

Preface

This is a book about a remarkable method of handling cattle on the range, written for the benefit of the range rider.

It doesn't explain a new method. It's about one that may be quite old but was developed and perfected in modern times by Bud Williams. Bud teaches a remarkable method that he calls low stress livestock handling.

Low stress handling has implications for livestock health that is perhaps more powerful than the advent of modern veterinary medicine. It reduces stress, which can promote sickness and poor productivity in livestock. It also produces astounding control—control that is far beyond what most ranchers believe cattle herds will do.

On the range, we can set it up so cattle want to do what we want, with amazing results:

- * Even large herds become easy to drive and stay mothered up the whole way, down hills, through gates, into new pastures.
- * Herds of cattle will stay where you put them for days. They will leave the herd in the uplands, go to drink at the creek, and return promptly to the uplands and the herd.
- * Calves can be weaned in an open field, placed in a pen or pasture, and be on feed and water in very little time—less bawling, loss of weight, or sickness after.
- * The herd instinct can be rapidly rekindled, so where you find one cow, you'll find them all.
- * Well handled, whole herds become calm, eliminating bunch quitters, fence jumpers, riparian loafers, and cattle that want to leave the range early.

This has been my experience. It doesn't take a lot of skill to do it fairly well, just some knowledge and dedication.

The traits of cattle, Bud Williams' techniques and tips on handling cattle on the range are contained in this book. I've included information in this book on how cattle learn, their essential handling traits, the basic techniques, and some range handling tips. These are the foundation of good stockmanship, no matter what type of livestock operation you run. They reveal the key to outstanding control, flexibility, and success using the powerful tool of grazing.

I have taken the liberty of applying horsemanship principles to handling cattle. Although working cattle and training horses are certainly different, the principles about how they learn and basically react to human handling are not. I've also been very fortunate to have learned and experienced some key principles from a master horseman about how horses think and learn. I believe these principles are the basis for changing all livestock from wild to calm. They provide the foundation for using all the techniques and solving handling difficulties.

I found these principles not only helpful, but necessary, when I was green to this and the idea of handling cattle like Bud teaches. In fact, working cattle to do anything well was a foreign idea. In those times, I fell back on some principles of horsemanship. It helped me, as it has a number of riders since.

This remarkable method of handling cattle is the best and perhaps only practical solution to solving one of the most pressing and difficult range management problems in the West: Protecting and enhancing riparian and other critical areas.

Controlling the time range and riparian vegetation are exposed to grazing is the crucial element to avoid overgrazing. Time can readily be controlled using Bud's method, because cattle will want to be in a herd, can be moved readily, and placed so they stay in uplands or wherever desired.

About seven years ago, range conservationists Lloyd Bradshaw of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Chance Gowan with the Forest Service, myself and other team members decided to combine holistic management and planned grazing with this method of handling cattle to solve pressing riparian concerns on an allotment.

On this allotment, in fact on most allotments, riders didn't have good enough control to meet riparian range standards consistently. No amount of riding using traditional methods produced the control needed. Riders wore out horses, ran weight off cattle, lost cattle and even killed a few. They got a lot of sick ones and lost an average of 40 head per season to larkspur poisoning. It took many riders 30 days of hard riding just to gather and bring them off the allotment. Ranchers in grazing associations inevitably faced administrative action by managing agencies after the grazing season was over. Ranchers with larger private grazing lands face similar difficulty in achieving the control needed to successfully implement planned grazing.

After years of effort and some remarkable successes, we have come to the conclusion that this method of stockmanship is probably the most powerful range management tool ever developed. Each year, every allotment and private range we visit only strengthens this conclusion.

Conservationists from the Forest Service, Center for Holistic Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Society for Range Management, the National Riparian Service Team, grazing associations, and many others concluded long ago that high control over cattle is essential in protecting and enhancing critical range resources.

I have three reasons for writing this book. The first is that this extraordinary livestock handling method has never been documented in writing in any detail. It is important to record at least some of the facts and details about Bud's method so the information won't be lost and forgotten, as has already happened at least once in history.

The second reason is to produce a valuable reference and a guide for those who already have some training in stockmanship. There is much to remember from a Bud Williams school and few people who can help guide you afterward. This book, in fact, started out as documentation of the important points of what I had learned from his schools, through private visits, and questions over the phone.

The third and last reason is to help others gain confidence and success rapidly by including handling experiences from the viewpoint of a beginner. I want to do whatever I can to help this method become **the way** cattle and all livestock are handled in the near future.

Times are especially hard for the entire livestock industry, but especially so for ranchers using public lands in the West. Many more good riders are needed to help ranchers protect and enhance the range to the level they desire. Stockmanship knowledge is essential for ranchers to achieve success and some measure of prosperity.

Successful prospering ranches and healthy grazing lands are important to our Nation. But desertification, the opposite of healthy range, is occurring on a large scale on the seasonal rainfall areas of the United States. Indeed, it is a worldwide menace that has thwarted scientists and consumed enormous amounts of time and money.

Today it is understood that well managed and well handled herds of grazing animals play an essential role in preventing and reversing desertification. In the past, we haven't had the knowledge to control our animals without stringing up fences all over our public lands and larger tracts of private grazing lands. Fences do nothing to improve livestock health and productivity.

I've been around animals long enough to realize that the value of a method has a direct correlation to its true origin. Bud's method comes right from the animals, portraying how they need to be handled in order for us to get them to do things calmly and effectively, with minimal stress on them, us, and our horses. That's why it works on all cattle with normal brains.

Unfortunately, it doesn't mesh so well with the way the modern cowboy brain works, because it isn't how most of us want to work cattle. This is the only hard part to doing it—giving up how we want to do it and doing it the way the cattle need to have it done. But it is well worth the trouble to learn.

This book isn't a treatise on the depth of knowledge or experience of Bud Williams or his expertise. It includes a few of my experiences with the method and the way I think about it. It has worked delightfully well for me on the range—well beyond all claims. It became indispensable to me from early on. Please don't interpret any of it as the way Bud would necessarily do it, describe it, or teach about it.

Animal behaviorists, animal science students, feedlot operators, veterinarians and dairy farmers depend on good handling for optimum livestock health and productivity. For the range rider and ranch manager, optimum land health depends on sound resource planning and a high level of stockmanship.

So, study this book. Learn from it, and believe it. Then go out with some confidence and use it. Don't return to old habits. Traditional methods of handling create highly stressed cattle and a lack of control. Where the method fails is when you don't do it. Listen closely—the low stress livestock handling method works well on *every* animal, no exceptions.

