

## Cow And Cowboy Both Will Miss Sanctuary Of Mesquite Thicket

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MERTZON — A fanatic anti-brush feeling is developing in the Shortgrass area. Government agents in cahoots with agricultural colleges are stirring the populace up to a extent that Joyc Kilmer's "spare that tree" ditty is headed for the restricted reading list.

It's an awful mess. Brush killers in all sections are aroused. City folks claim that 50 or 60 percent overall infestation is stealing their runoff water; country people cry that they can't look off for fear the path from the house to the barn will be obscured by fast-growing shrubbery.

As with all human crusades, the entire matter is being grossly exaggerated. I'd bet, for instance, that half the critics haven't ever stopped and admired the sylvan charm of a 600-acre cloister of thickly entwined mesquite trees.

Once a rider plows into the thickets, he spends more time elbowing the limbs from his face than he does in appreciating his surroundings. Niagara Falls would never have been considered the spectacle that it is if each tourist kept his eyes closed half the time. Sunset on the rim of the Grand Canyon would never have made a calendar scene for a two-bit finance company if photographer took ducking and dodging shots instead of still ones.

Nor would Old Faithful ever have been considered a natural wonder of the world if everybody watched the geyser with his head sealed against his chest and his teeth gritted tighter than a novice scuba diver on a shark hunt.

Another point the brush eradicators are overlooking is the privacy of the thickets. As the human population boils into proportions that startle everyone except toll bridge chasers, the seclusion of a spot without the threat of being trampled by people or run down by machines is priceless. No better therapy against the closed-in feeling of the steady over-settlement of the earth can be found than the challenge of staying on a horse tearing through mesquite trees.

What's going to happen to the inhabitants of the rangelands, once the brush is gone, must also be considered.

First of all, herd after herd of livestock will lose weight searching for hiding places. Perhaps the veterinarians will find a cure for nearsightedness, but it'll be a long time before the bushwhackers' disposition can be adjusted to the loss of their ancestral homes.

Next to suffer will be the drovers. Without a shade in the pasture where they can heal up from post-payday withdrawal pains, the cowhands are going to be in a bad way. I guess those big shot brush scientists must think the modern range bosses are soft-hearted enough to provide artificial shades for recovery areas. But don't bet a nickel that the herders won't be abandoned to suffer alone in the heat of the unshaded prairies.

Oh, I know it's foolish to try to turn back this movement. Most of the fragments of the Old West are already rotting on hooks in saddle sheds. One more step toward converting the rangelands into sissified outdoor parlors isn't going to make much difference. And the rancher's previously hopeless obsession to make a living off the surface of his land might be realized by recovering acres and acres of brush covered pastures.

So it may all be for the good. In time the roar of caterpillars and drone of spray planes may become as soothing as the rain crow's call in the first light of morning.