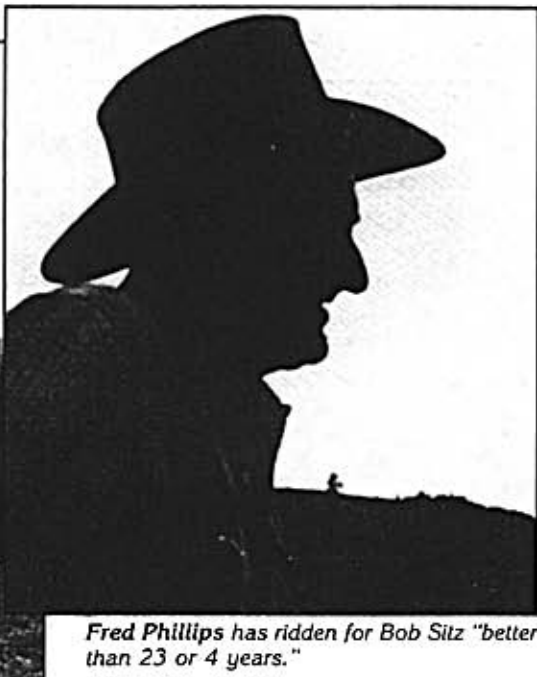
Bob Sitz: "We're 70 miles from home. We truck them up the highway and then trail them on in. It



*A visitor walked off with the camp kettle, making cleanup a more difficult chore.*



*The Schulz Brothers' cow camp on the Beaverhead National Forest. "It's 60 miles from the home ranch to here."*

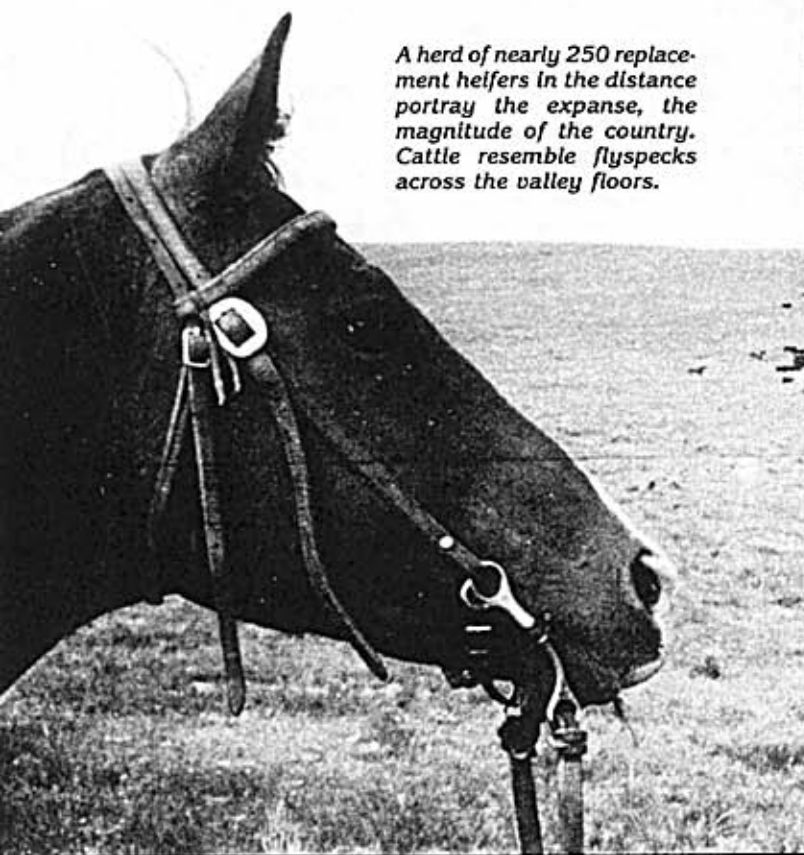


*Fred Phillips has ridden for Bob Sitz "better than 23 or 4 years."*

American Angus Assn. Regional Manager Bruce Weeter and Bob Sitz survey the results of decades of selection.



A herd of nearly 250 replacement heifers in the distance portray the expanse, the magnitude of the country. Cattle resemble flyspecks across the valley floors.



"Have to handle this one just right, or he'll give y' a ride." —Bob Sitz, Sitz Angus Ranch, Harrison, Mt.

takes close to 800 head to fill these two permits. We come off the forest the 21st of October. Then we move down onto some private ground."

Russ Schulz: "It's 60 miles from the ranch to here. We have to be off the fifth of October. We go right to Virginia City Hill where we've got trucks waiting for us. We'll just wean the calves and take them to the ranch. The cows are winterized—shot, poured, preg-tested, and then we leave them on Virginia City Hill until the snow drives us out."

Bob Rice: "We drive most of our cattle, 700 pair, to a range between McAllister and Virginia City. This is a distance of 21 miles, which is a two-day drive. Three hundred pair are hauled 52 miles to a pasture 15 miles south of Cameron (or 25 miles south of Ennis). Our steers are run on a pasture between Norris and Ennis, which is a one-day drive. Our range next to the Beaverhead National Forest is all private except for some BLM (Bureau of Land Management). This range is all in one block and covers 20,000 acres."

Bob Endicott: "This is all private right here, around 3,000 acres. We have very close to 600 head of cattle here this summer, first-calf heifers. This year, Pat also brought 80 cows and calves. It's a 240-mile haul from Vermilion at Billings to here."

It may seem odd that most of the cattle are bred by the time they get here to either the Beaverhead or the private ranges that surround it. This may not be true of all permittees, but for Messrs. Sitz, Rice, and Schulz, hassling bulls into the management agenda just complicates it too much. As turnout date onto forest ranges is mid to late June, breeding can be accomplished down lower at the home place. Sitz sent only one bull for every 250 heifers this season. He A.I.'s and doesn't worry about it. Like Russ Schulz, he achieves a success rate in the middle to high 90s. Says Russ Schulz of his practice:

"We pulled the bulls in just the last two or three days (June 22). We have a 60-day breeding season, and it's been working pretty successfully." Bob Rice states most of his cows are bred before they leave the range. "Those that are bred there pose no concern since our breeding rate runs at 97 percent or better. We do not pregnancy test because we have so few dries."

Sitz appears to have the approach well-defined: