Fence It Cheaper and Easier with— The Suspension Fence

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Ever since the day that "Bet-A-Million" Gates corraled a herd of longhorns in a barb wire pen in the middle of Alamo Plaza in San Antonio, the barb wire fence has been a part of the ranching business. Up until fairly recently however, it has not been a tool for range management, rather it has been a tool strictly for cattle control. Now, with a better understanding of the value of rotation grazing and deferment among ranchers, the barb wire fence is truly coming into its own as an instrument of range management.

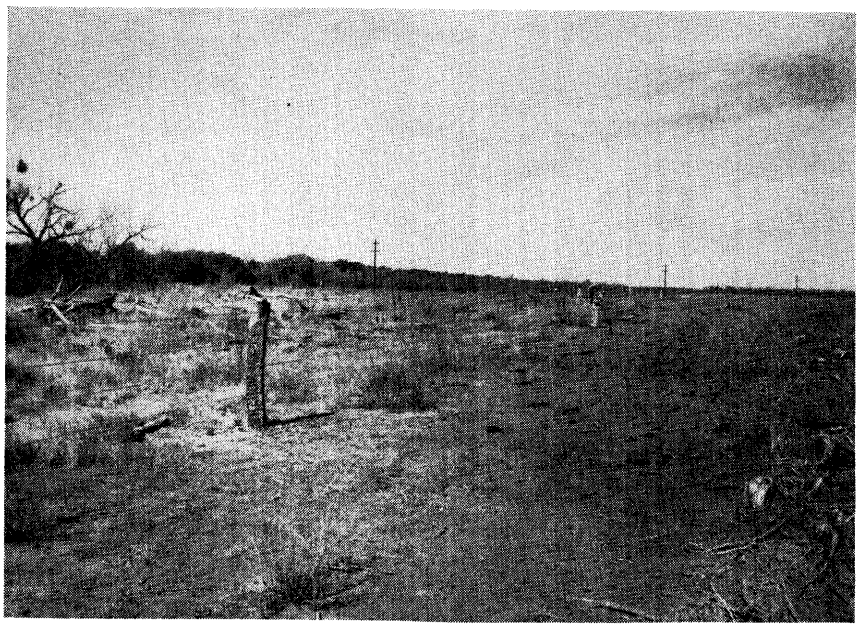
When fencing starts, it doesn't take long for the bills to pile up. Wire is expensive and becoming more so, and labor is even more expensive. Even when you can cut your own posts, as we can in South Texas, the cost is not low. Any way you look at it, fencing is not cheap.

About five years ago, on a visit to the Lasater Ranch near Falfurrias, Texas, Tom Lasater showed me his solution to the fencing problem. With very slight changes, I have successfully used his method of fence building for five years now. Suspension fence, as it is called, costs about half of what regular fence costs, and it will hold cattle just as well or a little better than regular fence. The first suspension fence that I built was around my bull trap. In the five years that it has been in use, only one bull has ever gotten out, and the total time spent on repairs falls short of an hour.

Thomas Halff has been using the suspension fence successfully on his ranch for the past five years. In this article he gives the details of the construction of this type of fence and points out how the initial costs and maintenance charges for fencing are reduced to a minimum with the suspension fence.

In building suspension fence, as with any fence, the corners are the key to a good fence. After trying

Line post in the suspension fence. The 12½ gauge wire is fastened to the post with a 3/16-inch galvanized plate, 1 inch long, held in place with two eight-penny nails driven through holes punched in the plate. Staples are not satisfactory for holding the wire to the line posts in this type of fence.



Posts in the suspension fence are spaced 100 feet apart. Line posts are 7 feet long, 6 inches at the tops, and are put 2½ feet in the ground. The fence is anchored every ¼ mile, and the strands are held apart by 40-inch twisted wire stays placed every 10 feet. The fence has a spring action between posts and has been very effective in holding animals. The approximate cost of construction in south Texas has been $250 per mile.

various methods of anchoring fence corners, I have found the most satisfactory method to be a deadman and Spanish windlass. In our type of soil, a corner post with a good deadman set a couple of feet in the ground with a Spanish windlass running to the top of the post is practically immovable. This corner will work for any fence.

It's when you leave the corner that suspension fence becomes different from other fences. Posts are set every 100 feet, that's right, one hundred feet apart. (I have seen the fence built with posts as far as 150 feet apart on level land). The wire should be stretched so that there is not over a three-inch sag in the hundred feet between posts. Instead of staples, we use a small plate stamped out of sheet metal and two eight-penny nails to attach the wire to the posts. This plate is stamped out of 16 gauge metal, is an inch by one-half inch, with a hole for the nails punched in either end. Just slap the plate over the wire, drive an eight-penny nail above and below the wire, and you will never have to worry about the wire coming loose from the post. Since suspension fence will literally sway in the wind, staples will soon work out of the post, therefore, the use of the plates and nails. Almost any sheet metal shop with a stamping machine can make these plates. Ours have cost us about one-half cent each.

The final step in erecting suspension fence is placing a twisted wire stay every ten feet between the posts. This stay should be well clear of the ground, should hang on the fence in the air.

I have been told by many that this type of fence wouldn't hold cattle, that it wouldn't last. I have been using it for five years, others have used it longer. All have found that it costs much less to build, stands up over the long haul, and it certainly will hold cattle.

Try it and see for yourself.

Support posts are placed every ¼ mile. The support consists of a deadman anchor set 2 feet in the ground and attached to the post with No. 9 smooth wire. The twisted wire stays, as shown, are placed every 10 feet to keep the animals from forcing the wires apart.

The Ranchman's Issue

This is the second issue of the JOURNAL OF RANGE MANAGEMENT to be devoted entirely to articles by ranchmen or about practical ranch operations. The first *Ranchman's Issue* was the November 1956 issue.

In the pages of this issue you will find recorded the thoughts, attitudes, and practical courses of action that progressive ranchmen throughout the western range area have developed in the application of the science and art of grazing land management to their own specific problems. The papers in this issue are a substantial contribution to the field of practical range management.