

Frank Ricks,  
late 1800s,  
Glenbow  
NA 3046-4

feet per day, which was by then supported by 11 wells in the area. The years of the Cold War caused another jump in the demand for sulphur, which was needed by the nuclear industry to process uranium, and the plant's sulphur output reached 80 tons per day in the 1950s. More development has involved improvements to safety equipment and environmental considerations. Currently, attention is directed toward revitalization of the aging facility. A number of environmental controls have been added, and the huge flare that used to be a landmark for drivers heading home on Highway one no longer lights the sky in that area.

### *Frank Ricks and The Hermitage*

The next landmark on the Trans-Canada is the turnoff for Hermitage Road. The name for this road comes not from any recluse, but from the title attached to a homestead located down this road. The reason for the house's name is a bit unclear – some claim that it was so called simply because of its remoteness, while others state that it was named after a location in Scotland.

Frank Ricks arrived in Alberta from California in 1883, when he took a job to drive a herd of 200 horses up from Oregon to the Mount Royal Ranch near Cochrane. He stayed to work as a ranch hand and married Isabelle Jane Potts, the daughter of James and Jessie Potts of Morley. The couple homesteaded a spot southwest of this turn-off. Here Ricks built a grand house, complete with ballroom.

Before arriving in Alberta, Ricks had an illustrious career as a bronc rider in California and Oregon. His reputation only increased with his performance in Alberta, as the following testimony indicates: "An outlaw horse was brought in that was as bad as the worst animal that had ever come into the Province, and that is saying a good deal. He was a fine, active, long-barrelled dark chestnut, a wild horse and an outlaw of some ten years' experience. Not only did he buck in a thousand different and original twists, but he was a man-killer – a savage, untamed brute... One September day Frank Ricks came along on foot and asked for the loan of a horse. "Take the chestnut," offered Kerfoot [manager of the Cochrane Ranch] and Ricks promptly roped and saddled.

Then he rode as the Cochrane hands present had never seen before. Ricks was a superb horseman, riding on weight and balance, not by main strength like John Ware and other hard horsemen. He rode that ugly chestnut until it could scarcely stand, he cut it from tail-stump to ears with his



spurs, he temporarily beat the spirit out of it with his heavy quirt. When the session had been completed to Ricks' satisfaction he left a wreck in the place of the thousand pounds of fighting horseflesh he had mounted."<sup>11</sup>

Ricks continued to move around frequently. In 1902, he became involved in the Alberta Hotel in Banff (now The Cascade) with Walter Potts. He was thrown from a horse in 1913 and badly hurt. That may have been a factor in his talking his own life the following year. His family moved into Calgary, and after going through a few owners, the house was allowed to fall into a state of disrepair that finally made it beyond rescuing, and in the 1960s it was burned down.

Facing page:  
Noble Ridge



### *Why Are There All These Ridges?*

The hog's back ridges that you cross repeatedly as you drive from Calgary to the mountains are composed of a harder sandstone rib surrounded by softer crumbled shaley rock and soil. The ridges all run from southeast to northwest, and beneath them lie a complex of faults (fractures in the earth's crust) with a similar orientation. The next chapter will delve into an explanation of the geomorphology (the study of how land forms come about). But, for a brief explanation here, try to imagine the mountains extending from where they end now on across the foothills toward Calgary for many kilometres, gradually diminishing in size. That is what it would have looked like 100 million to 200 million years ago. What you see as these ridges are the roots of these vanished mountains that have eroded away over millions of years, leaving only the remnants of their rocky cores. It is a bit mind-boggling to imagine, but trying to wrap your mind around the immense time scale of the geological history of the mountains is always a challenge!

## *More Ridges*

There are two ridges in quick succession just after the Jumping Pound Gas Plant. Mainly to the north is Nicoll Ridge, another feature named after early settlers. A distinct hill on the north end of this ridge is known as Pile of Bones Hill. For years, bones of animals that had succumbed to harsh conditions, disease, or sometimes old age were hauled here for disposal. A market for bones developed as the many piles of buffalo bones were collected from around the prairie. So the bones collecting on Pile of Bones Hill were dug up and shipped to B.C. for use in refining sugar.

The next ridge, on the south side of the highway, is Bateman Ridge. You guessed it – the Batemans were a pioneering family. This land is now owned by the Copithornes.

Next you'll pass by Noble Ridge – again named for a homestead family. It is more noticeable on the north side of the highway, and has a rocky spine along its crest. These ridges are called “hog's back” ridges for their resemblance to what must be a rather underfed swine's shape.

## *Sibbald Flats*

Here we get a bit ahead of ourselves – and, I will admit, a little far off the highway. But trust me, the story is worth the diversion. We will meet Andrew Sibbald more intimately with the story of Morley. His son, Howard Sibbald, was a rancher in this area (as well as Banff Park's first warden) who used the flats along the road leading southwest as winter pasture for his cattle. He did so because the area was well protected from harsh weather and provided better winter feed in the grassy meadows than much of the surrounding areas did. The area was made a part of the Bow Crow Forest Reserve in 1910, but it continued to be used for cattle through grazing leases, as it is to this day. Watch for cows on the road if you drive through this route. The flats are about 20 kilometres from the turnoff onto Highway 68 from the Trans-Canada, lying in a broad valley that leads into the mountains.

The reasons for Sibbald to turn his cows out here were also good reasons for the ancient inhabitants of the area to themselves settle by these meadows for the winter. When Highway 68 was upgraded in 1980, prompting a survey of the archaeological significance of the location, this is exactly what was found. The area around the flats is rich with evidence of human occupation. The oldest finds included fluted points dating from 11,200 to 10,200 YBP (years before present), and there are uninterrupted indications of occupation right up to historical times. The most recent pre-contact artefacts are plains side-notched points (for mounting on shafts). Historically, there are records of Assiniboine hunters using the area throughout the second half of the 1800s.

It appears that the area was mainly used for winter camps, with groups of four to six families establishing themselves to weather through the cold months. Hearths were found, as well as the charred remains of animal bones heavily marked by stone tools. The only bones found that were marked by metal tools (and hence were from the post-contact years) were not buffalo. This suggests that the bison were largely gone from this area by the time these people started using trade tools.

“Lithic workshops,” areas used for crafting stone tools, were identified by the collections of stone chips. People must have

Remains of  
a sun-dance  
lodge at  
Sibbald Flats

