

# Journal of RANGE MANAGEMENT

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## Editorial

### The Range Rules

**M**ANY a romantic story has been spun about the men who ruled the Western range in its heyday. Well paid pens still thrill new readers—and a lot of us old ones, too—with tales of the days when men were tall in the saddle and unspoiled grass swept the stirrups as they rode! Empires of grass were marked out, fought over, and ruled by men who left their mark in the history of the West and whose legends live on in many a famous brand.

These earlier, territorial conflicts settled, the men who build and hold range empires today are those who have recognized the natural limitations of their ranges and have adapted their uses accordingly. Or, we might say, *it is the range that rules*, and he who would prosper must fit himself to its requirements.

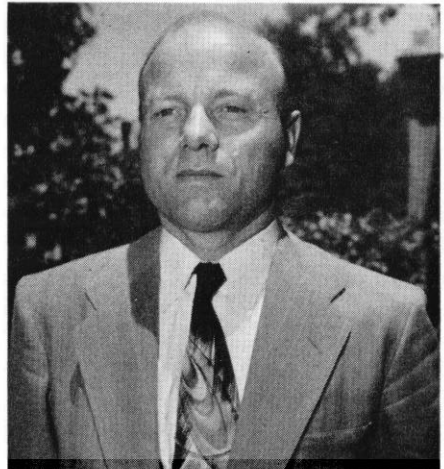
This is not a new thought. It has been expounded with increasing frequency over the last generation. It is fully accepted in thoughtful range circles today. Then why mention it?

The idea is worth our attention here because, notwithstanding the general recognition just mentioned, there remains a widespread unawareness of one of its most important implications. If, indeed, the range rules, then there lies ahead of the range brotherhood a major task as yet only touched here and there—the task of fitting livestock, and refitting

livestock operations, to the range. The too frequently held idea that this task is essentially completed will not bear close scrutiny.

There is a current emphasis upon fitting range to the existing livestock. Vast sums are being spent on reseeded, introducing forage plants more resistant to destruction by usual grazing usage, developing water at most effective intervals, etc. This effort by no means should be abated. But its limits should be recognized and courses of action established to provide for the blank spots which it does not and cannot reach.

Throughout the arid sections of the United States range area today, and extending into Mexico and Canada, are



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millions of acres adjacent to available waters being overgrazed in the effort to secure maximum area utilization from each water. Adjoining them are other millions of acres underused because they lie beyond the normal travel radius of the livestock concerned. This maladjustment has been and is being systematically reduced by the range restoration and development practices mentioned above. But only so many waters can be developed no matter how intensive the effort. Only a minor fraction of the arid range acreage is susceptible to effective reseeding by methods now known. After all has been done that may be done by these means, there will remain a major balance of the total problem area yet untouched. And even successfully restored areas must be expected again to decline unless the causes which produced the original decline are removed.

Major shifts in livestock production over the last thirty years have intensified the problem. Range horses of an earlier generation made good use of various areas little used today. Similarly, the larger sheep populations of past years utilized major grazing resources only partially reached by the cattle which have replaced them.

What is the answer to this problem? Plainly it is not fully contained in the livestock breed improvement work now going on, well conceived and executed though this work is. For by and large this work is directed toward developing animals fitted to the more general needs of efficient production. To produce more pounds of meat or wool from the same feed does not solve the problem of more complete and balanced utilization of the available range resource.

This is a problem of many parts. Experienced stockmen, especially those whose memories include the operation of wether sheep or mature steers in con-

trast to the ewe-and-lamb, cow-and-calf operations which dominate so much of the range today, will quickly recognize the advantages in range utilization which these earlier modes of range operation provided. Many outlying reaches of range lying fallow today were well used by the wethers and steers of former years. Again, the longer legs that have been so purposefully bred off our range animals in recent decades were not without virtue in carrying those animals more readily to the less easily accessible areas of the range.

But let us waste no nostalgic tears on these changes. They were practical changes, dictated by the needs of the time. The point is, we face a new need for practical change. Today's needs may require some retracing of the way we have come. If so, so be it. Or they may lead in other directions. Perhaps today's need for cattle that will travel farther, and more readily, from water than our present dominant range strains can be met within the limits of existing breeds. Certainly this need should be met without undue sacrifice of the progress in carcass desirability and efficiency of gains achieved by animal breeders to date. But in any case the practical need should, indeed must, rule.

And while the breeder busies himself with this part of the problem, let the range economist apply the tools of his trade to the mass of range plant data now available. Let him come up with some usable determinations on the relative economy of various grazing operations on various ranges, based on the sustained-yield productivity of those ranges under the various alternative uses, including realistic consideration of the costs of rebuilding damaged ranges.

Admittedly there are other factors than those of animal-plant relationships to be considered. A man must produce

what he can sell. Available labor skills may tip the scales one way or the other. Governmental price and production policies may be important.

The basic point, however, remains: There is a limit to how far these other factors can be accommodated without serious loss in range utilization and/or serious impairment of the producing capacity of ranges.

The challenge to the range fraternity is three-fold: To determine the above

limit; to produce range animals with grazing habits suited as closely as possible to range needs; to produce practical guides for choosing between various classes of livestock and operating plans, in keeping with a long term range economy.

There is work here for all.—*Kenneth B. Platt*, Land Management Specialist, T.C.A., Cairo, Egypt; formerly U. S. Bureau of Land Management, Washington, D. C.



#### A CHECK LIST FOR RESEARCHERS

1. An insatiable hunger for clear understanding.
2. An incessant curiosity about things not understood.
3. The gift for patient, close observation.
4. An unfettered imagination.
5. Initiative and an impelling urge to exercise it.
6. Devotion to orderly procedures.
7. Objective interest in results.
8. Integrity in the interpretation of results.
9. Clarity in reporting results.
10. Basic Training conducive to proficiency.
11. Tolerance of conflicting viewpoints.
12. Willingness to cooperate with others.

—*Dr. P. V. Cardon.*