

One of the hardships of living in the shortgrass country is finding a resort within reasonable range to escape our summer temperatures. Going as far back as the first railroad lines, and maybe to the stagecoaches, folks longed for the higher altitudes of New Mexico and Colorado.

Several of the Big Boss's friends migrated to log cabins by alpine trout streams for the whole summer in the 30's and 40's. But those gentleman were hombres blessed by enough judgment to invest their money and time in ventures removed from the grand game of woollies and hollow horns. While the ranch population cast loops at screwworm-infested livestock in the stifling heat of the mesquite brush, the much better to-do city folks cast dry flies over fat rainbow trout in cold mountain streams.

Many present-day shorgrassers use the racing season at Ruidoso, New Mexico, for an excuse to avoid our hot summers. One information base for economists studying Texas business is the real estate market at Ruidoso. Values of New Mexico mountain property parallel West Texas intermediate crude and wellhead natural gas prices. About one out of every 16 years, a cow herder sells enough steer calves to play the short term market, but for the most part our business turns us into confirmed homebodies.

The best times to visit New Mexico, I think, are after Labor Day race meets and before the Octoberfest. I like

Cloudcroft and Santa Fe any season. It doesn't take much improvement in the climate to be better than roasting your boot soles in an August sheep corral, or wondering whether the coolest part of your forehead under your hat brim is going to be fire-branded by the sweatband.

Cloudcroft showed just a tinge of autumn when I hit there. The handsome old hotel promoted by the railroads in the early 1900's was booked for the weekend. A New Mexico line built the first inn on the site to draw fares from the lowlands to be brought up the final ascent by a seven-mile ride in horsedrawn buggies.

One of my great uncles, a Fort Worth doctor, spent his summers up at the hotel, forever leaving me the license to long for the grandeur of the past. It was just as well I checked in under the hill in a neon sign-decorated lodge. The last renovation had changed the library off the lobby into a gift shop so scented in perfumed wood chips the hall smelled the same as a French floral shop. Furthermore, all the choice tables by the windows in the mahogany paneled dining room were occupied by a big gang attending a motorcycle conclave.

On top of missing the sunset, the bike riders' wives and girlfriends made the room feel crowded. Until they thawed out from hanging onto the men's waists, their arms stayed paralyzed in a ring the way oriental hoop dancers pose in review. The pianist playing in the center of the crowd became so uncomfortable in his black tuxedo among the

slick leather jackets and short billed caps, he slipped out a western style straw hat from under the bench. The score changed from sonatas to a lot of yellow rose tunes and beer barrel polka ditties.

I'd had enough of motorcycles making the last 350 miles of the road from the ranch to the mountains. Past Roswell a ways, I followed a caravan of Harleys so far, I began to grip the steering wheel like it was a set of handlebars.

When my old uncle came up from Fort Worth on the train, folks dressed for dinner. I'd stayed at the hotel myself one Easter as snow fell off the pine boughs and the air cleared and exposed hundreds of miles of the white sands and red clays looking off toward the West. Bellmen lit the fireplace in the library. At 10 a.m., a young lady came by serving tea and coffee from a cart. I am unsure whether she wore a white apron, but I still recall the smell of baked bread from a brown basket and the pinion logs exploding in the fireplace.

The next morning I wandered around walking in the woods. Trails led to lookout spots off the rims and cliffs. The true feeling for the mountains comes when I look down on redtail hawks gliding above tall pine trees and riding the drafts up and down. I could tell my body temperature was dropping. My skin had been so hot from the sheep work, it made a cracking sound similar to a stove pipe cooling off after the fire dies.

Once or twice I started from the sharp crank of a motorcycle. But my prejudice let me down again. Those motorcyclists weren't bad people at all ...