

APRIL 15, 1976

*{Editor's note: Monte Noelke wrote the following column a few weeks ago. There've been some showers around since then, so his drouth lamentations may seem misplaced to some readers. However, much of the Southwest, probably most of it, is still trying to green up on what's left of last year's moisture.}*

Drouth reports are being overdrawn. Herders howl easy in dry weather. The cowboy's drouth threshold is a fine triggered emotion. Ten months of so of no rain will put them to carrying in worse than a choir director in the midst of bad strep throat epidemic.

Horror stories spread fast. Up in Colorado, farmers and highwaymen are fighting over the dust that's blown from the farms to the highways. As long as they don't start breaking the taxpayer's shovel handles over each others heads, the dispute is not hurting anyone.

Highwaymen grow frustrated picking up beer cans day after day. Farmers aren't busy in dry years. I know it sounds bad for folks to fight over dirt that's apt to blow back the next day, but idle people can get into trouble.

I got tired of hearing about Texas cattle being so drouth stricken that their eyes were sunk in their heads. The last time we worked our cattle, I got down by the head catcher and checked. These cattle's eyes are at the same focal level they were during the wet years. It's their heads that are swollen up.

Over at the auction rings, you can see old boys suffering from the same drouth fever. I watched a fellow go into a coma from an overdose of 34 cent finished cattle. After he'd passed out, I got down in the same position that I used at the head catcher. His head was 5/8ths of an inch bigger than his hat.

Sure, his old eyes were watered up from the cow calamity. Little Orphan Annie would have died of a broken heart had her life been as sad as the news the cow operators receive. I saw an hombre trying to reach his feeder on the phone in such desperate state that he ripped out the shoulders of his shirt dialing the telephone.

I mean, you can't go by the eyes. Now when their hair starts slipping in patches, the sign is bad. Another symptom that hurts is that glazed look they get after prolonged weather failure.

In the dry part of the '50s, those San Angelo bankers' eyes looked like they had freezer burn or radiation damage. It was awful to talk to one of them. Jugkeepers, you know have a way about them that makes you uncomfortable. In the course of a man's life, he's forced to divert from the truth about his financial condition. From then on, he never does feel forgiven in the money chambers. When that complex is added to a fellow sitting in a desk chair staring into space, it makes for a mighty nervous session.

I am beginning to see that the dry weather is getting to me. On a trip I took to Colorado, an Indian lady was riding an escalator down as I was going up. Though she didn't look a bit like Child Who Sits in the Sun, I backed down that escalator in complete defiance of the laws of gravity or science.

On up at the Denver terminal, a snow skier landed a direct hit with his poles to my posterior. Lady running a cigar store started hollering fire. She thought that my pipe ashes had fallen down my shirt. Two security guards had to guide me to the air ship. I didn't used to be that afraid of Indians or ski poles. Drouths just make a man skittish and jumpy.

Politicians say they want to serve mankind. Biggest service they could render would be to make those snow skiers hitchhike and renew the treaties to keep the Indians off escalators.

Long range weather forecasts called April dry and cold. Feed disappears awful face on these late feed runs. Trouble hits and takes a toll. Flats on the pickups seem worse than blowouts did in the fall.

I am going to see that the lying is stopped about our cattle and traders. We may have something worse than swollen heads before it rains. Wouldn't it be great to awaken in the morning with it running off the roof and down the trails?