

Ranching Heritage

The most extensive tract of undisturbed, natural rangeland in North America lies along the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies in Southern Alberta. For more than a century, the area has supported a thriving ranching industry, which has operated in balance with nature and maintained safe habitat for a variety of rare and threatened wildlife species.

Cattle ranching started in the late 1800s in these rolling hills between the Plains and the Rockies. The Bar U was founded in 1881 by Fred Stimson, and was later owned by George Lane and Pat Burns. The Bar U National Historic Site is located south of Longview on 800 acres -- a miniscule portion of the original Bar U where a cowhand could ride for days, never meeting a fence nor seeing a sign of civilization.

Lane, Burns and A.E. Cross were three of the "Big Four," who founded the Calgary Stampede in 1912. The Cross ranch, the A7, is still in the family while much of the Bar U land was sold in 1950, mostly to neighbouring ranching families.

Other legendary ranches in the area include Mt. Sentinel Ranch, which has been in the Gardner family since 1898 and once harboured cattle rustlers at Robbers' Roost. The EP Ranch, which Edward, Prince of Wales bought in 1919 after being bewitched by the beauty of the landscape and the romance of ranching, was sold in 1962 to the Cartwright family. Gordon Cartwright owns the neighbouring D Ranch, a well-known hideout for the Sundance Kid.

As history and science demonstrate, the ranchers are stewards of the land. They follow the rhythm of the seasons, moving cattle from summer to winter ranges in the grazing pattern of the buffalo. They have kept the land pristine and intact, the water sources pure and reliable. The invasion of the oil industry, in pursuit of non-renewable resources, threatens to destroy the integrity of this sustainable ecosystem and industry.