

MAY 4, 1972

Dry south winds have thoroughly dehydrated the Shortgrass Country. The land has tried to green up several times in the past 45 days. Late frost followed by early heatwaves have regularly burned the scant greenery.

Signs are pointing toward a hard spring. Rain crows can be heard late in the evenings, coughing and clearing their throats. Late lambs look more like nest-size animals than sheep. I saw a set of twins fall in a ground squirrel's hole during marking. It doesn't matter how many times you see a sight like that, it still is a traumatic experience.

Weather scientists are predicting that a drought has already started that'll last until the spring of 1975. The prophets don't say how we are going to last that long. I figured out the first of April that we'd be lucky to make it until the Mayday dance. I never thought of trying for deadline three years in advance. We might be able to last through the summer but I wouldn't bet a quarter that the Rocky Mountains would last until 1975 without a rain.

Meteorologists count the sunspots to foretell droughts. When their sunspot count comes up short, they start blabbing as loud as they can that the rainfall also is going to be short. Meteorologists don't cause droughts, but they sure don't go to any trouble to keep their gloomy ideas to themselves. I hope my kids grow up to be somebody that can foresee monsoon seasons. If people can't find something encouraging to predict, they ought to be quiet.

Indians predict droughts by their dreams. My Arapahoe wife claims that when she dreams of empty scalp poles, she knows that a dry spell is coming. I am always too frightened to ask her the connection. One time I asked her why she wore a possumtooth necklace on feast days. For an answer, she threw a glass of ammonia in my face.

Squawmen learn to keep their mouths shut around the lodge. One dose of full strength ammonia in the face will teach the blabbermoutheDEST hombre in the country to shut up. You'd be surprised how quiet a house can be kept by an Indian woman. I've already walked further on my tiptoes than lots of pallet dancers twice my age.

Knowing a drought is going to come isn't any help. CBS could have Waiter Cronkite say that our fate was going to be as parched as a candlebug and we wouldn't back off four steps. Shortgrassers won't start running from a drought until the track is too dusty to see the finish line. By then, running will be as sensible as asking a big league politician to hold your pocketbook.

Scattered widespread mist has been falling over parts of the country. I don't know why the government wanted to send astronauts to the moon when the rainspots are on the sun.