

What Once Was Wild

A photographic reminder of the Old West.

Photo story by Carrie Heitman, manager of Creative Media



35 Keys to Success
Four-legged Helpers

Cattle at Willow Creek Ranch in Kaycee, Wyo., graze in the shadows of what was once the Wild West.

Here, the rugged Red Wall spans the perimeter of the ranch, where you can find one of three major hideouts on the outlaw trail, the Hole-in-the-Wall. The area is located about 60 miles north of Casper and has been home to generations of cowboys since its establishment in 1882.

Cattle today populate the same prairie that once provided safe haven during the days of cattle rustlers and others who often escaped capture through the small, steep crevice for which the area is named.

The Hole-in-the-Wall conceals part of the Wild West's great stories, only revealing itself when visitors turn to the east, their backs to the wall.

When the first cattlemen finally reached the top and could view what lay beyond, they saw a valley that opened up at the mouth of Buffalo Canyon and hugged the curve of the rock that extends for about 18 miles. The wall is just one part of what made the hideout famous. The bowl-like shape of the valley made the pastured stolen cattle essentially invisible.

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Now, Willow Creek Ranch is a 57,000-acre cattle and horse ranch owned by the Vieh family. The ranch itself has more ties to the Old West. On the ranch, the foundation of old "Fort Houck" was originally built as a "road ranch" to house a post office and small contingent of troops to protect a marching road and stage-coach route.

The high walls and caves of Buffalo Canyon still

contain the names and dates of soldiers stationed at the fort, plus many Indian petroglyphs. A Sioux Indian trail crosses the ranch, and was once part of the Army wagon road. There is evidence of Indian campsites with teepee rings still intact, in addition to a few pioneer homesteads.

Now, the cattle link the wild past to a way of life that cattlemen continue today.

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