Travelers on the Oregon Trail were accustomed to trouble and delay. Sickness, Indians, accidents, a shortage of supplies and innumerable other things caused delays on the 2,200-mile trip west from Independence, Mo. And that’s why, as the immigrants approached a shallow Wyoming creek they encountered on the cutoff between Fort Laramie and Casper, no one was concerned. They had already crossed hundreds of creeks without mishap. They should have been concerned.

This particular creek became legendary among wagon masters. Due to its unusually steep banks, many of the immigrants’ wagons broke their “hounds” while crossing it. The wagon hound is that part of the running gear where the wagon tongue attaches to the front axle. When it breaks, the caravan is shut down. Most wagons carried an extra pair of hounds, but yet another delay was necessary for the wagoner to make his repairs.

Before long, that creek, which flowed out of the mountains into the North Platte River, became known as Wagonhound Creek. It’s Wagonhound Creek that runs through what is today Wagonhound Land and Livestock, and, of course, gives the ranch its name.

Wagonhound Land and Livestock lies in the foothills of the Laramie Range of the Rocky Mountains in Converse County, Wyo., approximately 20 miles south of Douglas. It’s home to 12,000 acres of some of the most productive range land in the state. The ranch property consists of over 10 miles of river bottom and about 18 miles of meandering creeks and streams, which provide excellent opportunities for waterfowl hunting and fishing.

The ranch is comprised of 740 head of Hereford cattle, 1,100 sheep, 130 head of horses, 250 head of wether lambs and 50 head of ewes. The calves are brought from the feedyard back to the ranch in May and graze throughout the summer.
to about 5,000 Red Angus cows and features one of the top horse breeding facilities and training operations in the state. The farming division includes 7,500 acres and produces about 20,000 tons of top quality alfalfa hay per year, and the outfitting division hosts hunters who annually harvest record bull elk, as well as other game.

The terrain varies from 5,000 to 9,000 feet, from rolling meadows to pine-covered mountains. The native western wheat grass, blue grama and prairie June grass have supported all kinds of herbivores since the end of the Ice Age, about 11,000 years ago. That's also when man first arrived.

The history of man in southeastern Wyoming is traced by the earliest artifacts found in the area, which were Clovis-type spear points. Those were in use about 11,000 years ago. But a few thousand years later, during the 1800s, the area played a major part in the development of the West. Fur trappers, the Pony Express, numerous Indian battles and the building of forts for protection from the Indians all marked the development of the region. But perhaps the most important of all was the Oregon Trail, which followed the Platte River west through what is now Nebraska, and then up the North Platte into Wyoming. The North Platte River runs alongside a portion of Wagonhound Land and Livestock, and the Oregon Trail comes very close to the ranch.

Wagonhound Land and Livestock is a working cattle ranch. Owner Art Nicholas was raised on a cattle ranch in Nebraska, and when he had the opportunity to return to his roots, he knew what he wanted.

The first land purchase in Wyoming was the 14,000-acre original Wagonhound Ranch, on which the former owners ran about 250 cows. As the ranch expanded with the purchase of land from neighbors who adjoined the original property, the cow herd expanded, too. Today, Wagonhound Land and Livestock encompasses more than 235,000 acres, running 5,000 cows and about that many yearlings at different times during the year. In addition, two feedyards on the ranch have a total capacity together of about 7,500 head.

All the cattle on Wagonhound are Red Angus. The ranch went with that breed because the original Wagonhound owners were running Red Angus, and Art thinks that the breed is a good fit for their part of the country. Ranch general manager Dustin Ewing agrees. “We raise all of our replacement heifers,” he says. “We think we have a moderately framed cow that can handle the mountains and the winters up here, so we’re selecting out of our own heifer base.”
Many of the pastures are flood irrigated during the growing season, thanks to the irrigation ditches that run throughout the lower areas of the ranch. Without the flood irrigation, our animal units per acre would be drastically different, says Dustin. Some of those ditches have been here since the early 1900s, and they are critical to the ranch. We are lucky that we have the live water in the creeks that we can irrigate from.

Horses are also an important part of Wagonhound. Art, who grew up working cattle horseback, wanted ranch horses for Wagonhound, horses on which he could work cattle. Wagonhound needed ranch horses, and all of those Quarter Horse stallions were well known for siring horses that could work a cow. Then, through another friend, cutting horse trainer Tim Smith of Temecula, Calif., Art bought WR This Cats Smart. Smart was a National Cutting Horse Association all-time leading sire whose foals have earned more than $10 million.

A building program resulted in one of the top breeding facilities in Wyoming, to include a barn with 18 box stalls, 10 foaling stalls, a complete surgical facility with the latest equipment and a veterinary lab — all heated — as well as outdoor paddocks and barns where mares could be put under lights to induce estrus earlier in the year. Cooled semen is shipped from the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas, where WR This Cats Smart stands, and from other breeding farms around the country.

In addition, Wagonhound breeds to Stressolena, a ranch-raised stallion that has earned about $75,000 in reined cow horse competition. Other stallions used are Metallic Cat, Rey Dual Badger, Chics Magic Potion, A Shiner Named Sioux, Cats Merada, Sixes Pick, Dual Rey and Rockin W. As a member of the Rockin W syndicate, Wagonhound has lifetime breeding rights to him. About 35 broodmares are housed at the Wagonhound breeding facility. Weaning and halter breaking of the foals is done there, but when those foals become yearlings, they are turned over to the ranch trainers. For most of their yearling years, the foals are turned out with the other young horses, but they begin their education about the first week in January of their 2-year-old years. This includes bridling and riding, and it involves the fillies as well as the colts so that those headed for the broodmare band are easier to handle in the breeding barn. Any of the 2-year-olds that appear to be extra nice are sent to various professional trainers to get other.
opinions and give them a try in the performance arena, whether it be for cutting, reining, reined cow horse or ranch horse competition. The others are destined for work on the ranch.

The Wagonhound farms are also a very important part of the operation as a whole, although much smaller in acreage than the livestock division. On approximately 7,500 acres — 5,000 of which is irrigated farmland — Wagonhound’s rotating crops include alfalfa, corn silage, barley hay, barley grain and oats, almost all of it watered from the North Platte River by 34 irrigation pivots.

Alfalfa hay is the primary crop, and due to its good quality, it is utilized primarily by dairies and horse operations. It’s shipped as far as Florida and Pennsylvania, with much of it going to Texas and New Mexico. Wagonhound has even shipped hay to Saudi Arabia.

Most of the feed for the ranch feedyards is raised on the farms as a part of the crop rotation with alfalfa. Corn is chopped for silage, and the barley that is harvested also plays a part in the ration. Wagonhound’s introduction of a computerized, controlled irrigation system via sprinkler pivots has helped the farms evolve into the highest-producing farming operation on the North Platte River system. Innovations introduced by Wagonhound enable the ranch to produce all the feed it needs for its cattle business and still have a product that’s sold commercially.

Outfitting is another successful division of the ranch. According to Wyoming Game and Fish Department biologists, approximately 4,500 elk graze on Wagonhound property on any one day during the winter. The numbers are not specific because the animals roam at will throughout the Laramie Mountain range. But it’s not just elk. There are also untold numbers of whitetail and mule deer, black bear and antelope. All of those species, the big game, make up the primary basis for the outfitting division of Wagonhound Land and Livestock, but waterfowl hunts and fishing excursions are also available.

Hunters can stay at one of three different hunting camps, or they have the option of upgrading and staying in one of the luxury guest houses on the ranch. The guest houses, as well as a lodge where guests can mingle and visit, are all decorated with Western and cowboy art, much of which Art and his wife Catherine have purchased through various art shows at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. As a board member of that museum, Art has supported the Cowboy Artists of America and the Traditional Cowboy Artists Association. He also has hosted both groups at the ranch for trail rides.

“I guess what we do through our collection is preserve and interpret history and America,” Art says. “When I got to a place in life where I could collect some things, I started out with subject matter that was Western. We really love art, and that includes the saddles, bits and spurs. It all ties into the horse and the West.”

Art was raised in the Midwest, but through his working life he has lived on both the east and west coasts. However, when he started looking for a ranch, he looked at Wyoming.

“I’ve always had kind of an affinity for Wyoming,” he says, “because it almost seemed like the last stand of the old West. It just had an attraction to me. And it still does.”

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