

AUGUST 22, 1985

The first thing I did when I got back from England was to start balancing my checkbook and begin working over the bills. Wild extravagance had taken place. The old milk cow down at the line camp had taken 25 bucks worth of feed; the saddle horses had gorged themselves on two full sacks of oats. And, as near as I could figure, the fencing crew had charged three pounds of coffee and a full sack of sugar. It sounded to me like the whole outfit had been on a binge to see how much they could eat and drink in my absence.

I was in an awful rush to get back to attending to business. On the last lap of the trip from Dallas to Midland I'd ridden with a herder who had been down to the big International Rancher's conference in Laredo. He'd warned me that one of the bankers on the panel had publicly stated the day of ranchers being off in Colorado skiing while their bankers stayed home and defended their notes against the bank examiners was over.

I wasn't worried about anyone questioning my travel expenses, because I don't get good TV reception at the ranch and have to get around to be informed. Furthermore, I knew if my banker was worried about my breaking a hind leg against a frozen pinon tree, he could relax. During the winter months I go to Florida and Mexico where it's warm and safe. I think that jugkeeper was perfectly within his rights to objecting to the manager of his collateral sliding off high slopes and generally risking their bones and muscles falling in the snow and ice.

But in case my bank did have a hang-up against the British Kingdom, I went right to work after I got over jet lag and started helping a couple of hands wean our late lamb crop. Things did seem awkward around the saddle house. On the first morning I asked where the brush and curry comb were hanging. One of the men replied that I ought to be the one to answer that question, as I was the one who had told him last summer to brush off his old pony's back with a tow sack and forget about such luxuries as a comb and brush.

After he had reminded me, I recalled that when we changed over to a fully organic stock raising operation I'd also cut down on everything to do with the horses except a few boxes of nails to use with the old shoes that were left.

Once my expenses had become such a sensitive topic down at the bank, and we had agreed that frost was the best agent to control parasites and mesquite brush, a lot of little knickknacks like fence steeples and windmill rivets and new bridle reins were dropped from the budget. Understand when I use "we" I am actually using it in the singular form. This was a situation of one man-and-one vote in it's purest form. I'll leave it to you to decide who was disfranchised as this is far too delicate a subject to discuss in full detail.

I sure am thankful the old boy warned me in advance of the anti-skiing feeling in the banking circles. I'd planned on going elk hunting up there in the fall, but maybe I'd better wait and test the situation. I can't imagine what they have against ski resorts, but if I had a guess, I'd say they'd had some bum paper on a lodge one time and still haven't forgiven the industry.