

Old Oregon Ranch Has Varied History

Hidden among the Coastal Range Mountains in southwestern Oregon are native meadows that make a cowman's eyes light up with joy. Early Oregon settlers homesteaded these sites and started running cattle in the early 1850's and today the native pastures remain as they did in those years. They are not reseeded nor is any other special care required.

Ellis Dement owns 3,500 acres of this land scattered throughout the area southwest of Myrtle Point, Oregon with an average rainfall of 65 inches. Ellis's son operates the ranch and is the fourth generation of Dements to run cattle on this range. The pastures are on mountain slopes overlooking a series of canyons and valleys overshadowed by towering fir and cedar trees which are being cut everyday for lumber.

The Dement holdings were originally started by Samuel M. Dement in 1854. Mr. Dement followed the gold miners as a blacksmith until he ran onto the site of the present Dement "home place." Upon seeing the native grass and the lay of the land he stated "I'm going no farther, I'll settle right here." In the following months he walked across the mountains to Oregon City, 225 miles and bought two cows, one of these calves and he was in the cow business.

With game being plentiful, Mr.

Dement and his neighbors each had a few yearling Elk they had captured as calves in the hills. Struck with the notion they might be trading stock Mr. Dement gathered six of these elk and trailed them 70 miles over mountains into the next county until he met up with a rancher who traded him six yearling heifers for the six elk. Slaughtering the produce of these cattle for miners, etc. enabled him to return to his native Iowa in a few years where he purchased a carload of cattle for shipment to Oregon.

Ellis Dement was managing the ranch in 1912 when he decided four new bulls were needed and he wanted to try Hereford bulls. Ellis's first personal knowledge of Herefords was in 1906 and he was so impressed he was sure he had to try them. After scouring the surrounding county he finally traveled to Prineville, Oregon, climbed on a horse and rode 40 miles back in the hills to purchase two purebred Hereford bulls. He trailed the bulls to Redmond, Oregon, put them on a train to Roseburg and then trailed them another 75 miles to the home ranch.

At the same time the Herefords were selected he bought two bulls of the popular breed of that day and took them home also. After one year's calf crop Ellis says, "there was no question in my



A SAMPLE OF SOME FINE COWS are shown above in one of the high pastures of native grass on the Dement family ranch. These big boned, blocky members of the foundation herd are the result of careful breeding practices. The cows are bred at three years of age and wean an average 400 pound calf. The ranch is located in the mountains below Myrtle Point and has been in the same family since it was settled in the 1850's.

mind what breed of beef cattle were the ones to use. The Hereford calves were by far the best." The selection of replacement heifers reassured him his decision was sound. From that day to this the only bulls running on Dement ranches have been purebred Herefords.

Ellis says one of the outstanding reasons for his preference for Herefords is, "one particularly hard winter we had to feed every head of cattle except the Herefords. They got out and rustled for themselves while the others would have starved had we not fed them." As for crossbred cattle, Ellis reported "one year we bought some crossbred steers and we couldn't get them fat enough on grass to sell them as three year olds and had to carry them to four years of age and when we sold them they brought \$1.50 less per cwt. than our three year old Herefords. The present program of the Dement ranches is to carry steers to three years of age and sell them off of grass to packers on the Portland market weighing up to 1,350 pounds. Dress-

ing percentages have been up to 61 per cent.

90% CALF CROP . . .

The cow herd numbers around 100 and four bulls are used with them. Calf crops run around 90 per cent with about 15 of the heifers retained as replacements. Ellis and Sam always buy purebred Hereford bulls and purchase them both privately and through auction sales. Ellis says, "we want our bulls meaty and blocky with plenty of bone as well as good feet and legs. They should be marked well and we want them heavy boned and with a good big frame. We can keep an eye on purebred breeders by watching their show records and from their reputation among other commercial men who have been their customers. Some breeders have gone in for too small a type cattle for us commercial men and others have done the opposite and gone overboard for size. We would like them to stay in the middle of the road and produce a medium size bull with frame enough to carry some beef and still retain the ability to mature in a reasonable time."

In regard to the cow herd Ellis

and Sam said "we don't think there is any breed of cattle that can beat Herefords. These cows are wintered in the pastures and not a single supplementary feeding is made to any cow beast on the place. Their winter feed is made up of growing and matured grass on the pastures and in the forests surrounding them. When the snow covers open pasture, three or four days at a time, these Herefords get out and rustle for themselves in the forest and do a darn good job of it. We are not troubled with pink eye or cancer eye and have very little trouble calving. The cows are calved for the first time at three years of age and when they are shipped to market with only grass to fatten them they weigh around 1,200 pounds. Year after year our calves start coming in March and most are dropped in April. When they are weaned at six months they weigh an average of 400 pounds. We are considering plans to operate on a cow-calf basis rather than the three year old steers since the current market trends seem to make this type of set-up more practical for us.



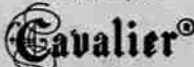
THE FATHER AND SON TEAM of Ellis and Sam Dement are shown above in one of the native grass pastures which they use to fatten three year old steers which attain an average weight of 1350 pounds and dress as high as 61 per cent without any form of supplementary feed. The original founder of the ranch, Samuel M. Dement, began with a herd of six elk which he traded off for cattle.



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