

Shortgrass Country

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Ranchers are seeing more varmints than they have for years. Parts of this particular area are experiencing a reinfestation of predatory animals. At one time the coyotes and most of the cats were whipped out of here.

Reports are hard to verify, because the dry weather has everybody so shook up that shadows of the fence lines are beginning to look like snakes crawling on the ground. Many more weeks of dry winter running into dry spring, and you'll hear of hombres who have seen swarms of Loch Ness sea monsters.

These are awful hard times for stock-killing animals to make comeback. At night around the waterholes you can hear the varmints coughing in the stillness. Dust plus the dehydrated condition of their prey is causing the animals to choke up. Games trails leading to water abound with tracks. The wild animals, too, must have to drink two or three times a night to wash down their food.

Hunters have brought in a new species to compete with the cats and the wolves. Red Fox have been cropping up for the past few winter. The foxes are wonderful sporting animals. Once they get conditioned on lamb and goat meat, they can't be beat for running the pads off a pack of hound dogs. Filled up on meat, they can set a trail that'll make a bunch of pot lickers out-yodel anything that Nashville has to offer.

Hound and hunt clubs should soon be eyeing the Shortgrass Country. The foliage and climate are better suited to raising predatory animals than sheep and goats. Real running stock could be developed on a dependable diet of domestic animals. Whelps and kittens raised out here would be of superior quality. Dry weather tracks are perfect for putting the desired speed and maneuverability that houndmasters like in their quarry.

With the value of wool and mohair fading faster than a dice-shooter trained on a bingo table, the tallyho set would be a welcome source of income. Running a tack room stand with an inventory of nothing to sell but flea powder and horse liniment would beat tearing around trying to finance the shearing industry on a product that appears to have lost its value. The money hunters lost out of their watch pockets would outscore what you make off a fleece of wool; tips for the grooms would run higher than what a goat shears.

Demand for that type of hunting is good, too. I read the other day that British Army officers stationed in West Germany were so void of sporting animals that they were having to use corporals to chase through the woods. They'd tried to run privates, but found out they treed too fast to give the hounds any exercise. You can imagine how much of that old pence and shilling it was costing the officers to field noncommissioned officers

I don't know how much a corporal makes in the British Army; but I'd bet that, counting side benefits, they'd be expensive hound bait. Then too, probably the only advantage of using men over foxes would be the fact that the humane society wouldn't be so apt to object to humans being choused. I never in my life ever heard of a society or an association that could stay interested very long in any kind of inhumane treatment of humans.

Uncovering the potential of fox hunting and steeple chasing is the first hope we've had since it quit raining.

Having silver spurred gentlemen riding high-withered horses is going to be a lot better than putting up with shearing crews. I can see it now: Where the dusty corrals were, we'll have a big stainless steal kennel for the dogs. The barns can be torn down for stalls and tack rooms. Instead of drinking coffee from cups that came out of oatmeal boxes, we'll be sipping cream sherry from big silver goblets.

Wool buyers and bankers will come out to see the excitement instead of coming to practice their open-range scowls. Hombres who have been careless about stepping on our corns in town will start being more courteous about such things as pushing with their elbows or slamming a door a bit too fast.

Instead of our wives trying to save up money for a bus ticket home, they'll be proud to have an old man who owns a hunting resort.

The bees don't fly over the cream pitcher very often in the Shortgrass Country. This could be our chance to break free. The old timers always said that if you'd hold out long enough the country would look after you. I doubt, however, if the old timers ever dreamed that wolves and cats would come to the rescue.