

## FARM LIVING

# Sask. ranch offers cowboy hospitality

The historic operation, which was founded in the Cypress Hills more than 100 years ago, offers history and dramatic scenery



The Reesor family filed a homestead claim in the Cypress Hills in 1904. This is a view of the ranch from a hike into the hills. PHOTOS: ROBIN & ARLENE KARPAN

## TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

**A** visit to the Reesor Ranch in Saskatchewan's Cypress Hills combines history with cowboy heritage, hospitality and a chance to explore the natural prairie amid jaw-dropping landscapes.

It became the first ranch in the province to be designated a Provincial Heritage Property, representing the shift in the early 20th century from large corporate ranches to smaller family run operations.

The story began in 1900 when W.D. Reesor moved from Ontario to the

Cypress Hills to manage the Markham Ranch Company, with his wife, Alice, and children following two years later.

Disaster struck in 1903 when the ranch went broke after losing more than half its herd in a bad storm.

However, the Reesors stayed to continue ranching and filed a homestead claim in 1904.

They started with a modest house, but by 1917 they had completed the impressive ranch home that still stands today. It was among the first in the area to have electricity and running water.

The large size was designed to accommodate two families, since one of the Reesors' sons, Frank, and wife, Hazel, moved in and shared in the ranch work.

Important to receiving a heritage designation is that the house and other buildings have "historical integrity."

The house is mostly original and purposefully kept that way, and the Old Log Barn from 1905 was built using hand-hewn logs harvested in the Cypress Hills.

The Reesor family still operates the ranch, with Theresa and son Jason (fifth generation on the ranch) having the most contact with guests, including doing most of the cooking.

Opening the ranch to guests started gradually with a bed and breakfast in part of the huge house. Over the years, they built additional accommodation and self-contained cabins, and plan to add a campground.

The social heart is their Ranch Hall Grill, where meals are served, with barbecue steak using locally raised beef being their signature dish.

Supporting local businesses even includes the beer on tap from a brewery in Maple Creek and specialty ice cream made in Medicine Hat.

Horseback rides rank as the most popular activity, heading into the hills, through pockets of forest, across native grasslands and stopping for sweeping views over the Battle Creek Valley.

The Cypress Hills had better moisture

conditions than many places this spring, so when we visited in early June, everything was lush green with wildflowers ablaze.

Trail rides come with a unique twist.

Most places have their horses ready and saddled, but here, guests learn how to brush and saddle their horses as a way of getting acquainted before the ride.

Another option is all-terrain vehicle tours, which provide access to parts of the ranch that are farther afield, with even more amazing views.

Hiking is popular, with a three-kilometre route marked through prairie and forest to a set of conglomerate cliffs.

Shorter walks head to tipi rings and conglomerate outcroppings in the hills above the yard. These formations look as if millions of rounded stones were cemented together, which they were millennia ago through natural forces.

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» CYPRESS HILLS  
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The reddish-tinged rocks are covered in lichen, and a rare species of lichen was discovered here that is globally endangered.

During our visit, Theresa was excited to tell guests about another walk where she found several wild orchids. The Cypress Hills are known for the abundance and variety of orchids, including rare species.

Guests also use the ranch as a base for exploring Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park right next door. Because the ranch is almost on the border, it's easy to access both the Saskatchewan and Alberta sides of the park.

While the ranch is located in Saskatchewan, the only road approach runs through Alberta along Gramburn Road just inside the Alberta border, with a short access road to the ranch yard.

The ranch, which has won a list of tourism



Jason Reesor makes supper at the ranch.



Horseback rides rank as the most popular activity at the ranch.



A trail marked through prairie and forest takes hikers to a set of conglomerate cliffs.

awards, attracts guests from around the world, with most being from Saskatchewan and Alberta. This year looks especially busy with more people in the mood to travel within Canada.

We have visited the Cypress Hills many times over the years and thought we had seen most of the top spots, but the ranch introduced us to a new set of spectacular vistas and more ways to enjoy them.

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The ranch house, built in 1917, was one of the first in the area to have electricity and running water.

## Solidifying lease agreements provide clarity, certainty

### ASK A LAWYER



LAURA KLEMMER & SARAH HOAG

Like a bale without twine, unwritten agreements can quickly fall apart. Here are some of the myths about unwritten agreements, which show the benefits of formalizing agriculture leases:

**MYTH:** When the parties involved in the lease agreement are trustworthy, no written lease agreement is necessary.

**REALITY:** It is advisable to formally document your leases even though there is generally no strict legal requirement for a lease to be in writing.

The trustworthiness of the parties involved in the lease agreement can be irrelevant if one party, for example, suddenly falls ill or passes away. It is prudent to document your agreements now in preparation for the future.

**MYTH:** There's the land and the rent, we don't need any more details in writing.

**REALITY:** A well-written lease agreement gives the parties certainty over their rights and the freedom to operate as they intended.

Agreeing up front on issues such as access, permitted use, duration of the lease, rental rates, use and storage of hazardous materials, insurance and maintenance of improve-



Farmers are advised to formally document their leases even though there is generally no strict legal requirement for an agreement to be in writing. PHOTO: GETTY

ments such as fences will give both parties certainty over what they are getting into.

A written lease can also be a safeguard against situations that would otherwise be out of your control.

For example, if the landowner passes away and their estate decides to sell the farmland, having a written lease can give the tenant an added level of protection and peace of mind.

Without turning your mind to these things and agreeing at the outset, both parties risk disputes arising later.

It is easier when parties agree up front, rather than issues having to be resolved by a court, tribunal or arbitrator.

Decision making power is in the hands of the parties involved in the lease when they can come to an agreement about the scope of their lease up front. Negotiating an agreement before there is a disagreement can help alleviate stress and head-

aches down the road and save time and money rather than trying to resolve a dispute after the fact.

**MYTH:** Lease agreements are only beneficial when there is a dispute.

**REALITY:** Written lease agreements can help you when you are looking to access government programs such as crop insurance or when you are looking to finance your operation.

For agricultural landlords seeking financing, lenders may want to see formalized and documented cash flows from leased land.

For tenants, lenders may want assurance that the operation has access to the land it needs to support the farm operation, or a crop insurer may want to know you have legal rights to use the land.

Clarity on terms will help both landlords and tenants not only have assurance for themselves, but provide supporting docu-

ments to the lenders they work with or programs for which they are applying.

Written agreements can also support estate and transition planning by providing certainty to the parties involved in the transition plan.

**MYTH:** Once you sign an agreement, there is no "going back" or changing it.

**REALITY:** Contracts can change and evolve over time. When the parties follow the proper channels, written lease agreements can be amended.

It is always advisable to get independent legal advice. The lease modification process starts with negotiation. Changes to leases must be documented and must meet other legal criteria to be valid changes.

In most jurisdictions, you can register your lease interest on title to the land. This provides an additional layer of security by notifying third parties of the lease.

There are pros and cons of registering a lease, which you should discuss with your team of advisers.

Clarity for your business is important, and clarity and certainty is one benefit of having a thoughtful and documented lease. If you have questions about your lease, consult a lawyer for advice and guidance.

Laura Klemmer is counsel at MLT Aikins LLP and Sarah Hoag is a law student at MLT Aikins LLP. This article is of a general nature only and is not exhaustive of all possible legal rights or remedies. In addition, laws may change over time and should be interpreted only in the context of particular circumstances such that these materials are not intended to be relied upon or taken as legal advice or opinion. Readers should consult a legal professional for specific advice in any particular situation. If you have a topic or question you would like us to address in future issues, please email [kkriell@mltaikins.com](mailto:kkriell@mltaikins.com).