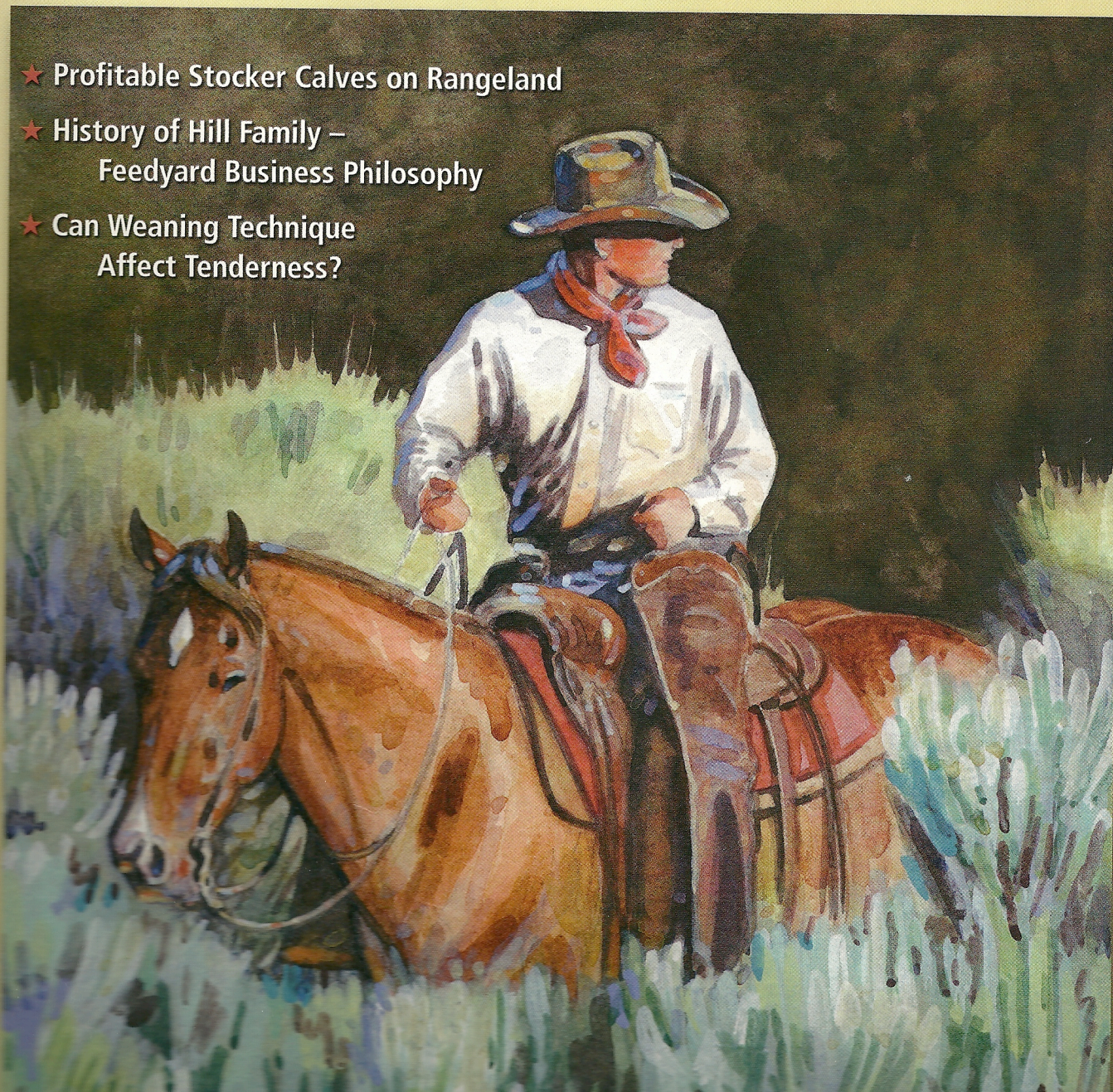


The Cattleman

September 2007 • \$4.00

ANNUAL
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- ★ Profitable Stocker Calves on Rangeland
- ★ History of Hill Family –
Feedyard Business Philosophy
- ★ Can Weaning Technique
Affect Tenderness?



50 *and Counting*

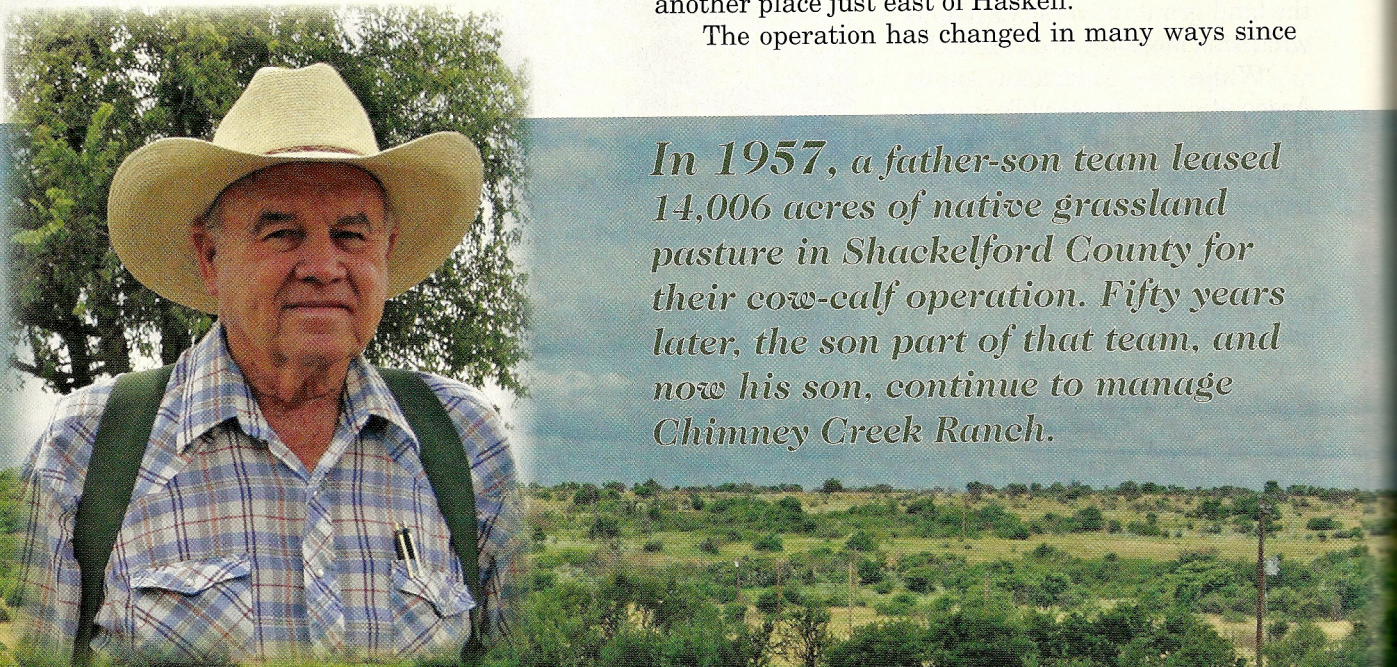
By KATRINA WATERS

When the late Charles Waller and his son, Robert B. Waller, heard from a friend that the ranch, located 14 miles west of Albany on U.S. Hwy. 180, would soon be available for lease, the elder Waller was ranching in New Mexico and the family had another place just east of Haskell.

The operation has changed in many ways since

In 1957, a father-son team leased 14,006 acres of native grassland pasture in Shackelford County for their cow-calf operation. Fifty years later, the son part of that team, and now his son, continue to manage Chimney Creek Ranch.

Robert B. Waller (pictured) and his family have managed Chimney Creek Ranch for 50 years.



CHIMNEY CREEK RANCH
HEADQUARTERS

relocating to one central site in 1957.

"[When we leased the land] We'd just gone through the drought of the '50s," Robert B. Waller recollects.

"My dad had been ranching in New Mexico and we had a place east of Haskell. We moved some of those cows down here — I guess about 25 pair. Then roughly 100 cows from New Mexico to down here. Then we bought a few cows, but that was all we had at the time."

The family's cow herd eventually grew to about 550, until the drought of the 1990s caused them to reduce their numbers to about 400 to 450 cows.

Both the cattle operation and the land itself have changed tremendously in the half-century since the Waller family relocated to Shackelford County.

"We were running Hereford cows back then," Waller says. "Then we started using some Angus bulls on them and kept

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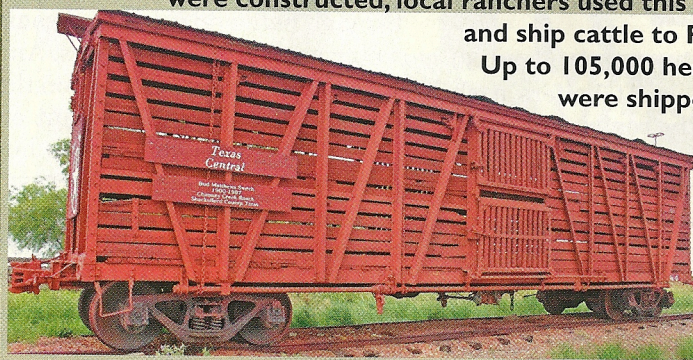
HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

The Chimney Creek Ranch is home to two historical sites, marked Butterfield Overland Mail and Bud Matthews Switch.

The Butterfield Overland Mail stagecoaches passed through the ranch from the 1850s until the onset of the Civil War, carrying mail, cargo and sometimes passengers.



The second marker serves as a reminder of the Texas-Central Railway, which extended a line across a portion of the ranch in 1900. Once appropriate chutes and pens were constructed, local ranchers used this site to load and ship cattle to Fort Worth. Up to 105,000 head of cattle were shipped annually until 1967.



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50 and Counting ...

(Continued from page 111)

those heifers back. Then we had some Chianina and Chi cross cows there at one time. But we didn't get into that too big."

Now, the family's operation consists of Angus, Maine-Anjou and Charolais, including some registered Angus cattle.

"We've been running about 40 or 50 registered Angus cows. In the past few years, we've been using Maine bulls on them mostly. But we're going to go back. We've got two really good [registered Angus] bulls we're going to start using on those cows," Waller says.

He says they retain about 80 to 100 replacement heifers each year and sell the remainder. They also sell an average of 20 to 30 club calves annually.

The Wallers have also made some changes to the property itself.

"When we first leased it, I think we had seven pastures;

now we have 16. And there were just seven tanks on the ranch back then; we've put in about 26 tanks," Waller says.

On the eights

Not all of the land's changes were man-made, though. The Chimney Creek Ranch has survived drought, floods and fires — all in 10-year increments.

In 1978, it was excessive water that caused damage and changed the landscape when the area was struck by floods in the least-expected time of year — August.

"The Chimney Creek comes through here and it took out some water gaps and some fences. And we lost a few tanks that are on the creek. Washed the dams out on them. Maybe not completely, but did a lot of damage," Waller says.

"The main flood was back north and east of here. We had about 12 inches, where they had about 20 to 22 inches. That was in less than 24 hours I think.

"That was about the first few days of August. And we were real dry [before the flooding]. Following that, though, we had one of the best winters we've had. Good grass and kept the ground wet."

Just less than 10 years later, in March 1988, the Big Country Fires swept across the area, burning 300,000 acres of land near Albany.

... **no place** for a
wild one

Although the ranch suffered damages from the powerful fires, Waller notes it could have been much worse.

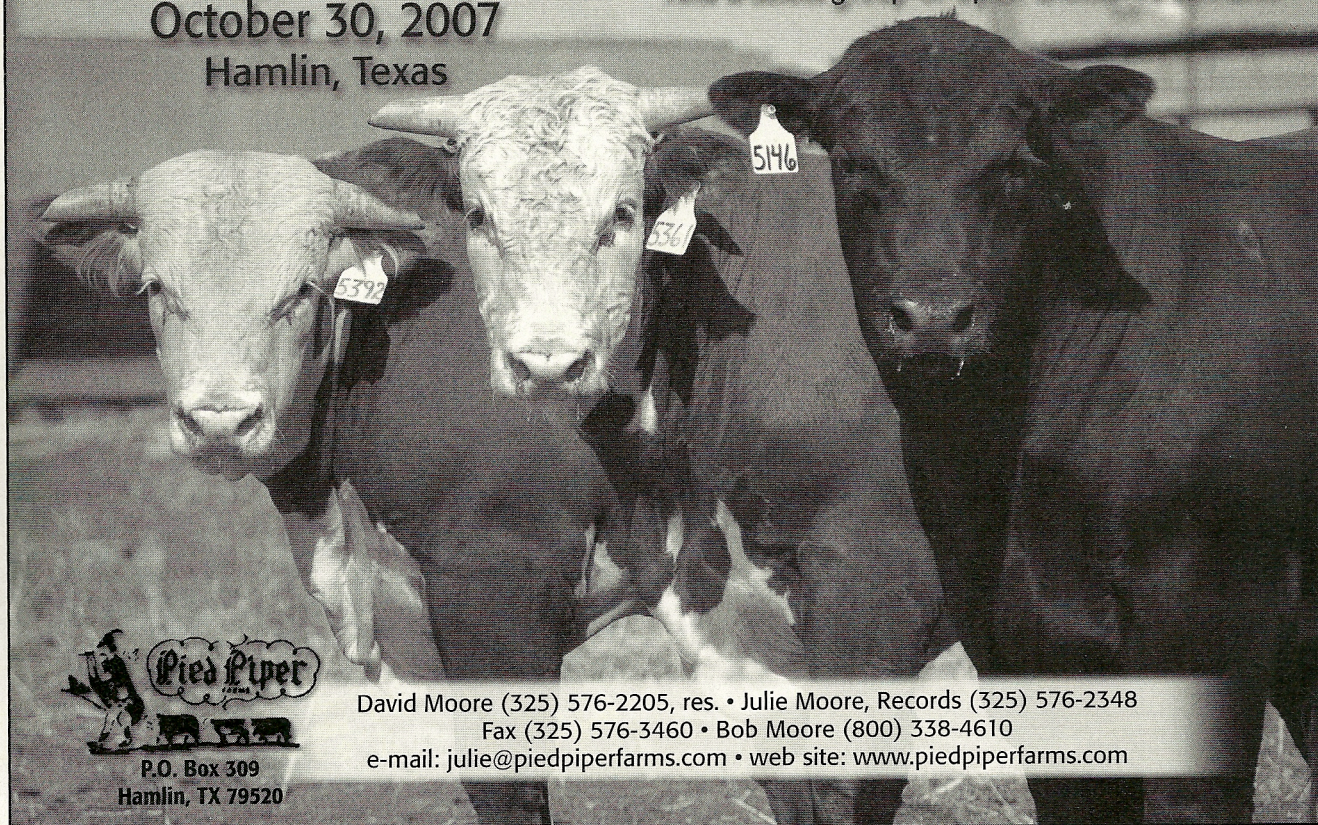
"We were lucky on the cattle," Waller says.

"We didn't lose any cattle, but we lost several miles of fence. It burned about 3,000 acres of the ranch off. We were lucky in that it went across on the east side of the ranch. If it had gone further

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west... There are some ranches it nearly burned completely down.”

Continuing the pattern, a drought caused major challenges in 1998.

“I don’t know what will happen in 2008,” Waller says, with a laugh.

The ongoing challenges

Unlike sudden weather events and environmental changes, some challenges are constant. In West Texas, three common concerns are mesquite trees, prickly pear and a lack of water.

Chimney Creek Ranch is no exception when it comes to these concerns.

“For a good many years we were fighting the mesquites. Then we started fighting the prickly pear. Kind of a losing proposition. But we’re still working on it,” Waller says.

“What we’ve been doing is burning it then spraying it. It sure is hard to control. It’s like fighting a losing battle with a short stick.”

He says they planned to aero spray two pastures for mesquite this year but “the conditions aren’t too good for it.

“We had a late freeze that set the trees back and then it’s rained a lot now. I think with a lot of rain you don’t get a very good kill. So, I think we’ll defer that aero spraying until next year.”

Water, always a hot topic, became a big issue for the Wallers a few years ago.

“We ran out of water around 2000. Our neighbors were good enough to let us hook into their creek up there and that got us through that.

“We were completely out of water for the cattle and the headquarters (where he and Ruby, his wife of 60 years, live) until we got on that creek water,” Waller says.

Stewards of the land

Taking care of the land is of utmost importance to the Wallers. There is no farmland on the ranch

— it is all native pasture — and they utilize a rotational grazing system to maintain the land.

The family has even been recognized for their efforts as land stewards.

In 2004, Waller Cattle Co. was named Outstanding Conservation Ranch from the Lower Fork of the Brazos Soil and Water Conservation District.

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Texas then named Waller the Region Five Resident Conservation Rancher in 2005.

Keeping the pastures in good shape also has economic benefits: the Wallers rarely have to purchase hay and supplementing is only necessary a few months out of the year.

“We just keep a little hay for emergencies — ice storms, that kind of thing,” Waller says, “and we supplement our cows with cake from November through March.”

Bulls in the off-season

To remain as efficient as possible, the calving season is



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50 and Counting ...

(Continued from page 113)

contained from the middle of August to the middle of October each year. Of course, a shorter calving season means a shorter breeding season...and a lot more time off for the bulls.

Although most of their bulls get put out in a separate pasture to graze during the off-season, a select few continue to earn their keep.

"We use half-Jersey, half-Angus bulls on first-calf heifers for the low birth weight," Waller explains.

"On those bulls, after our breeding season is over, we lease them out quite a bit. They go out as far as Pampa.

"We keep them pretty well leased out during the off-season. We can get enough out of them that way, equivalent to them producing a calf."

'A shot for everything'

Herd health is a top priority

on this operation.

"We just about give a shot for everything," Waller says.

His son, Robert C. "Bobby" Waller, who has been back on the ranch since completing his degree at Texas Tech University in 1976, elaborates:

"The main thing is just vaccinating our calves at branding. We give them a modified live five-way. This past year we then came back and boosted all those cattle again fairly quick and it seemed to help quite a bit," Bobby says.

"We give our cows that same five-way type deal and we vaccinate them for trich, Vibrio and lepto. And then there's an annual worming and fly tagging in the summer. We also try to keep out a good balance of minerals in them with trace minerals," he says.

Genetics and bull selection

Waller does not put a lot of stock in EPDs. To him, bull selection is based much more on phenotype.

"[They've got to have] bone

and thickness and be smooth, extended and clean fronted," Waller says.

"And they've got to be sound on [their] feet and legs," he continues. "It's pretty rocky out here."


He also likes to evaluate the bull's dam when possible.

... give a **shot** for **everything**

"I like to get a bull whose mother has a good udder, because that sure passes on. We watch the udders for sure on our replacement heifers. You're going to get a few that are unsound but if you watch that it sure helps," Waller says.

Whether looking to buy or just deciding which ones to retain, Waller has one rule there is no exception to — whether it is in a bull or heifer.

"Our cattle are gentle. There's no place for a wild one here," he says. ■

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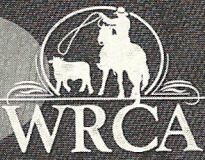
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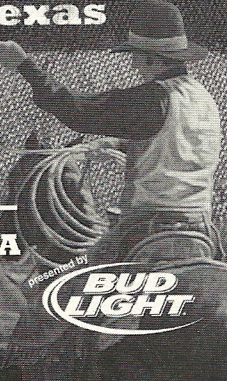


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