

Kids Korner

Ranchers Turn Cattle Skulls Into Western Art

BARNESVILLE, Ohio — A father and sons team of ranchers ride herd on a trend—turning cattle skulls into Western Art. It started back in 1977 when a devastating blizzard on the high plains of Colorado killed 40 percent of the Dickinson family Longhorn cattle herd. At a point when everything seemed hopeless, Darol Dickinson started salvaging what was left sticking out of the snow, those serpentine long horns and skulls. Although not as good as the production of the living cow, the cleaned and polished skulls often sold for more money than a normal commercial living cow would bring at auction.

Over the years collectors and western decor buffs have continued to snap up the one of a kind appendages.

Today Darol and sons Joel and Kirk, now ranching in Belmont County, Ohio, sell 50 to 80 skulls a year at prices that begin at \$130 and go to \$950. Collectors and designers view the longhorns as the quintessential symbol of the Old West.

"Longhorns have a mystique about them," said Joel Dickinson. "They stand for courage, stamina, independence—all the admired qualities of our early frontier settlers."

The Longhorns Head to Tail Store, located on the family ranch north of Barnesville also markets all the other longhorn components such as steer shoulder mounts, mounted steer tails, tanned hides, bull walking canes, bull golf clubs, hoof lamps, and of course healthy lean beef, all natural and delicious.

Everything really started with the skull polishing. Many of the

skulls come with a lengthy history, photos of the living animals taken in its heyday and the documented registration certificates. Customers who purchase a skull get more than a skull, they get a personal history.

There's Shorty, a longhorn steer doing the rodeo thing. After a year he became increasingly lethargic and instead of a rodeo star, he became an X-Rodeo performer, graduated to a feed lot and then went on to a health foods store.

Each of them has been professionally immortalized as a bleached and polished skull.

Over the years, Kirk and Joel have developed a 23 step cleaning and polishing technique. They ship by UPS polished skulls across the USA as well as Norway, Germany, and Japan. German people are especially taken with the culture of the Wild West and are enthusiastic collectors of all things western, according to ranch manager Joel Dickinson.

To start collecting skulls, price is a consideration. The wider the spread the better. The more "cork screw" the higher the price. Horns, like trees produce a growth ring. Horn grows fast in the summer and grows a long light colored section, but grows slow in winter with a darker, smaller section. The younger cattle have smaller, shorter horn and the older cattle have the really big trophies. Bulls have a more masculine horn with a large circumference and steers have the six to eight foot spreads. The longest horned steer on Dickinson Cattle Company today measures right at 90 inches. Many people purchasing trophy skills

from the store actually prefer smaller spreads due to limited den or wall space. Not every one can have an available area for the really big ones.

In reality, longhorn skulls aren't for everyone. Gaping nasals and eye cavities strike some as, let's say, not sophisticated.

But buyers can be guaranteed one aspect of the skulls, immaculate cleanliness. The craniums go through a multi process of boiling, bleaching, sanding, and high pressure washing that leaves each one polished and as bright white as if it had sunned in the desert for 50 years. Kirk says, "During the buffing and polishing process I try not to overdo it. Most collectors prefer a natural look. The horn natural color is beautiful; if they are too polished, they look like plastic."

The family cattle operation in the Appalachian foot hills of south eastern Ohio runs over a thousand registered Texas Longhorn cattle and sells mostly breeding stock for people starting herds. Tours are provided during the Summer for the public. The regular processing of beef for the store provides a renewable supply of skulls to a limited degree.

The 23 step skull process is not an easy feat, in fact it is quite labor intensive, to the extent not many Longhorn ranchers take the time and trouble to make them "indoor desirable." It is just easier to hang a skull on the side of the barn.

"People aren't fighting to get into the authentic Longhorn skull-polishing business," said Kirk. There's not a lot of competition in this industry." For more info www.head2tail.com tells the rest of the story.



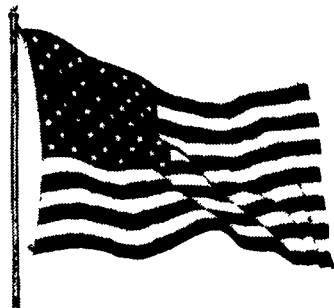
Joel and Kirk Dickinson of Barnesville, Ohio, display a state of the art Texas Longhorn polished skull. The Dickinson Cattle Company has been polishing skulls for 26 years for sale to collectors of unique western memorabilia. The ranch runs a sizable herd of Texas Longhorns and develops a number of decor products from every part of a critter. It isn't just the all natural beef that sells at the Longhorns Head to Tail Store but also tanned hides, Longhorn steer shoulder mounts, hoof lamps, mounted steer tails, leather place mattes, bull walking canes, bull golf putters, and ladies purses. The ranch also provides public tours during the summer.

Grange Hosts Flag Raising Ceremony

LEWISBERRY (York Co.) — Lewisberry Valley Grange #1360 and #1230 Rosstown Road, Lewisberry, hosted a special flag raising ceremony Sunday, March 2, at 2 p.m. at the Grange hall.

The 40-foot flag pole was purchased and erected as an Eagle Scout project by Adam Karl of Boy Scout Troop 312, York/Adams Council. Adam is the son of Mary and James Karl of Fishing Creek Road, New Cumberland. Adam is a senior at Red Land High School

The project included research into flagpoles and kits, removing



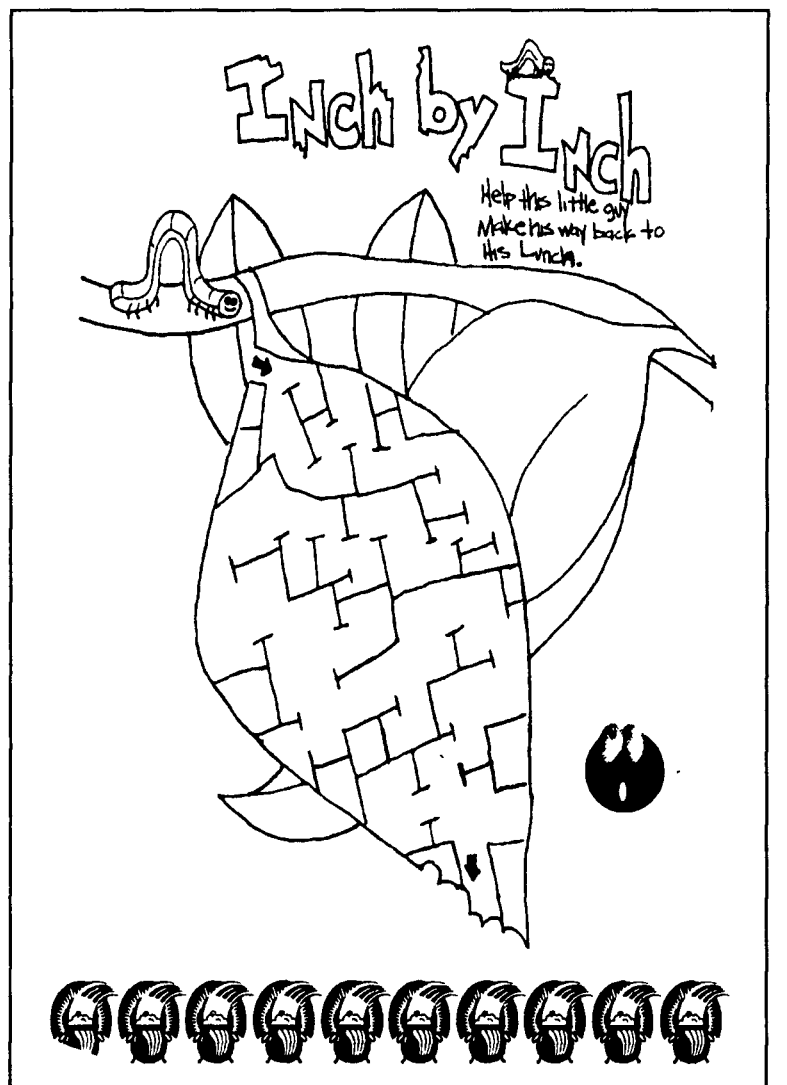
vegetation and shrubbery from the parking lot island where the pole was erected, installing the base for the pole, placing a weed barrier in the island, planting new plants and shrubbery, erecting the flagpole, installation of a solar powered dusk to dawn light and finishing the landscaping with tanbark.

Adam began the project with Valley Grange #1360 in July 2002 and completed it in December of last year. The original plans called for him to erect a 30-foot flagpole and Valley Grange #1360 donated half the costs. Adam decided to purchase and erect a 40-foot pole and is raising money to cover the additional costs through candy sales.

The ceremony was attended by Sen. Jeff Picola and Rep. Bruce Smith (a member of Valley Grange #1360), officers and members of Valley Grange #1360, surrounding granges, and Betsy Huber, PA State Grange Master.

Construction of the Valley Grange hall was completed in 1996. Valley Grange had previously sold their original hall in Lewisberry. There had been much discussion since then among members about erecting a flagpole but nothing had ever been finalized. Boy Scout Troop 312 began meeting at the Grange hall early in 2002 and shortly afterwards the idea of Eagle Scout projects was brought up. A flagpole was one of the first items discussed and Adam quickly decided to make that his Eagle project.

The Grange is a family fraternal organization dedicated to the betterment of rural America through community service, education, legislation and fellowship. Valley Grange #1360 meets at its hall at 1230 Rosstown Road (Rt 177), Lewisberry, the second and fourth Mondays of each month at 7:30 p.m.



Helping kids do the job safely

The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks can help parents match a child's physical, mental and emotional abilities with an agricultural job



View the Guidelines online at www.nagcat.org