

24SHORTGRASS.DOC

Within 400 feet of my present location in Port Aransas, Texas, the Gulf rages from a northeasterly winter storm. An upstairs picture window frames the breakers pitching and cross-tides roiling the surf into brown sandy tones.

In the night, a rain topped off the ponds and barrow ditches already filled from previous fronts. A small pump attached to an inch and a half plastic exhaust pipe makes a feeble effort to drain a big pool blocking the driveway to a condominium.

Marooned by the flood is a white four wheel drive Chevy with a front license plate imploring "Ski New Mexico." Five other vehicles park on high ground. Visitors are scant because of the recession up north.

If the owner descends from some of the bloodlines in the outbreaks, say, north of Roswell or up on the Peñasco River, he might have deliberately parked in the water to keep coyotes from gnawing on the tires. Drouths and floods made those hombres resourceful.

In South Africa, bush pilots put thorny brush upon the airplane wheels to keep animals from bothering the tires. Male canines, from big hyenas to small pot hounds, mark tires with urine. Wouldn't be a big shock to learn these

island coyotes, far removed from feasting on spring lambs and kid goats, used the same procedure on whitewalls to relieve frustration.

A newspaper article reported that Animal Control trapped 24 coyotes in humane traps in the past four months where sightings had been reported. The story ended by warning that if you were going to sleep on the beach to bathe in perfumed soap before bedtime to keep from being bitten.

On previous trips, the hombres sleeping on the beach looked rusty enough to repel everything from the sand crabs to jellyfish. The article claimed five persons were bitten on the beach last year by coyotes, but that could be corrected to read "tasted on the beach." The way beachcombers down jugs of screw-top wine, it would take a mighty hungry prairie wolf to take a second bite.

For protection when beach walking, I carry a light cane that a bellhop dug from a lost article closet in a hotel in Iowa. The sharp-pointed ski pole used to discourage town dogs is back in Mertzon; Grandpa's Colt is in the bank box downtown.

Yesterday, a news article covered Utah's move to declare Browning Automatic Pistols the state's firearm. It makes the shortgrass country look good. We may be backward,

raising cows and such like; but we know better than to adopt a weapon as a symbol in this age of threatened flyswatter control and possible mousetrap regulation.

Port Aransas has half a dozen excellent seafood restaurants. They serve so many tempting fish dishes that gulls follow along downwind on my walks, hoping, I suppose, that I'll fall so they can eat me.

The bath soap's wrapper in the apartment reads to be "light perfume - for dry winter skin." Mindful of coyotes and respectful of the gulls' domain, I bathe before walking. One thing that's noticeable, however, is that the gulls attack (scavenge) every crumb, morsel and bite man throws out.

The gulls fight over the least little shell that washes in with a fragment left of life, yet failed tosses at one trash barrel revealed a taco untouched on the sand ... Close examination showed the taco might possibly be one recently alleged in a class action suit by an Alabama law firm to be 33 percent beef instead of the labeled 40 percent.

The percentages made too big a challenge to solve without a calculator. A contact in the office here refused to help, expecting a trick. She wanted to know my car model at registration. Miscalculating the seriousness of the

question, I answered May 19, 2004. Clerks become mighty sensitive to wise guys around these resorts.

But see how this sounds, please. Say you eat three tacos at 33 percent meat to make 99 percent, or you eat three at 40 percent, the legal margin. You have 20 percent more meat in the 40 percenter by my figuring, and less filler to spit out.

It looks like as insatiable as a gull's appetite is, the seven percent meat deficit alleged per taco wouldn't be the reason for the birds refusing to eat the taco in the first place. Gulls may not like the oat filler admitted to be a secret ingredient in franchise tacos.

If I were at home, I could go across the street and ask a lady I know in the superintendent's office for help. She's real good at numbers. Port Aransas only has two franchise food restaurants. No taco places are listed in the room's phone book.

Whatever the percentages the suit uncovers, the gulls won't be fooled by the tacos. I wish I had paid more attention to arithmetic in the fifth grade.