



Newsletter

"... When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." ... Aldo Leopold (1886-1948), *American Forester*

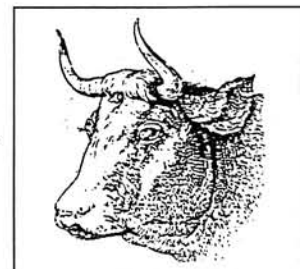
Cattle Ranching Benefits West County

by Anne Greenfield with Michael Presley

This article summarizes interviews with three local ranchers and presents a seldom heard point of view. --Editors

Marshall Hendren sits astride his horse looking out over acres of rolling green hills. His face is tan and weathered, his eyes a keen blue as he rides range -- checking up on his herd. The ocean shimmers across the horizon.

Marshall Hendren's grandfather found mostly dairy farms when he came to the Bodega coast in 1903, and he started his own dairy on Coleman Valley Road. Young Marshall, like many ranchers in the area, grew up in the milking barns and watched the dairy industry become increasingly difficult to maintain. The demands of WW II on young men severely diminished the labor force needed for dairies. When Marshall started ranching on his own, he took to sheep instead. Over the years, the coyote problem began to seriously affect Hendren's sheep operation, and the surge in residential development during the 1970's brought another sheep predator -- dogs. In 1983 Hendren, like many other sheep ranchers during that time, turned to raising cattle.



Beef cattle take readily to the climate and pasture grasses of the coastal hills. In fact, a cow seems to be a natural in an ecology that has included large grazing animals for eons. Elk, deer, and bison have flourished here, as well as mammoths, camels, and musk-oxen. Grazers and grasses enjoy a symbiotic relationship: the grazing animal stimulates the grasses' growth by its munchings and keeps the pasture open by nibbling brush and young trees at the forest edge. The land is effortlessly fertilized and re-seeded by the animal manures.



Buck Piazza has been raising cattle in Bodega since 1955. An early Saturday morning finds him walking the dewed grasses -- checking his fence line for breaks. He notices a watertrough nearly empty and stops to fix a leak in the waterline. Farther on, he drags brush off a fire road making a pile that will compost into the pasture land. As the sun gets high, he pauses in the shade of the creek bed -- noticing mink tracks in the mud and a hawk overhead. "I like being out--being my own boss; I like working!" says Piazza. His

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Bodega Land Trust

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Bodega Land Trust



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broad smile accentuates the ruddy glow of his face. His bearing is youthful and strong, belying his 70 years. Although Piazza works an off-the-ranch job and keeps busy on the ranch every evening, his attitude is easy: "I just take my sweet old time, checking things out, cleaning things up, taking care of my cows. If it doesn't get done today . . . then tomorrow."

Ranchers are probably our best information bank for knowledge about the local land. Anyone who walks or rides the range daily or weekly, year after year, has made a great many observations about plants, animals, trees, weather, and water. A rancher's mind must remain open and sensitive to the many changes nature makes, while the daily ranch work is a hands-on, body-into-it interaction with the land. A rancher's very survival depends on knowledge of the land.



Bill Feige grew up on his family's Taylor Lane ranch. For his livelihood, Feige combines raising a small herd of cows with cutting and selling firewood from his land. As we talked in his Occidental home, he lounged comfortably -- holding his sleeping baby and caressing its back with range-hardened but gentle hands. Ranching has allowed Feige to stay home and raise his three sons. His sons are learning how to ranch as Feige once learned: "...most of it when I was 7 or 8, just by being out here." A ranching lifestyle seems to create a strong sense of family and, reciprocally, family seems to encourage the continuance of ranching. As Feige states: "I'm hooked to the land; it's been in our family since the 1860's."

Hendren, when asked why he stays in ranching, smiles: "Seems to be a couple other generations that want to follow granddad around." In an era when the American family is dissolving, the ranchers continue to hold up a viable family model.

Cattle are often charged with causing erosion and land compaction. Overgrazing can be counter productive to healthy pasture lands, resulting in erosion and stream siltation; however, as rancher Piazza explains: "You don't overgraze your land, because then your animals won't have food!"

Traditionally, the restoration of stream banks has meant the exclusion of livestock. Recently, however, Wayne Elmore, a well known riparian research specialist with the Bureau of Land Management, writing in *Range* magazine (Vol. IV, #4, Fall, 1996), has asserted that the question is not so much "if the stream banks are grazed, but *how* and *when*." Several creek restoration projects are now using local cattle as "vegetation management tools". Cattle break the upland crusts, thereby allowing greater water penetration and seed establishment. Even in the riparian zones, cattle are used to graze the previous year's growth, and their inevitable trampling is found to help in the establishment of new seed.

Feige rotates his 15-cow herd among four pastures, keeping the grazing level optimum in each. His fields show lush fertility. Piazza often re-seeds trails and needy pastures to check erosion and replenish the grasses, feeling that "you

gotta put back something." After 40 years of running cows on the steep hillsides of his land, his pastures remain viable and nourish his 80-cow herd well.

The cow on the hillside and the successful ranching operation behind it help maintain the open space that gives the Bodega area its natural beauty, but it has not always been easy. Sometimes our open space has been preserved at great cost to the landowners, as in the 1970's when coastal development skyrocketed and property taxes along with it. Hendren's Highway 1 ranch was severely challenged: it could no longer support both his and his son's families. His son moved his family to a ranch in Idaho, while Hendren scraped up the taxes and held on until Proposition 13 relieved the tax pressure. His persistence saved from development a mile of open coastal hills for the Highway 1 traveler to enjoy.

Piazza was asked what changes he'd seen in Bodega in the last 70 years. "There's still a lot of wildlife around here," he states. "We don't have maybe as many dances or picnics along the creek as we used to. People are still friendly and helpful. But mainly the difference I see is people buying property and not using it for anything. Soon we'll have nothing but homes with weeds and brush grown up and making the land not good for anything but fire coming through." Grasslands, without grazing or other agricultural use, quickly grow high and dry, or are invaded by oil-laden exotics such as gorse or eucalyptus, creating a highly flammable local environment.



Though real estate prices in the West County are dishearteningly high for the would-be large rancher, much open (perhaps leaseable) land still remains. Hendren discourages the newcomer, yet his life-history demonstrates the possibility of working one's way into ranching success. As a young man, he sheared sheep and worked the woods, saving enough money to rent his first piece of land in 1954. Gradually, he acquired more and more pasture until now he owns 750 acres, leases another 10,000, and is the biggest beef producer in the West County.

Raising cattle is, in many ways, easier than raising sheep. Cows needn't be shorn or hoof-trimmed, and they are less vulnerable to predators. The ever-fluctuating market, of course, remains a challenge. Last year's beef price was low but Piazza remains optimistic: "For 40 years now, I've watched the beef market go up and down and up again. There's money in beef. I know I could survive on just ranching although I choose to work an outside job."

The largest expenses to a rancher are property taxes, liability insurance, fencing, and hay. Feige feels he will be able to hold onto his land until he can hand it down to his kids, "if the property taxes don't go way up." Hay costs are high and cows must be fed all winter. Traditionally, local ranchers not only grew red oat hay but also beets and carrots as cattle feed; some ranchers still grow their own hay. Calves are usually left on the cows and do not need supplemental feeding, and at 300 to 600 pounds they are sold. Beef ranchers don't get rich but they survive, and continue to do something they enjoy. At a time when most of America's

(see *Ranching* on p. 5)

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Easements for Everyone
 by Sandy Sharp

There seems to be a widely-held belief among small landowners that easements are not for them. One reads in the papers about the exciting deals involving hundreds or thousands of acres made by large organizations such as our own Sonoma Land Trust and Open Space District, or nationally by Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and the American Farmlands Trust (founded, incidentally, by a rancher from Two Rock).

But what about the small landowners? No one seems to be considering them in terms of open space preservation, including themselves. In a democracy, everyone should have equal access to the benefits provided by law, and this is where small local land trusts can help.

Let's say you own an acre or two, or twenty, have a nice house and garden on half an acre, and want the rest to remain pretty much as it is. You can put it into a conservation easement, as the large farmer or rancher does, and the process can be quite simple and enjoyable.

Putting your land in a conservation easement can save you money in two ways. First, the value of the easement, as determined by the county assessor, can be counted as a charitable donation, and as such may be deducted from your taxable income. Second, the assessed value of your property is reduced by the amount of the easement's value, so your property taxes come down. Best of all, you (and your neighbors) will have the peace of mind of knowing that your property will stay the way you like it.

So, if you, or someone you know, would like to investigate a small property easement, please write to us, or call 876-3422 or 876-1806. We are here to help you make it happen! ☺

The Great Bodega Potluck Cookbook and Dinner, Coming Right Up!

by Gloria Molica

The response has been wonderful to requests for local recipes and we are nearing completion of our not-to-be-missed *Potluck Cookbook*! Most of us have experienced first-hand the pleasures of a Bodega potluck gathering, whether it be a family celebration or a local fund-raiser. The combination of good food and good friends is hard to beat. And have you ever wished you could find out who made that heavenly dessert or hotter-than-hot chili, or what that secret ingredient was? The answers to these questions and more will be available in March in *The Potluck Cookbook: Bodega Cooks for the Bodega Land Trust*.

Potluck dinner promotes new cookbook. The Bodega Land Trust invites you, your friends, and family to a Bodega Potluck Extraordinaire! On Saturday, March 22, at the Bodega Fire Hall, we will be having a fund-raising dinner, featuring foods prepared from the recipes in the new B.L.T. *Potluck Cookbook*. This is your chance to sample the tasty fare offered in the cookbook and to purchase your own copy of the book - maybe even get an autograph from the creator of your favorite recipe!

Date: Saturday, March 22

Time: 6-8 PM

Place: Bodega Firehall

Requested donation: \$3.00 if you bring a homemade potluck dish (one ticket per dish), or \$5 if you come without one.

B.L.T. is also seeking donations of unchipped dinner and salad plates, mugs and cloth napkins for our permanent potluck service collection.



UC Ranch Planning Courses to be Offered

Two Ranch Planning Short Courses will be held during April for all interested ranchers in the Salmon Creek and Stemple Creek watersheds.

Ranch Planning is a process of inventorying ranch resources, assessing water quality concerns, evaluating existing management practices, and setting goals. Livestock and dairy producers are encouraged to participate in a Ranch Planning Short Course in order to develop a plan that will address water quality issues on their own ranches within the context of the entire watershed.

A plan can be the first step in dealing with environmental issues and can also be used by ranchers to make management decisions that will sustain their economic viability. Participants are given a workbook organized by topic. Each section includes a worksheet and informational materials to help landowners write their own ranch plans.

The courses are sponsored by the University of California Cooperative Extension and the Bodega Land Trust. The first meeting for sheep and livestock producers will be on Tuesday, April 1 at the Bodega Firehall, and for dairies on Wednesday, April 2 at the Two Rock Firehall. For complete information on times and places, please call Stephanie Larson at the UC Extension, (707) 527-2621. Hope to see you there! ☺

Water Monitoring of Salmon Creek

by Ann Cassidy

The presence of salmonid fish are a good indication of a creek's overall health. We are fortunate to have Steelhead and perhaps Coho in Salmon Creek. In urban areas, one might worry about pollution from sewage or numerous chemicals. Since Salmon Creek is located in a rural setting, complicated testing is not necessary. In September we began monitoring water quality with several simple tests at a site on our reach of Salmon Creek downstream from Bodega.

Temperature. The ideal water temperature for salmonid species is 56° F (13° C). Higher temperatures reduce the amount of dissolved oxygen present and increase the toxicity of ammonia. A simple thermometer is all that is required.

pH. Measured on a scale of 1 to 14, pH tells whether the water is acidic (pH less than 7) or alkaline (pH greater than 7). A neutral reading of 7.0 is ideal for fish. Like temperature, pH affects the toxicity of ammonia.

Ammonia(NH₄OH). Certain kinds of ammonia can be very deadly to fish by restricting their ability to utilize oxygen. Ammonia results from the breakdown of organic matter such as manure, fertilizer, and dead plants. We measure total ammonia and then combine this value with temperature and pH readings on a chart to determine the amount of un-ionized ammonia - the toxic form that kills fish. Un-ionized ammonia (NH₃) levels should be less than 0.025 PPM. An inexpensive color test kit is available.

Conductivity. This is a measure of the amount of salt in the water. It is an easy way to detect pollution from urine or over-fertilizing. High salt concentrations can stress and even kill fish. We measure conductivity with an electronic meter. The reading should be less than 725 for fresh water. Ideal levels for an estuary can be determined by the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Dissolved Oxygen (DO) Oxygen dissolved in the water is as important to fish and other aquatic creatures as oxygen in the air is to us. We would ideally like a DO of 11 ppm (saturated) but a level greater than 7 ppm is adequate. Warmer water holds less DO than cooler water. Dissolved Oxygen is tested with an inexpensive calorimetric kit.

Water Flow Rate. Greater volume and faster flow enable a creek to more quickly dilute and clear out pollutants. We estimate it as low, medium, or high.

Sedimentation. Sediment from excessive erosion covers spawning gravels and fills in pools that provide nursery habitat. It can be measured by noting water clarity or allowing settling in a jar.

To perform all of the above tests takes only a pleasant 15 minutes down by the creek. The table shows my results. They all look good. If problems do occur I hope water monitoring can identify them before the fish are permanently affected.

| SITE DESCRIPTION | STA | DATE | TIME | pH | TEMP | COND | DO | NH ₃ | Total NH ₄ OH |
|---|-----|----------|-------|-----|-----------|------|-----|-----------------|--------------------------|
| clear water, no current, shaded | #1 | 9/4/96 | 12:30 | 6.5 | 15° C | 260 | 6 | <0.025 | 0.1 |
| clear, no current, shaded | #1 | 10/12/96 | 13:30 | 6.0 | 14° C | 270 | 6 | <0.025 | 0.0 |
| clear, slow current after rains began | #1 | 12/1/96 | 13:45 | 6.0 | 10° C | 250 | 10 | <0.025 | 0.15 |
| 4 inches rain, much runoff, fast current, sl. cloudy | #1 | 12/5/96 | 16:30 | 5.5 | 12° C | 110 | >10 | <0.025 | 0.6 |
| after 1 week of rain; sl cloudy, running fast | #1 | 1/3/96 | 16:45 | 6.0 | 12° C | 90 | >10 | <0.025 | 0.6 |
| slow current, clear water | #1 | 2/6/97 | 16:30 | 6.0 | 10° C | 150 | >10 | <0.025 | 0.2 |
| IDEAL CONDITIONS | | | | 7.0 | 10°-15° C | <725 | >7 | <0.025 | <1 |

The **Surfrider Foundation** has been checking E-coli and total coliform counts at the mouth of Salmon Creek and along the coast. They are also working on a method for testing home water supplies. For more information call the Northern Light Surf Shop at 876-3032. 🌊

Spider Gorse Mites

by Laura Sauter

I walked up the highway towards the graveyard last Fall and was struck by the sight of hundreds of misty white tents draping the gorse bushes near Bodega Lane, as if scraps of the fog had caught and torn in the tangled, spiny thicket. These tents are the homes of the Spider Gorse Mite, *Tetranychus lintearius*, a tiny predatory insect which feeds on the tough, thorny gorse. Gorse is a big problem for many ranchers in Western Sonoma County. It smells faintly sweet, and in the summer its yellow blossoms are thick with bees, but it is also terribly invasive and difficult to kill. Ranchers fight gorse with fire and bulldozer and chemical sprays, but it always grows back — taking over acres of otherwise excellent pasture land. I have heard it said that an early settler of this region, a Scotswoman lonesome for her native land, first planted gorse outside her kitchen door, thereby, albeit innocently, creating a problem for generations of ranchers yet to be born.

The Spider Gorse Mite is a

biological control — a new weapon in the battle against gorse. No bigger than the tip of a ball-point pen, the tiny parasite builds its webs to serve as a shelter under which it feeds — sucking the sap out of its host's spiny leaves. The cottony webbing also serves the parasite as a bridge on which it travels from one plant to the next. In clusters, the mites have the appearance of rust-colored fuzz.

Spider Gorse Mites are cheap and effective and harmless to everything but gorse. The parasites have been widely used in New Zealand, where farming and forestry industries spend about \$9 million a year to control gorse.

These particular bugs were released four years ago, on the Randy Mantua and Hagemann Ranches, by scientists from the USDA's Agriculture Research Office, agents of the Sonoma County Ag Commissioner, and UC Farm Advisor Stephanie Larson. Since then, they have migrated throughout the area and are doing great work. Evidence of the spider mite's silent struggle with its thorny host is scattered over the hill between Bodega Lane and the trap shoot —

hundreds of twisted gorse skeletons surrounded by the white tents of the arachnid invaders. 🕷



(Ranching from p. 2)

food is grown by large impersonal corporations, supporting the smaller family operations of our locality is a way to help preserve their way of life. Finding ways to connect local consumers and producers could garner more support for the local ranching industry. There is now a growing demand for organic meats. Perhaps a market middle-person could coordinate an on-going supply of local beef for our markets.

Cattle ranching benefits all of us who live in the Bodega area, whether we eat beef or not. Cows, together with their caretakers, help preserve our open space and occupy an important niche in the coastal ecosystem. Getting to know a rancher can lead one into a wealth of land lore and into a deeper understanding of the traditional family life of our coast. 🐄

Come Explore Fay Creek . . . On **Sunday, March 23**, a B.L.T. Nature Walk will be held along Fay Creek. The leader will be Jay Sliwa, a budding naturalist and student of local Native American culture. Jay has spent many hours exploring the creek and knows it well. It is a beautiful walk whatever the weather. We will meet at the corner of Salmon Creek Rd. and Fitzpatrick Lane around **10 A.M.**, and finish by mid-afternoon. Bring lunch, liquids, and creek-walking shoes.

Have you joined or rejoined B.L.T. in the last year? If not, here's your **BIG CHANCE!**

BODEGA LAND TRUST MEMBERSHIP FORM

I would like to become a member or continue my membership at \$10 \$20 \$50 \$100 Other

Please check your address on the other side of this form for accuracy and mail to:

B.L.T., PO Box 254, Bodega, CA 94922

Make checks payable to Bodega Land Trust

All donations are tax-deductible

I am interested in being involved as:

an interest group participant
an advisor
a Board member
an occasional volunteer
other

My special interests are:

My special skills are:

A project I would like to see the Bodega Land Trust consider is:

One of eight drawings in the series
"Wild Plants of the Salmon Creek Watershed." They are available as sets of notecards, at the following stores:

Bodega: Bodega Landmark Studio;
Artisan's Co-op; Northern Light
Surf Shop

Bodega Bay: Tides Gift Shop

Occidental: Natural Connections

Sebastopol: Wild Things

Proceeds support B.L.T.



Birthroot (*Trillium erectum* L.) -- A forest perennial, this harbinger of spring has only one maroon flower, quite pretty though foul-smelling, which emerges from its three leaves.

A tea made from the rhizomes and roots was traditionally given to new mothers to stop hemorrhaging after childbirth. Poultices were made from the bruised leaves to soothe insect bites and skin irritations.



Newsletter Staff: **Editors:** Sandy Sharp, Laura Sauter, and Sue Head

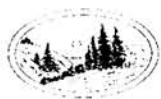
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THE GREAT BODEGA POTLUCK! ...See p. 3



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