To make working livestock safer, Randy Miller built a catwalk alongside his corral. "It keeps people from being in the alley or chute areas with the animals," he says.

"Corral Catwalk" Makes Working Livestock Safer

By Klaire Howerton

Anyone who has driven livestock through a corral system knows that trying to work on the ground while the animals are in the alleys and chutes can be challenging. That's why Randy Miller, bison and cattle rancher near Bruner, Mo., decided to build an overhead catwalk around his corral.

"Catwalks can make working livestock safer and more efficient for any setup. Along with reduced livestock stress, we gain efficiency and operator safety by removing people from being in the alley or chute areas with the animals. A catwalk offers a safe and healthy working environment for both people and livestock," says Miller.

Miller designed the catwalk to take advantage of bison and cattle "flight zones". When the handler stands above the animals in the alley, it triggers a flight response and causes the animals to move away from the perceived threat – the handler – bringing them farther along in the alleys and eventually to a squeeze chute.

The catwalk wraps around an entire side of the corral, and also leads up and over the corral's 2 loading chutes – one for livestock trailers and one for semis. All alley gates can be controlled from the catwalk and since the alleys in Miller's corral are 16 ft. wide, having a way to quickly and easily open and close gates is necessary. Using ropes, pulleys and sliding doors, all the gates can be maneuvered from the catwalk.

The wide alleyway is in place for another reason as well. "I believe that animals are like people and become agitated when having to stand in a line," says Miller. "The wide alleys allow the bison or cattle to move forward together in small groups until they reach the chute."

The catwalk is about waist high off the ground and is fitted with stepladders and handrails along the entire length of the catwalk for operator safety. The walkway is made from welded bar grating, and the handrails are made from angle iron welded to channel iron posts. Bracing is welded to 4 1/2-ft. upright metal posts to further stabilize the catwalk. The sides of the corral are solid sheet metal, so livestock can't see the lower half of the handler on the catwalk. The entire catwalk system is painted green.

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"Pilot Post" Helps Build Fence In Rocky Or Frozen Ground

Idaho rancher Michael Thomas uses a 7-ft. long pointed metal "pilot post" to set wood fence posts in rocky or frozen ground. He simply uses it to dig a pilot hole.

As the metal post is driven down through rocky or frozen ground, it pushes the rocks aside, whereas a wood post would be forced out of line or just shatter. Several other ranchers in the area have also borrowed the pilot post, which was made by a neighbor.

It measures about 3 in. in dia. and can be driven into just about anything but solid rock. The bottom 3 ft. of the post is made from solid steel while the rest of the post is hollow. The top has a thick metal cap on it for the post pounder to hit.

You drive the pilot post down as far as you want and then use a front-end loader to pull it out. Then insert the wood post into the pilot hole and drive it into the slightly smaller hole, which will make the wood post stable and secure.

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Pointed metal "pilot post" pushes rocks aside as it's driven down through rocky or frozen ground.

You can keep horses from chewing up wood fences by covering the posts, poles or boards with small-mesh chicken wire, says Heather Smith Thomas.

Chicken Wire Protects Wood Fence From Chewing

By Heather Smith Thomas

Horses often chew wood fencing out of boredom, especially when confined in small areas, and can quickly destroy a fence. You can apply foul-tasting coatings to try to solve the problem, but some horses will chew wood no matter what you put on it.

A safer way to protect wood fences is to cover the posts, poles or boards with small-mesh chicken wire. Horses can't chew through the wire and it's unpleasant on their teeth, so they quickly give up.

Horses can't chew through the wire so they quickly give up.

My husband and I first used this idea in 1990 when we built some horse pens. We used diamond mesh wire topped with a wooden crossbar. Then we covered all the posts and the crossbar with chicken wire, cutting it into strips and stapling them onto the pole. Our pens have had horses living in them continuously for the past 24 years, but our horses haven't taken a single bite out of the wire-covered posts and poles. We still use the idea on any new pens we build.

A non-toxic wood preservative can be applied to the posts and poles periodically right over the chicken wire in order to provide long lasting protection.

Heavy-built shed has 4 by 4 corner posts with 2 by 6 wallboards spaced 8 in. apart.

Shed Keeps Firewood Dry All Year

Retired Minnesota veterinarian Tom Hohl heats his house and garages with wood, often using nearly 6-9 cords a year. "Like most people I stored cut wood under a tarp or canvas, but it never cured very well and moisture always seemed to work its way into the bottom two feet of wood whatever I tried," says Hohl. "I decided to solve the problem once and for all by building a sturdy 12 by 16-ft. woodshed that would store my wood off the ground, offer protection from any kind of weather and hold a year's supply at one time."

The shed has double 4 by 4-in. corner posts. It's bolted securely to a wood frame made of 6 by 6-in. treated lumber. Eight pieces of 1 by 4-in. bracing provide diagonal support from the top plate to the foundation. Each piece is bolted to a joist and also to the floor plate. Wall boards are 2 by 6's spaced 8 in. apart.

Inside the structure Hohl used solid pallets for the floor. "I thought about pouring concrete, but the pallets help keep the bottom rows of wood dry and aren't affected by moisture," Hohl says.

Hohl built a gable roof 4 ft. high in the center with 2-ft. overhangs on all sides. The roof is covered with raised rib steel and metal facias all the way around provide a nice finished look. The roof ends are open to allow ventilation and for moisture to rise as the wood cures.

Hohl says he probably invested close to $2,000 in lumber and materials for the crib, plus 40 hrs. or more to build it. "To me it will pay for itself in a couple years because it holds 11 cords of wood and keeps the supply dry in any kind of weather."

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