

Below is a newspaper article that was printed in the Florence, AL, TimesDaily. Brian Smith is on the board of the Lauderdale County SWCD and president of the Lauderdale County Junior Cattlemen's Association. He led a group of 56 students and adults to South Dakota to assist landowners devastated by a blizzard. The trip was sponsored by the Lauderdale County SWCD and the Northwest Alabama RC&D Council.

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## Feeling at home in South Dakota

Cattlemen's group brought heifers, assisted ranchers



**Courtesy photo**

Lauderdale County Junior Cattlemen's Association members Clay Crafton and Collin Brown work on fences for rancher Delbert Cobb near Red Owl, South Dakota, during the group's trip earlier this month.

**GREENHILL** — Brian Smith said Southern hospitality is alive and well — in South Dakota.

Smith, president of the Lauderdale County Junior Cattlemen's Association, led a group of 56 students and adults to South Dakota earlier this month.

The group delivered 21 heifers to ranchers who lost cattle during last winter's blizzard. "They just gave us a huge welcome," Smith said. "They opened up their homes to us. There were 12 families that divided 56 of us into their homes."

The junior cattlemen delivered one heifer to 21 different families.

"All the ranchers had their own branding so the kids got to help with that," Smith said. "That was something new to them. They still have branding up there so they can round up their herds in the fall."

Smith said the kids will remember the experience for the rest of their lives.

They spent their days working on fences, clearing brush and other ranch chores. Each night, the families gathered for a potluck supper for their visitors from Alabama.

"They learned a lot of things with all the sights they got to see and about beef production," Smith said. "But the most important thing was the citizenship and the bonding, the relationships that were formed. When I was leaving, I felt more like we were leaving home instead of heading for home."

Smith said the group had lots of invitations to come back.

"It would be interesting to see what kind of calves these heifers give birth to next year," Smith said. "There's already a group of ranchers talking about chartering a bus and coming to Alabama to pay us a visit."

Smith said the area the group visited was 60 miles from the nearest town.

“I was really impressed with the ranching heritage of the area,” he said. “They remember the stories of their pioneer ancestors. The old schools, old homesteads and barns are still there.”

Smith said the elementary school students still attend a two-room school. Once they get old enough for high school, they move into town and board with someone.

“They do that just to get to go to high school,” Smith said. “It’s a great sense of community there. They are so incredibly remote that they really bond with each other. They are so proud of their heritage.”

Smith said the families lost much of their herds during the blizzard. He said they gave one woman a heifer, and she said it was the only one she had on her place.

“They took us out the first day and showed us where the blizzard hit, where the cattle were blinded and fell into a creek,” Smith said. “They showed us the mass graves where the cattle were buried.”

Smith said earlier that the ranchers lost about 80,000 head of cattle.

Tree planting was also one of the chores the group did, according to Smith.

“We planted about 300 trees in one day,” he said. “They actually plant trees to catch the snow to store up and put on their hay fields during the summer because they don’t get a lot of rainfall.”

The 3,300-mile round trip wasn’t all about work, however. The group visited a 50,000-head feedlot in Nebraska and a show cattle and hog operation in Minnesota. They went to Mount Rushmore and toured the John Deere plant and the assembly line that builds combines.

“They came away with a fantastic experience that they will treasure forever,” Smith said. “Almost everyone of them would say being with the ranchers was their favorite part of the trip.”

Jeffrey Calvert, 16, of Lexington, said he thought it was “pretty cool” to deliver the Alabama genetic cattle to South Dakota. “It was an awesome feeling,” Calvert said. “I thought the trip was educational for us, and life-changing for us and the people in South Dakota.”

Calvert said the ranchers treated the visitors like they were family.

“The most memorable part was the people we stayed with,” Calvert said. “They didn’t want us to leave when we did.”

Remington Bradley, 12, said he went with his whole family to South Dakota. His mom was raised in the area.

“The most memorable part was seeing the scenery and the wildlife,” he said. “I can’t wait for us to plan another trip to South Dakota.”

Rogers student Morgan Grigsby, 17, said she enjoyed meeting the people in South Dakota.

“The women up there work a lot harder than they do here,” Grigsby said. “It was amazing to see how different things were up there than they are here. But they treated us like we were at home even though we were miles and miles away.”

Nick Canfield, 13, said he enjoyed seeing how people live in different parts of the country.

“I enjoyed helping people rebuild their herds and just seeing how much they appreciated it,” Canfield said.

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