

# PRINCEVILLE RANCH

## CATTLE RANCHING OPERATIONS

Princeville Ranch is one of the oldest working cattle ranches in Hawaii. It is leased and operated by the Carswell family, who have owned a successful trail riding business there since 1978 and a cattle operation since 1994. The ranch's historical roots pre-date those of the American Old West, beginning in 1831 when Richard Charlton, British Consul and Advisor to King Kamehameha II, leased land mauka of Kalihiwai and Hanalei (from Governor Kaikoewa), and brought in 100 longhorns from "Norte California". In 1895, Princeville Plantation was acquired by A. S. Wilcox, son of missionary Abner Wilcox and great great uncle of Gale Carswell.

Donn Carswell, formerly Project Engineer/Manager for Princeville Corporation from 1969 to 1980, heads up the cattle operations, while serving as president of the Hawaii Cattlemen's Cooperative, representing 46 ranchers statewide. Daughter Karin Carswell Guest, mother of three young children, has been active in the cattle business for a number of years. She is a former vice-president of the Kaua'i Cattlemen's Association. She oversees herd management as well as health care for both the cattle and over 100 ranch horses. Karin's brother David Carswell, who serves as director of horsemanship programs, is active in a number of key cattle ranching functions.

Prior to starting the cattle operations, the Carswells hosted the Hanalei Stampede rodeos in their arena for 12 years. Donn, known to friends and family as Curly, Karin and David paled up with each other to participate in the team roping. Karin and Curly even scored a 10-second run, which is a great time for this event.

The family ranching team can often be seen cruising the pastures mounted on horses or ATV's in search of a lost calf or to check on the herd of cows, calves and bulls. . Karin even worked cattle the day before her son Ryder was born. And, she's definitely in charge of the 10 bulls. As Curly says, "Bulls, beware of Auntie Karin." While the bulls are generally docile, the ranchers do have to establish their authority over them, especially if they even threaten to charge.

2500-acre Princeville Ranch is a "cow-calf" operation. Not all ranches produce their own calves, as the Carswell do. Their herd of bulls and cows produces calves each year for both natural and grass-fed beef production. The herd includes 220 Brangus cows, a cross of 5/8 Angus and 3/8 Brahma. This mixture handles the heat and humidity of the tropics better than full Angus cattle. The cows are bred by 10 Brangus or Angus Plus bulls carefully chosen based on their production statistics. For example, a bull that produces calves with low birth weights, yet high growth rates is desirable. The low birth weight is easier for the cow to deliver, yet the high growth rate produces the best yield at market time. All of the Princeville

bulls have been provided by Kipu Kai Ranch, where the nation's best genetics have been used in artificial inseminations.

The breeding process is left up to Mother Nature. The bulls simply join the cows for two and a half months from May to mid-July. Cows have a 9-month gestation period and normally produce one calf each year between February and April. Before calves are shipped in November at an average age 8 months, the total herd of cows, calves and bulls numbers around 500 animals.

Each year's crop of calves is separated into three major categories. Most of the males and a small number of females are selected to be sent to the Pacific Northwest, where they will spend the next 7 months in pasture and then 3 months in a feedlot in Boardman, Oregon. Princeville Ranch retains ownership and feeds the animals a natural vegetarian finishing ration with very little grain. Antibiotics and growth hormones are prohibited.

Shipping cattle to be finished on the mainland is a common practice in Hawaii. Most ranches don't have enough or the right type of grass for finishing. Carrying capacity is the issue. Grass finished beef takes 24-30 months while, feedlot finished beef takes only 17-20 months. Those who also maintain cow herds, such as Princeville Ranch, have an even greater challenge in ensuring enough quality grass for the cows and must ship their calves to other locations.

The mainland finished beef is marketed through Oregon Country Beef in Whole Foods markets and restaurants on the West Coast. "Country Natural Beef featuring Hawaii ranchers" will appear in selected markets in Hawaii in the fall of 2004, including the Princeville Chevron Convenience Store. These natural beef programs return a premium price and enhance the viability and sustainability of ranching operations, for the Carwells and for ranchers throughout the state.

The second group of Princeville cattle, comprising about a third of calves, are kept at Princeville Ranch to go into their Hanalei pastures to become grass-fed natural beef, sold locally under the brand *Princeville Pride*. The grasses in Hanalei are higher in protein and more suited to grass-finishing than the pastures on the upper sections of the Ranch.

The third group are the replacement heifers, the young females who will someday become moms in the herd. They are chosen by their appearance, temperament, health and physical suitability for delivering calves.

Princeville Ranch spans spectacularly beautiful lands mauka and makai, from the mountains to the ocean. It runs from the base of Mt. Namolokama to the Hanalei River to the bluffs overlooking Anini Reef. and on to the Kalihiwai Valley.

In cattle ranching, pasture management is a critical issue. The Carwells originally had their grass tested for nutritional content. The pastures have to be mowed and cleared regularly to keep down the weeds and invasive trees and bushes. There are six pasture sections which are used in regular rotation approximately every 5-7 days. Princeville Ranch Stables offers guests and opportunity to go on a cattle drive ride on rotation days.

Cattle ranching on Kaua`i's spectacular North Shore can seem to be idyllic, but it does come with its challenges. Just keeping track of 500 animals spread over hundreds of acres is a daunting task. The weather is always unpredictable. 2004 has been an extremely wet year, affecting pasture conditions and making many areas very slippery. Recently a young calf slid off a cliff. It was not possible to take ATV's or horses in. Under Curly's guidance, David and Ranch operations head Randall Cremer had to hike down and herd the calf out via a narrow pig trail. This was just one of several occasions where cows or calves were rescued, due to the watchful eyes of the Carswells. In other situations ropes were lowered and used to bring out both the calves and their human helpers.

And yes, there are pigs on the Ranch. These animals dig up pastures creating dangerous holes that can hurt cows and horses, as well a ruin the grasses. Pigs have even challenged some of the horses and gored them.

In terms of challenges, the Carswells have also faced poaching, rustling and loose cattle on the highway, either through broken fences or through uninvited hunters' dogs chasing the cattle into the road. One year they even had some steers in Hanalei that ended up swimming in the river, headed for the ocean. Fortunately, no one drowned, human or bovine. With the ranch lands divided by the Kuhio highway, there are times when the cattle must be herded across the road, no small task. Or the highway serves as a vehicle for invaders, like the buffalo from a neighboring farm who walked down the highway and into the Hanalei pasture, destroying fences wherever he went. Fences are also destroyed by impaired drivers, and usually require repairs in the middle of the night.

One of the rewards that mitigate the challenges is the community of local ranchers that support each other. At branding time, cowboys and cowgirls from various ranches come to help each other, with some rewarding grinds (food) and celebrating at the end of a tiring day. At Princeville Ranch, the brand used is the W with a small cross sitting atop the midpoint of the W. This is the original Wilcox brand, dating back to 1895. Prior to that the HP brand of Hanalei Plantation was used starting in 1853 by Robert Wylie, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Hawaiian Kingdom.

At the state level, there is a Cattlemen's Coop headed by Curly Carswell. This group is collaborating to establish and brand "Country Natural Beef – Hawaii", working in conjunction with Oregon ranches and feedlots where the calves are finished. The meat is processed and boxed at Washington Beef, a plant in Toppenish, Washington.

For the Carswell family, Princeville Ranch and its historic and scenic lands have been a way of life since David, Karin and their siblings Kelley and Chris were born. Kelley managed the Stables prior to starting Kaua`i Backcountry Adventures with brother David on Lihue Plantation lands. They offer tubing through the irrigation ditches and tunnels, ATV rides and a thrilling zipline course winding down into a deep canyon. Chris owns a successful tent and party business and often provides services to vendors and guests for events on the Ranch. David and his wife Denise, a former trail guide and Japanese interpreter for the Stables, own

Princeville Ranch Adventures, where guests can experience the ranch via hiking, kayaking and the new zipline course which soars through the air over the lush valleys and waterfalls.

The scenic beauty provided by the open pastures and dense foliage of Princeville Ranch is a testimony to the value agriculture provides to the visitor industry as well as to preserving open space, view planes and beauty for guests and for the local community. The tours on the Ranch support many of the visitor niches identified by the Hawaii Tourism Authority – agri-tourism, edu-tourism, adventure tourism and historic/cultural tourism.

For more information, contact Princeville Ranch Stables at 808-826-6777 or Princeville Ranch Adventures at 808-826-7669. For *Princeville Pride* and *Country Natural Beef*, contact Princeville Chevron Convenience Store at 826-1122 or e-mail to [pstable@aloha.net](mailto:pstable@aloha.net).