

From Scotland

It must have been the bagpipes. How else can one explain the behavior of Leo Causland once he had been to Scotland?

Of course, not everyone is so captivated by the haunting sounds carried across Scottish hills when air is pushed out of a funny bag. But this was unusual: there were 10,000 of those noisy things in Edinburgh at that moment. And poor Leo didn't stand a chance, for he had yet another distraction...Leo was in love.

It all started when he went to Scotland with his father to see his fiancée and her son play their own bagpipes in a massive celebration to welcome in the new millennium. Leo returned from Scotland a married man, and was soon part owner of a herd of Scottish Highland cattle.



Today, Leo and his ranching partner Mike Bohrer own up to 15 Scottish Highland cow/calf pairs and two working bulls on a High Country ranch they lease near Silverthorne, Colorado.

It was a young Leo Causland who in 1983 responded to the modern version of "Go West young man," leaving the farmlands of New York to seek work somewhere toward the setting sun. Armed with a college degree in architecture, he soon found a job in Dillon, Colorado. "The state of Colorado is awesome in every way," he says looking back, "and I knew this is where I'd like to set my roots."

There he met Mike Bohrer and his family, transplants from the Kansas wheat fields. Mike was managing the historic Maryland Creek Ranch near Silverton and needed help out at the ranch. Leo jumped at the opportunity.

"Mike taught me everything I know about ranching, including flood irrigation, harvesting hay, working on tractors and implements, and, of course, raising cattle," Leo said. "We bought a few head of black and red Angus every year, and I immediately knew this was the life I had always hoped for."



Leo and Donna Causland (small photo) on their wedding day in Scotland. Above, Back home in Colorado, Leo receives some serious counsel from a Highland friend.

...with Love

That same year, 2000, Leo and Donna were married in the old ruins of Inchmahome Priory near Aberfoyle, Scotland, that dates back to the time of Mary Queen of Scots. It was a storybook outdoor wedding within the ruins of the priory and with the bride and groom in traditional Scottish dress.

Donna and her son Neil were members of the Denver Pipe Band that was invited to be part of the millennium celebration with the spectacle of 10,000 pipers and drummers parading down Prince's Street below the Edinburgh Castle.

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A Highland bull on Maryland Creek Ranch. Above, hay on the ranch is made with self-propelled New Holland balers.



Above, ranching partners Leo Causland, left, and Mike Bohrer. A Highland bull, right, visits the ranch's open-air beauty salon. Below, cutting hay high in the Rockies.



Anticipating the historic setting, Leo had proposed to Donna before the trip to Scotland. She, of course, said, "yes" so all the necessary arrangements had been made prior to the trip.

It was on their honeymoon, driving through the Scottish countryside, that Leo became interested in these "incredible fuzzy cattle. I began to ask a lot of questions about them while we were there, and by the end of our trip, I couldn't wait to get back to the states to do more research on the breed and see about buying a few."

Back at the ranch, Leo brought up what must have seemed like a crazy idea to his ranching partner Mike, just to see what his reaction would be. "Mike agreed that it would be worth at least a try to see what happens, but a few others in the valley didn't have quite the same reaction and thought that if it wasn't a black Angus, then it wasn't "beef worthy."

They ended up buying one Highland bull, two cows, and a heifer calf. They have never looked back since. They now raise Highlands for both show and sale as well as a niche market for ranch raised beef.

"These are very easy keepers. They are long lived, can browse and survive where most other cattle have difficulty," Leo said. "And the beef is, bar none, the best out there. Naturally grass fed, they come in around 92 percent lean. Studies have shown them to be the lowest in fat and cholesterol but still retain that great robust flavor that people love.

"Our niche market is ranch raised, premium, grass fed, 100 percent pure Highland beef. It takes us a little longer to get our cattle to market, but everything that's good in this life is worth the wait," Leo said. "We minimally process our beef and hang it for at least 21 days to dry age. So we don't really compete with feedlot beef.

"We market our beef to folks who like to buy locally, want to know where their beef is coming from, that it is good for you, and they enjoy getting a discount buying in bulk. We never use growth hormones, implants, or antibiotics, and we never add any animal by-products to their diets, all very important concerns to people these days. We listen to our clients, and we now

have a long list of locals who continue to come back for more.”

In addition to being easy to handle, Highland cattle are especially good for people new to agriculture but have small tracts of land, Leo explained. The breed is extremely docile and intelligent. They are easy calvers and generally never need help pulling in calving season, he said. They are easier on the mother cows during the birthing process because their calves have smaller heads.

“Moving these cattle in the spring and fall requires a shake of the grain bucket, a few panels, a stock trailer, and you are good to go,” Leo said. “No more rounding up 10 friends with horses, hot shots and the like. With a good working corral system and a few people experienced with easily obtained Highland knowledge, they are fairly easy to manage.

“At the National Western Stock Show held in Denver each year, our cattle carcasses have consistently placed better than other breeds for quite some time now,” he added.

“If handled with care and compassion, this breed can become as friendly as a household pet, if you like. They can be halter trained for show or just hand feed them, and they will come running. They love attention and can be brushed out with some work during weaning time, which is a good time to do quite a bit of their imprinting.”

Leo and Mike lease the 1,200-acre Maryland Creek Ranch from the Everist family. “The Everists treat us well, and they very much enjoy having the Scottish Highlands on the ranch,” Leo said. “They are excellent stewards of the land.”

One of the few working ranches left in the High Country, the ranch sits up in the Colorado Rockies at an elevation of about 9,000 feet above sea level. The ranch harvests about 8,000 bales of premium small square bales of grass hay each year that is sold to horse owners. The hay is mainly Timothy with some brome, orchard grass, and clover.



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Mike Bohrer

"Our mountain hay is highly sought after mainly because of our reputation and the overall quality of the hay, which is typically higher in protein than hay on the Eastern Plains," Leo said.

The natural grass the cattle graze in the summer is the same grasses as the baled hay. For feeding their own cattle, the hay is put up in round bales because it is easier to feed and there is less waste. It is supplemented with crystal lick tubs during the harsh winter months to help the mother cows that are pregnant at that time.

Mother Highlands weigh 1,000 to 1,200 pounds and their calves about 70 pounds with some over 80 pounds at birth. Steers go to butcher at 24 months when they weigh about 1,100 pounds. Hanging weight is usually around 600 pounds

"Our calves are weaned at five to six months. This is a great time for us to work with and imprint them. It's also a good time to decide which will be good replacement heifers, breeding bulls, and those that will go to the beef end of things.

"We typically feed our weaning calves hay and some grain during this time, it helps us get close, gain their confidence, and makes them overall easier to work with. This is also a good time to halter train the prospect show quality calves.

"Our cattle are not branded. The American Highland Cattle Association requires a herd letter registration to be tattooed into their left ear," Leo said. "We also usually put in a numbered ear tag as well on the right ear.

"What we have found that works well for us living in the High Country, is to schedule calving for late March and into April. The weather isn't as bad then, and the deep snows are subsiding. Otherwise, calving earlier puts a lot of stress and strain on both mother cow and calf under such harsh winter conditions. They do survive though, where other breeds would have trouble without the heavy Highland fur coat."

Leo is currently president of the Mountain States Chapter of the American Highland Cattle Association. "We thoroughly enjoy this breed and are always looking for new breeders," he said. "Our goal is to continue our breeding program, grow our fold as capital and the market permit, and basically just continue being around them, showing them off, and getting more young people involved.

"Our entire agricultural heritage is at stake here, and no matter what breed you choose to go with, it's our duty to get more young people involved, or we're doomed to lose this part of Americana forever." ■

Article by Gary Martin

Photos by Leo Causland and Tom Lucachick



Face-to-face...shaggy Highland cattle invite affection from Emarae Garcia, middle photo, and Lindsey Bohrer, Mike's daughter, bottom photo.

