

Branding Information

The **origin of branding** livestock dates from 2700 B.C. Paintings in Egyptian tombs document branding oxen with hieroglyphics. Ancient Greeks and Romans marked livestock and slaves with a hot iron. Hernando Cortez introduced branding from Spain to the New World in 1541. He brought cattle stamped with his mark of three crosses. There has never been anything to take the place of a visible brand as a permanent definitive mark of ownership and deterrent to theft. Livestock people say "a brand's something that won't come off in the wash."

The original Spanish brands were, as a rule, complicated, and beautifully rich in design, but not always practical. The early American ranchers wanted more simple designs that were easy to remember, easily made, that did not blotch, and that were hard to alter.

Brands, both hot iron and freeze **brands, are recorded by state livestock agencies** in many states. In some states freeze brands are not valid on cattle. The agencies also record the location you place the brand on the animal. You may not register a particular brand if the same symbols and location have already been registered by someone else in your area.

Branding is very important in proving ownership of lost or stolen animals. An unbranded animal is called a "slick," and is almost impossible to legally identify. No other way is as easily visible as branding, not only for identification, but as a deterrent to theft. Other methods such as implanted computer chips are positive identification, if a new owner is aware of them, but hot or freeze brands are highly visible and hard to alter. "Trust your neighbors, but brand your stock."

Horse brands: In addition to a brand, a horse owner should have good identifying photographs of their animals. If a horse is lost or stolen, the owner should immediately contact local brand authorities, slaughter houses and auction yards with brand information and photographs showing distinguishing markings.







The most popular locations for brands on horses are the left or right hip or the left or right shoulder. Other less common locations are ribs, stifles, and jaws. Cattle are usually branded on hips and ribs. If an animal has more than one brand or many brands, this would mean that the animal has sold or traded ownership more than one time.

Reading Brands


For many new livestock owners, the art of reading a brand is a mystery. Brands, to the inexperienced, resemble hieroglyphics; to the experienced livestock person, however, they become a readable language. With practice and an 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."


Brands are composed of capital letters of the alphabet, numerals, pictures, and characters such as slash /, circle O, half-circle C, cross +, _bar, etc., with many combinations and adaptations. Letters can be used singly, joined, or in combinations.

They can be **upright**,  XIT ;
lying down or "lazy,"  (lazy S); **connected**  (V B connected) or **combined**,  (V B combined);
reversed,  (reverse B);
or **hanging**  (V hanging S). Figures or numbers are used in the same way as the letters.

Picture brands are usually used alone, for example  (ladder) or  (rising sun).
There are three accepted rules for reading brands.

1. Read from the left to the right as  (M L).

2. Read from the top to the bottom as  (bar m).

3. When the brand is enclosed, it is read from the outside to the inside as  (circle S).

The reading of a brand, especially the more complicated ones, in one locality or state may not correspond to the way it is read elsewhere.

Today, with the influx of Mexican horses from south of the border, we see a lot of odd, hard to read "scripty" brands, a little reminiscent of the old elaborate Spanish brands. Many of them look like they are applied with a "runnin' iron." Unlike a pre-shaped, stamp style branding iron, a running iron is a straight or curved piece of metal that is heated and then the brand is drawn rather than just stamped on the animal.

Now let us examine a few brands:

Y hanging 5

A stylized brand consisting of a vertical line on the left, a horizontal line at the top, and a hook that curves down and then back up to the right, resembling a '5'.

Rocking Reverse R

A stylized brand that looks like a capital 'R' with a curved bottom that hooks back to the left, resembling a '3'.

J M H bar

A stylized brand consisting of the letters 'J', 'M', and 'H' joined together in a bold, blocky font.