

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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Our fall cow work has been going on for 10 days. The Daughterd of the American Revolution could have handled the job in five days. I've been giving the orders and I can't tell you why we've been so long. My Grandpa could have rounded up the British Kingdom in 10 days. Our whole outfit should be ashamed to wear boots.

Yesterday we lost 15 minutes due to a horse and man wreck. An old pony bucked a boy off right in the middle of the double gates leading to the working pens. Cattle couldn't be sorted as long as he was knocked out. You can't get a range cow to pass by a fellow lying on the ground, and labor laws are so strict you can't drag one off like you do a sheep that falls over at shearing. All you do is just wait until they regain consciousness. If it'd taken him an hour to come to, we would have had to wait that long.

Fifteen minutes is hard to make up when you're already three days behind. Time is an enigma, anyway. I used to try to make up a lost hour in the 10 minute drive from town to the ranch. Modern pickups are mighty fleet of tire, but there's not one rolling that can whittle down a 60 minute loss on a 10 mile trip, although from the way lots of people drive, you can't help thinking they're trying to do it.

I see cars on the highway that would make the trials at Indianapolis without reaching high gear. On days of the big clearance sales in San Angelo, ladies pass our place so fast they leave holes in the horizon.

Safety experts carry on at great lengths over the dangers of speeding. Frankly, I don't see any relation between safety and the automobile, must less the speed that they travel. Folks interested in preaching or practicing safety ought to stay at home. The only reason that highways are still called highways is to soften the Highway Department's appeal for money. By all rights, they should be called morgue-ways or funeral paths.

It certainly wasn't my fault that the cowhand bucked off the horse. The preceding weekend, one of my sons posted the new labor law signs in the saddleshed. This loose-seated horseman had three days to study that sign. That was ample time for him to know to avoid on-the-job hazards. Furthermore, he's been at the game for 40 years; he's had plenty of time to identify the hazards on a ranch.

I read this morning that Armour had to close their lamb processing plant in San Angelo because the employes were holding up production. I suppose that we may be facing the same threat. An alley could be built to pass around the cowboy's falling ground, but who is going to know when he's going to block the alley. I can't afford to build detours all over the ranch. It looks to me like the mountees and the mounted could find a more isolated spot to throw their fits.

The horse trap has 365 acres in it that should be enough room to pull off a spectacular wild west show without stopping the corral work.

During Daylight Saving Time I saved up 76.5 hours. Deadheaded cows and careless cowhands have bankrupted that account. By next week, we'll be through. I'm glad my grandpa doesn't have to live down the shame of his descendants.