

It's Summer To Some Folks, But It's Simmer Here

By Monte Noelke

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Page 11

MERTZON — All the forces of a dry summer are cooking the Shortgrass Country. The citizens have been in an awful mood as the heat wave has kept sucking away the velvet of the past spring. For 18 days straight the San Angelo weather station reported highs of over 100 degrees. That record was set some time ago. Things haven't changed much.

No one would have fussed if it had merely got hot and stayed that way. But true to form for our climate, the mercury's ups and downs made people irritable.

Hombres leaving their nests after mid-day siestas didn't know whether to prepare for a 104-degree afternoon or to expect a two-point variation either way. Lady folks haven't had the slightest idea whether to wear a sun dress or bundle up in one of those Egyptian burnouses. In a matter of the flickering of the sun's rays a mild 102 degrees could change to a blistering 106.

Sheep and cow wranglers had the hardest time adjusting to the temperature fluctuations. One morning we left the ranch house facing a south wind backed by a 99-degree cool front, and before the sun came out some of the boys acted like they were going to chill down. Their horses didn't respond well to the briskness, either. Even though the heat spell had drawn the old dirt daubers down to where they looked more like spider-legged cranes than ranch ponies, a tourist from the city could have detected the change in their dispositions. I'm not saying that anybody was threatened by a leather-popping calamity, but the coolness did make the horses come back alive.

The sheep were harder to gather. The cool snap had the woolies scattered into the open places. After so many days of hunting for them in the shades, it was hard to keep from looking for them under bushes. I was sure glad we didn't have to rope anything, because an old ewe can run a long ways when the weather is fresh.

Along about the same time the heat spell was broken, the domestic front underwent a change. The failures of overworked air conditioners, combined with the breakdowns of overloaded refrigerators put several of the housewives on the warpath. Female-wielded fly swatter licks taken in the general direction of the kids, plus broom-swinging charges at cats and dogs occurred in sufficient numbers to cause a change in the air currents within the city limits.

The proportions of the crisis were never precisely evaluated, as observers were limited to a few worn out repairmen. Most married men, you see, were on the move. It doesn't take much slamming of ironing boards or crashing of oven doors to make a wedded male mighty spooky.

Bachelors think that we husbands are dumber than retarded musk oxen. But when it comes to a hasty retreat, the most fleet footed general in the world can't match an old hand at the game of prolonged wedlock. I'll bet some of those Olympic sprinters would give good money to develop a takeoff like some of the married boys have.

From now on, the temperature won't run such a crazy course. The last of July and August are normally dependably hot. September, also, gives the populace no cause to keep wondering if a case of heat exhaustion is going to be suddenly replaced by a siege of chills. As the dry air seeps in from that other desert over in northwestern Mexico, late summer and autumn can get hot enough to make a camel herder happy.

However, life is never perfect. Come winter, many a shortsighted soul is going to wish for the warmth of summer. The only thing to worry about now is the diminishing moisture and the downturned cow market.