



This Calder Range

By Janet Dailey

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Chase Benteen Calder was bound to wrest a fortune from Montana land, where the whisper of riches swept across a sea of buffalo grass. With Lorna at his side, a woman who took the tough ways of the land as her destiny, he would breathe life into his dream.

Through the treacherous Texas prairie, the perils of Indian country, and a bustling Dodge City, they forged their way to Montana. With Calder strength, they would harvest their fortune from the rich earth, on the sprawling plains of *This Calder Range*.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Janet Dailey is the author of scores of popular and uniquely American novels, including such bestsellers as *Scrooge Wore Spurs*, *A Capital Holiday*, *The Glory Game*, *The Pride of Hannah Wade*, and the phenomenal Calder saga, including the newest title in the series, *Shifting Calder Wind*. Her romantic fiction has also been featured in a story anthology, *The Only Thing Better Than Chocolate*. Since her first novel was published in 1975, Janet Dailey has become the bestselling female author in America, with more than 300,000,000 copies of her books in print. Her books have been published in seventeen languages and are sold in ninety countries. Janet Dailey's careful research and her intimate knowledge of America have made her one of the best-loved authors in the country and around the world.

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Chapter 1

It was a country of benchlands and breaks, coulees and cutbanks -- and grass that stretched a hundred miles in every direction. The dominating expanse of blue sky overhead seemed to flatten it, but this vast northern range undulated like a heavy sea. The lonely grandeur of it gripped at the heart of the strong and intimidated the weak.

A pair of riders leading packhorses topped a crest of this virgin Montana Territory and reined in. From the stout, double-rigged saddle to the shotgun chaps and the low crown of their cowboy hats, their clothes and their gear marked them as Texans. They were covered with a thick layer of travel dust.

They walked their horses partway down the gentle slope and stopped again when they were no longer skylined by the plain's swell. Saddle leather groaned as the taller of the two men swung to the ground in a fluid motion. The chalk-faced bay he was riding blew out a snort and dipped its nose toward the grass.

Rawboned and lean, Chase Benteen Calder carried his near-six-foot height with the ease of a shorter man. His weight was distributed in hard muscles that lay flatly across his chest and broad shoulders and the long girth of his legs. The twenty-six years of his life had beaten a toughness into his boldly spaced features. It showed in the quickness of his dark eyes, the small break along the bridge of his nose, and the pale track of an old scar on his right temple. Experience had made him closemouthed and vigilant, and the sun had darkened him.

He kept a hold on the reins to his chalk-faced bay while it lowered its head to graze. The rattle of the bridle bit briefly drew his glance to the horse tearing at the curly, matted grass growing close to the ground.

It was native buffalo grass, more nutritious than any other kind. Heat and drought couldn't kill it; cold winters cured it into hay; the trampling of hooves couldn't destroy it. It was said this short grass could put two hundred extra pounds on a steer at maturity. A few minutes ago they had ridden through some ripening blue joint. Taller than the buffalo grass, its wheatlike heads had brushed the stirrups of his saddle.

The great herds of buffalo that had once roamed this range were well on their way to being exterminated by buffalo hunters and hidlers. It was an act encouraged by the government in Washington in a deliberate attempt to break the spirit of the Plains Indians and subdue them once and for all. A year before, on October 5, 1877, Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé had surrendered over in the Bear Paw Mountains. Most of the Sioux and the Cheyenne were corralled on reservations, and the rest had fled to Canada with Sitting Bull and Dull

Knife. After years of pressure from clamoring ranchers and railroads, the government was finally throwing open the last isolated island of open range. All this land was going to be free for the taking.

Chase Benteen Calder scanned the limitless expanse of the plains with sharp and knowing eyes. His glance stopped on the wiry rider sitting loosely on his horse. Both men were seasoned veterans of a half-dozen trail drives of longhorns north to the railheads in Kansas and beyond. They had just come off a drive Benteen had bossed for the Ten Bar ranch south of Fort Worth, Texas, to deliver a herd to an outfit in the Wyoming Territory. The horses they were riding and the ones that carried their packs all had the 10-brand burned on their hips.

It was on the trail during a stopover at Dodge City that they'd heard the first talk about the Indian country of Montana Territory and Benteen's interest had been aroused. Then, the ramrod of the Wyoming outfit had mentioned the free grass opening up to the north. Instead of heading directly back to Texas, Benteen had taken this side trip to get a look at the country, and Barnie had tagged along.

This vast rolling grassland was all that they had claimed it to be, and more. Its lower altitude made it more desirable than the plains of Wyoming and Colorado, and its grasses were rich -- capable of putting hard weight on cattle.

There would be a stampede into the territory. Free grass was like whispering "gold." Right now, it looked like a sea of gold. Summer had ripened it to a rich yellow and autumn's cool breath was bronzing the heavy-headed grasses that covered hundreds of square miles. Its location wouldn't stay a secret for long. Soon the place would be overrun with people arriving to make their big chance. Would-be ranchers and speculators would come crawling out of the woodwork like cockroaches to try to make a quick buck and run. But Benteen made up his mind to be here before the cockroaches came.

"I think this is it, Barnie." His narrow smile was cool and sure.

"Yep." Barnabas Moore didn't need an explanation of that statement.

Three things were required to make a good cattle range -- grass, water, and natural shelter from winter storms. There was grass aplenty; plum thickets and chokecherry trees offered brush shelter; and just ahead there was the wide course of a riverbed meandering through the heaving plains.

Looping the reins around the horse's neck, Benteen swung into the saddle and turned his mount and packhorse toward the cottonwood-lined banks of the river. The taciturn Barnie Moore followed, swaying loosely in rhythm to his horse's gait.

"Look there." Barnie nodded, the rotted front brim of his hat pointing to a cutbank where erosion by water and wind had exposed strata of rock and earth in the slope. Close to the surface, a wide seam of shiny black coal gleamed in the autumn sunlight. "Won't lack for fuel."

Surrounded by virtually treeless ridges, it was an important scrap of information to be tucked away for future use. Benteen made a mental note of it as both men continued toward the river without slacking their horses' pace.

Summer had reduced the river's flow to a sluggish current. It was well within the banks carved by spring melts, the shallow water running crystal clear. But it was water -- life-giving, life-sustaining water.

Benteen let the reins sag on the saddlehorn. Beside him, Barnie reached into the deep pocket of his vest and fetched out his tobacco sack and paper. Certainty eased through Chase Benteen Calder. There was no longer

any need to search this stark, lonely Montana land.

His eyes were filled with the enormous landscape, the sprawling plains valley with its shallow river flowing through it, the upthrust of range beyond it -- and the high blue sky. This range reached from here to forever.

And it sang its promise to him. It sounded crazy to think the land was singing to him, but it was. The low murmur of the water set the rhythm while a keening breeze swept down the slope, playing a melody in the grasses and the dry leaves of the cottonwoods and willows bordering the river.

In his mind's eye, Benteen could see it all as it would be, herds of cattle growing fat on the native grasses, big barns walled with thick wood beams, and a big house sitting on that knoll from which he could view it all. Not in the beginning, but someday. In the meantime, there was plenty of room in these wide-open spaces to think and breathe and dream -- and work like hell to make the dream a reality.

Benteen knew about work. He'd been working all his life for somebody else, but always watching and learning, putting aside money for a place of his own. All of it had been preparing him for this day when he rode onto this land where his knowledge and skill would be put to use. These trackless plains were going to carry his mark. Here he would build something that would endure.

The conviction that he'd found his home range swelled in his chest. This was his. This would be Calder land. "I'm filing on this stretch of river," he stated as Bernie licked his cigarette together.

Every cattleman knew that laying claim to a narrow stretch of the allowed 160-acre homestead tract gave control of an entire region -- a minimum of ten miles on either side, or as far as a cow could walk to water. Elbow room increased it by at least another ten miles, and sometimes more. Bernie had already agreed that if Benteen found the right rangeland, he'd file on the adjoining stretch and turn it over to him, which was a common practice of the day. The additional 160 acres would give him breathing room -- with more to come.

Texas had given Benteen his fill of being hemmed in and crowded. He'd been a boy at the close of the Civil War, but he'd seen the changes that had come with Reconstruction -- few of them good. There had been too many lost causes in his young life. Here was the place for new beginnings.

"Come spring, I'll bring up a herd," Benteen stated in a spare, even tone while Bernie cupped a match to the hand-rolled cigarette and bent a little toward the flame. "If all goes well, I'll be back before the end of next summer. Do you think you can hang on here till then?"

"Reckon," Bernie drawled. He was younger by two years than Benteen. "What do you suppose yore pa'll do?"

Benteen looked into the distance, a net of crowtracks springing from the outer corners of his eyes. "I don't know." The sun-browned skin became taut across the ridgeline of his jaw. "The Ten Bar's got him choked off the range. But he's a stubborn man."

His father, Seth Calder, was a good man -- a strong man. It was possible he could have been an important man, but he had a blind spot, a fatal flaw. He didn't know when to let go of a thing that was dead. The War Between the States had ended years ago, yet his father continued to argue the South's cause, insisting Lincoln had thrown a political blanket over the true issue of states' rights that had prompted secession and turned the war into a question of slavery. That position hadn't made him popular with those in power in a Reconstructed Texas.

His support of the South during the war had left him nearly broke at its end. He struggled to rebuild his

modest ranch, only to be wiped out by the Black Friday crash in the Panic of '73. Judd Boston's Ten Bar had survived the crash unscathed. While Seth Calder had to sell cattle, Judd B...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Decker:

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