

## chapter three

# Benefits of stockmanship

**g**ood livestock handling is an indispensable tool, and with it comes some amazing benefits. Stock handled right will really work for you, and you'll get a lot of satisfaction from the quality of work you've done.

### The benefits

- Prevent livestock from leaving the range and going home before you want them to. This will help you take advantage of a full season of grazing without a battle.
- Stock will stay together as a herd and stay where you put them.
- The proportion of upland forage grazed versus riparian areas grazed can be reversed from the typical grubbing out of creek bottoms and over-rest of uplands.
- Drive cattle herds easily. They will line out, stay together, and react solely to direction from the rider.
- Stock will readily go uphill or downhill, across creeks and bridges, be driven and placed in what used to be "impossible" places.
- You can sort out sale animals or sick animals from a herd and load them easily without stressing them or other stock.
- Reduce fencing chores and expense, as stock can be kept together, placed, and moved in larger pasture or range rotation systems without fences.
- Avoid spending time and money on tubs, fancy corrals, and hot shot batteries. Fancy and expensive systems that really only cater to our bad handling habits won't be needed to get the job done right.
- De-stress stock that someone else buzzed up. Take the stress off animals in far less time than it would take by just leaving them alone. This eliminates the time they go off feed, weight loss, and potential sickness.
- Wean calves easily on the range without building fancy corrals (or any corrals). This allows you to run dry cows only, easing use on the creeks during critical periods and facilitating use of high elevation forages.
- Graze key places to reduce fire hazards.

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- Achieve higher conception rates if you breed on the range because the bulls will be with the herd, not brushed up during the heat and fly season.
- Decrease fly problems. You can stay ahead of the fly hatches in manure by moving the whole herd ahead of the hatch.
- High-strung and low-condition stock will gain better and get healthier.
- Increased gains on weaned calves because you can get them on feed and water soon after weaning. Mother cows will stay calm during and after weaning so you can wean across a fence without fence damage.
- Decrease diseases like pink eye, pneumonia, scours, and even dystocia. Overall herd health can improve dramatically.
- Get along better with your wife or husband when working stock (this was no small deal at my place).

The future of public lands grazing in the West very likely depends on ranchers adopting a more management-intensive approach with positive results, doing it profitably, and doing it soon.

### **The risk—breaking old habits**

People have a host of reasons for not committing to stockmanship.

Many ranchers have a tendency to hang on to traditions and practices. The way they handle livestock is perhaps the hardest to change.

Some don't believe the control that can be achieved and just dismiss it.

Some believe it, but say they can't do it.

Some say it's too much to learn and too much trouble, so decide they don't need it.

True stockmanship is very different from traditional livestock handling, so it's an affront to some people, almost like saying that most of the things you've been doing with your stock all your life have been wrong. This can be hard to accept.

Perhaps the most common obstacle is that you realize stockmanship means you won't get to handle the stock like you want. You'll have to fight some old habits and really pay attention to what animals require.

Still, I believe that almost any one who really wants to—and spends the time—can do it well. Wanting to is extremely necessary, because you have to persist at working with yourself to change.

No matter how long you've been around livestock or what you think about handling strategies or facilities, I can tell you that **we are the cause** of livestock handling problems. The problems are caused by not understanding how cattle need to be handled and/or how much handling can stress cattle and what it costs.

Cattle are easy to control. Your beliefs and attitude are the only real obstacle to doing it well.

The basic handling techniques aren't hard to do. The traits of cattle and handling principles aren't hard to remember.

It's hard for some people to see how sensitive stock are to how they are handled. Accommodating their sensitivity in every facet of handling is a challenge in the beginning because the inclination is to think you're letting them get the upper hand—spoiling them, perhaps.

For all these reasons, many people stop learning and trying, even though the benefits are almost endless and the drawbacks few.

Recognizing and using what is familiar about cattle for you already will be helpful.

Many of you have seen cattle return to the exact spot on the riparian area where they were just removed.

You've seen that going up the sides of a herd slows them—and that going down the sides speeds them up.

Pay attention to what happens when your partner rides right up the sides of a herd. Watch when he pressures stock from directly behind or head on, or when he shoves stock.

Watch what happens when riders get out of line behind the herd and where the herd turns. This will help you become more sure that what you do determines what the stock do.

The essence of low stress handling is the experience of being the absolute master of a herd and knowing how readily they will turn over control to you. Once felt, the old way will lose its appeal.

