

Even Accidents On Ranches Are Mere Repetition

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MERTZON — Modernism hasn't had much influence on the Shortgrass Country. Jet airplanes tear across our skies, automobiles rip down our roadways, yet on the rangelands the old fashioned ways remain.

The other morning, for instance, we had a horse-and-man wreck over on the east side of the ranch. But the incident wasn't any different than equine calamities that the Spanish explorers were bound to have had. The horse and man hit the ground just like they always have. As usual, the waddies started chattering and coming from all directions. The dust rose to the usual height, and the old pony went bucking through the brush, popping leather like loose horses have been doing since the first saddle was invented.

Naturally, the work had to be stopped while the rider was helped over to some shade. It's a wonder the newly gathered sheep hadn't escaped. You know how cowboys are. They can forget in a minute how important it is to wean lambs and cut out old ewes to sell. Nearly any little thing will distract them. And they go flat loco when one of their partners takes a fall.

After things had settled down I rode over and examined the scene of the accident. Judging by the tracks and other signs I'd say that if the horse had centered the tree he hit, he'd have been lucky to come out of the scrape alive. Horses can take a lot of punishment, but a head-on collision is apt to break the neck of the toughest cowpony that ever lived.

The men had to be scolded back to work. The joy of the day was ruined. All morning long I kept worrying whether to take the horse to a vet for a checkup or take the chance of ignoring some serious internal damage. Furthermore, it was hard to get the sheep through the chute while the shaken-up wrangler was hobbling around on one leg.

Shortgrassers will never become a part of this marvelous age of indifference as long as they cling to the old customs. Up-to-date city folks don't waste their time messing with citizens who are careless enough to get run down by cars. If we are ever going to catch up with the rest of the society, we're going to have to be the same way.

We finally got the work done. But it sure was hard, working among a group of hombres whose habits wouldn't have been called progressive in the darkest part of the Stone Age.