

NOVEMBER 20, 1980

Late fall rains healed most of the Shortgrass herds from the hard summer drouth. The benefit to the livestock exceeded to long term benefit to the grass.

Six minute gramas and regional fallow weeds made a fast comeback, but the important forages didn't have enough time before frost to make a stand. The sheep, as expected, fattened on the fast growth, however, cattle had a difficult time converting the negative protein into a winter margin.

In late August our cows stopped eating the prickly pear cactus. I suppose they overdose on the thorns and leaves. One reason, I think, they dropped the habit was because of sore lips and sticker burned tongues. Cocaine addicts receive a similar cure after too much coke burns their nostrils. I guess an old cow can eventually get enough thorns in her head to do the same thing.

The prickly pear curse goes way back in our history. For those of you unfamiliar with the scourge, I had better explain that Shortgrass cactus doesn't have the food value of the variety that grows in th cow jungle of South Texas. We have all of the disadvantages of prickly pear without being able to burn of the thorns for roughage. Under the worst circumstances, we can burn pear, but at the end of the season a new appraisal generally shows that other forms of financial suicide would have been much less painful.

Whether pear is toasted with a propane burner or not doesn't mean that our cattle and sheep wont become addicted to it. Some of these old sisters just can't resist the sugary taste of the pear apples, or the stinging sensation of a ball of stickers stuck in their stomachs. To my knowledge, humans are immune to eating pear except in jellies from carefully de-spined fruit. I think I once told you that one of the grave problems of shepherders being around bitterweed poisoned sheep was the danger of the owners taking up the same habit.

I have seen suspects from the cactus patches that later turned out to be hombres that had ruined their mouths eating hard candy or chewing plug tobacco. Someday when I get around to it I intend to ask San Angelo dentist that I know if he's ever pulled any pear thorns from a patient's mouth. It's sure not uncommon for cowmen to pick up their cattle's bad habits.

The best type of cow to burn prickly pear for in our country is the narrow horned, inbred whiteface breed. In the cow jungle they favor the humpy cross breed cattle. Up here, however, the thin residue. A straight hock reduces the problem of residue clinging to the hind legs and a rat tail even further helps in the same lines. (Darn this is a delicate subject to handle in print.)

As I started out saying, I can't dispute that the Brahman breeds by reputation and fact do better on prickly pear. But I'll tell you it's a mighty pretty sight on a cold winter morning to see an old boy in these parts packing a pear burner in a herd that's holding a 400 pound weight loss in a big pasture covered in mesquite and cactus. The red cows stepping on the hose and bawling above the roar of the burner to a bunch of knot headed calves is something you'll remember for a lifetime. In particular, you'll never forget it if you are buying the propane and happen to own the cattle.

Three days ago, San Angelo's 93 degrees was the hottest in the nation. I see our cows standing close to the prickly pear, but not a one is back on the plant. Maybe spring has already hit. It'd be something to make a second crop of pear apples this late in the season.