

APRIL 7, 1977

MONTE NOELKE SEES RANCH FAR FROM SHORTGRASS HOME

AUCKLAND, N.Z.- You'd like my setup. Over on the hotel coffee table is a big basket of fresh fruit. Out the hall window is a bay of ship traffic and maritime occupation. Street scenery is upper New York state. Skylined through my window is a huge cathedral. Early this morning, I walked a block to a park layered in flowers of striking reds and vivid blues spread among the bright oranges that I think are an Italian poppy.

You'd approve of my company, too. Men and their wives from the Short Grass Country and sheep people from the Northwest. All connected to agriculture in either a feeding, packing or herding capacity. The United States Department of Agriculture has sent along an agent from the import/export division. The New Zealand Government has supplied staff from their meat board to make every arrangement. Official name of the American delegation is the Lamb Promotion Coordinating Committee of the American Sheep Producers Council. The mission will end in a big meeting over on the Australian mainland to discuss marketing of lamb from New Zealand and Australia in the United States.

It's going to be a big affair as meat boards in the Southern Hemisphere pack plenty of wallop. Producers elect seven of the 10 members to handle things like issuing export licenses and spending money to promote foreign markets. Jobs on the boards, and they have them for all farm products, are much sought after. The members wield a powerful voice in the government.

We were entertained last night at a poolside barbeque. You know the affair. Lamb chops and beef steaks roasting on a grill. Real gracious folks serving drinks and appetizers from a tray. No noticeable difference from, say, a gathering in Texas or New Mexico, except we don't have any bays with volcanic mountains for a background like they do.

I didn't have one bit of fun. Before I'd left home, my wife, Child Who Sits in the Sun, led me out to the backyard. Four long war arrows were stuck in the ground. In case you don't know Indian signs meant that I'd better not make myself at home too much while I was away.

It's mighty hard not to be at home here. People are the easy laughing, open sort. Their ancestry is British. Only thing wrong is that they can't speak correct English. They pluralize the pronoun "you" without adding "all" like we do in Texas. Tell one of them to "pasele" through a door and he'll just stare at you. It sure would help their speech a lot if they'd blend in enough Spanish to know that proper usage needs a few "quien sabe" in parlor language. I've noticed that in other places besides my homeland but was too polite to write of the matter.

One fellow at the party was a big enough storyteller to compete with the yarn spinners at the coffeehouses in the Short Grass Country. After a few trays of liquid refreshments had passed, he told me they had a sheep killing parrot that was worse than our coyotes. Kind of under his breath, he said that these parrots had got so fierce down on the South Island that they'd attacked a crew of sheep shearers right out in the open. I

knew he was telling a big one, as there's not a creature on this earth that can stand the taste of a sheep shearer.

I've had to skip a few days to get back to writing. We've traveled by bus up north of Auckland. The towns have Maori names. Maoris are the aborigines of New Zealand. They fit in the story by being part of a big Treaty Day celebration that we attended this afternoon.

You see, in 1840 English settlers and church people had seen enough of the two lovely islands of New Zealand to recognize that these natives needed to be protected by British law and taught not to claim so much land. I didn't get to read the treaty, but figure it was about the same kind of deal we gave the Indians, except we withheld the protection of the law for a long time.

The celebration, however, I did see. Our hosts had reserved seats for us out on a big grassed-over parade ground. Out in the bay two battleships were all flagged and illuminated by brilliant lights. Down at the far end facing us, a navel band provided the English music. A little later on, a bunch of yellow skinned hombres wearing sarongs and carrying spears in their hands and mouths did a lot of native singing and dancing. Like on our government holidays, worthies equipped with powerful lungs made speeches. The prime minister said he sure favored racial peace. Then a big tall man in a white uniform representing the Queen of England got up and spent about 15 minutes telling how much her majesty liked for the subjects to be peaceful. After that man that looked like the dancers, except he had on street clothes, said he thought peace was a good thing, but that a little action along those lines would be appropriate. It wasn't hard to figure out that was a Maori leader who was causing all this peace talk to start with.

Most touching part was a prayer for peace by the archbishop of the Anglican Church. His Excellency was mighty convincing on the subject as he has better connections than the politicians.

Those natives dancing and chewing on spears had brought on an awful case of homesickness. So I copied down the bishop's prayer on a postcard to send Child Who Sits in the Sun. I sure hope she receives it. Total cost for the card and the postage was 78 cents in our money.

During the other part of the time, we've been visiting sheep properties. New Zealand has 57 million head of sheep and about six or seven million head of beef cattle/ Thus the three million total human population has to share 56 some odd million acres of land with enough animals to feed several countries this size.

Aerial seeding and fertilizing make the land run, say, five ewes and a cow to the acre. Big problem of the southern hemisphere is that the freight costs on ships and airplanes make our trucking bills look like the upkeep on a dogie lamb. What I've decided after visiting a dozen outfits is that they need to forget about the seeding and the fertilizing and work on some way to drain the Pacific Ocean.

Personal prejudice for homesteaders makes me especially impressed by Briscoe Moore's family. Mr. Moore started clearing his land back in 1920. Forests of eucalyptus trees and Japanese cedars were jerked from the ground with horses and manpower. Grass seeds were sown from a sack on his shoulder. Fence posts were cut from the native timber.

Sixteen hundred acres have been eventually cleared of the 2,000 acres in the unit. Modern machinery and aircraft, under the supervision of his son, completed the project.

Un-cleared land has sufficient timber to support a sawmill. Don't think of these trees like the shrubs we have in Texas, but as giant timbers that are as much as 500 feet tall.

Mr. Moore's son and grandsons carried the delegation in a pickup up to the pastureland. Up is used to describe steep hills. Roads revealed the soil base to be of a crumbly igneous type of rock of volcanic origin. I think I've seen the same kind in New Mexico or somewhere in the Southwest. The bus couldn't have negotiated the route. I struggle to think of a comparison to the land. Looking off from a hill to the timbered country, I believe I'd say Colorado. The grass cover was excellent, the sheep and cattle in good condition.

We looked at a flock of replacement ewe lambs. The Moore's winter 3400 ewes and 800 Hereford cattle. Extra livestock is bought in the summer, making a stocking rate that exceeds anything that we know in the States. The operation is a breeding farm, thus speculation in muttens or steers is limited to small numbers.

Tea was served after we returned from the pasture on the shady side of the house. Children delighted by such strange company served sandwiches. One child brought me a nectarine fresh from the orchard. Moore's valley smells of the fragrance of fresh clover. I was lulled by the serenity of a spot that had no diesel trucks or roaring jets. So much greenery cleared the air. New Zealanders say that this land of theirs is God's home. It's easy to see.

Tomorrow the tour will be airborne. We are only visiting the North Island of New Zealand on this stage. Don't worry about my health as I am well attended and over fed.

I'll resume the story after we reach the southern part of the island...