

ForestTalk

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Cover: The frost may or may not be on the pumpkin this time of year, but it definitely has left its mark on an abandoned pile of dogwood leaves photographed by Bob Herger of Photo/Graphics.

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When the forest industry is down, the effects are felt in every household in the province. The main cause for this economic downturn is the high interest rates which have greatly reduced housing starts worldwide. These are homes that would have been built with B.C. lumber. Looking ahead, there is good reason to expect that interest rates will drop, housing starts will increase, and B.C.'s economy will improve. In the meantime we will all have to tighten our belts, and ForesTalk is no exception. In the next year ForesTalk will convert from a quarterly to a semi-annual publication. Although the magazine will appear less frequently, it will continue to inform readers on a wide variety of forest-related topics.

Hon. Tom Waterland,
Minister of Forests

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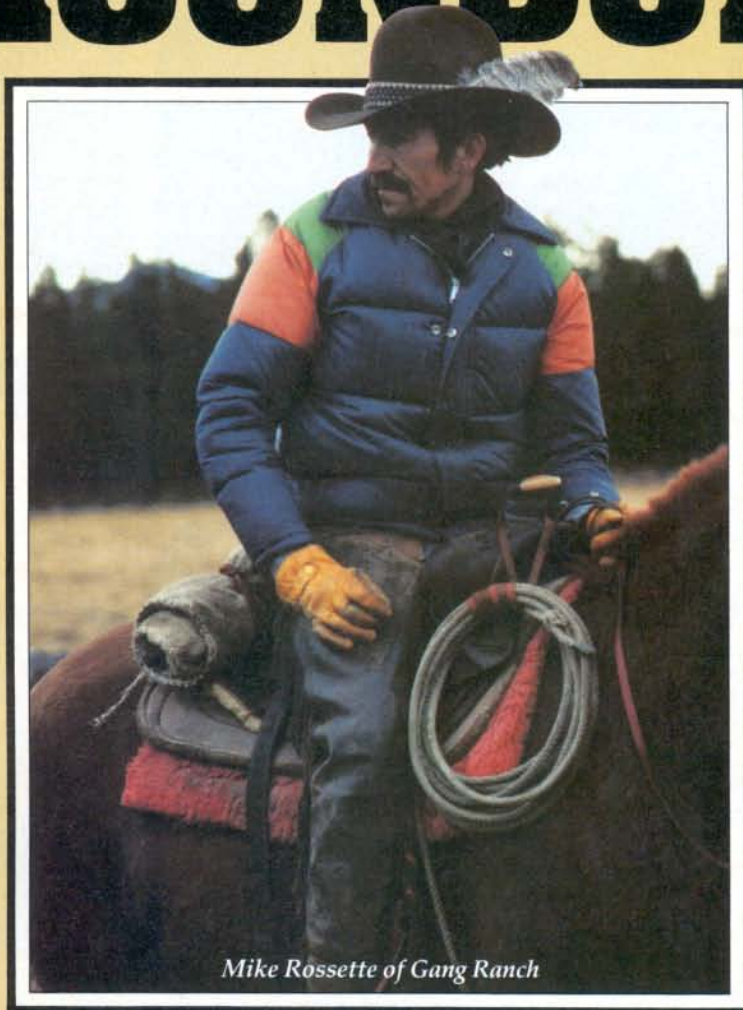
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Province of
British Columbia

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CHILCOTIN ROUNDUP



Mike Rossette of Gang Ranch

by Douglas Cowell

Angry grey storm clouds pour in over the Coast Range, silently smothering the Chilcotin country. The golden leaves and blue picture-postcard skies of September are long past; sticky, wet snow washes away the quiet greys, greens and browns of pine forests and dry grass.

Suddenly, crashing and bawling, a half dozen whitefaced cattle come lunging wild-eyed through the pines. Behind and overtaking them, a cow-hand in yellow raingear spurs his horse through the brush. With thundering grace the horse and rider gallop past, cutting off the Herefords' bid to spend a winter on the range. Yapping and darting, a silver-grey cow dog keeps the cattle moving. As quickly as it appeared, the procession vanishes through the grey-green curtain of tree trunks.

This is roundup time in the Chilcotin, the largest ranching area in British Columbia.

Three and a half million hectares of undulating, generally infertile glacial soil covered in lodgepole pine and willow swamps make up the Chilcotin Plateau. The eastern boundary is marked by rolling prairie and the Fraser River; the plateau's southern and western edges boast the alpine meadows of the Coast Range foothills; to the north are spruce swamps and miles of muskeg.

One main road, 400 kilometres of gut-wrenching gravel, stretches westward from Williams Lake to Bella Coola. There are a few side roads, an abundance of lakes and rivers, and a handful of settlements that are more outposts than towns: Alexis Creek, Chilanko Forks, Tatla Lake, Anahim Lake. The plateau shelters large populations of black bear, moose, deer, wolves and coyotes, and feeds more than 25,000 cows. There are about two people for each of the Chilcotin's one thousand or so horses.

On this wet, cold day the riders from the C-1 Ranch in Alexis Creek are hunting down and driving out 280 head of reluctant, near-wild cattle

that keep scattering and dodging, trying to hide out in the endless pine forest. They've got to be corralled before dark. By late afternoon four bunches of cattle, each being pushed along by a rider and a dog, straggle into the flats along a bushy, meandering river. The groups join forces and move at a trot to the holding corral three miles downstream, dogs dancing and barking at the cattle's hooves. For nearly a hundred years cattle have been driven down this valley to corrals that have stood there for almost as long.

Seventy-two-year-old Jimmie Ross, now too old to ride, has a fire waiting for the cowhands. Jimmie's son David crowds close to the fire to soak up some heat, dipping his white Stetson to keep the smoke out of his eyes. Roy Blatchford joins the circle

after loading his saddle into the truck and stowing his Winchester carbine behind the back seat.

But the rider in the yellow raingear, rubber gloves and rubber boots hasn't dismounted yet and doesn't seem to be cold. This is Mary Ross, wife and mother of the other two Rosses, and chief rider for the C-1 Ranch. She's the one who follows the herd into the remote summer range and watches over them for months at a time, moving them before they start to overgraze an area, keeping an eye out for injuries or disease. She is 69, an Indian, and has been riding for the C-1 for 19 years. When asked how long she's been working cattle she says:



"Since I was old enough to ride. About 60 years."

Dieter Kellinghusen has been manager of the C-1 and its 1500 stock ever since German royalty bought the ranch 22 years ago. Like other ranchers in the Chilcotin, he has difficulty finding good cowboys — people with an intimate knowledge of cattle, horses and the wild rangelands mixed in with a willingness to live in the backcountry, sometimes for months at a time. "I've found that Indians make the best cowboys," he says. "They're the only ones who really know the bush and like that kind of life. And of the Indian cowboys I've hired, I've found that women are the best."

Ranchers in the Chilcotin straddle two worlds. One is the world of Winchester and rawhide, campfires and



On this wet cold day Roy Blatchford (opposite page) and the rest of the riders from the C-1 Ranch in Alexis Creek have to corral 280 head of reluctant cattle by dark. (top) Seventy-two-year-old Jimmy Ross has a fire waiting for the cowhands, including Jimmy's son David in the yellow raingear. Wife and mother Mary Ross (right) is chief rider on the C-1 Ranch. Now over 69 years old, she has been a cowhand for a good 60 years.



