

PRETTIEST PLACE
IN THE COUNTRY



CATTLE *on the* Coast

The Waddells turned a central California dairy into a beef ranch with sweeping views of the Pacific.

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MORRO BAY, CALIFORNIA

The ranch offers dramatic views of the coast (top) that stretch out for miles. The family behind Swallow Creek (above, from left): Paul, Odin, Kyla and Duane.

Swallow Creek Ranch began life as a dairy farm in the 1800s, when Italian and Swiss families settled in the hills and hollows of California's central coast. Cows were milked in the huge redwood barn, and canisters were kept cool in the smaller adjacent creamery, awaiting transport to the big Harmony Valley Dairy Association creamery several miles up scenic Highway 1.

In the 1960s, a house was built on a knoll above the barn that afforded a view down the canyon to the sea. It was also around this time that the dairy industry began to disappear from the area.

Changing directions

In 1985, Duane Waddell bought the property's 617 acres and moved his family from Southern California into the house on the knoll. He set about transforming the old farm to accommodate 50 head of hormone-free, grass-fed beef cattle. His daughter Kyla and her fiancé, Paul Grafton, both naturalists,



The grass-fed cattle soak up some sunshine and scenery on the ranch.



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The entrance to the ranch (top) reveals a glimpse of the rolling hills; Odin and Grandpa Duane take a ride on the ATV (center); the modern house features walls of windows (above); farm dog Packy says hello (right).



helped him clear the land of invasive species and plant native trees and shrubs. They also painted the 100-year-old barn pale blue.

Kyla got the idea that the barn would make a perfect place to hold a wedding, and she and Paul celebrated their nuptials there. Soon others caught on, and Kyla found herself in the wedding business.

Ceremonies have been held outdoors, high on a hillside overlooking the ocean, with receptions back in the barn, but for now the weddings are on hold because of a zoning problem. Still, Duane continues to be generous with his land, hosting many environmental fundraising events at the barn.

A place to call home

The original residence burned down years ago, and for a while Duane lived in a bunkhouse on the property. He has since designed and built a modern, one-story dwelling atop the highest hill. Duane used local Monterey cypress trees in the construction of the house, which has floor-to-ceiling windows all along the rear wall. Every room features sweeping views of the coastline and Pacific Ocean.

Duane, a recent cancer survivor, says he still has landscaping to do around the house. A good steward of the land, he is careful to keep the cattle out of riparian areas and the sections of native plantings.

Gifts from nature

Hundreds of swallows swarm overhead, flying back and forth to their mud nests under the eaves of the barn. Kyla and Paul's son, 3-year-old Odin, loves running through the tall grasses and especially enjoys riding with Grandpa on the ATV.

A stroll along the creek leads to a lovely little waterfall and a pond that Duane built by damming the creek. A grove of century-old oak trees stands a mile back into the hills.

In the springtime, wildflowers add a flourish of color to the fields: Lupines, poppies, filaree and dandelions bloom profusely. The hillsides green up from the winter rains, and the beauty of Swallow Creek Ranch emerges once again. 🐾