

Art and Significance OF BRANDING LIVESTOCK

Story and photos by Bob Miller, OII



History

The origin of branding livestock dates from 2700 BC, as shown by paintings of branded oxen in Egyptian tombs. Hernando Cortez introduced branding from Spain to the New World in 1541. He brought cattle stamped with his mark of three crosses. Once adopting the practice of branding, early American ranchers wanted something simple that was easy to remember, easily made, that did not blotch, and that was hard to alter.

There has never been anything to take the place of a visible brand as permanent definitive mark of ownership and deterrent to theft. Livestock people say, "a brand is something that cannot be cut out or washed off." Registered livestock brands are important as they establish proof of ownership.

Brands also facilitate the return of stray animals to their rightful owners.

Alkali Lake Ranch, located southwest of Williams Lake is known to be the oldest ranch in the history of BC ranching dating back to the mid 1800's. In a 1940 BC brand book, an Alkali Lake Ranch brand first appears with the registration of five different livestock brands combining cattle and horses. In 2008, the Alkali Lake Ranch was bought by Douglas Lake Cattle Company and continues to operate maintaining its heritage.

In the current OII brand registry office the BC brand book archives trace back to 1924.

Confirmation of Ownership

Branding is very important in proving ownership of lost, stolen animals or livestock changing ownership via sale transactions. An unbranded animal is called a “slick” and is almost impossible to legally identify. Other methods such as implanted microchips can provide a source of identification, if the new owner is aware of them. This method to date is considered unsuccessful with bovine, limited success in equine although more successful in some species of pets.

Brands are one of the most interesting tools used by livestock people. Hot and freeze brands are highly visible and hard to alter. “Trust your neighbours, but brand your livestock.”

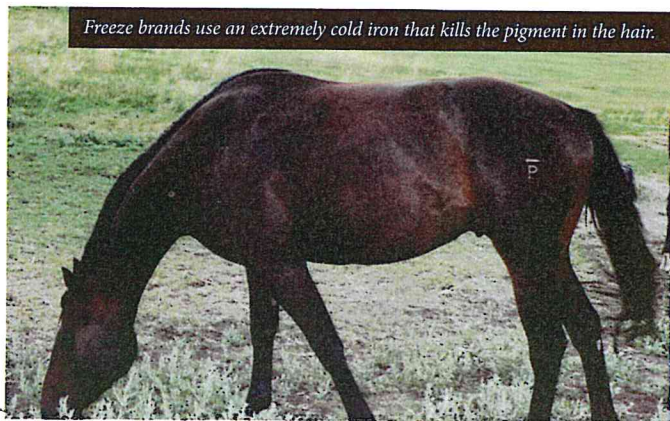
No other way is as easily visible as branding, not only for identification, but as a deterrent to theft.

The first step in protecting your livestock is choosing a good brand. Choose a brand that is distinctive and readily recognized. Ownership Identification Inc. will help you select a brand that has your desired qualities within the limits imposed by the current brand bylaws and guidelines.

Section 55 of the Livestock Identification Regulation BC Reg.4/2010 states, “it is an offense for a person to impress or cause or directs to be impressed or assists in the impression of livestock with a brand or identification brand in a location other than that specified on the brand registration certificate or permit.”

The Irons

The brand should be clearly and cleanly applied with a hot iron or freeze brand. The location where the brand is being applied



Freeze brands use an extremely cold iron that kills the pigment in the hair.

should be dry and clipped free of hair, to improve the quality of the brand. It is critical that the iron be the correct temperature for the impression to be successful. Electric irons maintain a fairly constant temperature, however with steel irons, if too cold the brand will be unsuccessful and if too hot, the hide will be burnt more than required. A properly heated iron should be the colour of wood ash. This would burn the hide sufficiently to deform the roots of the hair follicles. This is necessary for the new hair to grow at a different angle than the original hair so the brand is visible. The degree of heat can be determined by the colour of the iron. A black iron will be too cold and will burn the hair but not the hide. A red-hot iron is too hot, resulting in burnt hair, an excessive burn to the hide and generally a blotched brand.

The hot iron should be applied to the animal firmly and then rock the handle slightly, to assure that the brand characters are being applied evenly. This prevents under burning or over burning.



As the old rancher once said, “brand high, wide and deep and saddle leather brown.”

When the iron is removed in three to five seconds, the hide should be a buckskin colour and look like saddle leather. If the iron is removed too early, a temporary brand (commonly known as a hair brand) will be left and may soon disappear or be difficult to read. In this situation, take extreme care to apply the iron a second time in the exact same location to avoid blotching.



Freeze branding is a technique where a super cold branding iron has been applied to the hide which kills the pigment producing cells resulting in the growth of white hair instead of coloured hair. Freeze branding works successfully on both cattle and horses. In the case of cattle, freeze branding is more common within the Angus breed and although most horses branded today are identified using this style. The resulting brand will be readable at any time of the year. Prior to the application of the brand, it is necessary to clip the site closely and a source of refrigerant must be available. The process takes longer than hot iron branding and the irons are made of copper or stainless steel. The irons should be thicker and deeper in order to keep the face of the iron cold. The face should be $\frac{1}{2}$ " (12.5mm) thick with the corners well rounded. The irons must be cooled in a container of dry ice and 99% alcohol or in liquid nitrogen. Liquid nitrogen is available from artificial insemination units and welding supplies firms.

Reading Brands

Brands, to the inexperienced can be a mystery and yet to the experienced person or rancher they become a readable language. With practice and understanding of some important brand terms, the average person can easily acquire basic skills in reading brands.

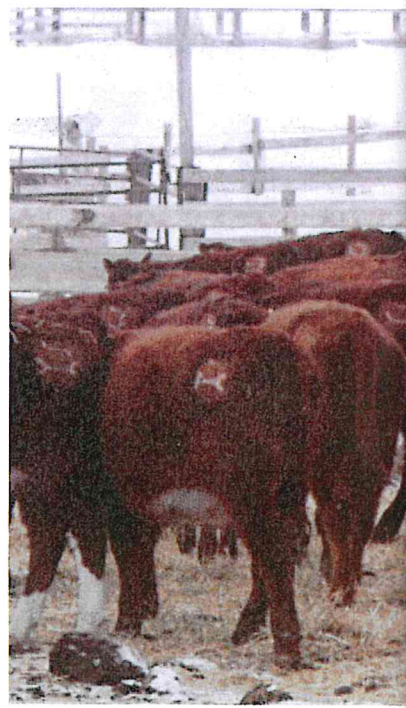
Brands have a language all their own. That language, like any other, follows certain rules. The ability to read these symbols is referred to as "callin" the brand. When reading a brand it is important to remember it must be read from left to right or from the top character to the bottom character. Brands are composed of capital letters, numbers, symbols and characters. Symbols such as a quarter circle, a rafter, or bar, and over or under the character are acceptable descriptions. Certain letters and numbers can be used in a lazy left format. Some can be inverted, some before or after the character; others may be connected or hanging. There are so many possible descriptions, using letters, numbers, characters and symbols. Today OII administers approximately 5800 registered cattle and horses brands combined.

Attention Brand Registrants

When one registers or renews a brand, ensure that it is registered in the manner that you wish. *The Livestock Identification Act* states that "a brand on livestock is evidence that the owner of the brand is the owner of the livestock." Thus, the brand must be registered in the name of the owner of the livestock. If there are multiple owners of the livestock, then all their names must appear on the brand registration. The words "or" OR "and/or" are not allowed and will be changed to read "and" only. All named persons listed on the brand registration are owners of the brand and must be listed as the owner on the Livestock Manifest when moving livestock.

The Owner / Contributor

The contributor is responsible for ensuring that the brands on livestock are plainly visible and readable at the time of inspection. This may mean clipping them prior to presenting them for inspection. As well, a correctly completed manifest along with an appropriate bill of sale for livestock carrying a brand other than the owners or a second brand must be presented to the inspector to verify ownership of the livestock. When there is a question of ownership, the inspector has the authority to detain the livestock or funds derived from the sale of the livestock, until the correct ownership is determined.



Cattle properly presented for inspection

Get a Bill of Sale

When selling animals you should always protect yourself and others by providing the buyer with a properly filled out bill of sale. Also require a bill of sale when you buy livestock. On animals with more than one brand, be prepared to offer proof of purchase. In BC the manifest (form 3) is not recognized as a bill of sale.

Apply the brand properly. When registering a brand with OII, the significance of the characters, numbers and symbols and location on the animal all factor in to your application being approved.

Visit, www.ownership-id.com then click on the Branding Information link for more information.

The Manifest

A properly completed Manifest (form 3) must accompany your cattle when being transported in or outside of the province, other than within the non-prescribed Lower Mainland area.

When consigning Finance Association cattle carrying an agency brand, the Manifest must be completed in the name of the association. Otherwise an association authorized release form must be provided.

The most common problems on manifests are;

- Owner listed incorrectly
- Incomplete address and phone number
- Description of the livestock not accurate
- Confirmation the brand(s)
- An un-accurate head count
- Not signed by the owner or agent
- Contributor expects the brand inspector to fill out the manifest

When transporting horses anywhere, it is highly recommended that you complete a Livestock Manifest and carry it with you. This form serves as a legal document. If horses are consigned to a sale, feedlot or slaughter anywhere within a prescribed inspection area or out of province, an inspection

is required. This applies to all horses whether branded or not.

If horses are being transported outside of the province for exhibition, rodeos, other events etc, it is highly recommended to have an inspection prior to leaving. This practice will become beneficial if entering a province or state with an enforced brand inspection program.

About Ownership Identification Incorporated

Ownership Identification Inc (OII) was designated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries in 1997 to administer a brand registration and inspection program in British Columbia. OII is a company that is owned by the;

- BC Cattlemen's Association
- BC Breeders and Feeders Association
- BC Association of Cattle Feeders
- Mountain Auction Markets Association
- Horse Council of BC

The company is run by a Board of Directors representing the shareholders. The head office is located at 102, 1402 McGill Road, Kamloops, BC, V2C 1L3.

Under the designation from the Government of BC, OII administers the Livestock Identification Act and the Livestock Identification Regulation. To fulfill this role there are livestock inspectors residing throughout the Province.

Serving the livestock industry as a multi agency partner, our OII staff and inspectors are waiting to assist you with your brand registration, transfers and inspection needs.

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