



A Texas Central Railway line was built through the ranch in 1900. Rose Ella (Matthews) Conrad owned the ranch at the time. She and her brother, John A. "Bud" Matthews, built cattle pens and a chute to load their own cattle onto rail cars and made the pens and chute available to neighbors. This site has been named the Bud Matthews Switch and an estimated 105,000 cattle were shipped every year until the railroad ceased in 1967. The site is still used to load cattle onto trucks for transportation to market.

LONG-TERM LEASES AND LIFETIMES OF STEWARDSHIP

In grazing, hunting, business and history, Hank and Ted Paup take the long-term view of stewardship – and the results are exceptional.

Article by ELLEN H. BRISENDINE
Photos courtesy of TED PAUP

In 1981 Ted Paup knew something had to change about the way his family managed their ranch near Albany, 35 miles north of Abilene, Texas, in Shackelford County. He had gone to town for a haircut at the local barber shop and when talk turned to hunting, fishing, and football, the barber gave him detailed directions to a great fishing spot. Something about those directions sounded familiar.

"The barber gave me the exact directions to a locked gate on our ranch," he said.

Ted shared the story with his brother. "Hank's response was, 'That does it. We're going to get into the hunting business and we're going to do it right.'"

Apparently, they have succeeded because Chimney Creek Ranch, which has been in the Paup family since 1920, was recognized by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department with the 2021 Lone Star Land Steward Award for the Rolling Plains Ecoregion.

Carter Smith, TWPD executive director, and others commend the work done by the Paup family, their long-time hunting les-

sees and their much longer-time grazing lessees, Robert Waller and his family. Together, these three groups maintain a healthy ranch and they continue to improve wildlife habitat and populations.

The Paup and Waller families have worked together for more than 60 years. Today, the third and fourth generations in both families continue to own the land and lease the grazing for cattle production.

“The Wallers have been wonderful to us, and they’ve done a wonderful job,” Ted said. “It wouldn’t be the place it is today without them.”

In 1920, Paup’s great-grandfather G.R. Davis, purchased the ranch. His daughter Robbie Davis Johnson inherited the ranch in 1955 and in 1957, she leased the grazing rights to Charlie B. Waller, who lived in Breckenridge. In 1973, Ted and Hank’s mother, Mary Francis Driscoll, inherited the ranch. It was put into trust and the grazing rights were leased to Robert B. Waller, Charlie’s son.

Hank and Ted inherited the ranch in 2007 and were happy to have the Wallers continue their long-term lease agreement.

In the years between that 1981 barber shop visit and 2007, Hank and Ted became more involved with the ranch’s management. Paup said they considered a wide range of options, from preserving the ranch as a natural reserve to adding a managed hunting program to the work-

ing ranch. Before they made any decision, the first thing they did was improve security, probably to the unhappy surprise of a certain fishing-pole toting barber.

During those years, Robert Waller and his family were recognized for their stewardship of the ranch with awards such as the Outstanding Conservation Ranch award in 2004 and the Outstanding Resident Conservation Rancher in 2005.

When asked why they lease their land for grazing rather than running their own cattle, Ted chuckled and said, “We’re not smart enough to run a good operation.” The long-term lease agreement with the Waller family “was a match made in

heaven, so to speak, because we didn’t have the expertise, but they did and we’ve always cherished that tradition.”

Long-term leasing worked so well with the ranching side of the business that the Paups naturally gravitated toward long-term hunting leases.

After a few learning experiences with individual hunters, the Paups came to an agreement in 1985 with a group of 14 hunters from the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

“Someday we are going to be talking about them like we do the Wallers, because we have had hunting lease agreements with the same group of hunters for nearly 40 years,” Ted said.



The history of the Chimney Creek Ranch is important to the Paup family. From 1858 to 1861, the Butterfield Overland Mail Route crossed the ranch at this site, dubbed Smith’s Station. In 1866 and 1867, Smith’s Station was a stop along the Goodnight Loving Trail. The remnants of Smith Station are still visible on the Chimney Creek Ranch.



The Paup family has been leasing the grazing on the Chimney Creek Ranch to the Waller family for generations. Working together, the two families along with the hunting lessees have turned it into a great example of how livestock production and wildlife production can be accomplished together.





Even in the dry years, wildlife thrives on the Chimney Creek Ranch.

Hank and Ted are the fourth generation to own Chimney Creek Ranch. The third and fourth generations of the Waller family are leasing the grazing rights. The children and grandchildren of the original 14 hunters are leasing hunting rights.

Echoing his earlier answer about why they lease the land instead of ranch it, Ted said, “We know how to lease, we don’t know how to hunt.”

After almost 40 years in the hunting business, Ted said Chimney Creek Ranch white-tailed bucks hold their own in Boone & Crockett statistics. “Our hunters know what they’re doing. They know to take certain deer or wait until next year.”

The long-term lease may be a factor in their patient approach to their part in managing the white-tailed deer population at Chimney Creek.

ASK THE EXPERTS FOR HELP

For landowners who find themselves facing questions of what to do with their land, Ted said, “My recommendation, of course, would always be to go see your experts.”

Two of those experts are Troy Reinke, USDA NRCS, and Jesse Oetgen, TPWD.

“We don’t know the things to do out on the ranch. We’re businessmen,” Ted said. Since this is a family business, he and Hank watch it closely and have weekly ranch business meetings.

Using their business management skills, they are open to new ideas from

knowledgeable experts, and are willing to evaluate and accept advice. They are also realistic about making decisions and understand the balancing act of “keeping the cowboy and keeping the hunter happy.”

Ted said, “It’s only fair to let people know that it hasn’t been decades of just getting along. We do have some discussions about management methods and whether the hunter gets the best deal or whether the grazing tenant gets the best deal.”

For example, treating prickly pear and mesquite with herbicides may reduce the forbs the wildlife prefer. Both sides of decisions are considered in the overall stewardship of the land and business.

PRACTICAL PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Reinke, now resource conservationist with NRCS Ecological Science Division, Temple, Texas, was the district conservationist for Shackelford County when many of the cost-sharing natural resource management plans were written and enacted at Chimney Creek Ranch.

“The Paups and Wallers are very definitely in the same book when it comes to conservation and stewardship,” he said, commending both families for their care for the land.

“The Wallers take care of the ranch even though it isn’t theirs. While I was working in Shackelford County, I could drive to the ranch and see fat cows and big deer, hear quail whistling, find flowers and plants across the ranch that we were hard-pressed to find on other properties. The Paup’s conservation ethic worked hand in hand with the Wallers’. All of them wanted to see the best possible outcome for the land,” he said.

Before Reinke arrived in Albany, the Wallers had a long history of working with the Lower Clear Fork of the Brazos Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS. They had been implementing conservation practices across the ranch that included brush management, prescribed burning and water distribution for many years.

The Paups had also enrolled portions of Chimney Creek for which the ranch



Where there’s water, there’s wildlife. Could it be that Chan’s Lake on the Chimney Creek Ranch is the spot that started the family down the hunting and conservation path?



is named into the Continuous-Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP). This enabled them to fence off and revegetate those portions of the creek, allowing the riparian area to go through plant community succession and restoration.

Reinke said, "One of the first projects I assisted the ranch with was connecting all the CRP areas to create two smaller pastures on either side of the creek. We were able to connect those portions with additional cross-fences and control the watering points available in each pasture, giving the cattle access to water, but not to the actual creek."

With Reinke's help, and with support from NRCS cost-share programs, the Paups and Wallers continued to upgrade the ranch's grazing systems with additional cross-fencing to break large pastures into smaller grazing cells. They improved water distribution with additional lines and water troughs to accommodate the new grazing cells and implemented improved brush management techniques such as treating the best ecological sites and using brush sculpting patterns.

The results of this work show in the diversity in the pastures.

Reinke said, "After about three years of monitoring, I could see the sideoats grama and the blue grama start to increase in the pastures in the grazing systems. The stocking rates ticked upwards a couple of animal units per grazing system."

In those weekly business meetings, it is likely that the Paup brothers discussed these changes in detail. Reinke knows they also discussed how changes would affect their tenants. "They constantly looked for ways to help incentivize the Wallers. Along with our programs, they developed lease agreements to help the Wallers increase the conservation work that was going to be a little more costly in the beginning, but had long-term benefits," he said.

Jesse Oetgen, TPWD technical guidance biologist, started working with the Paups, Wallers and the hunting lessees in 2014 on their deer habitat, quail habitat, and harvest efforts.

He remembers the droughts of 2009, 2011, and 2014. Range conditions in Shackelford County were tough, he said,

"with very little grass on the ground. Desert termites had eaten up anything and everything they could. We came in with the Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP) as a cost-share program to manage grassland habitats, specifically for grassland birds, with Bobwhite Quail being the focus species for Chimney Creek Ranch."

They deferred grazing on key pastures, removed mesquite and undesirable brush species, left lotebush and more desirable brush species and created mixes of native grasses and forbs.

"Every year we developed the next plan for what habitat work had to be done, which pastures were next most important, evaluated the limiting factors for grassland birds and quail. The Paups were excited to implement the plans," Oetgen said. "Our focus was to enhance nesting cover, which had been a limiting factor on the ranch."

In a case of "timing is everything," once the GRIP-funded work was done on Chimney Creek Ranch, Oetgen said,

"Mother Nature turned on the spigot and it rained. In 2015 and 2016, we had wet springs and summers.

"We had quail populations that would rival any from the past two decades. It was fantastic," Oetgen added with more than a little satisfaction in his voice.

Reinke concurred. "It was a joy to see things coming together. All of the sudden, things just really started flourishing."

Reinke and Oetgen commend the Paup family, the Waller family, and the cadre of hunters for their open approach to keeping Chimney Creek Ranch healthy and thriving. This generation of land stewards, be they owner or tenant, combine their abilities to achieve award-winning results.

Ted takes a humble view. "I guess we're very dull people because we just kind of kept those leases the same all these years. We're dealing with top-notch people. The Wallers have been wonderful to us, and they've done a wonderful job. It wouldn't be the place it is today without the Wallers." ❧