

Oldtimer's Wildest Story Concerns Hippy Roundup On Los Angeles Ranch

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MERTZON — Cowhands have about jointed wheel oxen and covered wagon's; they're a scarce breed in this age of hauled horses and mechanized ranches.

One did show up at the ranch the other day. Though his main trade is trapping predatory animals, he's been all over the ranch country. His every feature was reminiscent of the booted hombres who once abounded in the saddle shops of San Angelo.

While the coffee was heating, this fellow began telling about a new use for cowboys out on the West Coast. He said that last summer he worked for a cattle company near Los Angeles that had to gather a herd of hippies off the ranch.

The way he told it, the flower children had holed up around an abandoned mineral spring. The policeman couldn't house them from the brush on foot, so the ranch boss sent my visitor and another waddie to work them on horseback.

The old boy made the roundup sound exciting. One morning, for instance, he had to rope one off a rimrock; the stray wasn't wearing anything but a guitar. He said she wasn't real heavy on the end of a rope, but the downwind situation made up the difference. According to him, the flower folks avoid soap just like they shun barber shops.

The cowboy said he and his partner never knew how good a job they were doing because the cops kept hauling off the herd before a count could be made. He did think that quite a number of strays got away through the thickets; the longhaired mavericks, he said, were easier to smell than to track by other sign.

There's no telling what sort of impact this news will have. The shrewdest psychiatrist in the nation can't chart what city people are likely to do at home in the next few seconds, much less predict how they'll respond to gathering people on horseback.

I gave up a long time ago. Back when a bunch of urbanites started wanting to clothe livestock and, about the same time, fashion designers began laying plans to undress humans, I decided that analyzing the metropolitan scene should be left to other parties.

A country-based writer has no business trying to size up a situation where one group is trying to put long pants on four-legged animals while another is trying to put such short dresses on two-legged gals that they'd cause a veteran cab driver to kill his engine in mid-flight.

So actually you can't say what the outcome will be. To my knowledge there's no human society to protect humans. Man never has got as heated up over the woes of his brothers as he has about the plight of lap dogs and house cats.

Thus, if members of a hippy colony show up with rope burns and their hind legs pulled out of joint, they may be out of luck for sympathy. One thing is certain: the barber supply houses and soap companies won't come to their rescue. Unless the dope peddlers and string instrument manufacturers are interested in preserving these longhaired misfits, they may be mighty friendless.

Tales such as this make the Shortgrass Country seem very precious. Battling drouths, dodging floods and putting out prairie fires are insignificant compared to being invaded by a pack of over-advertised louts. The world has always had its ups and down periods; sometimes, however, it appears that the end of the current decade has marked out lowest point.