

The History of Princeville Ranch

Princeville Ranch, located on the scenic North Shore of Kaua`i, has roots which intertwine with the early 19th century history of change in the Hanalei area. Traditional Hawaiian crops of taro, sweet potato and breadfruit made room for new economic ventures in cattle, silk, coffee, oranges, Irish potatoes, sugar and rice. Princeville lands were first grazed by cattle in 1831, making Princeville Ranch the oldest working cattle ranch on Kauai. In that year, Richard Charlton, British Consul and advisor to Kamehameha II, brought one hundred head of longhorns from northern California. Charlton leased lands from Governor Kaikioewa, to be used as a cattle ranch between Hanalei and Kalihiwai.

When Charlton brought his herd to Hanalei, none of the Hawaiians there were trained to handle the big animals or “pipi”, as they were called. Horses had been introduced to Hawaii in 1804. Cattle had been brought to the Big Island by Vancouver in 1798, as a present to King Kamehameha. They were allowed to roam free and were protected by a strict kapu until 1820, when the king enlisted the aid of hunters like Samuel Parker to hunt the wild bullocks. Hides and meat were salted and eventually replaced sandalwood as barter goods for the kingdom.

In 1832, the king brought three Mexican vaqueros to the Big Island to train Native Hawaiians in handling and domesticating the wide longhorns. Hawaiian cowboys were called “paniolos”, derived from the word “espagnoles” meaning “Spanish”. Eventually more vaqueros were brought to other islands, including Kaua`i. Charlton probably used vaqueros to assist with his herd and train his paniolos.

In 1845, Charlton conveyed his ranch to Ann Dudoit, wife of Captain James Dudoit, the first French consul to Hawaii. Upon retirement from government service in 1848, Dudoit moved his family to Hanalei and then to Kilauea, where he also ranched the ahupua`a of Namahana.

A brisk local and mainland trade developed on Kaua`i. Salt beef for whalers and fresh beef for Honolulu were shipped from Hanalei in Dudoit’s brigantine, The John Dunlap. Oranges were grown in Hanalei, Lumahai and Wainiha in large quantities. Oranges and potatoes were packed in straw and shipped to San Francisco by schooner during the gold rush of the 1850’s.

Previously, in 1840, Charles Titcomb had started a silk plantation in the Hanalei Valley. He converted it to coffee in 1843 and planted sugar in 1847. In 1853 Robert Wylie, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Hawaiian kingdom, acquired a coffee plantation which he later converted to sugar. He named the plantation “Princeville”, in honor of little Prince Albert Edward Kauikeaouli, only son of Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma, after a visit by the royal family in 1860. In 1862, Wylie acquired Titcom’s “Emmaville” estate and much of the present ranch lands in the ahupua`a’s of Kalihikai and Kalihiwai. Sadly, Princeville Ranch’s namesake, little Prince Albert, died in 1862 at the age of four.

In 1867, Judge E. H. Allen and a group of businessmen bought Princeville from Wylie’s estate. Sugar became unprofitable, due to insect damage and a lack of water to run the mill during drought. The last crop was harvested in 1893. Two years later, A. S. Wilcox acquired Princeville. He was the son of missionary Abner Wilcox and great great-uncle of Gale Carswell, mother of the Ranch’s present day operators.

Records show that “the lower lands were rented out to Chinese rice planters and the upper lands between Hanalei and Kalihiwai were planted to imported grasses and restored to a cattle ranch.” In 1916, Wilcox sold the lands to Lihue Plantation and ranch manager W. F. Sanborn. Lihue Plantation ran Princeville Ranch until 1969, adding pineapple and taro to the crops produced.

From 1969 to 1994, Princeville Ranch had four different operators, including the Carswell family, who began leasing the land in 1978. In that year, Donn and Gale Carswell began a successful horseback riding business called Princeville Ranch Stables, which including guided tours to an inland waterfall and to bluffs overlooking the ocean. Their daughter Kelley later managed the stables, prior to starting Kauai Backcountry Adventures with brother David on Lihue Plantation lands.

In 1994 the Carswells took over the cattle business, converting the herd from Herefords to a Brangus cow-calf operation. Raising natural beef became a focus of the ranch production. The beef is grass-fed without antibiotics or hormones, matching consumers’ growing desire for healthy fare from ‘green’ endeavors. Equally important, it provides a sustainable operation for the future. Today, Princeville Ranch occupies approximately 2,500 acres and is of similar herd size to 90% of the ranches in the United States. Cows, calves and grass-fed cattle number around 400.

Princeville Ranch continues to be family-run. Donn Carswell and daughter Karin Carswell Guest oversee ranch operations. Son David is a master horseman and proponent of natural horsemanship. He directs the horsemanship program and supports all other aspects of the ranching business. Son Chris owns a successful tent and party business, providing services to vendors and guests for Ranch events.

In 1999 David and his wife Denise (a former horseback guide and Japanese interpreter for the Stables) started a small business offering a hiking adventure on the Ranch. This initial endeavor proved highly successful over the years, adding kayak and zipline tours into the lush heart of the Ranch, and eventually evolving into Princeville Ranch Adventures. In 2010 Princeville Ranch Adventures integrated the Stables and now is owned by David and Denise Carswell and Karin Carswell Guest.

Since the early 1800’s, the lands of Princeville have evolved to meet the needs of the times. Today, Princeville Ranch continues on as a working cattle ranch with deep historical roots, providing a highly prized natural beef. With the Carswell family at the helm, the Ranch also has witnessed the development of a highly successful adventure company. With a staff of over 70, Princeville Ranch Adventures now welcomes as many as 220 guests a day during the busy summer season. All of these endeavors make an additional contribution to the Princeville Resort area and the island of Kauai by preserving open space, scenic beauty and dense foliage.

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