

MARCH 25, 1976

Field days occur in big orders in the Shortgrass Country. Alert herders can trim their grocery bills by making the outdoor barbeque dinners. Range experts and livestock specialists stay busy organizing parasite clinics and brush control seminars. Agriculture reporters and association secretaries burn lots of gasoline to make the events. I attended one last week at the experiment station down at Sonora. Three of my compadres came along. Suggestion boxes placed in every bus terminal in the United States wouldn't have held the criticism they had for my pickup and my driving style.

Relaxed conversation was impossible. Two of the riders were connected to banks. Every hungry old ewe and cow was standing along the fence lines, Empty feed sacks were blowing across the road. Breaks in the scenery were charred spots left from grass fires.

I knew they wouldn't pay any mind to my opinions. Moneyed people's attention span before income tax time is non existent. While broke down hombres brood about chattels and loans, carriage class fellows mourn over their tax payment. Neither party ever knows that March has passed. Red liners hear winds after the storm has gone; Rich folks never know the storm struck.

It was a tedious situation. I didn't want to talk about religion. Churches borrow money for building programs. Politics had to be marked off. The people are supposed to own the government, but I'm nearly sure that the jugkeepers have a first lien on the deal.

Upon arrival, I sought the company of a neutral party. I'd been under too much strain. I knew the ranchers were going to be talking about how high feed was, so I looked up an old boy who does a radio broadcast for money for a feed company. You can see I was doing some thinking on the way down. The bottom end of last year's holdovers in the first grade know that the total annual take from associating with sheep and cow herders lacks about 15 cents of covering the price of a Coca Cola. When I was young, I kept bad company. I am not going to spend the rest of my days with the losers. A church at Mertzon made \$350 net profit last month selling hot tamales. I've already volunteered to be chairman next year.

I found the radio reporter too late. He was as drouth fevered as the ranchers. We were discussing a chain restaurant in Houston that served boiled crabmeat. Without notice, he switched to a story about smoked crayfish that had the crawdads smoking in Little Rock, Ark., and the party being held in Minneapolis, Minn.

He said that it'd take over 10,000 crawdads to serve the guests. High wind was blowing across the picnic table. I'm unsure what caused this rambling recital. Maybe he'd had an ear operation that allowed too much air to pass through his head. I've listened to some disc jockeys that sounded like they'd had a mastoid operation that'd gone too deep. Always before, I'd found this hombre to be as scheduled as his programs.

Lots of folks are going to be acting strange until it rains. Bankers will be muttering to their secretaries. Plenty of us outdoorsmen will be backing over telephone ploes one day and tripping over the fallen wires the next.

Drouth survival is a mighty still sentence. The boys who stayed through the scourge of the '50s didn't get out with enough scalp left for a hair transplant. Fighting people grew peaceful; peace lovers had to be contained. It was a terrible disaster. Nerves were so bad toward the end that the call of a coo-coo clock would have set off a stampede.

On the way home, we followed a pickup load of furniture with two light calves partitioned in the back. I sure didn't say a thing. Once a man has worked an interest book, he is on the other side. The next field day I go to will be to show off the newest line of drilling rigs or the latest machine to strip cotton.