



Donna Yates 3 wears the Yates brand 'Y' on her shoulder.

The Yates Family: Tested by Tough West Texas and Surviving

North of the Big Bend region of western Texas, north of the dry, arid deserts of Chihuahua, Mexico, came a unique family of Texas Longhorns. It is a family formed by a Texas rancher who knew exactly what he wanted in his cattle herd. The Longhorn family is the Yates and the rancher was Ira 'Cap' Yates.

When Yates began his search for cattle to live on his tough Texas land, it seems he kept two things in mind. Firstly, he knew he had to find an animal that could survive the driest of conditions. The area surrounding Yates' ranch in Alpine, Tex., about 70 miles north of the Mexican border at Presidio, Tex., was the birth place of the family. This terrain near Alpine is what many consider to be the beginning of habitable land and Yates raised animals on these same conditions as far west as El Paso, Tex. This stretch of land is bordered on the north by the colorful rocks of the Fort Davis Mountains. It is an area that receives less than eight inches of rain annually and mule deer, jack rabbits, javelina and mountain lions manage to survive. But if a domesticated animal expects to survive here, it must be willing to live on sparse trees and grass clumps.

Yates' second concern in selecting cattle was purity. "Cap was more vehement about keeping his Longhorns pure than anybody else," says Gary Henry, of Stephenville, Tex. Henry spent time in the Big Bend region in

1984, tracing the roots of the Yates family line and Cap Yates himself. Henry, as a breeder, raises Yates Longhorns because of his interest in Texas state history.

The Yates family has its roots in old Mexico and more than 30 years ago Yates began a series of trips into Mexico to find Longhorns for his herd. By the late 1950s, Yates was raising nearly 500 of his unique Longhorns, and his particular traits are being perpetuated to benefit breeders today.

Dick Robbins of Pratt, Kans., is one breeder who has found a place in his Longhorn herd for the Yates family. "The reason I use them is because they seem to be more efficient and bigger cattle in my country," Robbins says. Robbins' flat, grassy Kansas land is a luxurious alternative to the desert that holds the Yates family's roots, and that is part of what makes his cattle as successful as they are. "I think their traits are caused because they evolved from tougher country," he says.

A Yates Longhorn is definitely identifiable by external characteristics and some breeders feel the quickly disappearing bloodline is the line least influenced by any European bloodlines. Yates brought his cattle from Mexico's interior and because of his particular feelings about the Longhorn's purity, breeders doubt any outside influence in today's Yates line. The possible mixture may be with the Curriente cattle of Mexico. The Curriente are

similar to the Longhorn but differ in the shape of the head and body characteristics. But because of Yates' desire for pure Longhorns, Henry says he believes that no outside influence permeated the bloodline.

"Cap and his associates were too cantankerous to accept anything but Longhorns," Henry says.

Yates Longhorns are beefier than some Longhorn bloodlines and their influence is instrumental in commercial Longhorn herds. Although the family animals have the beefier bodies, they tend to be smaller horned than the other bloodlines. Breeders feel the shorter horns hurt the Yates family during the period of high demand for big-horned Longhorns, but the beefy body is helping the bloodline stage a comeback.

"When people were looking for big horns," Robbins says, "they got away from Yates animals because they didn't have the monster horns. But I think breeders are going back to Yates Longhorns, which are beefier."

The Yates family has been traditionally marked by its horn shape that is a singular characteristic of this family. Horn shape is a definite upward twist with minimal horn width. The twist of the Yates horn is very observable and can be seen in nearly all Longhorns drawing heavy influences from the bloodline.

"In Yates cattle every one of them will have a twist to their horn," Henry says.



Spear E 83, owned by Darol Dickinson, is a Yates cow from Cap's original herd and bears the slice in the left ear that became a trademark of Cap Yates' herd.

"They'll be a little slower maturing and be smaller than Peelers."

But Robbins selected Yates Longhorns because of the advantageous traits he wanted in his herd.

"In the cows that I picked I was looking for a long, tall, thick-bodied cow with good legs and generally good body conformation," Robbins says. His government-bred influence comes mostly from the Fort Niobrara animal refuge in Valentine, Nebra., he adds.

Interestingly enough the "government Longhorns" that Robbins talks about are of Yates descent. Most of the Valentine Refuge Longhorns have been transplanted from Oklahoma's Wichita Wildlife Refuge, where during the early portion of this century the U.S. Government first made efforts to save the declining Longhorn population. In 1920, two forest service employees began a hunt deep into

Texas and selected 19 "specimen" Longhorns, holding heavy old Mexico influence, the same influence desired by Yates himself. But differing from the WR family's traditional twist horn that goes outward, "The Yates tend to be a high-horned cow with an upward twist to them," Robbins says.

Longhorns in Yates' herd were particularly identifiable with his trademark "jingle-bob" ear. The mark was a horizontal slice through the left ear of the cow that left the bottom half of the ear hanging, thus the name "jingle bob." "It was just something that he came up with as kind of a flamboyant breeder," says Henry. "But few if any of Yates' original animals with the sliced ear remain," he says.

Yates was an heir to his father Ira's, Yates Oil Pool Interests of Pecos County and those interests helped finance Yates' ranching. Along with his Long-

horns, Yates raised Charolais cattle, sheep and was fond of small Spanish horses of a dun color. His ranching success was indicative of the hard work Yates put into his ranches. Yates was the first rancher in the Alpine area to successfully employ advanced well drilling techniques and developed a sophisticated system of irrigation and watering to change the tough land into a home for his livestock. The 6-foot-4 Yates was a large image in the Texas ranching industry and had influence on other Longhorn bloodlines. Through his friendships with Emil Marks and Graves Peeler, Yates bred some of his Longhorns with Marks' and Peeler's and today those families pull some influence from the Yates. The Peeler family especially is noted for being probably the beefiest of Longhorns and they have drawn influence from the Yates.

"I like Yates really well for commercial breeding," says Henry.

Robbins maintains that the Yates family is "better for my market. When I picked those first Yates Longhorns, I was picking what I liked and not what I was supposed to be looking for." In fact Robbins, says he did not know what a Yates Longhorn was until after its influence had become part of his herd. As Robbins puts it, he inherited a little history. But in his beef market, Robbins is finding enough size in his historic Yates Longhorns to be successful. His Yates bull Anchor D 057, a Bevo son, weighs a healthy 1,700 pounds and he maintains that "we've never touched a calf" during calving periods.

Breeders must agree that the Yates family is hardy and Yates' cattle themselves were able to survive in tough west Texas. As was written in the 1984 *Texas Longhorn Journal*: "They (Yates) search for food where other breeds won't go, they eat what other cattle can't or won't eat and they avoid such poisonous plants as loco weed, which other breeds will eat and die from. Further, they are willing to travel several miles, every day, between sources of water and food. Obviously Yates cattle epitomize the very traits that make the Longhorn breed the wonderful cattle they are."

Yates' personalized herd was dispersed in 1960, following his death the previous year. Yates was born July 4, 1886, and was 82 years old when he died. He is buried along with his wife on a hill near the west Texas land where his heritage developed.