

MANAGEMENT NOTES

AN OREGON RANGE SHEEP STORY

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Big, rangy cross-bred ewes. Suffolk bucks. Mutton-type lambs. This month's cover photo shows animals typical of Oregon's range-sheep operations.

Sheep have a bad reputation generally for being the cause of range destruction in eastern Oregon and other portions of the West. Certainly, much devastation was caused by the multitudes of sheep that criss-crossed back and forth enroute from one seasonal range to another. Common sense however, forces acknowledgement of the hordes of cattle and horses that shared the range for forage year after year. The cumulative impact of excessive livestock numbers of all kinds was particularly destructive in the vicinity of winter headquarters and other areas of concentration.

Not all sheep outfits are characterized by depleted range. Range will recover under sheep use. The Hinton & Ward sheep ranch in Wasco



country, Oregon is a prime example.

The photo depicts this ranch's private rangeland, most of which rates in Good and Excellent condition class. Bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) and Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) are the major plants of the range sites. This range has been used for spring and fall grazing by sheep for 26 years to the personal knowledge of the photographer and probably has been grazed by sheep for more than seventy years. Note the excellent understory of Sandberg bluegrass, the primary forage plant for sheep

on this kind of range. The soil is Shaniko silt loam which consists of 24 to 30 inches of loess over Columbia River basalt under an annual precipitation of about 14 inches.

The area of the photo is about five miles west from the little town of Shaniko. In the spring of 1901, the Columbia Southern Railroad reached Shaniko from the Dalles, Oregon and as a result, Shaniko exploded with activity and business. Thousands of cattle and sheep were trailed long distances from the John Day and High Desert areas to this interior shipping point. Shaniko for a time was the largest interior shipping point for wool in the United States. Grazing pressures in the neighborhood of such a concentration surely must have been severe. The history of Shaniko indicates that the Hinton-Ward range probably was grazed heavily during those days. Fenced, and grazed judiciously, this range now represents an expansive area of what the country probably looked like originally.

Obviously, it is the kind of management rather than the class of grazing animal that accounts for range deterioration or improvement in the bunchgrass country of Oregon.