

# PRINCEVILLE RANCH

## CATTLE RANCHING OPERATIONS

Princeville Ranch is one of the oldest working cattle ranches in Hawaii. It spans from mauka (on the mountain side) to makai (ocean side) and from Hanalei to the edge of Kalihiwai Valley. Currently the Carswell family leases and operates the ranch, having started a successful riding stables business in 1978 and later acquiring the cattle operation in 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, has headed up the cattle operations for many years. He also has served as President of the Hawaii Cattlemen's Cooperative, representing 46 ranchers statewide.

Beginning in his childhood in Kona on the Big Island, Donn has been a witness and participant in Hawaii's rich ranching history. He remembers seeing paniolos (Hawaiian cowboys) rope steers by the horns and drag them out to small boats that would take them out to ships. Then the steers were lifted aboard for transport to other islands or the mainland.

Daughter Karin Carswell Guest also oversees the cattle operation and has been active in the cattle business for a number of years. A former vice-president of the Kaua'i Cattlemen's Association, she is in charge of herd management as well as health care for both the cattle and over 70 ranch horses. Karin's brother David Carswell, who serves as director of horsemanship programs, is active in a number of key cattle ranching functions as well.

Prior to starting the cattle operations, the Carswell family hosted the Hanalei Stampede rodeos in their arena for 12 years. This rodeo was one of the biggest in the state of Hawaii, with cowboys and cowgirls shipping their horses via barges from all over the state to participate. Donn (known to friends and family as curly), Karin and David paired up with each other to participate in the team roping and other rodeo events.

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. Ranching is a lifestyle rather than a job, and it requires being on call 24/7. From calving problems to cattle escaping through fences, when there is trouble on the ranch, the family and their trusty ranch hands are all there to help.

2500-acre Princeville Ranch is a "cow-calf" operation. Cows birth calves each year for both natural and grass-fed beef production. The herd includes 150 Brangus cows, a cross of 5/8 Angus and 3/8 Brahma. The Brahma breed handles tropical heat and humidity, whereas the Angus breed provides a desirable meat quality. The cows are bred by 8 to 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.

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 400 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 do not have enough pasture 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 just for the cows and so, must ship their calves to other locations.

The second group of cattle - one half of the calves - is kept on the ranch to go into the makai (ocean side) and Hanalei pastures to become grass-fed natural beef. The grasses in Hanalei are higher in protein and more suited to grass-finishing than the pastures on the upper sections of the Ranch. Under the brand *Princeville Pride*, the beef is sold locally at three locations: Namolokama General Store in Princeville (the Chevron station) and in Kilauea, the Healthy Hut and the Kilauea Town Market.

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

In cattle ranching, pasture management is a critical issue. The Carswells originally had their grass tested for nutritional content. The pastures have to be mowed and cleared regularly to keep down weeds as well as invasive trees and bushes. There are seven pasture sections which are used in regular rotation approximately every 5-10 days.

Cattle ranching on Kaua'i's spectacular North Shore can seem idyllic, but it does come with its challenges! Just keeping track of close to 400 animals spread over hundreds of acres is a daunting task. The weather is always unpredictable. If there is an extremely wet year, it affects pasture conditions and makes many areas very slippery. Every calving season there are usually one or two rescues that take place. A calf might get caught in the thick Hawaiian uluhi fern or in a deep stream bed. Oftentimes ropes must be lowered to pull calves to safety, while trying to keep the protective mama cows away, to prevent trampling. Due to the watchful eyes of the Carswells and their staff, the herd is well taken care of.

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, reflecting Gale Carswell's heritage. Prior to 1895, the HP brand of Hanalei Plantation was used (beginning in 1853) by Robert Wylie, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Hawaiian Kingdom.

The scenic beauty of the open pastures and dense foliage of Princeville Ranch is a testimony to the value of agriculture in preserving open space, view planes and beauty for both visitors and residents. Raising highly prized natural beef matches consumers' growing desire for healthy fare from 'green' endeavors. Equally important, it provides a sustainable ranch operation for the future.

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For additional information, contact: Corinne Travillion, *Marketing Manager*, Princeville Ranch Adventures, at 808-826-7669, ext. 221, or corinne@adventureskauai.com.

For *Princeville Pride Beef* contact, Healthy Hut at 828-6626, Kilauea Town Market at 828-1512 and Namolokama General Store at 826-1122.