

Simple Cattle Handling Techniques

by Pat White, DVM

When we first brought our new cattle home, many of us never gave a second thought to any equipment that we might possibly need. After all, these are self-sufficient cattle that require little in the way of shelter; a field of grass should get us off to a good start.

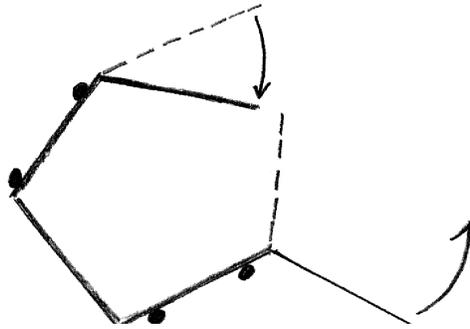
Unfortunately, there are going to be times when more than just a pasture of feed will be required for your cattle. Every animal experiences some episode in its life that will require restraint; if only when it is tattooed. Most people are not adept with a rope and lasso so that some form of mechanical containment will be necessary. This however, need not be expensive or elaborate.

First: You will require a means to round up your animals. If you cannot go out and halter your cattle in the field at will (meaning your will, not theirs), you will need a familiar lane, alley, barnyard or stalling area into which you can reliably direct your animals. A 20 acre square field is not adequate containment for treatment for the vast majority of Highland cattle. If your cattle require veterinary care, it is your responsibility to have your animals ready and restrained for your veterinarian. While some veterinarians enjoy a wild-west rodeo round-up, most do not; nor will they participate. Your veterinarian's livelihood depends on his/her health. Injuries can put them (and you) out of commission for considerable periods of time and it is neither considerate nor fair to endanger them.

You must have a way to get your cattle into your catch area; some means to direct them into a smaller and smaller area until eventually they have no choice but to go where you want them to. This can be accomplished with panels and gates but it always helps if you have a starting area that the cattle must congregate in, either for snacks or water (they are used to the area and used to coming into it). If the area is totally new to them, they will probably balk at entering it.

If you have nothing else, a set of relatively inexpensive 8-12 foot gate-type panels, at least 5 feet tall can function as your restraint area. Probably a minimum of 5 panels should be pur-

chased and to insure its functionality, at least one panel, and preferably two or more, should be attached to poles in the ground.



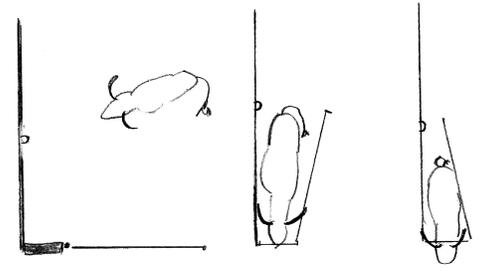
Highland cattle can jump quite well, when so inclined but they can also lift gates with their horns and bodies and crawl underneath fence so it is imperative that temporary panels be secured to something to anchor them into the ground. Even if your cattle don't attempt to crawl underneath the panels, the size of their bodies can easily move an entire corral if it is not secured. It is recommended that you either water your cattle, offer grain or a treat, or leave your mineral feeder inside this area so the cattle are accustomed to going into it and will not fear the area.

Obviously, if you have a barnyard, barn or run-in shed, these can be utilized as your base area for capture instead of having to purchase pre-made panels.

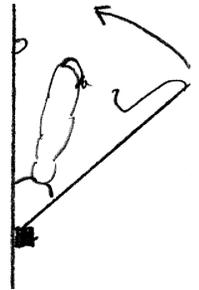
Second: You will need something to operate as a chute or crush. The idea is to restrain the animal in a manner that will result in no injury to yourself or the bovine so that some form of treatment, procedure or test can be conducted on the animal.

A. Several simple things can be utilized to accomplish this goal. A barn wall with a long, heavy duty swinging gate mounted to a beam can be used to squeeze a cow into the mounted end, pushing the gate as close to the wall as possible, and latching or locking

it in place by means of a rope or chain through an eyelet in the appropriate location. Although this will work with just a gate mounted on a barn beam, it will be more effective if you have a short wall or a built in head gate to attach your swinging gate to.



B. If you don't have a barn wall, then a sturdy panel well attached to several posts in the ground can act as your chute.



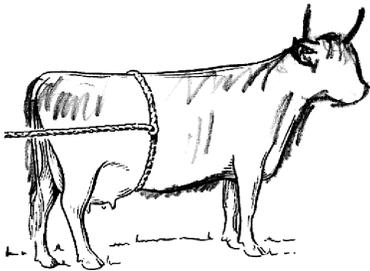
Third: Once your animal is *contained within your modified chute*, you may still need to do more to confine it.

A. A simple rope halter may be necessary to restrain the head. If you don't have a pre-made rope halter, one can be easily and quickly fashioned from a length of rope by placing a lasso around the animal's neck and then running a loop formed from the remainder of the rope through the lasso to ensnare the nose.

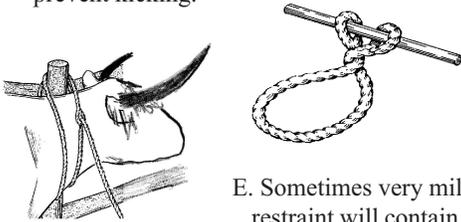


B. A set of nose tongs or a nose lead can be indispensable. Although these cannot be used as the sole means of restraint, when combined with a head gate or catch, a halter or a chute, a nose lead can adequately subdue an animal for an IV injection or for working on a hoof or the udder.

C. Other means to facilitate working around the udder in a cow not used to being milked or treated, is to use a cinch around her belly, just in front of her udder and tightened down. A rope with an eye in it is passed around the cow's body just in front of her udder. The rope is passed through the eye, and the end is pulled tight so that when the end is pulled tight it squeezes the cow and she should stand still, and not kick.

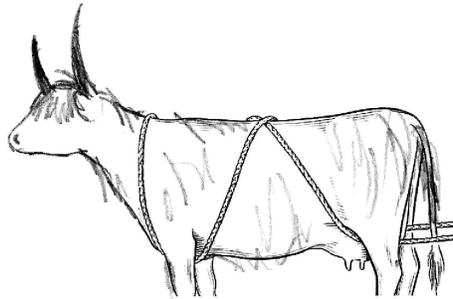


D. A rope tightened above the hock will also prevent kicking.

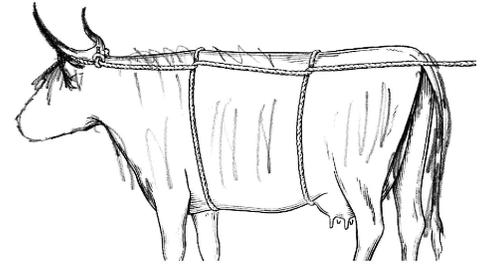


E. Sometimes very mild restraint will contain a quiet cow. A loop of rope thrown over a fencepost can be tightened down and will hold a cow for a simple examination.

A. The Burley method of casting is probably the simplest and fastest method. It does not put pressure over the chest and therefore does not interfere with the action of the heart or lungs. It also does not cross or endanger the genital organs of a bull or the mammary vessels of the cow. A forty foot rope is placed over the back of the cow with its center being at the withers. The ends of the rope are carried between the front legs and crossed at the sternum. Each end is carried up over the back of the cow and the ropes cross again over her back. The ropes then pass downward between the rear legs riding between the inner surface of the legs and the udder or scrotum. The ropes do not cross. When the ends of the ropes are pulled, the cow will fall. Once the cow is on the ground, the legs can be tied if necessary, or pressure on the ropes can be maintained by a strong person for a brief exam, however, if the legs are not tied, the animals can flail the limbs about, potentially causing injury.



B. An alternate method for casting a cow with a rope squeeze can be useful for horned cattle. A loop fastened with a bowline or some other knot that will not tighten down, is put around the horns and the rope is threaded over the cow's body with two half hitches used behind the shoulder and in front of the udder.



Obviously, all these methods require a great deal of common sense as well. If it appears that a particular method is not adequate to accomplish what needs to be done, it should be discontinued before serious harm to either human or cattle occurs.

Quiet handling probably accomplishes far more than many a lasso. Preventing your cattle from becoming agitated is extremely important.

Think carefully of what items you have available that can make the handling of your cattle safer and more effective.

Fourth: There are a couple of simple casting methods that also can be used if it is necessary to put an animal on the ground for either treatment or examination. **Both methods require that the cow first be held by a strong halter or a nose lead.**