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On the way through the South Texas cow jungle a few weeks ago, I stopped at a roadside park to rest. Through the heavy cover and undergrowth, a herd of humpbacked jungle cows were harvesting green prickly pear cactus on a forced basis.

High priced butane had terminated the normal practice of burning the stickers from the pear leaves. The wild old sisters of thickets were plenty tough, but the strain of the winter and buildup of the thorns was beginning to show.

On the car radio, a blabbermouth commentator was giving the Washington report. President Ford's head economist had stated that by summer the recession would be turned around.

Out my car window was living proof that Mr. Ford's head economist hadn't ever sat in a roadside park and watched some tiger striped cows rough out there existence on green pear. Several cherry threshings would pass on the Potomac before the balls of pear thorns would dissolve on these cows' mouths. I couldn't decide which was the worst — the commentator or the sadness of the rangeland.

Right over behind the roadside park, the Highway Department had put up a sign saying, "Warning! Poisonous snakes." Travelers, as you know, use roadside parks as rest stations. Ranchers adjoining the highways have been forced to concede that the public's needs wouldn't be turned back by a cow proof fence.

I began to wonder the reaction the sign was receiving from far-off city folks who thought that the Texas outdoors was composed of 50 percent rattlesnakes, 45 percent horned toads, and the rest made up of stinging scorpions.

Let's say an old boy from out of country has been traveling all day, drinking coffee from a thermos jug. His Volkswagon has two front wheels out of balance and his heater hose is leaking on the floorboard. At the last town, he and his wife had a fight about which service station had the cleanest restrooms. She said that he always picked the wrong one and he said that she couldn't pick a potato bug off a dashboard, much less select a good filling station.

So in a state of nerves that the marriage contract can provide, he swerves into the roadside park. In great haste, he heads for the fence. There in big letters is the sign "Warning! Watch for Poisonous Snakes!"

Either he is going to revert back to the habits of his childhood, or a urologist is going to have to be mighty smart at unlocking valves and restarting nerves to working.

One time we had a case like that over at the gas plant on the highway. The night operator had got so spooky of bandits that he was carrying a short barreled 30-30 rifle on his rounds.

Along after midnight, an old boy fresh from an evening attack on the Angelo beer joints stopped on the side of the road close to the gas plant. Just as he'd got his hindlegs planted, this over-spooked gas plant jockey cranked a shell in his rifle and said, "Reach for the sky."

It was 12 long months before that old boy could look after himself. To this very day, he's uncomfortable around open car doors. Doctors say he never will be the same.

Highway departments do that all the time. In high altitudes, they delight in putting out warnings to watch for wind currents. Did you ever see a wind current coming? What upon this green sacred earth would a man do if he did see one coming. Turn on his lights?

Road signs could be simplified. One deal would do it all. At major points, put one huge sign that says, “Cowards stay home,” or “Bud, you’d better watch out for old Bud.”

The old cows kept tearing the pear. Long lines of saliva would run from their mouths as they held their heads high to pass the thorns down.

No tourist tested the sign. From looks of the litter, I doubt if a snake could have stood the place. I know I was ready to leave.