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High prices have revived the fur market. Traders come to the ranches to buy pelts. Possum eradicators and pole cat hunters are making money. Mertzson's economy has been bolstered by school kids buying headlight batteries and .22 shells. Business is brisk after nightfall and the time may return when students are sent home from school for bringing the flavor of the traplines to the classroom.

Here at the ranch, the fellow at the bunkhouse runs his traps as he feeds cattle. Over on the east of his line, traps began to be thrown regularly. No signs or tracks were left behind. Trapwise bobcats of light footed coyotes don't leave a business card after they've called.

Animals, you know, aren't as smart in the wilds as they are under the direction of Disney's T.V. shows. But individuals do develop who can make a trapper thing he needs to be sent off to an old fiddler's contest to learn to retune his trap springs.

Tales of near-phantom wolves are part of the all professional trappers' resumes. I never held an interview with one that hadn't worn out a string of pack mules and nearly broke a county treasure, outsmarting a panther that traveled like a flying squirrel, who hadn't snared a wolf that spotted traps faster than a metal detector could be pulled from it's case.

Trappers, in fact, are among the world's most creative people. Story telling is as much a part of their game as talcum powder is to a poolroom. Many a dull winter day has been enlivened by their visits. Lots of secret bait formulas and honed down triggers have been spun by a fireplace.

The mystery of the thrown traps went on for days. We were marking calves over there before we discovered the culprits. The cows were covered with big grey ear ticks. It was those ticks that were throwing his traps.

Now I want to tell you about ticks. Ticks are impossible to trap I don't care what the Hudson Bay manual claims or the Sear's book says on trapping, you are not going to catch a tick in a double spring Victor or a light set. Newhouse. (I'm throwing in the brand names of the traps to prove my knowledge of tick trappings, not to advertise the products.)

Range ticks are harder to catch by hand than grasshoppers or bullfrogs. Hoppers and frigs can be found day dreaming. Tricks stay on guard, ready to jump. Unless you come across one that's suffering from overeating, you're better off if you never try to catch a tick.

I'm not going to swear to it, but I heard about a calf roper down in the worst part of the tick country of South Texas that caught a few, using surgical thread. The reason that I didn't document the claim was because the information came from a beer joint. Also, the man telling the story was the same fellow that caused me to write about southern ticks being able to whip a bumblebee so bad that the hive would overflow with bees wearing their stringers up under their throat-latches. I know you demand factual information. Some folks have a low grade regard for the truth. Other than in the case of politicians and married men, I think that out and out lying is a shameful practice.

After we'd sprayed the cows and turned them out, I got to thinking of all the sadness there is in this old world. Coonskins are worth \$9 a piece. Choice bobcat hides go right on up to the \$50 mark. Fur trapping never looked better. Then a confounded trick epidemic has to break out.

Introduction of Suffolk rams had raised some of the finest food that a varmint needs to eat. Experiment stations are working on increasing goat production. The future of the fur trade looked as easy as following a rich prospector with a hole in his pocket.

All trades have setbacks. I may have to find an Angus cow blood bank to restore the loss. 1976 is sure getting off to a bad start on this outfit.