

Range Riding—The Key to Range Management

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“Range riding takes a lot of watching, waiting, and understanding,” according to Stanley “Bun” Anderson, rider for the Starkey Cattle Association. “Bun” rides a national forest range in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon. A former top hand in rodeo circles, he now concentrates his efforts on getting uniform use of the range forage on a 27,000-acre ponderosa pine summer range.

Although Anderson has ridden the Starkey range only two years, he has demonstrated that he is as good on the range as he was in the arena.

The Starkey Experimental Forest and Range is typical of many summer ranges in the Northwest. Some parts are rough with deep canyons, steep slopes and timbered ridges without water. Other parts are open grassland flats, small meadows, and “jungled-up” lodgepole pine thickets. Since 1940 this range has been used as a demonstration area for well-known grazing management practices. Improvement in range condition and research results show that range riding is the key to good range management.

Water has been developed on this allotment so that cattle seldom have to go farther than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to water. This is a great help to “Bun’s” job of getting even forage use, but good cattle distribution is still difficult because of the topography and intermingled grassland and forested range.

Proper Salting Is Important

Salting of the range is an ever-present challenge to “Bun.” He finds that proper placing of salt in relation to water and good feed is the most economical way to get

uniform forage use. The basis for his plan is simple. Salt is placed in timbered areas where grazing is desired and is progressively moved to unused areas as the season continues. When an area is used properly, salt is moved to an un-

In this article Jon Skovlin tells how good range management is being accomplished on the Starkey Experimental Range in eastern Oregon, largely by means of range riding. The activities, observations, and philosophy of range rider “Bun” Anderson, as related in this article, illustrate the vital importance to successful operation of the man on the ground who knows his livestock and his range.

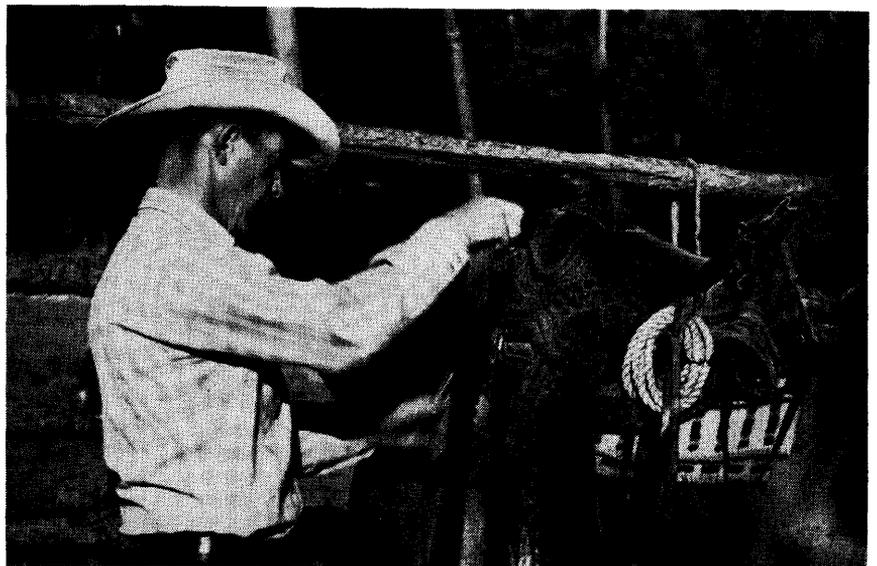
used part of the range. Ray Strack, a former range rider at Starkey, developed a simple tip to make this job easier on ranges where block salt is used. A salt ground is simply a spike driven into a

stump or down log, and the hole in the block is placed over the spike. These can be easily established or moved.

Anderson finds that cattle have to be trained. He takes small bunches to newly established salt grounds, holds them there and several days later repeats the operation. Some of these cows pick up other cattle when going to water, for example, and lead them to the lick and establish the pattern of use for the area. On isolated portions of the range, long pack trips with salt are necessary. Anderson judges the amount of salt needed by the grazing use during the past year. He places enough salt to go with the amount of feed available. In 1956, he used approximately 90 salt grounds on the range, or 1 to every 300 acres.

Water Is Like Money in the Bank

“A good range rider,” Anderson says, “is always on the lookout for possible water developments. Finding water in an unused piece of range is as good as money in the bank.” In this respect, “Bun” could be a rich man. In 1956, he found over a dozen sites which warranted development on a range which already had approximately 60 developed springs and ponds. He looked for plants which indi-



Anderson saddling up for the day’s ride. The rider, through his knowledge of cows and grass, is the key man in range management.

cate underground water for pond development, as well as for reservoir sites to catch run-off water.

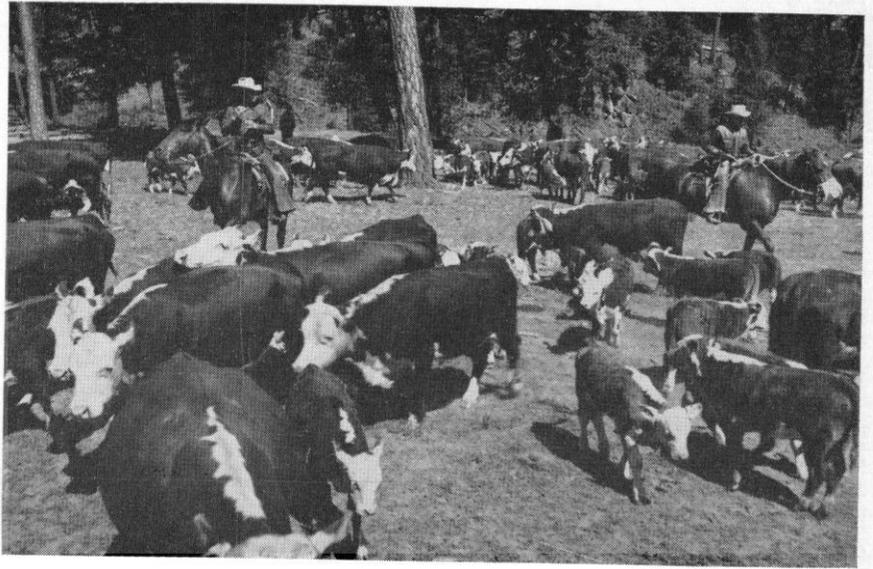
Many of the ponds at Starkey furnish only temporary water. They dry up about midseason. Anderson keeps these areas well salted during the early grazing season. Likewise, he keeps cattle away from areas where water holds up late in the grazing season.

A frequent question put to Anderson by ranchers and forest officers visiting Starkey is, "How much range can a rider cover in this kind of country?" "Bun" says this depends on a lot of things, such as topography and rate of stocking, but on a one-unit season-long range 20,000 acres is plenty. On ranges which are subdivided for rest-rotation grazing 30,000 acres can be managed. This is for the Blue Mountain conditions, where about 25 percent of the range is not considered usable for livestock. The rate of stocking for this kind of range varies from five to eight acres per head per month.

Ranges which are cross-fenced for rest-rotation grazing are good from the standpoint of riding. Then the work is confined to only half the range at any one time. This cuts down on time actually spent riding to any point. It also reduces the amount of fence the rider must inspect for proper maintenance, and the rider keeps a better check on all the cattle when they are in only half of the range at once.

"Bun" Uses Cow Psychology

One of Anderson's biggest jobs is moving cattle to keep them well distributed. When they first come on the range they should be left alone for several days. "Bun" says cattle like to investigate new surroundings before they settle down. He doesn't move these groups to new salt grounds or areas having only early water until he is satisfied the cattle are acquainted with the area, or until all the cows and calves are matched and the small bunches have regrouped. Anderson knows that cattle, like people,



Rider Anderson, *left*, and Ray Strack, former rider for the Starkey. These cows and calves are being paired up for use in a grazing experiment.

run in their own "family units." When he does any moving, he recognizes these groups and keeps them together.

As the season advances, "Bun" looks for areas of feed which are nearing proper use. When these appear, he removes the remaining salt. After a few days he rides through the area, picks up any lingering cattle, and moves them to lightly grazed areas.

During the midgrazing period, he may notice that a corner of the range is not receiving use. He immediately locates a new salt ground in this area. Then he gathers 30 to 40 head of cattle from one of the creek bottoms, or from a well-used meadow, and moves them into the new area, leaving them near the salt. To find the cattle for these moves or at gathering time, he takes advantage of their daily feeding habits. He rides the grassland openings in early morning and late afternoon and looks for them at watering places shortly after midday.

Near the close of the grazing season for this particular range, he picks up the salt from the far salt grounds and lets the cattle drift toward the gathering pasture. At Starkey, a rest-rotation system of grazing is used, and Anderson col-

lects the salt from the used unit and places it in the unused unit before any gathering begins. The actual gathering takes one to three weeks, depending on available help.

Range riding on the Starkey is complicated by the mountainous topography, different kinds of forage on grassland and forested range, and the grazing habits of cattle. "Bun" encountered these problems in attempting to get cattle to use a 1,500-acre area of previously unused forage. He began by salting the area and selecting the best route to trail the cattle. About 200 head of cattle were gathered and moved up a ridge into the grazing area, with the help of his dogs. This operation was repeated several times. Each time access into the area was improved by the trailing cattle and by swamping and removing windfalls. Because of Anderson's efforts, salt and forage use was doubled on this piece of range over the previous year.

While training the cattle to use this area, Anderson observed that some animals remained and others left almost immediately. Generally, the better rustlers were animals from ranches where cattle are fed on the range and are accustomed to rugged topography. Cattle win-

tered in lots or small pastures usually returned to the flats where the topography was less rugged. By observing habits like these, the rider can work the rustlers and the homesick cows into the kind of country they prefer to graze.

The amount of grassland and timber feed used by cattle depends a lot on weather and growing conditions each year. When rains occur during the summer, cattle usually prefer grasslands and graze them heavily. During dry summers cattle seek the lush timber feed. Anderson's understanding of forage conditions and the habits of cattle enables him to equalize the grazing pressure on these different types of range, regardless of weather conditions.

Equipment for the Range Rider

The effectiveness of a range rider is largely dependent upon his equipment. Anderson needs at least six horses to cover the 27,000 acres on the Starkey range.

He prefers a horse somewhat larger and more rangy than the popular all-purpose stock horse. Prime requirements for his horses are sound feet and power to last through a 10- to 12-hour day. Each horse in his string has a particular job. He wants at least three stout, all-day horses that can get out and travel for salting the far end of the range, and for long moves of cattle. He also needs a well-quartered, quick-cutting horse for close-in work on gathered cattle. In addition, he usually has a green colt which he is breaking. To complete



Anderson and two of his dogs, Jake and Molly. Well-trained dogs like these are indispensable for moving and gathering cattle on timbered or brushy ranges.

the string of horses, there are one or two common-type horses for packing salt and fence materials.

Equally important for the rider are his dogs. They are especially useful in timbered or brushy ranges. The rider regularly works alone and his dogs work for him by finding and gathering cattle. While moving stock, dogs excel in returning cattle that like to quit the bunch. A young dog of "Bun's" is particularly good at tracking lost bulls. He commonly rotates his dogs between days of work and days of rest.

Most cow dogs are natural "heelers," but the dog that can be taught

to head and turn a cow is invaluable. Some dogs are even taught to hold cattle. For example, when a bunch of wild cattle is jumped in the timber, the dogs will stop and hold them until the rider can get there and take over. As any cowman knows, there is nothing like a dog's bark to get a cow to find her calf. But dogging cattle can be easily overdone, and this is hard on both the dogs and the cattle.

Anderson says many outfits are selling themselves short by not getting use of all their range. Good distribution is a man's job. It requires the full-time services of a capable rider. The Starkey Cattle Association assessed themselves \$1.52 per head for this job of range management last year.

A range rider should have an understanding of how grass grows and should be able to recognize proper use. A rider must be alert to improve on methods of riding and to foresee the benefits to both grass and cattle. Changes in methods should be entered in his diary or the management plan, so that future riders and the range will profit. The art and practice of range riding requires patience, understanding, and knowledge of grass and cattle. The range rider of Charlie Russell's day is the grass-roots range manager today.

It has often been said that rangelands are all occupied and there are no new places in which to graze or expand a cattle operation. "Bun" Anderson doesn't agree with this. He says, "Take a new look at your old range. There are new areas in which to graze."

Transfer of 1.9 Million Acres of LU Lands Proposed in Montana

Administrative transfer of 1,953,853 acres of acquired lands in Montana from the U. S. Department of Agriculture to the U. S. Department of the Interior has been proposed to eliminate duplication and simplify conservation and land improvement programs. The transfer would be accomplished by order of the President under Title III, Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act.

The lands recommended for transfer comprise Land Utilization Projects in 10 eastern Montana counties. The bulk of the lands transferred would be administered by the BLM, but about 13,000 acres have primarily wildlife value and the Fish and Wildlife Service would administer these lands separately or jointly with BLM.

The Bureau will endeavor to main-

tain the present policies and procedures wherever possible in administering the lands it takes over. Permittees now using the land would have first preference for continued use. Grazing fees would remain the same, the counties continuing to receive their 25 percent shares. The Bureau will not have authority to dispose of LU lands except by exchange.