



BAR U RANCH

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA



Visitor Guide



Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Canada

Bar U Ranch National Historic Site of Canada

Businessmen, cattle, Natives, princes, women, children, Percherons, polo ponies and cowboys; all played a part in the unique story of the Bar U Ranch. One of the first and most enduring of the large corporate ranches established in the 1880's, the Bar U was chosen to commemorate the history of the ranching industry in Canada.

Follow the story of the Bar U through seven decades of change from 1882 to 1950. Explore the ranch headquarters. Visit the many historic buildings and learn about the people who made the Bar U one of the most famous ranches in its time. Sit in a saddle and imagine what twelve hours of riding the range might have felt like. Try roping our steers... it's not so easy, even when they don't move. Immerse yourself in stories of ranching pioneers... fortunes made and lost, cattle-killing winters and massive roundups.

The Bar U Ranch is the only National Historic Site in Canada that commemorates the history of ranching. Parks Canada Agency and Friends of the Bar U Historic Ranch Association are working together to protect, preserve and present the many historic buildings and landscape features of the ranch for you and future generations.

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Rangeland

At its largest, the Bar U Ranch encompassed almost seven townships of deeded and leased land: 157,960 acres or 63,184 hectares.

By 1890, eight years after the first herds of cattle were driven from Idaho, USA, the North West Cattle Company reported 10,410 cattle and 832 horses. The NWCC livestock, branded with the Bar U brand, grazed on the native grasses of the company's extensive lease land.

Jonas Rider - Native cowboy overlooking Bar U cattle herd.

Rough fescue is a native grass of the Alberta foothills. Chinook winds that blow in over the mountains often clear the snow from exposed slopes to allow easier grazing of the fescue grasses. Together with reliable rainfall, mountain fed streams and the shelter of wooded coulees, the foothills of Alberta provide some of the best ranching country in Canada.



Today, The Bar U Ranch National Historic Site of Canada is located on 367 acres or 148.43 hectares of the original Bar U headquarters and surrounding rangeland. The majority of former Bar U leases are still in use by neighbouring ranchers.

Before the Bar U

Huge herds of bison, the major source of food and material for the Native people of the plains, roamed the grasslands of western Canada. On a seasonal basis for nearly 4,000 years, Native people occupied the area on and around what was to become the Bar U Ranch headquarters.

After 1869, whiskey traders moved into Canada and began trading "firewater" to the Native people with devastating results. The newly formed North West Mounted Police (N.W.M.P.) arrived to maintain law and order in the west and were welcomed by many Natives as friends.

In 1877, Treaty No. 7 was negotiated between the Canadian government and the Natives of southern Alberta district: the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Sarcee and Stoney people. Treaty No. 7 opened the way for the peaceful settlement of 50,000 square miles of southern Alberta in return for reserves of land, livestock and farming implements, small annuities and other considerations.



Glenbeur Archives

The time of the bison and the Plains Indians, who lived in harmony with the herds, had suddenly passed. Railways had brought increasing numbers of sport hunters to the southern plains, while new technology had created an insatiable demand for bison hides. In a few years, bison numbering 50 million, were reduced to a few hundred animals by hide hunters north and south of the international border. Those remaining in southern Alberta district were driven south by prairie fires, ending a traditional way of life for the Plains Indians of Canada.





Fred Stimson and The North West Cattle Company 1882-1902

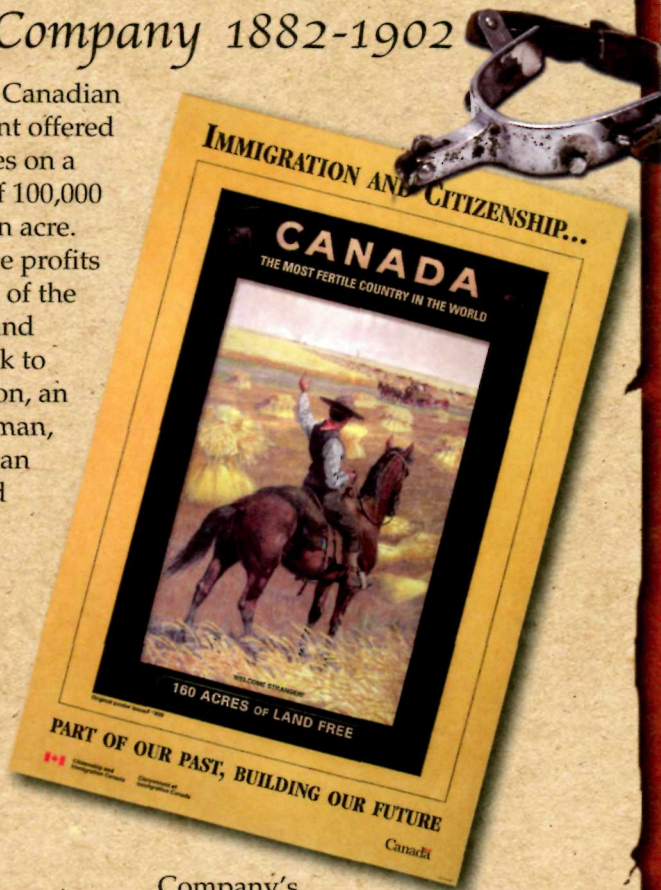
In 1881 the Canadian Government offered 21-year leases on a maximum of 100,000

acres of land for a penny an acre. Intrigued by stories of huge profits made from ranching south of the border, eastern Canadian and British investors were quick to respond. Fredrick S. Stimson, an experienced Quebec stockman, along with the wealthy Allan family of Montreal, formed the North West Cattle Company. The Canadian government granted two leases to Stimson and the North West Cattle Company covering 147,000 acres of prime grassland. Stimson became the resident manager of the Bar U Ranch.

In 1882 Stimson bought 3,000 Durham-Shorthorn stocker cattle, 21 purebred shorthorn bulls and 75 saddle horses in the northern United States and had them trailed to North West Cattle Company leases.

The Canadian Pacific Railway reached Calgary, opening the way to market cattle in eastern Canada and Great Britain. The North West Cattle

Company's first sale of cattle occurred when the Canadian Pacific railway purchased 1,000 steers for \$75.00 each. Bar U cattle were also purchased by the Canadian government to supply beef to the North West Mounted Police and the Native people. During the years of 1882 to 1886, almost \$300,000 worth of beef was provided annually for distribution in the Treaty 7 area.



North West Cattle Company's headquarters

Fred Stimson and The North West Cattle Company

George Lane arrived from Montana in 1884 and became foreman of the North West Cattle Company. He was an extremely ambitious young man of remarkable character, all arms and legs and grit. He sat on a horse like a clothespin, you just could not shake him off. In 1885, the largest and last general round-up in Canadian history was organized: over 100 men, 500 saddle horses and 15 wagons gathered 60,000 cattle spread over 10,000 square miles of open range. George Lane was elected round-up captain for the north half of the range.

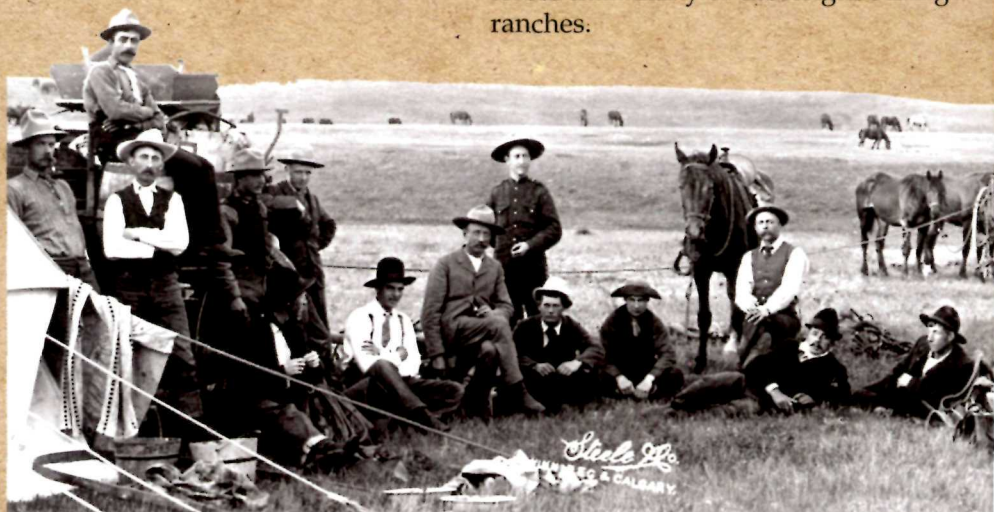
The North West Rebellion led by Louis Riel, caused fear among settlers and ranchers, particularly those in isolated locations. In response, Fred Stimson formed

"Stimson Rangers", a group of volunteer mounted troops to patrol the foothills.

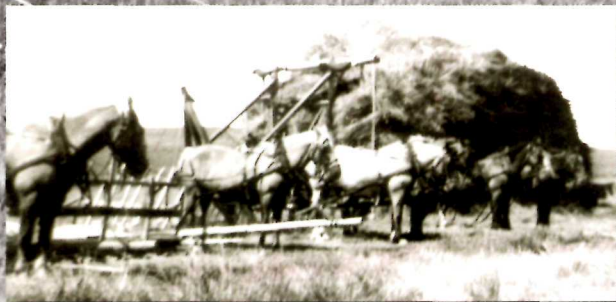


Glentworth Archives

Thousands of cattle died on the range during the killing winter of 1886-87. Ranchers learned the hard way that they needed to feed livestock in the winter. The Bar U had put up winter feed and subsequently suffered fewer losses than many of the neighbouring ranches.



Glentworth Archives



Dunham Collection

Bar U cattle were among the first live cattle shipped to Great Britain from Alberta. In 1890 the North West Cattle Company reported 10,410 cattle and 832 horses at the Bar U ranging on 157,960 acres of lease land. Census Canada recorded 18 people at the Bar U, including a horse breaker named Harry Longabaugh. Longabaugh was also known as the infamous Sundance Kid from the Wild Bunch Gang.

For almost a decade the Bar U ranch flourished without having freehold tenure to a single acre. In 1891, the Canadian government made changes to its lease policy allowing ranchers to purchase up to 10 percent of their leased land for \$1.25 an acre. The North West Cattle Company negotiated for the purchase of 15,000 acres while continuing to lease land for grazing.

Fred Stimson was very interested in the Native way of life, and always welcomed the Stoney and Blackfoot when they wished to camp at the Bar U. He learned to speak the Blackfoot language, hired Native range riders, collected Native beadwork, headdresses, leggings and moccasins and was an advocate for Native rights.

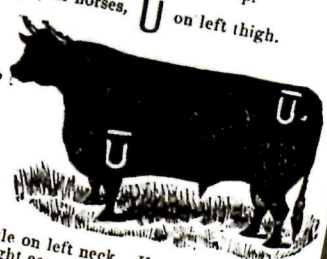
In 1912 Fred Stimson died in Montreal after spending eight years operating a dairy farm in Mexico called the El Rosario.

Northwest Cattle Co.
 S. F. Stimson, Manager, High River.

Horses, **U** on left shoulder, or **HL** on left shoulder, or **00** on left shoulder or hip, or **BX** on left shoulder and hip, and on left hip.

Vent, all horses, **U** on left thigh.

Vent, all Cattle, **D** on left side.



Marks, Wattle on left neck. Underbit left ear and undercrop right ear.

Also own Cattle, **10** and **HL** monogram left side. Marks, downcut dewlap on brisket. **⊙** on left hip. **U** on left side. **21** on right side.

Joseph Noel.
 Address, Lethbridge.

Horses, **W** on left
 Vent, **—** through b on right
 Cattle, **W** on right
 Vent, **W** on right

Glennbow Archives

Glennbow Archives

Bank's Camera R.W. Gardner Collection



John Ware



Glendon Archives

Montana. Cattle prices were high in Montana so they travelled west to Lost River, Idaho. When business was concluded, Fred Stimson headed back to High River, leaving Tom Lynch to put together a trail outfit to bring the herd some seven hundred miles to their new range. At Lost River, Lynch hired two hands just up from Texas, Bill Moodie and John Ware.

At the beginning of the drive, Ware was given the lowly job of night herding on a decrepit old horse with shoddy rig to match. He fulfilled his duties for several days before approaching Lynch and asking if he might have "a little better saddle and a little worse horse." John's request was granted and not only did he ride the bronc, he also gained a new measure of respect and admiration from those he rode with.

Over the next two years, Ware worked for the Bar U Ranch and eventually moved to a spot along the Red Deer river, just north of the village of Duchess. In September of 1905, John was killed when his horse tripped and fell on him. Since his death, a wealth of legends have been woven, making him something of a Paul Bunyan of the Canadian west.

Few personalities stand out in the ranching industry of Canada like that of John Ware. An African-American born into slavery in the Carolinas, John rose to fame in the Canadian west. A true pioneer, John Ware established his reputation in frontier society with deeds rather than words. His skills in the saddle and straight forward honesty earned him the respect of fellow cattlemen. Because of his courage and enormous strength, the First Nations people called him "Matoxy Sex Apee Quin" (bad black white man) and wondered if he had a connection to the spirit world.

In the spring of 1882, Fred Stimson met veteran cattle drover Tom Lynch in Helena,



John Ware homestead in the Millarville district before the turn of the century

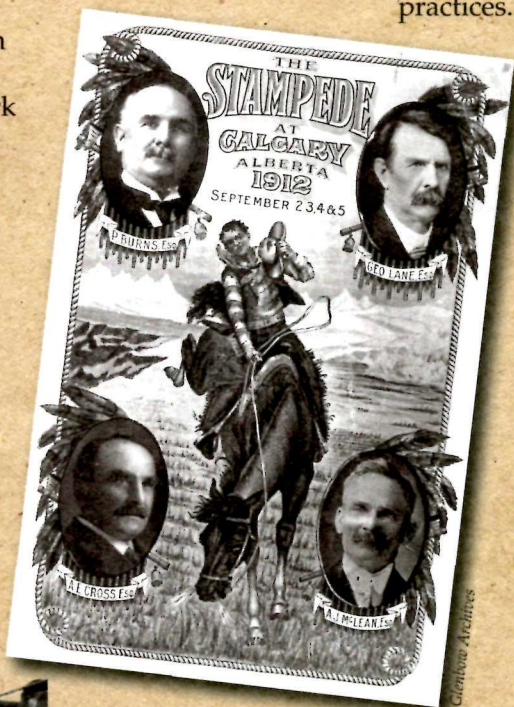
George Lane Buys a Ranch 1902-1927

Calgary Herald headlines read, "Largest ranch sale in Alberta's

history." George Lane and partners purchased the assets of the NWCC, which include over 3,000 cattle and 500 horses for a price nearing a quarter of a million dollars. Fred Stimson returned to Montreal.

"There was a touch of romance in the deal, in as much as Mr. Lane originally came to Alberta to work for this very outfit. He struck the country with exactly \$100 and started to work for the Bar U outfit for \$100 a month...he has by his own unaided efforts become one of the most wealthy and substantial men in Alberta. From a plain cowboy he has risen to be one of the largest, if not the largest, cattle ranch owners in Western Canada."

The winter of 1906/07 killed thousands of cattle, forcing many large corporate ranches to abandon the business. The Bar U survived despite losses of an estimated 16,000 head of recently imported Mexican cattle. This harsh winter sparked the end of the open range era and ushered in new ranching practices.



Glendon Archives



George Lane is best remembered as one of the "Big Four" who underwrote the first Calgary Stampede. Guy Weadick approached Lane looking for money to produce a "Frontier Celebration and World Championship Cowboy Contest". Lane, with fellow pioneer cattlemen A.E. Cross, Archie McLean and Pat Burns agreed to finance the 1912, first ever Calgary Stampede. Each of the Big Four contributed \$25,000 to Weadick to help him turn the dream into a reality.

Pekisko Polo Club 1904-1914

It wasn't all work at the Bar U. British sporting and social traditions were very popular in the Alberta foothills. At the turn of the 20th century until the beginning of World War I, Bar U cowboys and neighbouring ranchers played polo on the flats north of the Bar U headquarters. Pekisko Polo Club was also known as the Geebung Polo Club, the name taken from a poem written by A.B. Patterson about

a club in Australia. Using regular range ponies, the Pekisko crew drew chuckles from more sophisticated competitors from and Spokane, showed their field by Earl of

Vancouver until they stuff on the winning the Winterton's Cup in 1909.



Bar U Percherons

By producing superb draft horses for the increasing number of farmers coming into the area, Lane turned a threat into an asset. Lane moved his Percheron breeding operation from the YT Ranch to the Bar U. Three purebred Percheron studs and 72 mares costing a total of \$75,000, arrived at the Bar U from Le Perche, France. In October of 1909, Bar U Percherons won almost every event entered at the World's Fair in Seattle. George Lane kept increasing his numbers until he had the largest herd of purebred Percherons in the world.



Garou, Halifax and Americain, 1916.



Alex Fleming driving 6 up at Calgary Stampede

George Lane Buys a Ranch

During World War I, the Bar U and other Alberta ranches lost a lot of their skilled labour to the armed forces. George Lane employed Stoney families to work at many of the seasonal jobs like, branding, calving, haying and fencing. They lived near the Bar U in the summer and became an important part of the Bar U workforce year round. When the boys returned from the war, a generous George Lane rehired any man who wanted to come back to the Bar U, but he also kept his new help.

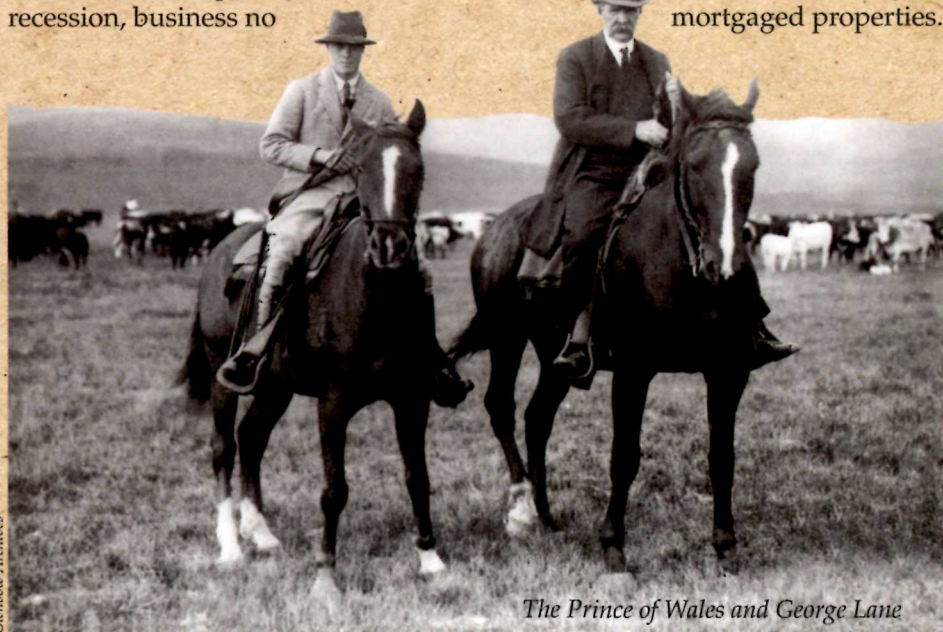
When Edward the Prince of Wales toured Canada in 1919 he visited the Bar U. He was so impressed by the area and the cowboy way of life that he purchased the neighbouring Bedingfeld Ranch and named it the E.P. Ranch. The implications of this purchase for the Bar U were considerable as the Prince relied heavily on George Lane for advice.

The famous Bar U was a premiere ranch but after a post war recession, business no

longer prospered. A cycle of dry years combined with a down turn in the cattle and grain markets hurt Lane's business ventures. To make things worse, Lane's partners from Gordon, Ironside and Fares collapsed in 1920. Lane's financial situation worsened when in 1921, prices of wheat and steers dropped to half their value of the previous year. Lane began to liquidate assets of cattle and purebred horses to keep the ranch operational.

Despite Lane's money problems, the Bar U continued more or less as usual. In 1924, Jonas Rider, a Stoney well known for his roping ability at the Bar U brandings, won the Calf Roping Championship at the Calgary Stampede.

George Lane always drove himself hard, but after the strain of his post war setbacks, his health deteriorated and in September of 1925, George Lane died. Tributes poured in from far and wide. The Dominion Bank took over Lane's heavily mortgaged properties.



The Prince of Wales and George Lane



Pat Burns - Changing Times 1927-1950

In 1927, Pat Burns, owner of a successful food business empire, purchased the holdings of George Lane & Co. for just over \$500,000. Bar U land at the time was valued at \$11.00 an acre. During the thirties the appraised value dropped to \$6.78 an acre and by 1947 jumped to \$20.00 an acre.

At one time or another, Burns owned many of southern Alberta's most famous ranches; the *Bow Valley*, the *Circle*, *Imperial*, *Walrond*, the *Rio Alta (OH)*, the *Bar S*, the *Q*, the *76*, the *Two Dot*, *Glengarry* and *Flying E*. But the jewel of Pat Burns' crown of ranches was the Bar U. With the addition of the Bar U Ranch to his cattle empire, it was said that Burns could ride from Calgary south to the United States border without once stepping off his property.

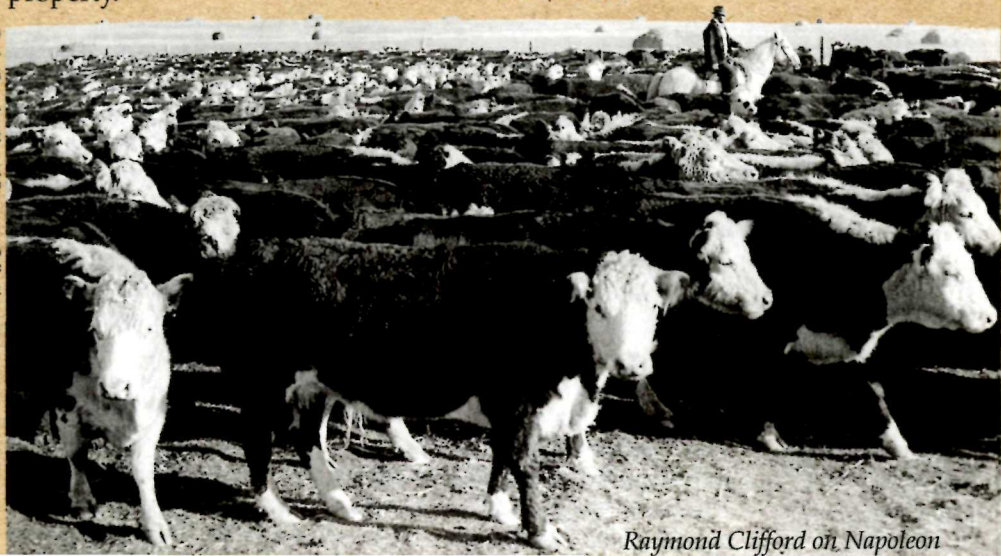


Glenbow Archives

After a period of high demand for cattle and exceptional prices for beef during the late 1920's, the bottom fell out of livestock prices in the thirties. Prices were so low during the Depression that it cost more to ship cattle to market than they were worth. As the grip of the Depression tightened, Burns, an astute businessman, cut back on general expenses and in spite of drought and economic chaos continued to operate the Bar U.

The Alberta foothills were hit by another severe winter in '36 and the Bar U fed 5,000 head of cattle a total of 38 tons of hay and 500 bushels of oats a day. In mid-August,

the editor of the *High River Times* remarked "About the only things we will remember this year is that it has been the coldest, the hottest, the driest and so on in the history of the settlement."



Parks Canada, Albrecht Ronssant Collection

Raymond Clifford on Napoleon

Another Bar U era came to an end when Pat Burns passed away in 1937.

Under the management of his nephew John Burns and a team of long term employees, P. Burns Ranches Ltd. introduced modern technology and large scale improvements to the ranch. Before long, white-faced Herefords replaced the Shorthorn cattle and grain production was increased.

During the Second World War many Bar U riders enlisted and once again the Bar U success benefited from its historic connections to the Stoney people. The Native work force ensured the Bar U Ranch's existence during a time of labour shortages and soaring labour costs.

By the late forties, trucks and tractors were in common use on ranches across the west. At the Bar U, the Percheron barns had been boarded up and were being used for grain storage. Burns Ranches head office decided there was no point in keeping non-productive stock around so they decided to sell off most of the Bar U horse herd.

A year later, the last large cattle drive from the Bar U took place. Over a period of five and a half days, 11 riders trailed 1,821 head of Bar U cattle 67 miles along road allowances to Burns feedlots in Calgary.

The third and final historic period of the Bar U, the Burns era, came to a close in 1950 with the sale of the ranch to J. Allen Baker.



Parks Canada, Joe Hayes Collection

Mrs George, the Bar U farm cook with her daughter outside the mobile cook car

Glenbow Archives

Campfire Bannock

- 2 cups flour
- 2 tbsps baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/3 cup lard or butter
- 1 cup water
- Lard for frying

Mix flour, baking powder, salt, fat and water to make a soft dough. Melt a chunk of lard in a large frying pan or Dutch oven. Spread the bannock in the pan. Cook on one side until well browned and crusted, then turn it over and do the other side. Cook over hot coals. Serve with butter and jam.



The Modern Era

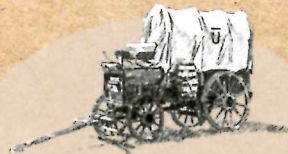


In 1950, P. Burns Ranches Ltd. sold the remaining Bar U horses, 500 cows and the major portion of the ranch including the ranch headquarters to J. Allen Baker. Nobody in the long history of the Bar U relished his ownership of the Bar U more than Allen Baker. The Bar U continued to be one of the very few large foothills ranches and covered thirty sections of deeded and leased land. Baker ran a traditional cow/calf operation with dedication and distinction. He was never content to maintain a comfortable and successful status quo, but rather he constantly pursued new and risky ideas. Allen Baker owned the Bar U Ranch for 27 years, longer than anyone in either the historic, or modern era.

The Wambeke family, already established in the agricultural community bought the Bar U headquarters and some of the ranch lands in 1975. The plan was to expand their production system, which combined a cow/calf operation with a feedlot and farm.

In 1984 Melvin Nelson and family purchased the Bar U Ranch. Melvin, for a brief time owned two of the most famous ranches in Canada; the Gang Ranch in British Columbia and the Bar U in Alberta.

Parks Canada negotiated with Melvin Nelson in 1991 and purchased 367 acres (148 hectares) of the original ranch headquarters to commemorate the history and importance of ranching in Canada and the Bar U's role in that industry.



The Friends of the Bar U Historic Ranch Association

was established in 1992. Together as partners, Parks Canada and the Friends are preserving, protecting and presenting our ranching heritage. On July 30th, 1995, the Bar U Ranch National Historic Site of Canada officially opened.



Historic Ranch Headquarters

3 Stud Horse Barn



Between 1909 and 1919, George Lane's Percheron breeding operation was the largest and most famous in the world. This barn was one of a number that housed the award winning Percheron studs, colts and show string.

4 Chop House



Originally built as a barn c. 1909, it stored feed for the Bar U livestock. Here, a mixture of grains were ground into chop to feed young cattle in the winter. The grain elevator was added during the 1940's.

5 Log Cabin



This little log cabin, where many foremen and their families lived, represents a portion of Bar U management history. Built in 1919, it was originally at the west end of the ranch but was relocated here in 1946.

6 Ranch/Post Office



This unassuming building was a beehive of activity on the ranch. Primarily an office and residence built about 1902 for George Lane's bookkeeper, it was also the Pekisko Post Office and a meeting room for the Pekisko Polo Club. Once a week, neighbours stopped by to collect their letters, parcels, newspapers and local gossip. In 1927, the postal service was moved east of the Bar U to the South Fork Trading Post and the building was moved to its present location.

7 Harness Repair Shop



Built about 1909 at the beginning of the ranch's Percheron era, this was originally a residence for the two men who cared for and handled the Percheron studs. It was also where the show wagon and harness were stored. In 1927 the shop was relocated from west of the stud horse barn and was used in the winter as a place for the part time harness repairman to work.

10 Cookhouse



Welcome to the “belly of the Bar U”! A Chinese cook with a fiery temper, huge ‘lazy susan’ tables and plates full of hearty ranch food were distinguishing characteristics of the cookhouse. Built in 1910 after the first cookhouse burned down, this was where orders of the day were given each morning and where the cowboys relaxed at night. The cook had a bedroom on the main floor and the full time ranch hands and chore men slept upstairs in a dormitory.

11 Storage Sheds



From the cookhouse, the cook could cross the road to the three sheds built before 1900 where he could pull out a crate of dried apricots from the dry goods shed, check on the Delco generator installed in the fuel shed in 1917, or cut some meat from beef quarters hanging in the locker of the ice house.

15 Blacksmith Shop

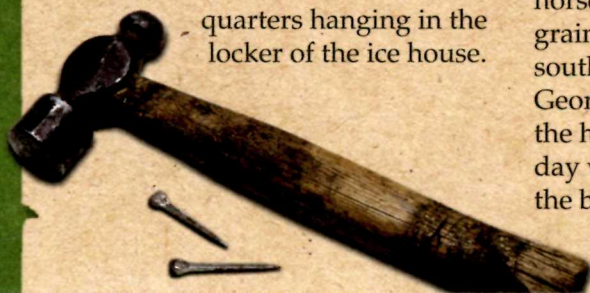


This shop represents one of the ranch’s earliest examples of recycling. It was built in 1910 with logs salvaged after the first cookhouse and bunkhouse burned down. In 1945 it was moved here from its original location near the Saddle Horse barn. During Lane’s time, the blacksmith or ‘smithy’ was extremely busy shoeing the many Percheron horses Lane and his staff took on the show circuit. In his shop, the smithy also shod the work and saddle horses, repaired equipment and made fittings for gates and buildings.

16 Saddle Horse Barn



This is the oldest and largest log building on the ranch. Built in 1882-83, it was where the riders kept their tack, and fed and saddled their horses for a days work. A hay and grain storage area was added at the south end of the building during George Lane’s time. The corral held the horses that were needed for the day while the round pen was where the bronc busters started training the young horses.



17 Work Horse Barn



Built around 1895, this barn was used for the ranch's workhorses. These huge horses transported feed to cattle in winter, hauled loads of firewood and manure, pulled farm implements, and hauled supplies from High River year round. Trucks and farm implements eventually replaced the use of workhorses on the Bar U.

19 Round-up Camp



From the first general round-up in the spring of 1884 to the last Bar U cattle round up in 1922, a camp like this consisting of a chuckwagon, bed roll wagon and tents was home for Bar U riders. Round-ups were held twice a year; for gathering cattle to be branded in the spring and for selecting those to be shipped to market in the fall. After the 1920s, round-up camps weren't used as often. Cattle were driven shorter distances to branding corrals built on the ranch or to railheads at Cayley or Brooks to be shipped to market.

20 Dairy Barn



The Dairy Barn was an integral part of the ranch's self sufficiency. Dairy cattle supplied the cooks with fresh milk to help feed managers, foremen and their families, a nanny, the bookkeeper, cooks, riders, horse handlers and trainers, the blacksmith, chore men, harvest crews and hay haulers.

The slaughter house, hog barn, the garden, root cellar, and the former hen house all contributed to the production and storage of food that was essential for the crews that ran the Bar U operation.

23 Percheron Foaling Barn

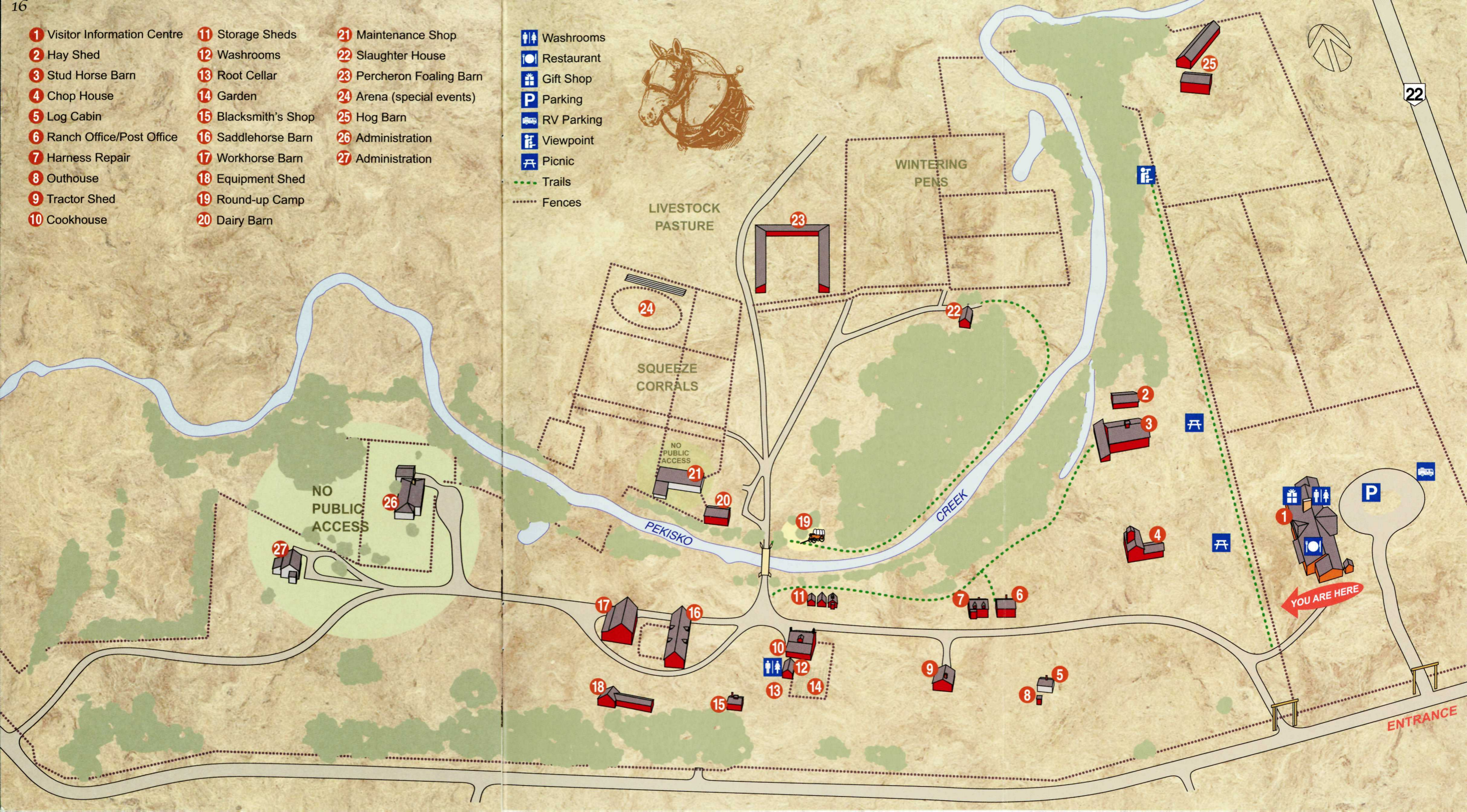
This box stall barn was built by George Lane in 1909 as a foaling barn for Percheron mares. Its 'U' shape helped to break the frequent north and westerly winds, creating a snug, protected yard for the foals. In the 1940's when grain production for the war effort was encouraged and Percherons were no longer raised for sale, P. Burns Ranches Ltd, adapted the barn for grain storage use.

Corrals and Squeeze

With the arrival of cattle at the Bar U in 1882, corrals were built in this area for feeding, sorting, branding and doctoring. Around 1906, George Lane introduced the wooden squeeze to assist in the handling of livestock.

- 1 Visitor Information Centre
- 2 Hay Shed
- 3 Stud Horse Barn
- 4 Chop House
- 5 Log Cabin
- 6 Ranch Office/Post Office
- 7 Harness Repair
- 8 Outhouse
- 9 Tractor Shed
- 10 Cookhouse
- 11 Storage Sheds
- 12 Washrooms
- 13 Root Cellar
- 14 Garden
- 15 Blacksmith's Shop
- 16 Saddlehorse Barn
- 17 Workhorse Barn
- 18 Equipment Shed
- 19 Round-up Camp
- 20 Dairy Barn
- 21 Maintenance Shop
- 22 Slaughter House
- 23 Percheron Foaling Barn
- 24 Arena (special events)
- 25 Hog Barn
- 26 Administration
- 27 Administration

-  Washrooms
-  Restaurant
-  Gift Shop
-  Parking
-  RV Parking
-  Viewpoint
-  Picnic
-  Trails
-  Fences



ENTRANCE

YOU ARE HERE

22

LIVESTOCK PASTURE

WINTERING PENS

SQUEEZE CORRALS

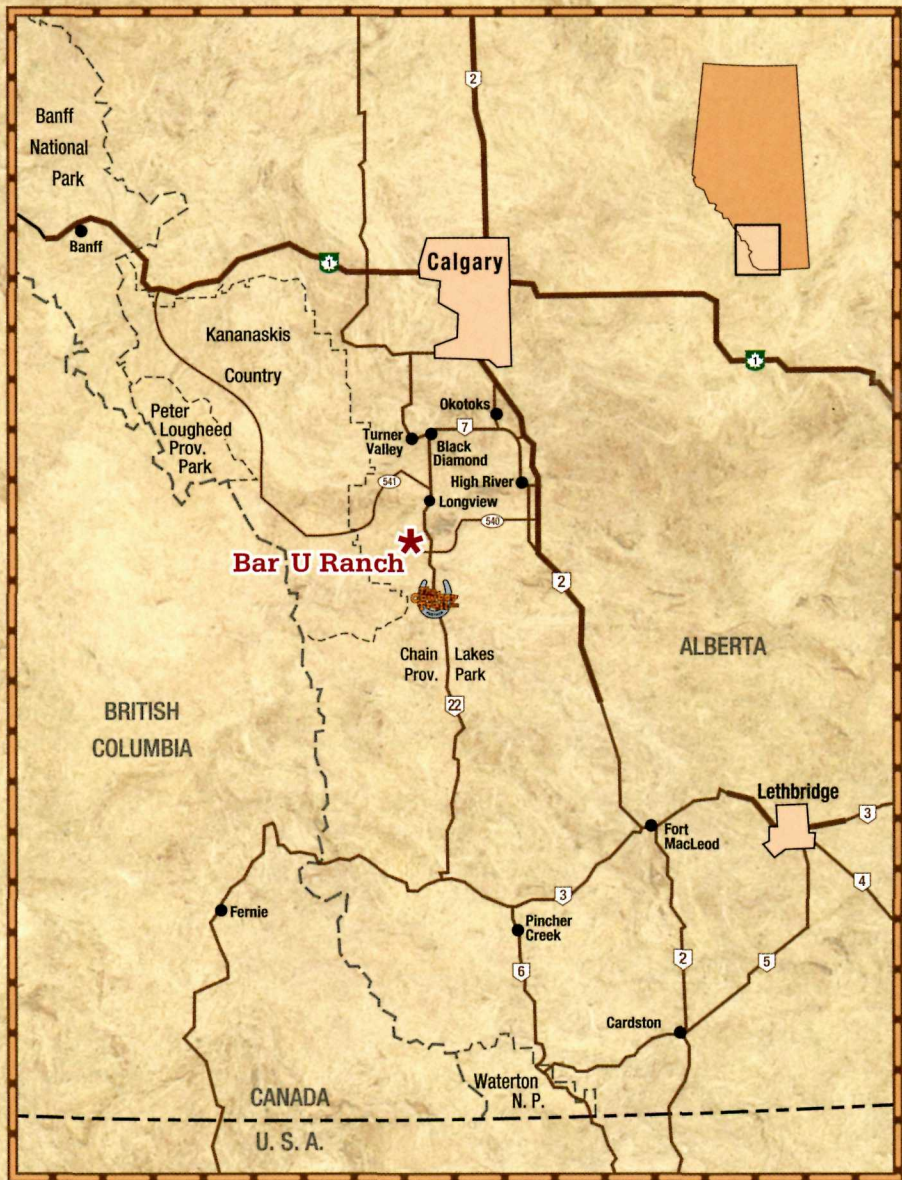
PEKISKO CREEK

NO PUBLIC ACCESS

NO PUBLIC ACCESS



Statue of George Lane inspired by a Charlie Russell painting.



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