

► Once part of a huge Mexican land grant, the 292,000-acre Bell Ranch takes its name from the distinctive butte known as Bell Mountain.

The Bell Ranch Project

A historic New Mexico ranch is demonstrating how commercial cattle operations can apply genetic evaluation through progeny testing.

by Troy Smith



► Bonnie and Keith Long manage the Bell Ranch seedstock division located at Mule Camp. Yearling bulls from the closed seedstock herd are the focus of progeny testing.

It's a landscape straight from the scenes of a classic cowboy movie. Deep canyons cloaked in juniper could conceal the outlaw's hideout. Comanche scouts might scan their hunting territory from atop red, sandstone mesas that rise above a short-grass prairie studded with mesquite brush and Cholla cactus.

But this New Mexico scenery is real and not some Hollywood re-creation. It looks much the same as it did 150 years ago, when real-life drovers pushed huge herds through the area, following the Goodnight-Loving Trail from Texas to Colorado.

They passed through the sprawling Bell

Ranch, located near the center of New Mexico's northeastern quadrant. Even today, the historic outfit's employees follow traditions founded by their 19th century forebears. Granted, pickup trucks, four-wheelers and even airplanes have their uses here, but many working days still begin at the horse barn.

The modern-day cowboys saddle mounts chosen from the large Bell Ranch remuda. Some mornings may find them trailering their horses to a far corner of the nearly 300,000-acre spread, but much of the real work begins and ends on horseback.

It's hard to improve upon some traditional



► All calves sired by yearling bulls are DNA-tested to confirm parentage. Data is collected for calculation of in-herd EPDs for economically relevant traits, including weaning weight, carcass merit and reproduction.