

In June, any hombre able to raise the dough flees from San Angelo to the mountains in New Mexico or Colorado. The more affluent spend all summer in cabins cooled by soft alpine breezes and cold rushing creeks, quaffing iced beverages served by wives restored to vigor by the high altitude.

The rest of us swelter in the shortgrass country, spending our meager substance on air conditioning, salt tablets, sunscreens and bottled lemonade. The ones of us devoted to the great game of ranching throw our money away in large enough rolls on cattle sprays and sheep drenches to assure we will never get far enough ahead to have a long summer vacation.

In August, the hundred and three degrees Fahrenheit severed my dedication to the ranch lands. I decided to go to Santa Fe, New Mexico, even if the city claimed to be having a heat wave. The other inducement was that the tourist business was off so bad, hotel rates had dropped 40 percent, depending how long you were willing to stay on the line with reservation clerks.

Upon my arrival in Santa Fe, the drop in business was immediately evident. On a first morning walk up Canyon Road, the location of the town's snooty art galleries, we

(I had a friend along) were greeted by hitherto insolent gallery keepers with a warmth known only in the salons of Parisian society. Old gals, who the summer before were anchored to a desk doing crosswords, met us at the gallery door in a burst of enthusiasm befitting the arrival of the Grand Duke of Hapsburg and the Duchess of Kent.

Santa Fe prices on artwork, however, remain strong, perhaps the strongest market in our country. One gallery had two oils by the French Impressionists Monet and Gauguin. No prices posted, yet adding a very classy tone to a hanging of excellent water colors by American artists. The lady keeping the gallery was intent on feeding the goldfish in a handsome scrolled pond in front.

I am never sure whether sneaking a peek at the price of a painting tips the owner or agent that the prospect couldn't buy a goldfish from the front pond, much less a water color priced at seventy-eight hundred bucks. I have to guess whether an art dealer or rich person who chats about the show at the Metropolitan or the auction at the Peabody, then flops down "seventy eight bills," points at the paintings and says "deliver it to my hotel," is recognized as a good customer. ("Seventy eight bills" is an attempt to sound worldly.)

Being ranchers, we talk in code to keep our values. She will whisper, "10 steer calves," or "10 tons of range cubes." We are never crowded in art galleries. An artist from Fort Worth, hawking his own wares in a Santa Fe shop, did laugh overhearing us say, "Maybe five packer cows' worth, but not a hoof more."

For a lunch, we walked to the classiest restaurant on Canyon Road. Still fasting from the heat in Texas, I ordered cold soup and a salad, my friend the salad and ice tea. After paying the bill for a tad over 40 dollars, \$7800 for a watercolor seemed in line. Leaf lettuce and red cabbage, the principal ingredients of a salad represented to be walnuts, tart apples, Gorgonzola cheeses and argula at fifteen bucks a plate, explained why galleries on Canyon Road ask big prices. Made me wonder what it cost the lady to feed her goldfish with red cabbage trading at six or seven bucks a head.

After lunch we took a back street to a custom hat maker's shop. No money was changing hands, but tourists were slapping on hats priced at \$2300 like green and yellow caps hanging in a John Deere store. One display was reminiscent of the hat rack in the coffee shop of the old St. Angelus Hotel in Angelo. Right on the front shelf sat a brown dress hat like "Chris the Gambler" wore every day to

make the upstairs game. Winced as I saw more ghosts of the past; "There's ol' Sam Kelly, Arch Bengé, and Bode Owens' creases."

Did I ever tell you about Arch? Arch Bengé weighed 90 pounds. His big-brimmed hat shaded his shoulders and put him right at the hundred mark. Yes, I think I did tell you of the time Arch shot a hole in his pickup roof in front of the Liberty Café, not realizing the six-shooter he was holding ready to shoot his son-in-law was loaded.

A cold mountain rain drove us back to our hotel. Total cost for the day on Canyon road came to \$50, counting a \$5 parking fee. Hard to say what was the highest priced, the red cabbage salad, the watercolor, or the full-crown hats. The best bargain, I guess, was being able to park all morning for five bucks.