

The Cliff Ranch

by Lori Riffel



The success of an American dream for Cameron Cliff has been harvested through hard work. At the Cliff ranch at La Pine, Ore., producing hundreds of black and black-baldy cross calves for top dollar is the functioning factor. With wife Ruth at his side, Cameron cut into the raw of the Oregon pines and established a homestead of 3,000 acres. In addition, the major part of his ranch lies 60 miles southeast at Silver Lake. Some 16,000 acres in the Oregon desert support more than 900 cow-calf pairs for most of the year. Building a herd with the use of top young Angus bulls from northwestern breeders, their purpose is to produce a top market product.

Now Cameron, the founder of this empire and a well-respected businessman, has been burdened with an illness. Sooner than expected, decisions are being shifted to another manager and eventual owner, Cameron's only child, 22-year-old Theresa. Theresa is optimistic about the future and will continue to implement her father's business management in handling the Cliff operation.

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Registered Bulls Add to Commercial Program.



Ruth, Cameron and Theresa Cliff are the nucleus of a 40-year-old operation that is successful through dedicated hard work.

Cameron Cliff has been raising black baldies for 40 years. For the most part, he was a trailblazer, buying Angus bulls to use on his Hereford cows.

Cameron owned his first land in the Silver Lake area of the Oregon desert. In 1945, he bought his first Angus bulls to use in his commercial Hereford herd and has been using them ever since. The Angus bull battery currently numbers approximately 50 head.

"Angus have a lot of merits. They take the horns off, lower susceptibility to pinkeye, are better mothers and give more milk," he said.

Angus bulls are used back on the baldy crosses. Every few generations a Hereford is incorporated into the program. Cameron does not intend to breed up to Angus, but rather his objective is to produce a uniform set of calves that will command top dollar.

Cameron and his daughter Theresa select the bulls each year at area sales. She attends the sales at Tehama Angus, Gerber, Calif., Klamath Falls and the Inland Empire Angus Assn. yearling bull sale at Hermiston, paying top money to get new herd sires for the Cliff operation.

"The Angus people have done a lot to their breed in the last 10 or 15 years," Cameron comments. "The bulls Theresa bought this year are on the right track."

Theresa attended the Inland Empire yearling bull sale in March and her top pick was a Ken Caryl Mr Angus 8017 son she purchased from Camas Prairie Angus at Grangeville, Idaho. She also made purchases from Wagner Angus Ranch, Wilbur, Wash. (a Sky Boy TE of RV son); and Unruh Angus, Warden, Wash. (a KAF Gold Strike son). Over the years Cliffs have made several selections from Eshleman Angus, Goldendale, Wash., and Tehama Angus.

Cliff criteria

Cameron has noted a change in the style of bulls being produced today.

"They have more stretch," he says. "But again we need to be careful to keep the thickness in these cattle." Cliffs have basic, no nonsense criteria for selecting herd bulls.

"We buy calves with the top weaning weight in each sale and the yearling weight is a progressive gain from that," says Theresa. "We don't stress much on birth weight, but will go by appearance (smoothness of muscling) of bulls as far as determining the heifer

calving, cows are supplemented with alfalfa and grass hay.

Cliffs keep a considerable number of heifers for replacement, and "eyeball" selection is the guide. Heifers kept weigh at least 550 lb. and are bred later to calve at 2 years of age.

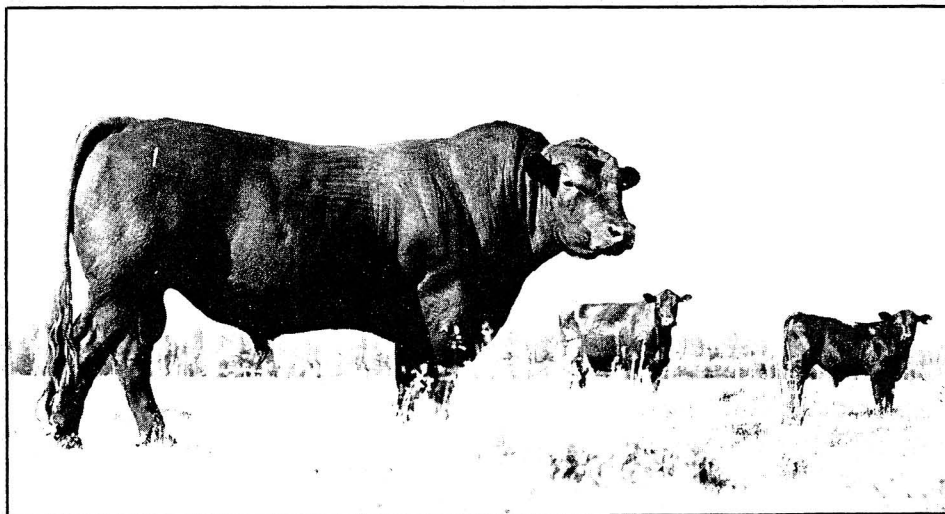
"We look a lot at their mothers, because you don't know which bull was their sire," says Theresa. Only a few times have Cliffs used a bull that was not Angus or Hereford. They have used several Brangus, but they have not done the job like Angus, according to Cameron.

"There is competition with the Angus bulls in those large pastures and cows have to be bred," he says.

Cow management important

The Cliff cows start dropping calves in February and in a herd this size diseases can be spread among several head before being detected. Such situations have the potential to cut a calf crop in half; several years ago Bangs and Vibro did just that.

"We're calving in a three month time



Cliffs will pay top money to get registered Angus bulls for their program. Currently they have approximately 50 Angus herd sires.

bulls and bulls to be used on cows."

Cameron believes environment dictates a lot of what birth weight will be.

"We winter bred heifers and cows on a maintenance program. Too much feed will yield a big calf. Cattle need to be handled correctly," says Cameron. And "correctly" is indeed important—they would like to have every female calve unassisted on the Oregon desert range, but this is not possible. After

period, but diseases are a knock in the head," says Cameron.

"Now we are probably getting a 95 percent calf crop, but over too long a period of time. It won't pay," he added.

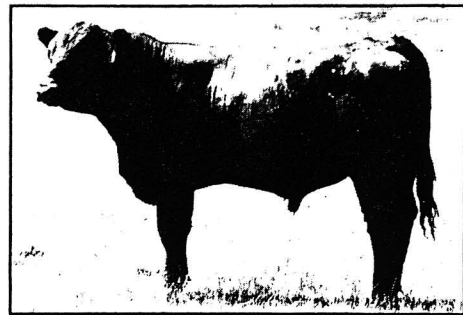
In March and April, Cliffs will gather 100 to 150 calves together at a time to brand and ear mark. It works best for Cliffs to use calf tables.

"It's a lot easier on the calf and quicker. Our experienced crew can ear



Angus bulls are used back on the baldy crosses.

All working facilities, buildings and fences are made from native pine and is so built to withstand hundreds of head of cattle and the age of time.



Yearling bulls are used on the first and second calf heifers.

mark, dehorn, castrate and brand in less than a minute," Theresa said.

Most of the cow herd is transported to La Pine to graze along the river for the summer months. Hay is then put up in big round bales at Silver Lake.

"We bring cows down from Silver Lake the first of May along with the 2- and 3-year-old heifers and their calves. The rest will be put out on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) allotments until July and then shipped to LaPine," says Theresa. Closer management is possible then at La Pine and the better Angus bulls are kept there for use. Bulls are turned out with cows in mid-April and pulled from pastures the first of July.

"In the summer we preg check the dry cows that haven't calved and ship the open cows," explains Theresa.

The cash crop

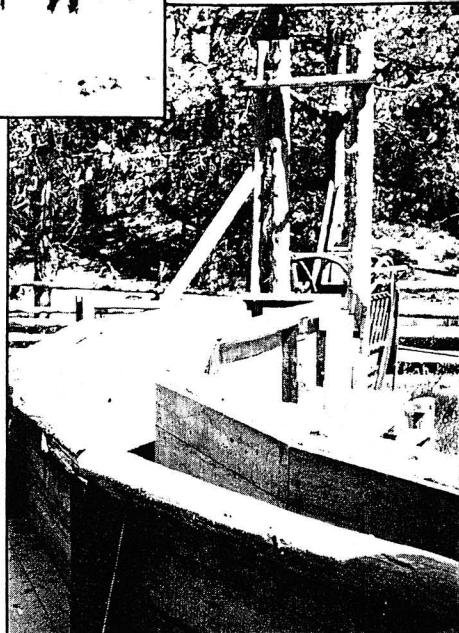
Selling feeders remains the heart beat to the continuance of the Cliff operation. Although Theresa now handles the physical management of the ranches, she points to her father who does the selling.

"He does a lot of the selling. Some people wait on somebody to call, not dad, he's on the phone calling Iowa, calling the buyers. He's a businessman and that's the reason we get a little more for our calves," says Theresa.

Cameron is a firm believer in black baldies and likes what Angus bulls do for his calves.

"When I talk to people buying cattle, the first question they ask is what percent of your herd is black baldies?" he says. The Cliff baldy cross is known for their feedlot performance to yield a profit. The calves go to several areas in Oregon and Washington—mostly around the Columbia River area—and east to Iowa and Nebraska. Cliffs sell calves on contracts and often have orders from the same buyers every year.

Cameron sees no reason to introduce any other breeds into his program. He has been breeding a desirable



market animal with the service of top Angus bulls for years. He lives with realization in the cattle industry and sticks to the basics of a functional cow and bull, selecting for sound feet, smooth shoulders, muscling, tight sheaths and a high reproduction index.

The La Pine land

Management decisions are conducted from the ranch at La Pine. In 1949, Cameron paid \$1,000 down on a tract of 62,000 acres with the intention of retaining only the 3,000 acres

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that constitute the La Pine ranch. The sub-irrigated land runs a 12-mile strip on both sides of the Deschutes River. Mt. Bachelor and the Three Sisters Mountains overlook the ranch that was indeed a raw west frontier. Confronted with acres of thick jack pines, Cameron and Ruth tamed the land like true pioneers.

"The first time I ever saw it was before we were married and there was just a cow trail for an entrance. You couldn't

even see the river," says Ruth.

Cameron set to clearing over 1,000 acres of jack pines and sowed it to clover. Over nine summers, Cameron hired Canadian Indians from British Columbia and built 30 miles of four- and five-pole pine fences. The fences run in a zig-zag pattern that enable them to stand up to heavy snows. Fences are repaired with barb-wire now, but not much wire is yet evident on the ranch. Fences may come down because of the elements and age, and elk also do their share.

"Herds of elk will come down from the mountains to our meadows to calve. They can be a nuisance, knocking down the fences to let their calves in and out," says Theresa. The barns, haysheds, modern working facilities and the house are all made from native pine.

New boss

Theresa will gradually take over all aspects of the Cliff operation. This petite blonde has grown up in the saddle alongside her father and from him acquired the business sense of running a large commercial cattle operation. She started taking on leadership at an early age and her interest in the cattle was evident.

"When my cousins and I were younger we had to pull our own weight, like chopping thistles and picking up sticks. Later I went with dad and while he checked water, I would check the cows and calves for footrot and pinkeye and bring in the ones we needed to treat," says Theresa.

Cameron credits the success of the Cliff operation to the basics of hard work, good help and good management and Theresa is optimistic about the future.

"Dad comes with quite a reputation and a lot of people are waiting to see if I can keep it all together and be able to be as good a manager," she says. "I worry about that, because he built this ranch from nothing and I want to carry it on in the same tradition." **AJ**