

Arrival Of Spring Lambing Season Heralds Frenzy Of Oil Exploration

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MERTZON — In the mid-1940s the oil companies began an extensive exploration program in the Shortgrass Country. From then until now, oil and gas prospectors have continued to work and re-work the area. A few strikes have been made. Fortunately, enough production has been found to attract modest amounts of bonus and rental money.

Needless to say, the money end of the deal has been the most popular aspect of the business. As result of oil revenue, many cases could be cited of the right growing richer and the borderline operators rising three degrees above the point of solvency. (In the Shortgrass Country the “point of solvency” is a value which traces back to the Squawbait Indians poverty gap theory; it is somewhat vague but it marks the point at which members of the tribe begin wearing their moccasins instead of boiling them into broth.)

Long before the oilmen came out here, there was a widely respected school of economists who claimed that money, lots of it, would do more for this country than an anti-mosquito law would do for the Panama Canal Zone. This contention was never fully tested, but during the early days of the oil boom a few landholders gave some opportunity to observe its working. And you had better believe that in every single instance the landowners were found to have 99.44 percent fewer cares than under the old order.

Anyway, along about the second year after the oil companies’ arrival, the natives began to realize there was more to an oil deal than fingering large stacks of deposit slips.

In a series of blows that would shatter the optimism of a habitual horse player, the ranchers discovered that the quest for underground minerals reached its peak exactly 150 days after their rams were turned in with the ewes. In a single spring period, my people learned that nothing on this earth whetted the oilmen’s appetite for action more than a lease covered by ewes already undecided whether to stay around for the responsibilities of motherhood.,

It was during this lesson that sheepmen were convinced that the advent of drilling activity in a pasture full of ewes wasn’t one bit more disastrous than inviting the Southern Branch of the U.S. Coon Dog Lovers Assn. to hold their field trials within the same pasture.

As the battle between oil production versus range management progressed, and the words “lambing” and “drilling” became synonymous, other developments occurred. Instead of allowing their new relationship to follow a haphazard course, and to reduce the trauma of their new method of operations, the ranchers turned scientific and designed a table of mathematical equations.

The following guidelines are the result:

- (1) For every 70 square yards of drilling site, allow 2000 acres for parking space.
- (2) In the rig area, the daily amount of trash accumulation is equal to the combined body weight of the workers. Thus one 200-pound roughneck equals 200 pounds of litter.
- (3) The dust-fogging potential of any oilfield road is found by taking the slip stream of 16 camel caravans and multiplying by six.
- (4) The projected damage of large oil leaks or smaller 5-gallon-per-minute salt water trickles is found by dividing the total depth of the test well by two and adding a dollar sign.
- (5) To find the range of empty discarded cement sacks, take the annual average wind speed and multiply by four. Allow 600 sacks per location. As a norm, a well site of medium depth will generally provide enough cement sacks to cover a four-section pasture fairly well.

After these tables were published, the temper and tolerance glands of the ranchers seemed to be calmed. It is now quite common to see a weary herdsman going about his pastoral tasks undisturbed by the clanging rigs or the billowing dust of trucks and cars.

For the time being, the battle has moderated. The ranchers know what to expect of the oil fraternity and the oilmen never let them down.

The money is more than welcome, of course. And as it looks today, it’s going to take more than this to drive present inhabitants from the land the Arapahoes called “Close Margin” so many years ago.