

# B&C PROFESSOR'S CORNER

## Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch: Myths and Reality



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I have been the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation for a bit more than a year, and during that time I have had many conversations related to the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch (TRMR). Some of them have caused me to question the

“truth” as they just didn’t jive with my perception of reality. So, I would like to take this opportunity to explore the aura of the TRMR as viewed by a relative newcomer to the Rocky Mountain Front.

When I first went to the Ranch, I had to find Dupuyer, Montana, to take the road to the TRMR. I naturally inquired as to the meaning of Dupuyer, and I was told it was the name of some Frenchman that named the town. Others told me it had to do with the anatomy of the buffalo. According to Rita Christiaens, co-owner of the Inn Dupuyer (a first-class and very comfortable bed and breakfast in Dupuyer, which according to Rita, had its beginnings as the town “cat house”), Dupuyer is indeed a French word but not a Frenchman. It is both a noun and a verb that is a much-esteemed delicacy made from the hump of the buffalo, which is called “depuyer” from the French word “depouville.” This delicacy was made with the fatty substance lying along the backbone of the buffalo, from the shoulder blade to the last ribs (i.e., the hump of the buffalo). The strips were from seven to eleven inches broad and as thick as a finger on the spine side, tapering out to a feather-edge. To make this prairie treat, the fat (depouville) was stripped off and dipped in hot grease and smoked for half a day. It is tender, sweet and nourishing and was used as a substitute for bread, eaten with lean and dried meat.

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After finding Dupuyer, the Boone and Crockett sign directs those looking for TRMR to head west for 11 miles. I looked at my odometer and was at the Ranch entrance in just under nine miles. Could the sign be wrong? To double check, I asked Lisa Flowers, the director of conservation education, to see what her odometer indicated—nine miles, too. I am sure that those traveling to the Ranch will be pleased to know the journey is now just a bit shorter.

Over the years I have heard that the TRMR was purchased in celebration of the Boone and Crockett’s 100-year anniversary but there were also whispers that it was acquired as a private hunting preserve. Not true. After the Ranch was purchased,

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the Club passed a resolution forbidding any member from hunting on the Ranch. The public, however, can hunt on the more than 6,000 acres, one of Montana’s most beautiful private ranches. Furthermore, young hunters are given priority for the controlled permit hunts. There are four main purposes the B&C Club purchased the TRMR: education, conservation, research, and to demonstrate that wildlife and livestock operations can be mutually beneficial.

Tom Stivers served as the first ranch manager of TRMR until Bob Peebles took over in 1989. Rumor had it that Bob was one of the cowboys who Marlboro used in its cigarette advertisements. Close, but no cigar

(pun intended!). I contacted Bob and he said he was the general manager for the Philip-Morris Marlboro Ranch east of Clyde Park, Montana, and he had worked in the marketing division but was not one of the “Marlboro men.” Another myth busted. The current ranch manager for TRMR is John Rappold. John is doing an outstanding job as ranch manager and has found the time (I am not sure where) to work on a B.S. degree in Natural Resources from Oregon State University. He should graduate by the end of 2008!

One more myth to check out. I had been told that the bestselling novelist, Nicholas Evans, wrote *The Horse Whisperer* while staying at the old hired hand’s house (which is now housing for graduate students and the conservation educator). Rumors ranged from the author writing the novel after visiting the TRMR to writing the whole thing there. I contacted Mr. Evans to set the record straight. The author learned about TRMR from a former professor at the University of Montana. Mr. Evans had been thinking of setting the book near Billings but as soon as he saw the TRMR, he changed his mind. He changed a few things, “but the geography in the book is basically as you find it.” And while he did not write any of the book at

TRMR, he stayed at the bunk house many times and quizzed Peebles about ranching terms and management practices. There are several times within the story that he recounted happenings from the time spent at TRMR (e.g., the young boys branding and chasing each other around trying to rope themselves and the branded calves).

The next time you are on the Rocky Mountain Front, look for the back fat on the hump of the buffalo and head west (nine miles, not 11) and visit the Ranch. The TRMR is a super legacy provided by the Club that you should experience. Who knows, you may even find some depuyer along the way, a book about horses, and something to rope. ■