

JULY 14, 1983

Fire ants are moving from the east to the west across Texas. So far I haven't heard of them in the Shortgrass Country. However, the area west of San Angelo is beginning to be so overrun by coyotes that fire ants may be burrowing off into wolves' dens and being smothered by fleas.

From the way visitors talk about fire ants, we sure don't need them out here. Hombres from East Texas get mighty upset over the ants. Every now and then, one will hit the cow sale at San Angelo to update the problem. No doubt about it, the ants are indeed a grave threat to what's left of any of our peace of mind.

Of course I have to let on like I don't believe the ant stories. The truth is never better served than when a stranger takes over and keeps an old boy off on a trip from taking advantage of a new audience. I don't have to warn you how broad the license is around coffee houses in regards to wild tales without the added incentive of being far enough away from home to go completely wild.

The best idea in any coffee match or beer session is to lay down table rules before the drinks are served. Say on fishing stories, limit catfish to 50 pounds in weight and put a top of two ft. on teeth and whiskers. Agree that deer aren't to be shot over 1500 yards and that any rack over 32 points is going to automatically change the floor chairman.

Until the opponents become acquainted, race horses and fast pickups should be disallowed. Lots of stylish liars blow their advantage by under estimating the universal popularity of those two topics. I've seen guys blow their best stories before they realized they were in heavy competition. In the case of professionals, counter arguments don't need to be limited. For example, on the fire ants, I use huge cockroaches to support my stand.

Horses are an excellent prop on any grounds. They buck, they run, and they fall. Some of them are so dumb that their heads wouldn't look good anywhere except on a hammer handle; others are so smart that only their lack of dexterity keeps them from mastering a computer.

My personal trouble, however, is not my material, it's trying to remember what's true and what I've made up over the years. At this stage, I have to know the truth from fabrication. It's like putting the proper English on a cue ball. A big lie just can't be verbalized the same way that a true story is told.

Also, I don't want my grandkids picking up my killer cockroach stories without knowing that they are to be saved for fire ant counters or water snake checkmates. I already have an over-imaginative son or two. I don't want the eastern fire ant dealers to take control. So it's going to be a hard call to say when and where I am going to have to retire and confess my past record.

We've had a lot of luck at the ranch starving harvest ants by using things like cigar butts and franchise cream gravy. When the Boss was around, we had an unlimited supply of the black stogies that come out of Old Mexico. I used to take a wet stub and make a ring of tobacco leaves around a den that'd hold them in their hole until they starved for food and water. Later on, after we lost our source of cigars, I found out that

cafe cream gravy in a little trench was just as good. If anything the gravy is a bit stronger than the cigars were.

I'm glad my name isn't associated with protecting stinging ants and hungry wolves. We are going to be dreadfully sorry one of these days that we didn't do more thinking. I don't know what a Mexican cigar or a dose of cafe gravy would do to a fire ant, but there's one thing for sure: if you tried it on him, he'd know for certain that you were mad.