

MARCH 10, 1983

Winter on the plateau that part of our outfit is on is synonymous with fog. Lots of mornings it'll be clear at the home place only to be shut in up the plateau.

Feed runs and roundups at these times have to be postponed. The best bet is to stay at the house and drink coffee. Pastures tend to magnify in a fog. Two or three sections of grasslands with a visibility of 100 feet is kind of like a submarine sailor that won't clean his periscope lens.

Yesterday was really soupy from all the showers and dews we've been having. For over a year I'd been planning on working a couple of pastures of our neighbor's goats that had moved in on us. By "goats" I mean the multi-color Spanish variety that is so highly cherished on barbecue pits and in Mexican kitchens.

The reason my patience overruled my judgment and sent us off blindly into the fog, was from the amount of "next weeks" that had passed while we were putting off working these fleet rascals. Once I had quite a heat on to run old mares and outlawed goats; however, age had left only a modicum of that insanity. Time seems to temper the wild thrill of a chase and make a man a bit more sensible.

The chosen strategy was to keep our horses loaded in the trailer and work the clear spots until we scented the goats. The odor from a full grown billy goat is strong enough to cut streamers in a fog bank. Garlic fumes will do the same thing. In Italian restaurants I've watched steaming plates of food literally breakup an overhang of cigarette smoke. I have a son who trains on garlic salt that has permanently defaced the mirror in his bathroom.

Our plan was to ride out the high spots and watch the canyons for unusual deflections of the sun that would signal the billies were on the move. We didn't have a chance of ground sighting the goats. Close to 75 percent of the herd were blues or greys exactly the same color as the fog.

Pickup work never reaches what can be done on horseback, in my opinion. The cab is too comfortable to seriously scout for your quarry. The thought pattern and concentration level improves under saddle horn conditions. Dashboards, for me, work a lot better in town than they do the country.

Once we did the goats, we learned that for some this was a virgin penning. However, under the surprise attack of the fog we took an early advantage and maintained it into the corrals.

On my desk are plans to build a goat trap that'll work in a fog. Modeled after the wing shaped traps used to capture untamed mustangs and wild hogs, mine is going to have a trigger that springs from strong odors like the musk of make goats.

All I lack are engineer skilled, odor-sprung trap doors to go into action. I already have outfitted the pickup with amber lights and a deep throated horn that'll keep us off collision courses.

By next winter we won't have to wait for the fog to lift. Pilots did the same with radar. It's time we did it, too.