

B.C. Rancher Picks Peavine Valley

By A. J. DALRYMPLE, Vancouver, B.C.

WHEN the pioneers were pushing northward through the Cariboo to the gold bars of the Fraser, the Horsefly River, the diggings at Barkerville, and other points, they crossed two streams just beyond Williams Lake; and with the grim humor of the day, they named one Whiskey Creek, and the other Soda Creek.

Soda Creek was the northern terminus of the Royal Engineers' Cariboo Road, and the trail in those days led down from the rolling hills to the shores of the Fraser where travellers boarded stern-wheelers for northern points.

In those days when ox-teams freighted goods in the north, Soda Creek boasted of a one-street boom town of 1,500 persons. When I was in the ghost town recently I roamed through several abandoned buildings, including one that had apparently been an "opera house and bar." During my visit I did not see a soul.

The visit to Soda Creek was just a side trip while enroute to Les Gilmore's Richmond Farms, just beyond the creek. In fact the stream flows through a portion of his property.

Les Gilmore is a rugged, ruddy-faced son of the soil, farm-born down near Steveston near the point where the Fraser meets the sea.

He has been much in the public eye ever since he was a sport-loving youngster. He played lacrosse, and is a member of the Lacrosse Commission. He is a Rotarian, and for 17 years has been active in the affairs of the B.C. Coast Vegetable Marketing Board; and is a director of B.C. Federation of Agriculture.

As a primary producer, he is known for his operation of two Richmond Farms near Steveston where he breeds world-record Holsteins; and he also has an international name in the production of top quality export potatoes; a consistent prize winner at potato field days.

About three years ago Les went into the Soda Creek region, and bought a beautiful ranch where he specializes in Commercial Herefords and potatoes.

It is one of the garden spots of the Cariboo, and even in this last summer which made records for lack of rain, Les Gilmore's Ranch was a lovely sight to behold.

The property consists of about 1,200 acres of crown grant; 400 grazing lease, and some additional acreage leased from the forestry department.

It runs eastward from the Fraser and up into the hills. There are about 400 acres of bottom lands. They are about 200 feet above the Fraser; but they are not irrigated by Fraser water, but by gravity from lakes in the hills on the property.

When I arrived at the ranch, Les had a couple of fine saddle horses brought out, and we started over the meadows. He is growing barley, oats, alfalfa, and has a trial patch of Mexican beans.

There are 20 acres of Netted Gem potatoes being grown under the direction of Alex Ross. He likes growing spuds in the Cariboo because there is isolation; no aphids, blight or flea beetle; and therefore no dust or sprays are necessary.

We rode through the lower areas where the water could be turned into any por-

tion of any field, and the crops were wonderful.

Then we returned to the main buildings where Les, and his farm manager, Reg. Millar, showed me the flume that runs seven miles from McLeesh Lake up in the hills.

Reg. told me that the original flume was made scores of years ago by Chinese who ran the water down from the hills to wash the gold-bearing sands of the Fraser.

The highway cuts through the farm yard, and the Pacific Great Eastern Railway runs just behind the buildings, so produce can be shipped by road or rail, right from the buildings.

They have their own cattle chutes for loading right out of the buildings; and also two root houses of 1,000 tons capacity, on the right-of-way. Potatoes may be loaded into cars by gravity.

The railway station is in their back yard; and the flume from the hills goes under the tracks; after that it rambles past the old time log ranch house, past a table with wash dish, soap, towels, comb and mirror, where the hands can wash from running water before they go in to eat.

While I was there they were haying. They put up about 14,000 bales of mixed cultivated hay for their own use over winter. They cut no wild hay.

They store some of the hay in buildings alongside the railway, and if shipments are made they deliver them by gravity to the boxcars.

Just behind the barns they have a number of corrals in among the trees where they can feed animals if necessary.

One of the interesting features of this ranch is the region of the upper levels around McLeesh Lake, which is a mile wide and three miles in length. This lake is on the property, and is one source of irrigation for the bottom lands.

It is truly a beautiful lake, unsurpassed for scenery, and it provides life-giving water for the crops below.

After spending the night in a cabin at the lake, we got into a pickup truck for a journey to Les Gilmore's herd of 25 Herefords grazing in the Peavine Valley, also in the upper levels.

Reg. Millar drove the truck over a tortuous trail through the woods, and there we saw a bunch of sleek, fat Herefords grazing on the peavines.

Then we came into the valley itself, a lovely pasture several miles in length, and with the Soda Creek running through the centre.

Although the grass was rich along the stream, and adjacent valley floor and hillsides, there were no cattle in sight; and Reg. said the Herefords preferred the peavines to all else.

We saw a small bunch resting under the poplars a quarter of a mile away and started over there, when we were met by Joe Pop, Indian rider on the herd.

Joe, mounted on a big sorrel, had just come down from the hills. He has a log cabin camp, and stays with the cattle practically all the time. He leaves every other day or so to go down to the ranch and change horses. The saddle horses are apt to go sore in the feet on the stony hillsides if they do not get the required rest periods.

It is the ideal job for Joe. He is in his 60's, tall, and lean, and his physical appearance belies his age. He likes the



Les Gilmore and herd in Peavine Valley.

work; and it also satisfies his desire to be well-mounted, and to do some hunting. He gets a bounty of an extra \$10 for every bear or coyote he gets. This is paid by Les Gilmore.

Joe says that the hunting however, has not been so good of late. He believes that his presence in the hills frightens off the marauders; and of course that is what he is there for.

Reg. Millar says however, that one bear did get past Joe, and hamstringed a steer. On the other hand, one day Joe found three animals that got bogged down in a little pot-hole. He saved them. They feel that Joe has been the means of saving enough animals one way or another to be an asset to the ranch.

Before we left, Reg. took me along the Soda Creek, and showed me a phenomenon. The stream rambles along; just a babbling brook, and suddenly it sort of swishes into some tall green grass and that's the end, to all appearances.

"It just goes underground," says Reg. "It takes a subterranean course, and pops out later, farther down, and then emerges near the highway, goes under the road where you saw it, and continues on to empty into the mighty Fraser; the Soda Creek of gold rush history."

I asked Les if he intended to increase his herd, considering there is so much talk of intensive feeding in irrigated pasture, and he said there was no intention at the moment.

He is raising commercial Herefords, and does not expect to go in for pure-breds in the near future; but he is pleased with his bulls; one from Charlie Turner of Salmon Arm; another from the Kelly ranch in the Chilcotin; and two from V. E. Ellison at Oyama.



The ranch house and garden, Les Gilmore's ranch at Soda Creek.