

chapter ten

Making a grazing plan work

Meeting riparian stubble height standards set by government managing agencies is perhaps the greatest concern for associations on many grazing allotments.

Agencies require that riparian areas be in good condition, so they set standards that must be met by permittees. When not met, they threaten or take administrative action. This can include increasing stubble height standards, reducing stock numbers, shortening the length of grazing season, and sometimes closing an allotment.

So agency staff turns up the heat on ranchers, who in turn light a fire under the riders, who in turn chase the cattle. This almost never works to a satisfactory end, but it's tradition.

Upland range usually has maximum percent utilization, and riparian areas have minimum stubble height standards. These standards usually aren't averaged across these areas, so both must be met on every grazing unit.

Riparian problems

Typically, when stock are moved to a new grazing unit, they usually start grazing the riparian vegetation first. When riparian vegetation is grazed to the set "trigger" stubble height, ranchers are required to move the stock to the next fence, which usually results in leaving a great deal of upland forage ungrazed. So the herd moves through the rotation quickly, based more or less on how fast they use up the riparian areas.

Every conventionally handled herd has its share of riparian loafers and herd quitters that hide out from the main group in creeks or meadows. Some will leave the range early, headed for home.

Riparian loafers are usually the greatest concern. They stay even when feed is limited. No amount of traditional riding can prevent this behavior with some animals in time to prevent problems. Even with a herd of 1,500 pairs, all it takes to grub out the creek bottoms is 20-40 animals that park on the creek bottoms as soon as the herd is moved in.

Making a grazing plan work

If an association does manage to graze a unit and meet standards, they usually miss some animals after the herd is moved to another unit. Back-riding is rarely 100 percent successful. The 20 or 60 pairs that get left behind quickly graze it to below standards.

Back-riding consumes a lot of time as cattle are typically spread out over a large grazing area, bunches here and there, some in the creek bottoms or up in mountain meadows or hanging around the springs. Riders have great difficulty trying to control this situation.

Agencies often require that when creeks are grazed to within a certain stubble height (for example, five inches), riders move the stock so they can meet the four-inch standard by the time all stock are gathered and moved.

One of a rider's priorities is to get as much grazing time for the association in a unit as he can. So he prowls the creeks, busts stock out of the riparian areas and runs them up the mountain. Some, however, will be back in the creek bottom after he leaves. Some might even beat him back down the mountain.

Whether it's riparian loafing or cows quitting the range and leaving early for home, the cost to ranchers is high. Many associations in central Idaho have to feed hay or feed them off haylands. Feeding a herd of 1,500 pairs hay versus staying another day on range can cost, conservatively, about \$1,000 per day.

Some good riders have proven they can get a few more weeks to a month of grazing out of the same allotment simply by handling the stock differently. This is a potential savings of between \$15,000 to \$30,000 to an association in one season just in hay costs.

Good riders can save an association a lot of money when you combine the costs of shortened grazing seasons or cuts in numbers. This is true on public or private lands, because a well managed herd under high control can also produce more forage for the future.

Traditional methods of handling indirectly lead to lots of over-rested upland plants, crusted soils, and some overgrazed riparian areas that lower range productivity.

Riparian loafing solutions

Riparian areas and seeps, springs and meadows have green grass, shade and water—all attractive and important to livestock. They stay in these areas long-term because of the way we handle them.

These cattle have experienced that staying in the riparian areas is profitable. Calves imitate their cows and get into this habit, but poor handling created the experience in the cows initially.

Just as handling caused the riparian loafing problem, handling can fix it. But as Albert Einstein once said, "The thinking required to solve this problem will have to be on a different level than what created it."

Riparian loafing behavior in cattle isn't a problem. It's a matter of perception of where the cattle feel safe. The solution lies in changing the way the cattle are handled **everywhere**.

Cattle, like horses, **do not** reason. They only assimilate experiences.

Riders say they handle the riparian loafing problem by making the wrong place difficult. With a horse, undesirable behavior can be discouraged by making the experience "not profitable." The idea for solving many horse-handling problems is to make the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard or miserable.

For example, if my stock horse wants to wiggle around when I tighten up the cinch because he doesn't like it, I wiggle the hackamore (bosal) side to side and put him right back to where he was standing.

The horse experiences that wiggling gains him nothing and, in fact, makes it worse. He subsequently experiences the contrast that he has a safe place, which is standing still, just where he was first being cinched up. Horses will choose this relaxation and also associate it with that spot. This invariably helps to get the horse to stand still for cinching up.

Riders, however, have been making the riparian areas hard or miserable for cattle for years without success.

What's the difference between making it miserable for the wiggling horse or the riparian loafing cow?

The riders are forgetting the first part of the horseman's rule: They aren't making the right thing (staying in the uplands) easy, just the wrong thing hard. This leaves the cattle with no contrast in options. They have no other safe place, so they fall back on the last safe place they knew.

If you want cattle to quit hiding in riparian areas, you have to create another safe place where they can have security and be comfortable.

Now, cattle don't care where they are—uplands versus riparian areas. It makes no difference to them! Calm, well handled cattle, that is. I know this is true, because when I handle riparian loafing cattle differently than they were handled before, they stay in the uplands.

So the difference between riparian loafing cattle and the horse is that we don't have to train the stock to quit loafing in the creek like we trained that horse to stop wiggling. What's required is to

remove the **reason** that cattle are seeking relief from stress in the riparian area. Knowing this, solving the riparian loafing problem is simple.

You can change the cows' experience that riparian areas are the safe place by making uplands seem safe and comfortable. This eliminates their need to hide out there. They will no longer need this place for a sense of security.

The object of good stockmanship is to create the experience in the minds of the cattle that being in a herd and going everywhere is safe and comfortable. Then we can settle the herd (take the movement out of them) wherever we decide is best.

If an association is having problems with stock grazing an even proportion of a grazing unit, place them in the under-utilized areas.

If stock are hanging out in the creek bottoms and over using them, I suggest you place them in the uplands.

If you're driving stock to another pasture, show them the area you want them to water. Stop there on the way to the uplands where you will place them. Let them drink and comfortably move them on. They will use this area to drink from then on.

I don't know of any association that has range riparian areas that is having trouble with the herd loafing in the uplands. But if you did, you can place them in the creek bottoms if you like. Either way, placing cattle is an ideal—and sometimes the only way—to graze an even proportion of all the range.

You quickly erase the reasons for cattle wanting to loaf in riparian areas if you start cattle right, drive them right as a herd, place them in the uplands, and move them off riparian areas properly.

Summary

Don't make being in the wrong place (the riparian area) difficult for cows. Make leaving it comfortable for them. Make being in the herd and everywhere they go comfortable. Then place them properly where you want them. Let cattle experience that the rider's approach, the gather off the creek, the drive to and stopping on the new place is profitable for them.

All of these things are readily done by using the techniques and methods in this book. The stock then experience that it is profitable to leave the riparian area and **very profitable** to stay in the uplands. This will be the end of riparian loafing problems.

Remember one key point in achieving success with cattle: How you approach them and what you do first with them in the very beginning sets the tone for the entire day.

If a drive starts out with a lousy experience for the cows, you're going to have to erase it and try to drive them. The new place to stay can be steep and rocky or hot and flat with coarse feed and they won't care, as long as they were handled right getting there.

The stock shouldn't perceive any spot on the range as the place to hide out from riders and stress. There should be no stress anywhere on the range as a result of handling by riders.

Handled this way, stock will stay where you place them. On the uplands, let's say. It has become free of stress, free of any pressure, and you took the movement out of them. They have feed, salt, water, and the security of the herd. Their calves are with them.

What would draw them away from that? Coyotes probably won't. Wolves or eventually running out of feed will, but nothing common on the range should draw them away from that place.

Make your cattle a herd

Controlling the time plants are exposed to grazing animals is key to protecting and enhancing all the range. Riders can't control a bunch that's scattered, so you may decide you want stock on the range to be a herd.

Using the methods in this book, riders will rekindle the herd instinct—even animals that are bad about quitting the herd.

When the herding instinct is rekindled and the herd drives well, you can control the results of grazing to a very high degree. You can place the herd one day, move them to another place the next. Where you find one, you'll find them all. All will stay, and all will go. A high proportion of plants can be grazed with less possibility of overgrazing. Show them water, place them where you want, and this place becomes the place they want to stay. Where you showed them water is where they will want to go to drink. Livestock will stay in uplands, go to the creek to drink, and then return to the herd. Riparian areas, then, are also protected from overgrazing.

Stop them from leaving the range early

Stock that decide when to move to the next pasture or head for home from the range is another common complaint.

It can be corrected using the same proper handling as dealing with bunch quitters and riparian loafers. Take the stress off by handling them right, taking the movement out of them, and placing them where you want.

Cattle have a powerful trait: They don't separate the location of all things around them with the handling experience. The reason they stay where you place them isn't completely understood, but

it happens consistently when they are handled properly and placed correctly.

It is likely that part of this response is due to the release of all pressure from the handler and the stock's association of the place where this happened. Similar behavior appears in horses.

One time, I had trouble getting a colt to move his shoulder (front left foot) to the left. He would back up instead. I finally got him to do it, but had trouble getting it again. So I waited until he came around to the exact spot in the arena that he first did it. When we hit that spot I asked again, and he did it quite readily.

Horses to a high degree—and cattle to some degree—associate the spot on the land with a training or handling experience.

Proper handling replaces experiences that were prompting cattle to leave early.

Too much help



"When old Slim helps us work cattle it's jest like losing four good men."

For riders who want to get more days out of each paddock, have calves that gain well and don't get sick, make sure that everyone who works the herd uses good stockmanship.

Day riders who handle the stock roughly can quickly undo the progress made by a dedicated rider.

Being handled well one time and roughly the next is also hard on the cattle. Stock can be re-worked to handle well again, but it takes time to regain their trust and take the stress off.

If unskilled riders show up to help, have them spread salt, fix fence, trap gophers, go for parts, tend camp, shoe horses, or wax the pickup. I don't loan my highly trained, light and supple stock horse out to someone who jerks on him or rides like a sack of spuds, because I did that once.

If association members who are hard on the stock insist on coming out to help, I have no solutions, just empathy. The boss may not always be right, but they are always the boss.

The best advice I have: Handle the herd so well that you don't need help. If unskilled riders do help, position yourself and work to correct the worst of what happens. Then do your best to take the stress off them when they leave, find an association or ranch that practices good stockmanship and work for them.

Combining different brands into one herd

It's common among grazing associations to have each member turn out his or her herd at different times onto an allotment. Sometime they also turnout in different locations.

This creates a hardship for the rider. Making these brands one herd requires having the whole herd together and enough time left over to drive them as a herd. It has to be done in one day or it's likely the herd will scatter overnight—different brands going different places.

Making a grazing plan work

There are a few key things to keep in mind if you want different brands to become a herd.

First: The ideal solution is for the association and riders to meet and develop a plan to coordinate turnout. Everyone's stock should arrive at the agreed-to time and place. The time period should be no longer than what the riders can hold the cattle in the area without causing overgrazing. The place should be an easy location to drive a whole herd.

If you don't do this, riders will be moving the main herd on and will then have to go back when new bunches arrive. They will have to gather and trail each new bunch to join the main herd. Then they will have to drive all the stock together to make them one herd. Riders who tend to two or more bunches can get too spread out.

Second: Place a priority on training everybody's herds prior to turnout. At a minimum, all herds should be comfortable with pressure into their sides and going by the handler. You can also get them better at turning and speeding up during the drive there. Make sure they are driven to the allotment with good movement.

For association members, don't dump buzzed-up stock on your new riders and expect them to fix it all on the range.

Third: Herds from different ranches won't want to associate together, even if they've all been handled well. To fix this, put each of the individual groups into one herd and work or drive them as a herd. You'll have to drive them well together sometimes for an hour or more until you see them all come together.

When I see individual groups following animals from other herds and running closer together, and they no longer appear polarized and are moving well together, I'm confident they are becoming one herd.

You can get individual groups to become one herd either on one big coordinated drive to the allotment or after they get to the allotment.

Having one coordinated drive is a good way to do it. Otherwise, riders will have to pull each group in as they can and go for a drive. This takes lots more time.

Cattle associate the place and the situation in which they experience comfortable handling, like being with the herd.

Different brands, handled together well as one herd, will soon incorporate themselves into this whole herd.

Note for association members: If you don't have a herd that's already staying together, don't expect a few inexperienced riders to be able to gather, drive, and place a thousand head or more in one day, especially in rough, steep terrain.

Don't expect inexperienced riders, however dedicated, to be able to place big herds consistently on the range for a year or two without timely follow-up training and good support.

Associations should provide help to the riders so a gather and drive can be done in one day to get the herd together and worked right once and for all. Too few riders can easily run out of horse or daylight trying to make a major gather and drive. Even with well-trained stock, moving a large herd through steep or timbered country can be a lot of work for a few beginning riders.

The biggest gains in efficiency and effectiveness for riders come from good planning, good communications, and practicing good stockmanship.

Major moves

I'm sure there is an upper limit to the number of cattle that one experienced handler can move. I don't know what that limit is, but if riders can't handle moving the entire herd on to another area, they should move just manageable portions and come back for the rest. They should place these groups as already described. They will still be there when they show up again.

The association riders may need to help with major moves. Just make sure that everyone handling the stock is on board with low stress handling. A few good riders are better than lots of high stress riders.

If an association is fortunate enough to have a rider who can be given the responsibility to make on-the-ground decisions and coordinate other hired help, use this to your advantage as much as possible. It will help reduce the time you have to spend meeting and helping them out. Good riders usually know the best thing to do and when to do it.

Associations should make sure their riders attend the appropriate agency team meetings, have good maps of the allotment and are clear on the range plan, range standards, and the team goal.

Bunch quitters on the range

Sometimes you'll show up the next day to find the herd you had placed is gone—and gone far. Maybe a few are missing; maybe all. You had at least some animals that were uncomfortable in the herd and with your handling, so they left overnight.

If you notice stock that are not comfortable with the herd, and if you have your hands full tending to the bulk of the herd that's inclined to stay put, then leave the bunch quitters separated away from the main herd. Cut them out or let them leave without letting the others go. Keep them as a second group and locate them well away from

the good handling group, so they don't draw animals from the main herd and have them moving away from where you want them. This allows riders to concentrate on working with problem animals as they are able.

Problem animals can be identified as the ones that drift away or distance themselves from the others. There will often be some that are inclined to follow, the others that would just as soon stay. As these "problem" animals handle well, they can be returned to the main herd.

If you don't know which animals are the bunch quitters, say someone else returned them and they are mixed in, drive the herd a ways until it has had the distance and time to sort out where they want to be in the herd position.

The leaders have the longest flight zone. That's why they put themselves there. They are also usually the most sensitive and the first to quit the bunch from bad handling and the last to be comfortable with good handling.

So, after driving the herd a short ways, ride up the side and cut off the back two thirds from the front third, or back three-quarters from the front quarter. You might separate some that are good about staying, but you will likely get all the bunch quitters. Drift the lead bunch someplace out of sight and sound of the main herd until you have worked them enough that they quit wanting to be someplace else.

Drive this group on until you see the animals in the back wanting to slow or stop. Keep dropping the calm ones off as you go, if you want. This narrows down which animals are still uncomfortable with handling. Keep this up until the last ones are comfortable with all that you ask them to do. Then drift them all back to the herd.

Return bunch quitters with the straight line technique

Strays or bunch quitters usually left the herd because they are sensitive animals and don't want people around.

If I come upon some that have quit the herd and are hanging out in a new location, I approach and watch them carefully. If they are hot and ready to take off, I begin training them exactly as I would start training a sensitive animal that I had never worked before (see page 92).

If they are calmer and more responsive, the starting point might be as described near the beginning of Chapter Nine (see page 87).

When the animals are responding well to pressure and somewhat comfortable with your handling, you can start drifting them back to the herd. This is also a good way to finish getting them comfortable with your handling while still going a direction you want.

Work straight lines behind in order to facilitate a slow drift back into the herd. There should be no crowding the ends or curves in the pattern that will stress them. If they aren't too far from the herd, let them move at a slow pace and graze back. If they are far away, start out by drifting, then drive them with good movement, then drift them in as you get close to the main bunch.

The most effective technique to use is probably straight lines behind the herd. It places you in the right position all the time and prevents stress on the animals.

If you get good movement (or bad) when nearing the main herd, you may have trouble getting them to stop and stay, as they will likely still be thinking about traveling on through or leaving the bunch later.

Bad movement is when cows are weaving, turning, crowding, bumping or leaving the group as you work them. It is a handler-caused problem that you can correct by watching more carefully and changing what you are doing until it stops.

As you get better at handling, it's possible to work with a group or even individual bunch quitters one time. If you do it right, that will be the last time they will need to be worked. Sometimes it takes only minutes. Sometimes it takes a few sessions over the course of a few days or more.

After enough proper handling, former bunch quitters should move with their calves and be relatively calm. You should see a marked improvement in how relaxed they are.

If you can't achieve this, don't return them to the main herd that is staying together!

Heading off potential bunch quitters

To head off potential bunch quitters and settle the herd, back way off and watch them. Look to see if all the movement is completely out of **all** the animals and that none want to leave and hide.

Sometimes even calm animals that stay still have moving on their minds, especially after a long drive. With these, think about driving them more until you see them want to slow when you ease off. Then drift them into where you want them to stay again.

Sometimes animals aren't completely comfortable with handling and being in the herd. They may graze and take a step, graze and take a step like they are sneaking off and start others going with them. They are thinking about someplace else. Sometimes they need just a bit more handling, and they will be alright. Sometimes you

need to work them more by driving with the herd or working them individually.

If you see individuals wandering off that need more work, go out and ask them with quiet and easy movements to turn and go back into the herd. Watch them afterwards to see if they have you on their minds and turn back to the herd, instead of wandering.

When they turn back to the herd, back off and watch. If they drift off again, do it a second time and watch. If they do it a third time, try something else.

Some animals appear rather quiet and calm. aren't afraid of you, and respond okay to most things you ask them to do. But they are still too bugged about past experiences to stay placed and eventually wander away.

A rider who thinks, watches, and checks the animals will find the things that concern them and the answer to correcting it. Perhaps they aren't yet comfortable with being handled in a herd or think they should keep moving because of past experiences.

I would probably pack them up and go for a drive on the range to find out what's wrong. How long a drive depends on when they show they are comfortable with everything I ask. They should slow or stop and relax when I back off pressure, even slightly.

Check that they will let you go up the sides. All should slow, stop and stand calmly, with their attention on you. They should all be calm and responsive when pressured from different angles, etc.

Watch and see if they want to get ahead or off to the side of the herd and want to be with their calves. If they do, I might slow or stop them and let the back catch up. Let them relax and mother up when all together.

Repeat until they want to stay with the herd.

More tips:

- Don't jam cattle during the drive.
- Don't cause them to weave.
- Don't drive cows into cows.
- Keep the movement constant and straight through the whole herd. There should be no speed up/slow down or start/stop movement.
- If individuals want to take side trails, ask them to turn back into the bunch and relax yourself a bit when they do or go with them and work them more.
- Check to see that no animal is single-minded on being someplace else or away from the herd, bent on taking a certain direction, or doesn't care much about her calf.
- When you drive the herd, go back and forth properly so the lead animals line out and the others flow in behind.

Start the drive and maintain it with a reasonably compact herd, not a strung out or spread out mob. If they are too spread out, movement won't attract movement and lead animals might still be acting on their own thoughts. Animals on the sides might also be making their own decisions about where they should be. They won't experience that driving with and being with the herd when you are handling them is okay. When all are calm and responsive with no thoughts of making decisions on their own, they should be ready to place.

Signs are obvious when cattle want to stay—they start getting a little harder to move. If you give them any opportunity to slow or stop, they will.

Making a grazing plan work

If you let them stop, some will bed down within a few minutes. Others will just stand in one spot and chew their cud or otherwise stand very relaxed and look straight ahead. Any of the others should be standing and/or grazing around them. They should be biting plants and looking for other plants they can graze while in that spot. This is a bunch that should stay.

It is something of an art to know for sure whether a herd will stay or not. Take the time to observe and look for signs before you go back to camp.

Placing cattle can be done many ways. The keys are:

- Never let them believe they are under restraint.
- Start the drive right.
- Never force anything to happen.
- Do whatever you need to let them experience that what they prefer to do is profitable for them.
- Don't bother or frighten the herd while driving them to where you want them to stay.
- Work them right until they will stop when you let them.
- Face animals in different directions so there is no particular orientation to the herd.
- Space them out so they have enough feed for the length of stay.

Culling sensitive animals

Some of the more sensitive animals that have the idea ingrained of going someplace else or staying in riparian areas may be candidates for culling. The expertise to handle some of these animals may take months or a year for riders to gain.

The time you may have to spend with these problem animals might not be the best use of time available, especially if a few are over-using critical resources like riparian areas or jeopardizing management of the main herd.

Keep in mind, though, that when you find a group that quit the herd or loaf in the creeks, it will probably contain some animals that really are comfortable within a herd. They might have left because they were drawn by others leaving.

If you're considering taking them home, you probably don't need to take the whole group. Work the group and look for the ones that are quiet and calm. They will probably be in the back and are okay to keep as they will likely get calm enough with handling them right for just a little longer.

Placing stock

When placing stock, you can expect that it's possible to get them to stay there all day or more. Depending on the length of drive, temperature and time of day, they might want to graze or go to water sooner or later. If they are thirsty, I like to water them first before placing them. Even if they aren't thirsty, show the watering place prior to placing them.

Sometimes they aren't hungry or thirsty, so most of them lay down or stand still when I place them. Check the herd later and get them up if it's gone beyond the time they should be grazing.

I recommend that you place or leave the herd at a low enough density so they will stay put for the length of time you require—and a little longer. Estimate the feed available on the area to keep them there for the time you wish and spread the herd out accordingly.

If your range produces about 400 total pounds of forage per acre and you want to take about half of that and you have 500 pair of beef cattle you want to stay for the day, you might have to spread them out on about 80-100 acres. They will drift some off this area, but it's a minimum area to place them on.

Monitor and watch to see what happens. Move if you need to or stay longer if you want to get a higher proportion of plants grazed.

Don't stay longer than the time it takes for grazed plants to send up enough regrowth to entice stock to graze them again. In some places, plants could regrow enough in three to four days for this to happen.

Placed stock should be close enough, however, to be able to keep a significant number of the rest of the herd in sight. If stock are placed tighter than they should be to have all the feed they need, their performance may suffer. Well-handled stock will sometimes stick around pretty close. Get them up and move them if they should be feeding and aren't.

After all the stock are calm and responsive, bunch quitters are under control, and driven so they are now one herd and placed, it's helpful to establish a pattern of moving them on to fresh feed when the riders show up.

Riders should arrive early in the morning so they can catch the herd before it gets up to graze. Note the herd's feeding times and get there before the first one of the day. You can also do this before the evening feed if you like.

If the drive to a new grazing area is a long distance away, allow them to drift graze while still heading in the direction you want.

A few days to a week of this and the herd will anticipate the rider moving them on to feed. Cows will know its time to move and will go get their calves. The herd will start coming together and anticipate the move.

If you catch them when they have started feeding, they can be a bit harder to move long distances. In this case, you may want to let them feed for an hour or so before making a long drive. The main idea is to show the herd you are there to show them new feed. You take them there, settle them comfortably and it's a good place. Stock learn real soon it's a good deal.

I often move a herd to fresh feed the night before, say around 7 PM, let them feed there all night, then place them on a new place around 10 AM the next day. They will stay all day on this area very nicely.

Longer moves on hot summer days are best done in early morning.

If you have stock on a riparian area or watering place, make sure you allow them adequate time to drink before driving them up the mountain. Cattle may need time to drink, relax, and then drink again.

If well handled stock leave the herd to drink on their own, they will return to the uplands on their own shortly after watering. Their desire to be with the main herd and that place will drive them back to it.

Pass Creek: A short story about bunch quitters

I went out to an allotment one morning to check grazing results on a creek of particular concern. Six-inch stubble height standards had to be met on this one, and it was nearing the planned move time.

Riders had placed stock on high meadows above the creek, and they were staying there. They had been doing this successfully for two weeks.

This day I came upon about 10 pairs and some yearlings that had just moved in and were starting to graze the creek edges. The creek was grazed enough, and we didn't want it used any more so standards could be met. The whole bunch was scheduled to be moved the next day, but even 10 pair for the rest of the day in that area was undesirable. I knew the riders were elsewhere, and it would be a while before they showed up.

As I came down the mountain, the stock ran off before I got a quarter mile from them. By their behavior, they had quit the bunch because they weren't comfortable in the herd and were looking for another place to be. I decided I would get them handling better for the riders so they would be easy to rejoin with the main herd. I would set them in the uplands so they could be found easily and wouldn't graze the creek any more.

After they took off, I followed them for about a third of a mile, just trailing behind. They were out of sight, but they knew I was still behind them. They stopped in a meadow and stood facing my direction, looking for me. I stopped too late as I came over the rise, so they spooked and took off.

I followed behind again. They slowed and stopped a few minutes later and looked at me. So I stopped and just stood there for a minute. They relaxed a little.

I approached at a flat angle and gradually got closer and closer until a few heads went up high. I stopped and backed off. In a minute or two they relaxed a bit, so I went back and forth in straight lines, edging a few yards closer each pass. On the last pass about 60 yards out, two heads went up, so I stopped and backed off. They relaxed, and I went back and forth the same way again.

Now I was about 30 yards out. One head went up, so I stopped and backed off. When this animal relaxed, I resumed edging closer, walking back and forth. They turned and walked off. I backed off all pressure and let them go.

I went with them after they moved off about 20 yards. They stopped soon and I got within about 15 yards from them. Most faced me. I backed up a few steps, and a few heifers took a step towards me. I went back and forth again, and all but one calf turned and walked away calmly.

The calf turned her head and looked straight back at me. I was too far back or too much behind it for its comfort, so I went out wide to the side and moved up, toward the direction the herd had gone. It followed me with its eyes, straightened her head, saw the herd, and calmly walked off to join them.

I went back and forth behind them to keep the movement going. While driving them, one calf decided it must take a left turn toward the creek, and the rest followed. I just let them all go, all the while asking them to just keep moving.

They were getting relatively relaxed by now, so I asked the calf that was leading the bunch to turn right by moving myself out wider to the left. It didn't turn, so I kept driving them forward. A few minutes later I asked again, and it turned. I drove them on, zigzagging and using direct pressure on any that wanted to slow.

By now, they had to be driven to keep them moving. Feed was looking short everywhere along the valley bottom, so I drove them around to find a spot with enough feed for the day. Everything within walking distance had been well grazed, so I decided to put them someplace that was at least easy for a rider to locate.

As we were headed to where I wanted them, a cow decided to turn right and headed straight back to where I had first picked them up. About half the others followed her. The other half just stayed put and watched.

I went up the sides to slow her, but she just kept marching so I stayed along her side. She eventually slowed, and I immediately moved out wider away. When I did this, she stopped. I waited a minute or two then moved across in front of her and went back and forth in straight lines. She and the others walked off nicely, and I drove them back to the others and on we went.

She took off again, half-heartedly, back towards the creek but this time nobody joined her. I went with her until she returned back to the herd when I asked.

As we came in to where I wanted them to stay, I backed off pressure from my position behind them and let them slow. They kept moving, so I went up the sides and they all stopped. I turned the front animals so they faced different directions. All of them looked very relaxed, so I left. I had placed them directly under a steep cliff with a distinctive tall spire of rock.

I had more monitoring work to do in the area, and two hours later I spotted them from a ridge across the valley. To my enormous satisfaction, they hadn't moved from that spot. I drove on and eventually ran into the rider late that afternoon. I told her I had found stock on the creek that morning and had put them under the spire. She said she would go get them that night.

Later that night an association member who had been on the allotment called me about another matter. "By the way," I asked him, "Did the rider get those stock I located above the creek?" He said he had gone with her to pick them up earlier that night and move them to another area. I asked if they had found them standing under the cliff face, just outside a patch of aspen and below a spire of rock. He said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, they were right there."

A few weeks later I asked the rider if she remembered those cattle. She confirmed they were right below the spire. She thanked me for the help but wanted to know why the heck I picked that spot to place them. I said so she could find them easily. She said, "Yeah, but you put them 10 yards away from a coyote den with pups in it." She couldn't believe the cows hadn't moved from it, especially with calves among them.

I only see cows when I work cows. Still, I didn't believe I was dumb enough to place them on top of a den. But they stayed in spite of that, which just tickled me to death.

What's important to cattle isn't what we might think.

Placing stock

These animals quickly went from real spooky to easy to handle. They stayed put on a spot with little grass and on top of a coyote den for over eight hours. It took about 35 minutes from the time I spotted them to the time I placed them.

I may have put them in a dumb spot, but I didn't do a lot of things wrong with them. It had a tremendous effect on the stock. One of the reasons I was so careful (subconsciously, probably) is because I didn't have a horse so I didn't get in a hurry and nobody was watching me. Time didn't matter.

During the course of handling these animals to stay where I wanted them, I showed that I wasn't aggressive. Nothing I did forced them to do anything. They could go where they felt they should until they wanted to do what I prompted them to do. I made no noise, no fast movement, and worked them with my hands at my side.

At first, I showed them that taking off wasn't profitable by just following them. When they understood this, I showed them all I wanted to do was get closer. I did this by working back and forth in straight lines, edging closer each pass.

By retreating and waiting quietly when they got nervous before they took off, I showed them pressure had a release and they could control it, calmly. Also, they could stand still and get relief from all the pressure. They saw I wasn't going to trap, force them, or be aggressive in any way.

I based what I did on the behavior of the most sensitive animal in the bunch. I helped the one that got nervous move ahead by moving to where it could see me and the herd it wanted to follow.

I showed them they could move calmly and pressure would be released. It became their experience.

I work every herd to experience these things before trying to place them.

The last thing I wanted to show the stock was that I wanted them to slow and stop. When they stopped. I left the area, which was a relief of all pressure to them.

If a herd doesn't stay after you've placed it, you haven't done these things well enough with any or all of them, and/or you may not have taken the movement out of them.

Canyon strategy

If you have long, steep-sided canyons with a riparian area in the bottom, consider grazing from top to bottom. Settle the stock at the higher part first. This makes it easier for stock to come to water and return to the uplands. They can drink and then just move sideways to get to upland feed instead of having to go uphill all the time to get into upland grass.

Train animals before turnout

Avoid the mistake some associations make of turning out big numbers of untrained stock on the range and expecting one or two relatively inexperienced low stress handling riders to make them a herd, keep them a herd, and place them. It won't happen. By the time a few riders get a big herd gathered into one bunch, they can be out of horse or daylight and never get the chance to work the herd as a whole.

Working the herd as a whole is often necessary to get different brands to come together and be one herd in one day. Otherwise the herd can spread out too far overnight, and you will lose many of them.

It's certainly possible to train big herds on the range, but it helps to be experienced at it first.

Achieving herd effect

Herd effect is a marvelous use of stock to create conditions on the range that promote increased productivity and diversity.

Herd effect is created by the placement of hooves without the stock having the choice or time to carefully place them around plants, as they do when grazing or moving comfortably with a herd.

Make sure a herd first stays together, drives and turns real well before doing this.

Move the herd at a walk to the place wanted. Get good movement and keep it. Have a lead herder or two turn the lead animals inward and toward the back of the herd. Have the outside edges follow in. Have the rear and back handlers send these middle animals coming back up the outsides and until the area is covered.

Animals turning this way are unstressed, but they will give you the impact you need. They tromp brush and dead standing matter into the ground and break up crusts as they turn. Stock don't have to be running to get this type of impact. What you want is them turning as a tight mass so they have little choice about where their hooves land.

You can also take a big herd and turn it left or right 180 degrees, like a roll back on a horse. Turn them pretty tight, and they will likely give you the herd effect you desire. The idea is to have them moving close enough to other animals that they can't choose where they place their feet. Keep turning them in circles or loops until the area is affected like you want.

They're back...running a rotational system without fences

I had about 300 acres of rangeland I needed to graze and had made a deal with my neighbor to use some of his herd. It was my intent to rotationally graze my range by placing cattle where I wanted them, have them stay there about three days or until I moved them, then move them to another spot and so on.

Getting them on the right pasture

I rode out to get the cattle and found them bedded in some bottom ground about two miles away. All the feed was gone there and had been for some time, but the owner still hadn't had any luck getting them to graze the uplands. I told him I would try.

I approached the bunch carefully and at an angle to reduce the chance they would run off too quickly. When I got about 60 yards away, some jumped up and looked at me with high heads and bug-eyed looks. I backed away, but they all took off at a trot anyway. I let them get ahead of me for a minute, and they went straight up the foothill of a mountain and through the rocks.

I followed directly behind them (in line with the lead cows) and rode slower than they were going. I kept myself directly behind the lead cow so they didn't think I was chasing them for about a quarter of a mile.

The lead cow and some others started turning their heads in order to see me, which made them slow down. They soon stopped and looked back at me. So I stopped, backed up a step and watched them. When they relaxed a bit, I rode straight lines back and forth, edging closer each pass.

They started off again and ran a bit, so I let them get away a little and then followed directly behind again.

They soon stopped again, so I stopped. But now one or two wanted to break back to where I picked them up. I went back and forth perpendicular to the direction I wanted them to go, and they went on. This time they walked off, so I quit pressuring.

I went back and forth behind them in straight lines to encourage them to keep going. When they slowed too much, I went to riding a zigzag pattern behind them. Whenever they reached the right pace I eased pressure by holding back and just walking back and forth in straight lines.

At one point, the lead cow started to circle back to the right, so I eased out wide to the right and she turned back in. Immediately after she

Making a grazing plan work

turned, I went back to being behind the herd again, zigzagging. After going about a mile and a half they were working much better.

I was now driving them up a fence line which was off to their left, so I was riding a straight line offset about 45 degrees to the fence from about the middle of the herd to a point in back. The fence (in combination with my pressuring them) was pushing them right a little, so I needed to ride this way to offset this affect. If I ran lines straight back and forth behind them, they would veer away from the fence to the right.

When the herd approached the gate to my pasture, I stepped to the left and pressured a little until I caught the left eye of the lead cows. They noticed the gate and me, so they turned left into the open gate. The lead went through okay but about 10 stopped at the gate. So I went up the left side toward the gate and pressured directly into their sides. They went right through.

Once through, they all ran down the mountain. I followed right behind, and they slowed to a walk in a few minutes.

I worked them on a flat at the bottom of the mountain (because that is where they decided to go) for about an hour. By then, they all turned well when I stepped straight out from behind them and wide to the sides, slowed down when I went up the sides toward the front, moved straight ahead when I pressured directly into their sides, and moved at a comfortable walk together as I drove them.

I missed a calf

I decided these stock were handling good enough for the day, so I put them into a corral to show them water. Then I noticed one cow had a bag. I hadn't seen a calf when I picked them up, and she hadn't acted like she had one. She was looking for it now, so I rode back to find it.

I couldn't find the calf in the big thick greasewood patch, so I went back to the corral to get the cow. I decided to let the whole bunch go back instead so the cow wouldn't be alone with her calf and inclined to leave it for too long to be with the rest.

I drove them up the mountain to the gate. I stopped at the gate and let the cow with the missing calf just lead them back. They all lined out after her, and she took them all the way back beyond where I first picked them up. I left the gate open and rode back.

The next day as I was getting ready to go back and get them, my wife said not to bother. The whole bunch was coming back through the gate.

Indeed, they did all come back, except for the cow with the new calf. They had traveled over two miles up the mountain and back into our pasture all by themselves. I rode back and checked on the cow and calf. It was a little weak and dinky to make the trip, so I let them both stay there for a time.

My grazing plan

The range consisted of a 40-acre center piece, a north pasture and a south pasture of about 200 acres each. My original plan was to graze cows on the 40-acre piece for a short time, then turn them back into the south pasture where they first came from. The north pasture had no water; the fences were bad on one side and open to the mountains on the other.

To start them grazing, I moved them out of the corral to graze the center piece and watched to see where they would go. For the first three and a half days those cattle grazed only the areas where I had worked (handled) them on the first day, so I didn't have to place them.

This was behavior I had never seen before. Perhaps it was just coincidence, but it was interesting. This was a small area of the pasture, perhaps seven acres or less, but it was the only area they would graze.

I decided it had been grazed enough on the fourth day, so I placed them on the middle third of the pasture. They all stayed and bedded down right there all day. I got them up that night, because by now I wanted them eating. From then on they used the middle portion for grazing.

They started to drift to the upper part in four or five days, so I settled them on there, and they used it for the rest of the time.

One day, a cow showed signs of being ready to calve. I thought she might want to go up the mountain into a draw, so I sorted her and about five others from the bunch for company and moved them through the upper gate.

They went back into the uplands on the south pasture for a few days. She calved and stayed, but four cows came back on their own back to the center pasture, just like what had happened with the first cow. The one cow with the new calf rejoined the bunch about a week later.

Now I started to believe the first time they came back wasn't an accident. They were just plain comfortable there. It was the handling that did it. The feed or water wasn't any better and there was no shade, but they had come back to the center pasture where they felt comfortable.

Any of the stock could go wherever they wanted at any time. I always left the gates open, and they knew that. Many of the fences were down in places anyway, except on the roadside.

Since these cows were behaving so well, I decided to see if I could graze all three pastures in a rotation. I wanted a high proportion of places grazed at a low to moderate level of use. I decided to do this by placing them only. Water was located in a corral in the middle of a 40-acre pasture.

After they had grazed the pasture like I wanted, I moved them to the north pasture even though water and salt were located in the middle pasture. They all came in to get salt and water and went back to that part of the pasture where I had placed them—and didn't re-graze the old pasture in doing so.

After I had placed them on a part of a pasture, they were reluctant to leave that spot, but with quiet persistence, they would go.

When I settled them on new pasture, they didn't go back to re-graze the old place. On the two occasions that I didn't place them, they went back to re-graze old pasture. In this case, I just let them do what they wanted.

These cows stayed where I placed them throughout the four weeks they were there, except one evening when I was in a hurry to move them to a new place. They also stayed put on small areas of ground, smaller than I had thought they ever would.

Settling them on new places

I introduced the stock to new pasture or part of it by driving them there. I brought them around until we could drift into exactly where I wanted them. When they were spread out enough so I was sure they all had enough feed for the day and night, I went up the sides to slow and stop all movement. I turned them facing different directions, watched them for a minute, and left.

Making a grazing plan work

When placing stock didn't work

One day I moved them to another part of the north pasture and followed this same procedure, except that I only had about half an hour to do it. These were well-handled stock that would really work for me, but it was 95 degrees in the shade and my (wife's) horse was being a jerk. So I got off to settle them afoot, and a rattler nearly got me.

I stopped the herd where I wanted them, but a few wanted to drift. I knew others would soon follow. I kept turning them back in toward the main bunch, somewhat sharply after the first time or two. They would go back toward the others but soon drift back to the original and unwanted direction. I kept trying for another half an hour.

Now I was hungry and late, but I wanted them to stay. I wasn't going to let them screw up my record. I pressured some, pretty sharp now, to turn and go back. When I had them associated together again, I left.

Before I got back to the house, they had drifted from where I left them. They eventually ended up at the far end. I was pretty sore about this and told myself that I was going to get one of my legged up Arabians tomorrow. If they wanted to march, we would—uphill.

The next day I saddled up my Arabian but left myself with lots more time (all day if I needed it). I felt a little stupid, as I knew better than to handle stock with such a short fuse. I hadn't taken the movement out of the stock enough and made them anxious by pressuring too hard and acting mad.

They were in the corral for water that morning, so I brought the bunch from water on the center pasture to the north pasture. They went nicely through the gate into the pasture, but they wanted to go straight to the far end where they had drifted off to yesterday.

I let them go this way a minute or two and asked them to turn uphill and on up the base of the mountain. I drifted them in by switching from zigzagging to going back and forth in straight lines. They slowed.

As we got close, I went up the sides to the front and they all slowed and stopped. They stood quietly without wanting to take another step. After a minute or two, about half started grazing around themselves, taking short steps. The rest just stood there or bedded down. The ones grazing started to slightly drift graze in one direction but didn't attract others to follow. I gently asked them (yesterday I had told them) to turn in and face the others. They did, and I left.

The stock stayed in that exact spot about seven hours. Later that night, they moved about 150 yards around the spot and grazed very slowly back toward the center of it. The whole bunch came in to the center pasture for water, went back out the gate into the north pasture, turned uphill (exactly where I had turned them uphill before), and went back to the original place I had left them. One cow did go straight up the road but came back when she noticed she was alone.

They were on that spot for the next two days. They went back and forth to water once or twice each day, but returned to the spot I had placed them.

After grazing the lower and middle parts of the north range well, the stock started to drift up the mountain, so I let them. When it was all grazed properly, I moved them to the south pasture to finish the rotation.

It all went well. They stayed in the uplands and off the bottomland. The only time it didn't work was when I had a bad attitude and once when wolves chased them.

The cow that waited

I was in a neighbor's corral with some cows when feed had just been put out. I noticed one cow was having trouble, because she had porcupine quills in her muzzle. My neighbor said he would get her into the chute when he got around to it later. I offered to pull the quills out, and he said okay. I worked her away from the feed and other cows and set her by the gate, parallel to it.

Then someone came up with questions about a horse for sale, so I talked to him for a few minutes. When he left my wife noticed some cows were out of the field. It took me about 30 minutes to collect them and fix the fence.

I walked back into the corral, and the cow with the quills was still standing in the same spot. She hadn't even moved her feet during the time I'd been gone.

This has happened many times for shorter periods. I think most would stay put a long time.

I wish my horses would ground tie like that. Maybe they will when I get smarter.

Stampede

One time I was helping a crew of riders that included some who were handling the herd pretty well and a few that weren't. We had moved 1,200 pairs through the mountains 9 miles to new range and had them at a place in a canyon that necked down.

A rider who had been aggravating some stalled cattle up front came back to us on a dead run. He said to get ready, they were all coming back. Before he finished telling us what we should do about it, 1,200 pair came straight at us.

All 12 of us galloped ahead of them, and they slowed and stopped. We formed a line ahead of them, but they were ready to bolt and go back to

where we first got them. The boss warned us to just let them settle there for about 10 minutes and ordered that nobody sneeze.

After they settled enough, he asked for volunteers to head them back up the road. No takers, including me, as I was still more than a little sore at having to fix what the rider had caused. So the boss worked them for about five minutes with no success. Then he asked me to try.

The stock were facing us, but a few on the sides were facing in the direction we wanted. I pressured a few of them, which drew the attention of others to look at us. Then I used more direct pressure into the sides of some that were just standing in line to go. Within 3 or 4 minutes, 1,200 pairs were going back up the road.

These cattle didn't stay where we put them. In fact, about half returned the nine miles to where we first got them. The one rider who had to take his stress out on the cattle caused the stampede, but this herd needed better handling.

Taking stress off stock

Weaning calves and post-weaning handling

A method Bud Williams has developed for sorting and weaning reduces the stress of sorting cows from calves and also helps reduce or eliminate weaner slump and sickness.

When cows and calves are sorted well, they can be put on feed or forage promptly and will be calm and quiet—no fences wrecked or bawling all night. If calves have been stressed during the weaning process, they can be calmed right down. You can avoid the loss of weight and sickness, because they can be put on feed and water and continue gaining weight without a major interruption.

Making a grazing plan work

Although compensatory gain certainly makes up for some of the traditional weight loss during the post weaning period, I believe you still end up setting the calves back longer term, especially if they get sick.

Range calves still need to be “pre-conditioned” if you are selling weaned calves to a buyer that will feedlot them. Handling them right helps them get comfortable with new facilities, feeding from a bunk and watering trough, and being in alleys and chutes.

There are many ways to set up sorting cows from calves, but I prefer to have all the pairs in a corral or small field. It’s also possible to sort on the range using a fence line, portable corrals, or a number of handlers holding the herd.

When sorting pairs in most herds, I like to sort the cows forward and turn the calves back. The reason—the cows usually move ahead first and the calves follow behind, making it easier to allow the cow out and then slow and turn the calf back. But you can do it either way you like. Check the herd and see which is easier.

If calves can’t take as much pressure as the cows, or the cows are real nervous about going through a gate, it may be easier to sort calves out and cows back.

Prior to sorting, it’s assumed you have trained the stock to give to pressure from the sides, and they are all comfortable going by you. If they aren’t, take the time to train them to do these things well.

Practice lessons on slowing and speeding up until every time you go with movement the stock slows. And when you go by them, they speed up. Look for a real relaxed attitude while and after they slow and stop and speed up. Practice allowing the stock to come right close by you standing at the gate as they come out of another pen.

I fill a pen and let the whole herd come out and go by. Let all of them go out, then put them all back in. Do this until they come by you in a very relaxed way.

My objective with sorting and weaning is that at the end of it all, the cows will be quiet, unconcerned, and feeding immediately.

I want all the calves to accept their new location, become part of the new calf herd, and be relatively unconcerned about being separated from their mothers.

I want to be able to keep cows on one side of the fence and calves on the other without any damage, no matter how light the fence.

I want to be able to move cows off to a new pasture with little fuss.

I want good control over the calf herd so they stay together, move as a herd, and respond well to my pressure. That way I can put them right on feed and water, because I have enough control to let them go up to the feed bunks and water facilities.

An example

The first group of just 350 calves I worked this way stopped bawling completely within 50 minutes of handling and handled nicely.

When I arrived at the corral, the calves had just been weaned on the range and shipped to the corral. Dry cows had been left on the range. This fit nicely with our range plan, as drys stay up high better and off the creeks because they need so much less water.

Most of the calves were standing around bawling. None of them were on feed or water.

I worked them around the corral by asking them to respond to pressure into their sides. I also worked them to drive as a group and turn, slow, and stop once they were good at going by me.

Then I started bunches up to the feed bunks and water and pressured any that wanted to hang back. I left when they had all moved.

The calves were weaned on the range with moderate stress and were loaded onto the trailers high stress. I had to work them in 3 separate groups because of the corral setup, but actually it took only about 17 minutes per 115 calves to achieve this quiet.

Some calves are more stressed than others so need to be handled for a longer time. Few things we do are more worthwhile for stressed calves at weaning time than this. So spend the time you need to, even if it takes all day. It can be worthwhile economically.

These calves were at an average weight of about 500 pounds and would have lost about 5 percent in shrink (about 25 pounds each) between the time of initial stressful handling and settling on their own. This is a loss of about 8,750 pounds for the entire bunch.

With compensatory gain, they probably would have gained back about 80 percent of that or more within about 50 days. But the calves were shipped off within 30 days of weaning. So, I figure the rancher saved about 4,000 pounds of beef loss just by my spending a little time de-stressing them. At a price of 91 cents per pounds (at the time), this was a possible net savings of \$3,640.

A three-day Bud Williams Stockmanship School costs a lot less than that, and you learn how to take off stress in your animals, yourself, and much more. Worth the trouble to reduce weaning stress? I believe just the quiet at nighttime is worth the trouble.

The replacement concept

One of the great things about good livestock handling is that you can actually take stress off previously stressed stock. The idea is called the replacement concept.

Horse trainers use this idea to correct some types of unwanted behavior like shying. The idea is to replace something a horse is doing that you don't want (like shying) with something that you do want (like moving ahead).

The premise is that no horse or cow can think about more than one thing at a time. They are single minded, and get stuck in one thought mode or another.

Replacing unwanted behavior gives us a chance to get a horse good at something we want it to do and stop what we don't. Cattle handling can be thought of in a similar way.

Just letting the calves settle can take three to four days, which usually results in weight loss and some sickness. Trying to force calves to stop milling around the corral doesn't help much and often makes the problem worse.

The way to take stress off calves is to ask them to do something else, which will take their minds off weaning. As you give them your attention and consistency in pressure and release, you'll see a change in their mindset that corrects the problem behavior.

Cattle can't concentrate on you (good handling) **and** dwell upon their past stressful events. Proper handling results in stock focusing on you and realizing it's okay and comfortable. It is very easy to take the stress off them and takes very little time and effort.

If the stock are stressed, don't leave them this way. Work then right so they become calm.

