

OCTOBER 16, 1980

Outside of this office I've borrowed, 12 busloads of herders and fossil fuel miners are eating lunch. The occasion is the idea of the idea of the Board of Regents of the University of Texas. In case you don't know, the University system has over two million acres of land in Texas. They've called a field day to show off the conservation efforts that oilmen and ranchers are making on these lands north of Midland, Texas.

It is my choice to skip lunch to work. I've been riding on a bus for three hours. We have a couple of hours more left to go. With no chance of a nap, I didn't want to risk nodding off in a bus seat and end up with bent neck like one of those work oxen in Mexico.

Fifteen inches of rain in September turned this country into near buffalo-era condition. As early as 10 a.m., fat English bred cattle were visible lying down, filled for the day. Understand that this portion of Texas is still a big ranch country. Big in the sense of the size of the ranches and miles and miles of unpopulated land. For example, one of the tour guides casually mentioned that the pasture to the left of the pasture to the left of the bus had 14,-000 acres. Cowboys need telescopes to work these ranges. On the plots that have had brush control, it'd take a mighty swift old cow to outrun a man on horseback.

Among things we saw that needed further investigation were some small green cone-shaped objects that the guide claimed were boll weevil traps. According to his spiel, weevils retreat from the cotton fields to live in the oak brush that grows out here. All along the highway, we saw these traps. Say for maybe 10 or 15 miles. I'm unsure of the exact distance because a linear mile in these parts must be 16,000 feet long.

I got real interested in the boll weevil trapping. Over the fence lines I knew that coyotes were so thick that barn sparrows had to fly over the country at high altitudes to make safe passage. An old man up on the plains had wrote me some time ago that coyotes were so bad in his country that they were eating the cotton bolls before they opened. I began to wonder, and I still am, whether the coyotes and the boll weevils are allies or enemies.

The fellow sitting across the aisle on the bus said that boll weevils live to 15 years of age. Another guy, obviously a woolie operator, said that as far as he knew, coyotes never did die from natural causes. I saw that things were getting out of bounds, so I told them about a turtle down in Galapagos Islands that had a tag in his shell dating back to the days of Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabel.

The delegation is covered in hombres bearing titles like "Chancellor" and "Regent." I've been most respectful out on the floor. Some of these fellows pack a big stroke in the use of the University lands. As careful as I've been, I wasted part of the time. The foyer of the building was turned into an informal receiving line. I was introduced to an awful stern looking man that I knew was a big shot by the expression on his face. But after I'd gone through a routine I learned from the English in Australia of deep curtsies and double handshakes, I found out that he was the chancellor of a college that didn't have any land at all except a campus and a few experiment stations.

When I get back to the ranch, I'm going to read up on boll weevil book, I'd bet a six-pack that they outlive turtles. The busses are loading, so I have to go. The world seems mighty big this morning, spread out over this part of Texas.