

LIVING DIAMONDS RANCH

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At Living Diamonds Ranch we currently have 55 yaks in conjunction with Bill Martin of Far West Farms and have selectively bred Tibetan Yaks for 20 years. Our history with yaks has been central to the history of yaks in North America during that time and may be of interest to those presently raising yaks, but unfamiliar with us.

1987: I acquired my ranch near Polson, Montana and moved there from Illinois with my herd of show quality llamas. Sometime during that year I saw my first yaks grazing in a pasture near Interstate 80 in Nebraska. And I actually had to inquire as to what kind of animal they were. I decided immediately that in the future I would acquire some of these “new animals”. Animals that had been bred in Tibet and China for 4000 years before my belated discovery.



FW Raven P022

1988: As promised I acquired my first yaks (7 bull / heifer pairs) from my good friend Jerry McRoberts in Gurley, Nebraska. The prior year Jerry had bought out the Royal yak herd of Ken Jones from Alberta and Al Oeming’s herd near Edmonton, Alberta.



Prince Allante C020



Senior Diamond D248

1989-1993: Starting in 1989 we began importing yaks from Alberta, Canada. Over the next 8 years we imported 120 yaks from Alberta. We were making about one importation (from 12 to 20 yaks) per year during that period. I even was greeted at the Carriage House Inn on MacCleod Trail in Calgary with “would you like your usual room sir?” That is how yak importers are greeted in Canada. These importations included Sergeant Pepper, who holds the first NAYR # C001 and later sired LDR Royal Gold C027, who gave birth to LDR Gold Diamond II G013, thereby founding the Diamond Line. Also imported Queen Allante D171 and her yearling son Prince Allante C020, who became without question among senior yak breeders, the best breeding yak bull in North America. They came from Al Oeming’s Alberta Game Farm northeast of Edmonton, Alberta. Also imported from the same place was WoollyBully C006, who later sold for \$12,500.00 and produced SBR Dreadlock F199. Dreadlock served as the great breeder until his death at Springbrook Ranch. Thus these importations led to the development of the three great breeding lines today: The Senior and Junior Diamond line, The Prince Allante line and the Dreadlock line.

1991-1995: These were the 5 years of the annual fall Yakarama Festival and Production Sale we produced at Living Diamonds Ranch in Polson, MT. These were private functions of Living Diamonds Ranch and were great weekend events featuring BBQ Baron of Yak dinners, country and rock bands, drinking sometimes without limits and of course the Saturday Sale. One sale had an estimated attendance of 300 and we served 180 BBQ dinners. I said we were the most popular restaurant in

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town that Saturday night. The five sales totaled nearly an unbelievable \$750,000.00. One year I wrote Jerry McRoberts a consignment check of \$100,000.00 and the following year \$90,000.00. Bill Martin was the volume buyer of the 1992 sale at \$52,000.00, including the purchase of Excalibur, consigned by Jerry McRoberts for \$15,000.00. The 1993 sale was the best at \$225,000.00 for 36 animals including the sale of a Royal cow and heifer calf at side for \$24,100.00 and the sale of Woolly Bully for \$12,500.00. Bill Martin was pleasantly stunned by the sale of his royal cow and calf for \$24,100.00 to Roland Perry of Oregon. Roland Perry was the volume buyer at \$102,000.00. Needless to say the party that carried into my house that night was pretty wild. The heart of the Yakarama was the lively presence of the Auctioneer Stanley Stout. I have never experienced a better auctioneer and loved having him for all 5 Yakarama Sales. Stanley has since passed away and I will always remember and miss him.

1992: At the 1992 Sale Sunday Brunch I called the International Yak Association into existence and coined the moniker IYAK. Jerry McRoberts was elected President, Lawrence G. Richards the Vice President and Dee Kirkum the Secretary. Thereafter we hosted the Annual IYAK Meeting at the Yakarama, but the sale and festival remained a private function of Living Diamonds Ranch.

1992 -1993: Dr. Dane Smith and I co-wrote the regulations for the North American Yak Registry. I purchased the first 30 tags and assigned the first tag C001 to Sergeant Pepper, our first royal bull at Living Diamonds Ranch.

1997-1999: In 1995 and 1996 I attended the National Western Stock Show and thru a contact in the NWSS management provided by our Yakarama auctioneer friend Stanley Stout we convinced the NWSS to allow an IYAK sponsored function on the grounds of the NWSS in Denver, Colorado. The first presentation and sale was held in January of 1997. I managed this event for the first 3 years. The first 2 years were a moderate success, but lacked the sizzle of the Yakarama productions. Despite the modest success of the NWSS sales, the annual presence of IYAK at the NWSS remains the backbone of yak promotions today.

1997: In August of 1997 I flew aboard an Argentina Aerolinas 747 with 12 yaks in 4 crates from Los Angeles to Buenos Aires, Argentina to deliver the yaks for the making of the movie starring Brad Pitt entitled "Seven Years in Tibet". The story of Heinrich Harrer and his escape from a British war prison camp in India during World War II and his climb over the Himalayas into Tibet and eventual survival as a private tutor to the Dali Lama prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet. For political reasons the movie was filmed on the border between Argentina and Chile. Our trip was itself an adventure amid rumors that China itself might attempt to block our delivery. I in fact was nearly arrested in Sao Paulo, Brazil for drinking beer while armed with a knife in public. (the knife was for cutting bale strings on the plane) Our plane was met on the tarmac by fire trucks when we landed in Buenos Aires, but there were no signs of the Chinese mafia. And we managed to sneak into Argentina unnoticed by the Brad Pitt paparazzi. If anyone is interested, I will share further details of our adventure over a beer.

In October of 1998 the movie came out with much publicity on the covers of Newsweek and Time. I was described in Newsweek as "an eccentric Yak breeder from Montana". I received an award and plaque from then Montana State Governor Mark Roscoe for an "Initial Export of Special



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Interest". This was in the time of publicity about the Unibomber and I apologized to the governor for bringing more negative publicity to the state of Montana as a haven for eccentrics. He said I appeared to be no more an eccentric than anyone else in the room, thereby commuting my sentence as an eccentric. With my self esteem restored, I was invited to address a Conference on Exporting at the University of Montana School Of Business in Missoula, Montana. The Dean of the School of Business was sitting in the front row and was beaming during my presentation. It was said my presentation was a breath of fresh air in an otherwise dull battery of presentations by high powered business graduates of the University!

1998: Bill Martin and myself exported 25 yaks thru Canada to Delta Junction, Alaska. We loaded the yaks into a semi trailer at 8 am on a Thursday morning and they unloaded in Alaska under the midnight sun at 1.00 am that Sunday. Thereafter, I could brag that I had sold yaks literally from the Southern tip to the Northern tip of the western hemisphere! Not to bad for a guy who did not even know what they were in 1987. You never know what kind of journey yaks will take you on.

2001: In 2000 and 2001 we sold Mr. Sam Bibler, an elderly gentleman and founder of SpringBrook Ranch in Kalispell, MT 45 yak females and 3 bulls. Included in this sale was a full brother to Junior Diamond G013 and most uniquely DREADLOCK F199 and a special group of seven or eight Prince Allante C020 Daughters. I proposed to Sam Bibler that there was a group of Prince Allante daughters in Oregon we could buy from Dan Thee and that there was a very special Wooly Imperial bull originally bred by Dan Thee and then owned by Jerry McRoberts that we might be able to purchase and that



LDR PANDABERRY R041

the combination would be outstanding. Sam agreed to go ahead with the purchase, if I could lock in the sale of Dreadlock. Jerry agreed to sell Dreadlock for \$10,000.00 and the deal was made. I sold Dreadlock to Sam for the same price, but retained a few breeding rights. I sent a driver the next day to Nebraska for Dreadlock and the day after he got back we took off for Oregon and rounded up the Prince Allante daughters. We processed them at my ranch with IYAK tags and delivered them to Sam in time to start the breeding season. In short this was a stroke of genius as the cross of Dreadlock on Prince Allante daughters is phenomenal and as continued by Sam's son-in-law Jim Watson has become the backbone of the very successful SpringBrook Ranch breeding program. Dreadlock sons from Prince Allante daughters have become the envy of serious Yak Breeders today.

I am always interested in the human aspects of these situations especially the humorous and would like to share this insight into Sam. Being the gentleman he was, Sam had reservations about the name Dreadlock. He said he would not want the other Yak breeders to think he was a racist. I assured him that Yak breeders tended to be a somewhat irreverent bunch anyway and that furthermore once he saw Dreadlock the applicability of the name would be obvious and that yak breeders would probably be offended if he changed the name as we had already christened the name amongst the inner circle. That pretty much ended the spoken reservations and the name Dreadlock remained the same. Mr. Bibler died within two years of putting his herd together, but I know he really enjoyed the yaks the first year when he was able to attend to them. And I enjoyed knowing Sam as well.

In short and even with modesty we can say our Tibetan Yak breeding program has been nothing short of spectacular. We have imported, identified or developed 3 major and in my opinion the most

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significant 3 lines in North American yak breeding; those being the Diamond, Prince Allante and Dreadlock lines. Importing 120 animals from Canada gave us great selection opportunities to keep those we most desired and in the cases where we let a few great ones escape we maintained breeding contacts. So I would say Selection is paramount to a great breeding program as is Persistence. But foremost to our success is our belief that “great bulls only come from great cows”. The goal of every breeding program of any species should be to have a breeding herd of only females that produce stud quality males. I want to go thru the development of these 3 lines to show what stands behind them.



As I mentioned we imported Sergeant Pepper C001 from Alberta, Canada. Bear in mind none of these animals had a name or any breeding history other than what we could try and put together. Sergeant Pepper was our first Royal Bull and was pretty impressive. After a few years of use we sold him to Brad Sprouse of Michigan for \$10,000.00. One of the females Brad had bought at the 91 Yakarama from Jerry McRoberts subsequently produced a totally outstanding daughter by Sergeant Pepper and we had to purchase her. We bought her as a yearling heifer for \$10,000.00. We named her RoyalGold as, I captured a photograph of her outlined by a spectacular rainbow against the mountain backdrop and symbolically she was the gold at the end of the rainbow. She bears the name LDR ROYAL GOLD C027. She became the Matriarch of our herd as follows: We bred Royal Gold to Senior Diamond (LDR DiamondII D248) and produced LDR GOLD

DIAMOND II G013, affectionately known as Junior Diamond. Jerry McRoberts originally sold Senior Diamond thru one of the early Yakarama Sales and we acquired him after the last Yakarama. Senior Diamond was very impressive weighing over 1500 lbs at his peak with floor length skirt and great horns and the best conformation we have seen on a yak bull to-date. He passes this conformation onto his sons and daughters. Cattle breeders would say they stand square on all four corners, which is especially unique for yaks. In addition, they have short hooves and stand upright on them. I have seen no better conformation in yaks than that of Senior and Junior Diamond.

But the story really takes off when we bred Senior Diamond to Royal Gold. Royal Gold being a big bold wooly Royal female and their son Junior Diamond out produced his dad producing wooly offspring with great conformation. This is how Royal Gold became the Matriarch of our herd multiplying her genetics thru Junior Diamond. Today in addition to Junior Diamond and his full sister, we have a battery of Junior Diamond daughters including the famous LDR BLACKBERRY K074 and LDR HALLEBERRY M067, but also her great grandson LDR DR. LOCK O086 from BLACKBERRY and DREADLOCK has just become our main herd sire producing in 2008 our best ever calf crop of wooly all Imperial calves! These calves would be Royal Gold's great-great grandkids and are living proof of our breeding philosophy that great dams produce great sires. We also produced an Imperial Trim son of ROYAL GOLD and DREADLOCK named LDR INFINITI L074 and he is doing a great breeding job in the Bitterroot valley for Tim Pulliam. Next year we will be breeding our Junior Diamond G013 daughters to Infiniti L074 to line breed back to Royal Gold C027. The resulting calves will carry 37.5% of her genetics and also the genetics of Dreadlock F199. Our original plan was to produce a breeding son of Royal Gold from each of Senior Diamond, Dreadlock and Prince Allante. The great tragedy is that she died a week short of delivering her Prince Allante calf. Our great hopes of producing a super-wooly Royal son of Prince Allante and Royal Gold were not to be. This was a loss for us and the entire N. American yak industry.

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The Discovery of Queen Allante and Prince Allante and the introduction of Bill Martin to the yak world. I had mentioned that one of my importations included a small group of super wooly brown cows from Al Oeming's Alberta Game Farm. Along came Tom York from New York driving buy the ranch one day. That night over dinner I sold him a group of yaks for \$52,000.00 On his next trip to Montana he wanted more yaks , but wanted to trade collector cars for them. I ended up trading 3 wooly yak cows for a red Cadillac convertible with a black soft top. The car was an Allante made in Italy. I ended up naming the wooliest of the cows Queen Allante and her yearling son Prince Allante and subsequently his super son Escalade L076, named for an oversized SUV. At the 1994 Yakarama prior to her shipment to New York, all the old time Yak breeders agreed she was the wooliest yak female in N. America. Queen Allante went to New York with Tom York, then she went to Massachusetts with Edward Cothey , then back west to Colorado with Tad Puckett and back a bit eastward presently with Mike Schwartz in Nebraska. She could be the oldest yak in N. America as well as the most traveled yak and as of this summer is still producing. I ran the Cadillac convertible into the ground in several years and then traded it in against a Ford pickup truck. With the departure of Queen Allante to New York, I traded Prince Allante to my friend and volume buyer of the 1992 Yakarama Bill Martin. Queen Allante was the pen-ultimate of the Toronto Zoo phenotype, that stock originally coming from the Berlin Zoo and Prince Allante was a big robust wooly version of that phenotype.

Bill started breeding with Prince Allante and the resulting females first produced in the G year were incredibly wooly. For the next 8 years Bill kept the very best of the Prince Allante daughters as his Private Reserve. He sold one group to Dan Thee of Oregon ,which I later sold to Sam Bibler. Without question Prince Allante was the best breeding yak bull in N. America producing super wooly females from cows of no particular significance. Sometimes breeds are created around one individual male surpassing all males in his contemporary group e.g. Justin Morgan's stallion and the early Hereford bulls in England.



Royal Gold C027

Around 2002 we brought the best of Bill Martins Private Reserve back to Living Diamonds Ranch and since then have been breeding them to LDR Junior Diamond G013, SBR Dreadlock F199 and LDR DR LOCK L074. The results have been outstanding. Our 2006 class from Dreadlock was incredible producing super wooly Imperials and our 2008 class by DR LOCK was even more outstanding. Dr LOCK is apparently homozygous for Imperial producing 100% Imperial and the old G series Prince Allante daughters produced more wool from him than we have ever seen. These calves individually carry the genetics of LDR Junior Diamond G013, FW Prince Allante C020 and SBR Dreadlock F199 and consequently of the 3 great cows behind these bulls : Royal Gold C027, Queen Allante D171 and Wooly Bully C006. Again with the theory Great Cows make Great Bulls! Living Diamonds Ranch plans to develop a brand designation called the Triangle Brand for yaks carrying the genetics of all three of these cows.

The story of Dreadlock begins at a kitchen table on a sunny fall day in southern California. Up in Montana I receive a phone call from Salers cattle breeder Bob Neben of Nebraska. "Hey Larry this old guy won't let me load the yaks!" I had sent Bob to California with a cashiers check for a small yak herd. The argument had already been in progress for several hours. The daughter and son in law were trying to convince her Dad to load the yaks. " Dad you got to sell those damn yak" she kept repeating. I had already struck the deal with the old guy (name I can't remember) and had prepaid my driver \$1000.00 to go get them. Imagine driving with a trailer to California and back to Montana for \$1000.00. Well finally the daughter won out and the yaks were loaded. Just be careful as you don't

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know what yaks might do to a person's life! You might be checking into an assisted living center and trying to take your yaks with you. A day later we unloaded the trailer in Montana and an old yak bull stumbled off the trailer about 6 feet out from the door and died that night in the same spot. Just to die in Montana! I later named him DOA. But also unloaded in much better health two big robust solid black nosed yak bulls 3 and 4 yrs old. I later named them Black Yak Fever and Bill the Bull. I sold Bill the Bull C057 to Dan Thee of North Powder, Oregon for \$5000.00 with his starter herd and I sold Black Yak Fever at the 1992 Yakarama for \$4000.00. Later Dan Thee went out and bought up all the Toronto Zoo phenotype yak cows he could find. This was one importation I had missed out on, except for the group that included Queen Allante and Wooly Bully. Dan began a program to produce wooly black nosed yaks and the first year Wooly Bully gave birth to a beautiful black bull. An elk hunter friend suggested the name Imperials be applied to the black nosed yaks and after a few phone calls among the yak "inner circle" the name was christened. In January of 1997 Dan Thee sold his entire group of Toronto Zoo phenotype cows and their calves to Jerry McRoberts for \$50,000.00. Included in the sale was the 9 month old Imperial Bull calf at Wooly Bully's side and priced at \$5000.00 Jerry's crew named him Dreadlock. I have told above how I purchased him as an adult for \$10,000.00 and now you know the rest of his story. Except from the same group of cows Dan, also produced another Imperial bull which he privately sold at one of the Yakaramas to Dick Klick of Augusta, MT. I later sold him to Tad Puckett for \$1000.00 and he named him Billy the Kid F117. We bought 2 calf crops of his offspring from the Klicks and used the best one of these (LDR Black Beauty G082) bred to Junior Diamond to create the Berry family of Imperial Trims, of which Blackberry has now become the Queen of the Ranch and the Dam of our new great bull DR. LOCK as described above. The Imperials are as remote genetically from the Royals as possible in N. America, and have proven invaluable in creating the Imperial Trims, the shining stars of Living Diamonds Ranch.

THAT IS OUR PROGRAM and HISTORY. DO YOU THINK I SHOULD STAY WITH YAKS ANOTHER 20 YEARS?



LDR CUB CADET R036



LDR BLACKBERRY K074

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