

Hillingdon Ranch

Roots run deep for stewards of Hill Country ranch.

The Texas Hill Country is not known for its thick topsoil, but family roots run deep on the Hillingdon Ranch in Kendall County, south of Fredericksburg.

Hillingdon Ranch, founded by Alfred and Annie Laura Giles in 1885, has remained in operation for more than six generations due to the diligent work and dedication of the Gileses' descendants, surviving droughts and other hardships.

Through photographs and stories, *Hillingdon Ranch: Four Seasons, Six Generations* tells the unique story of the Giles family, including how the ranch came to be and how the family has been able to sustain the ranch for over a century.

Hillingdon authors are David K. Langford and Lorie Woodward Cantu. Langford, an award-winning photographer who contributed both words and imagery, is the vice president emeritus of the Texas Wildlife Association. He lives on the Laurels Ranch, his piece of the Hillingdon family land. Woodward Cantu is a communications expert specializing in agriculture and natural resource issues.

A native of Europe, Alfred traveled to Texas after a bout with rheumatic fever, hoping the climate would help his health. An architect operating in the Hill Country as well as parts of Mexico, he bought the land from the railroad at 50 cents an acre and became one of the first recorded landowners in that part of Kendall County.

The ranch was named after Giles' ancestral home in Middlesex, England.

Nearly 95 percent of land in Texas is privately owned, and the Giles family's stewardship is an important example of how landowners can contribute to the success of their environment and the native animals that call it home.

As the family balanced the responsibilities for maintaining both land and wildlife, the Hillingdon Ranch survived two severe droughts and assorted parasites, including screwworms.

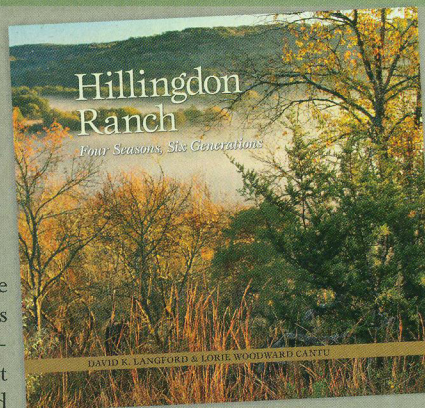
The stunning photographs featured in the coffee-table book were taken between Oct. 1, 2010, and March 1, 2012, while the ranch experienced the driest 17-month period recorded in the

ranch's history.

John Nielson-Gammon, Texas state climatologist, said the 2011 drought was the worst one-year drought ever recorded. Block Creek at the Hillingdon went completely dry. Previously, the creek had stopped running only a handful of times since the days of Alfred Giles.

Managing animal grazing during droughts is one of the major tests of stewardship for landowners. Fortunately, the long-term family views in regard to the health of their livestock helped the Giles family survive the drought.

"When the weather is perfect and everything is going perfect, which never happens, people look at us and think, 'Oh, what a wonderful way of life,'" says Robin Giles, a descendant of Alfred and Annie Laura. "If they were to live it a while, they'd find out it has its downfalls. There is always something going wrong, but you can choose to view those things as



something bad or you can choose to take them as challenges."

Turning the pages of *Hillingdon Ranch*, readers will see both the beauty and the hardship of living on the land. That mantle of responsibility has been handed down through the years to sons and daughters, who take the task of stewardship to heart.

"From my perspective, challenges make it interesting," Robin Giles says. "It would be such a boring world if everything ran perfectly all the time. Our challenge is adapting to dry weather."

For more information or to order, visit hillingdonranchbook.com. ★

—Stephanie M. Salinas

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