



Yavapai Tour Still Popular

By Lorraine Kingdon
Photos by Allan Fertig

Two middle-aged buses, a backup pickup—in case a bus broke down—and a university car searched out obscure county roads leading to some of the most historic ranches in Yavapai County this spring. Raising a cloud of dust that would have done credit to the Lone Ranger, the buses carried nearly 100 guests on the 1984 annual Yavapai County Ranch Tour.

The popular trek is sponsored by the Yavapai Cattle Growers, the Prescott Chamber of Commerce and the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service. The tour has become so well known that this year's was completely reserved four months in advance.

Carlton Camp, county extension director, led the group, giving a running commentary as the buses rolled, bumped and lurched through the country north of Prescott.

We heard ranch owners Bill and Betty Wells from the Bar H and the V 7, Tom Perkins from the Perkins Ranch and Dave Gipe from the Bar Heart explain the way it was back when — and the way it is now. One hundred years of tradition have taken the area's ranchers from cattle drives to computers, but hard work has never gone out of style.

As we stood under a spreading tree that must have grown up with the ranch, Betty Lo Wells talked about the ranch her father Claud Aiken started: "This ranch was put together with a dream and plenty of sweat. Dad didn't even have the proverbial shoestring. He did have a good head, a driving ambition and a terrific amount of enthusiasm for whatever he did. He was chore boy, hunter, prospector, farmer, sheepman, cowboy and rancher."

Many ranch jobs still require horsepower.
This corral is near Perkinsville.

Claud Aiken moved to Arizona in 1905 from Texas. Betty's mother Hazel came in 1910 from Washington. They wed in 1920 and homesteaded the Bar H in 1928. Betty said, "Dad took up a 360-acre grazing homestead and Mother picked up a relinquishment on a homestead adjoining. To prove up on the land, they had to live on both homesteads. So the house stands on the line, half on one homestead and half on the other."

Foresight and Hard Work

Betty told us, "Every time he got a few dollars ahead, Dad bought a few acres. He bought a little piece here or there, more at a tax sale, picking up homesteads from people who wanted to sell or trade. He always said the land would be worth a lot of money someday."

Besides cowboying for other ranches, her father cooked, worked as janitor at the county courthouse, and was trail guard and pump man for the sheep trail. Meantime, he looked after his own little bunch of cattle and raised a huge garden. Betty said, "We don't know what tough is, compared to him."

Of course, men weren't the only pioneers to work hard. Betty's mother canned hundreds of jars of tomatoes, string beans, peaches, pears, applesauce, jams, jellies, relishes and even catsup. She also did laundry to supplement the family income. "She carried water in buckets, first from a spring below the barn, later from a well up the hill," said Betty. "I thought I was pretty big when I could carry a bucketful in each hand without slopping my shoes full."

Bill Wells led our troop to a barn and a fenced, green meadow nearby. He said the ranch normally feeds 100 cattle in spring and summer in the meadow and about 300 calves in the winter. "We used to raise Herefords, but now I believe crossbreds are the only way to go—half Hereford and half Brahma or Charolais."

Someone asked about water. "It depends if you're talking about then or now," Carlton Camp said. "Now even Phoenix is looking to Chino Valley as a possible water source; the Verde River is a natural aqueduct. It used to be that Del Rio Springs had the most dependable water in the country. Santa Fe Railroad has owned the springs for 50 years; they hauled water to Flagstaff to use for their steam engines."

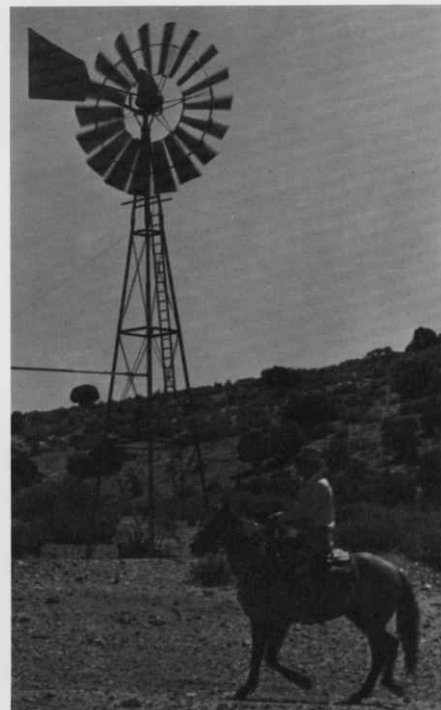
Bill said that Prescott now pumps water from artesian wells in the area; "really, except in the spring, they aren't artesian wells anymore." Artesian water was discovered in Chino Valley in 1930. A few years later Claud Aiken drilled his first irrigation well, for an alfalfa field. Bill said, "When Aiken started, he didn't know what a pump was. He just punched a hole in the ground and got water—a thousand gallons a minute. Those days are gone."

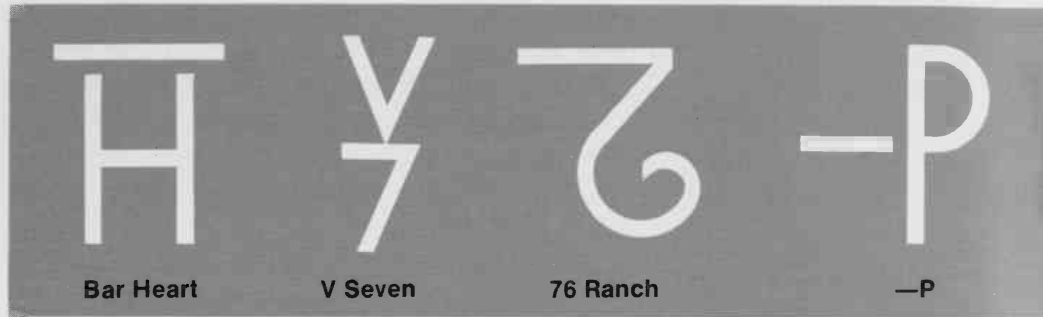
Grasshoppers and Dry Grass

Rain was pretty scarce in Yavapai County this spring. Carlton warned before the tour, only half facetiously, "We may find only dried out grass and grasshoppers." The Wells have faced dry weather before; Bill told us, "I remember in 1953, we didn't get rain until September. I got to thinking that hell wasn't over 100 yards away."

As we listened, Bill's grandsons rode into sight over a nearby rise, herding six young buffalo down for a good look at us. The buffalo looked well-fed, frisky and ready to pose for a new version of the buffalo nickel. Why buffalo on an Arizona ranch? As Bill put it, "I figured I was

The wind pumps water near the Wells homestead.





getting old enough I could play if I wanted to.”

Our next stop was near the railroad on a hilltop at Jerome Junction, close to Tom Perkins’ home. He is president of the Yavapai County Cattle Growers Association and the grandson of Marion A. Perkins, who homesteaded in the area in 1900.

The grasshoppers and dry grass surrounding us testified that rain had indeed been short this spring—just an inch since January, and this was June. But the range had looked good enough back at the first of the century to lure Marion Perkins coming from Texas on a two-year drive with 1,500 cattle. He left Texas because a law allowed only eight sections per homestead; it just wasn’t enough land.

Tom said, “Our ranch, the Perkins Ranch, was first started by Baker and Campbell in 1876. Their brand was the 76. My grandfather bought their open-range rights and arrived in what is now known as Perkinsville with a herd of cattle in November 1900. The brands used today date from 1923 and later—the TFH and Bar P.”

That cattle drive had troubles seldom seen in Western movies. Tom told the story: “On July 5, 1898, my grandfather, his family and several neighbors started from Fort David in Texas. He didn’t own all 1,500 head of cattle when the drive started, but he did by the time they got to Perkinsville. When they were someplace between Holbrook and Winslow, they ran into trouble with alkaline poisoning. And, he heard that Baker and Campbell were trying to back out of the deal, so he returned his cattle to Luna, New Mexico.” The sale wasn’t settled until the following year, when Perkins and his family completed the long trek.

Roundup on the Open Range

Actually, Perkins had only squatters’ and range rights. There were no fences; the range was entirely open. Each rancher had to watch his own cattle and keep them pushed back on his own range. In the spring, all the ranchers in the area joined in the roundup. Each rancher would stay with the roundup as it moved farther and farther from home territory



TFH

TFH

Flying D

Flying D

Quarter Circle Lazy Five

Quarter Circle Lazy Five

until no more of his calves showed up. Then, the cowboys would head home.

Tom claims that, though his father Nick might not have recognized a person the second time he saw him, once Nick saw a cow, he knew it for life. Nick liked big brands. He said that you only put a brand on once, but you have to look at it a thousand times.

Forty-five years ago, the Perkins family started raising crossbred cattle, an unpopular move at the time. Tom said, "Even 20 to 30 years ago, you couldn't find anything but Herefords around here. The first time we brought in a semi-truck load of Brahma bulls, the horses ran backwards when they saw them. Now, we're very proud of the distinctive 'Perkins cow' look."

Poverty Flat and Perkinsville

The back-road part of the tour really began at this point. Dust clouds separated the buses as we bumped along narrow tracks that were mostly rocks. Next stop was "Poverty Flat," the homestead of the V-7 ranch. The ranch was once part of Marion Perkins' holding, but Austin Nunn bought it before 1928.

After Nunn married Annie Jaggard in 1928, they built the house at Poverty Flat. Wells bought the ranch in 1952. The old ranch house is still in use, along with a newer home.

A stop in Prescott National Forest gave Forest Service retiree Jack Bohning a chance to explain tree-removal projects designed to improve the range. After lunch beside the Verde River, the tour moved on to Perkinsville, named by the Santa Fe Railroad in 1912. Once, it had a post office, a small store and a school. Tom Perkins' mother taught there, and he attended until the eighth grade.

Now it's a drowsy, abandoned siding with only a small house and boarded-up school. But it must have bustled during the two Hollywood productions that have taken advantage of Perkinsville's ranch-town looks.



From Left:
Betty Wells tells how her father homesteaded the Bar H Ranch. Tour organizer Carlton Camp listens.
W. J. "Bill" Wells
Tom Perkins
Bar Heart foreman John Herron
Dave Gipe

Dave Gipe's Bar Heart Ranch was the tour's last stop. Although the present owners bought it in 1978, the ranch dates back to 1911. Dave said, "At one time, the ranch covered an area from Williams to the Verde River. The part above the Mogollon Rim was summer range, with winter range 'under the Rim.'"

In 1911, George Barney held a temporary homesteader's permit for more than 1,000 head. He sold it to Shea and Goodwin in 1915. Historical names appear in the list of those holding smaller permits over the years: Ochoa, Brazil, Perkins, King Merritt and Putenney. More recently, Sam Steiger, 'Doc' Chapman, Tom McNeely, and Bill McCullough have owned the property.

Dave said, "We select beef for the consumer who wants lean meat. We're running a three-way cross between Brahma, Angus and Herefords to get a yield grade of two to two-and-a-half. Anything more is wasteful."

He summed it up for all the ranchers when he said, "There's a lot of fun in the cattle business, but in the final analysis, it has to be economically sound. The business you love can turn into the business you hate—if it doesn't work for you. Anybody in the cattle business works hard."



Buffalo at the Wells ranch run with the cattle.