

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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The view from my present station takes in the Chinati mountains south of Marfa. Our hunting camp is located on a large shelf that is high enough to afford a box seat chance to watch the sun play across some of the most rugged country in Texas. Each morning, the sunlight provides a multi-color display that is overpowering. No form of machinery corrupts the stillness. The evenings give forth a richness that makes me yearn to stay in the rimrocks.

The hunting group is composed of hombres of all walks. Their trades run from polo playing to vegetable farming. Some are wool buyers and some are cow herders. How they have fared, or how they are faring, doesn't make any difference in these parts. People as important as a newly elected county politician wouldn't make a specklet in this vast, beautiful land.

Going into the higher altitude has increase these hunter's imagination level to the same size as the surroundings. At nights, the stories in the camp reach proportions that are unheard of in the lower climates.

Before we were unpacked, I heard a wild hog tale that was wilder than the wildest wart hog in all Africa. (I mean the story not the hog.) Had any children been present they would have had day and night mares for the rest of their lives. The story teller said that down at his place they captured a maverick boar with tusks so sharp that he chewed down the gates, the brace posts and ate all the steeples out of a big set of wire corrals.

He said the hog was so ugly that the alligators in the nearby river were moving upstream to build their nests. The alligators, according to him, couldn't hatch their young for fear the hog's reflection in the water might mark their babies.

Right after he got through, a South Texas operator said rattlesnakes were worse at his ranch than a whole herd of hogs of that caliber would be. He said that last spring the rattlers ate up 700 Angora goats between marking and shearing.

For awhile, he said, they thought bobcats were catching the goats. Then, one day, a cowhand rode up on a young snake with a goat's head hung between his fangs. The cowboy, he said, would never have found the snake in the thick brush if he hadn't heard the reptile trying to clean his fangs by whipping his tail around to knock the goat's head loose.

As far as that goes, it probably isn't too easy for a rattlesnake to pick his teeth, he can't very well use a toothpick. Snakes' big suit is being close to the ground; they don't have a bit of talent for any sort of handiwork.

I'd have believed those two old boys if it hadn't of been for the history of the hog and goat business. In all the annals of the hair and ham industry, you've never heard of a fellow getting out that easy. I'd bet a six pack folks down in the goat country would pay money for a sackfull of snakes that'd thin out their herd and I'm positive that plenty of hog men would be delighted to liquidate their holdings for the price of a set of wire corrals. The luckiest dice shooter in Vegas couldn't shake loose from a hog or a goat wreck. These story tellers were just carried away by the scenery and the altitude.