

Big rains have soaked the Shortgrass Country. We had seven inches at the headquarters. South of the ranch as much as 13 inches fell on one weekend. Creeks ran high; water gaps were rolled into balls of wire.

One of our neighbors was over-eager to cash in on the rains. So much fence was washed down that we didn't check the gaps fast enough to keep the livestock from mixing up. Telephones were out for several days. By the time I reached him, he'd concocted the big story that he didn't have any cattle in his pasture joining us.

Several years ago, he'd taught me a lesson on a sheep trade that'd count as much as a masters degree from Harvard Business College. I wasn't about to let him slip a herd of old cows off on us. It had come a good rain, but that didn't mean the Noelke outfit was going to take in charity cases to eat up out summer grass.

Brand laws in Texas always have been too lenient. Out in New Mexico, an old boy can't just walk off and leave an old cow because she's losing money. Down here, a fellow has to be on guard for all sorts of strays. In the drouth of the '50s it wasn't safe to let your best friends bed down a kid at your house on a Saturday night party. You'd have to check every couple as they left for home. It was like the depression days of my youth. There were a lot of them trying the old premature weaning trick. We had eight children. We sure didn't need any extras to feed.

Besides the fencing grief and dishonest neighbors, I had to contend with Goat Whiskers the Younger. Right before the rain, he loaned us a couple of bulls. The very minute the telephone started working, he began to ask about his bulls.

He expected a day-to-day report on their whereabouts. We didn't have but 300 acres left under fence. The only way we were able to find the saddle horses was by tracking them down in the mud. And there Whiskers was, demanding to know where two bulls were.

We were having enough trouble finding our own bulls without looking for other people's oxen. I got plenty disgusted telling him over and over that I was going to check on his cattle once ours tallied out.

Like I told him, if one little old flood worried him so much, he ought to breed up a herd of cattle that'd float or knew how to use water wings. It wasn't my obligation to insure his bulls against high water.

He's the one, not me, that goes big-shotting off to cow conventions, selling high powered stock. My bull deals are with the packers. I don't try to swindle the public, that is unless the owner of a crippled bull is liable for the packing company adding water to the meat after he's sold the bull.

He finally got so unreasonable that I got mad. As soon as it dries out, I am going to personally take those two bulls home. It's going to be the last time I borrow anything from him except his windmill tools and his studhorse. As far as that goes, it may just be his windmill tools as he was so nasty the last three years about the amount of time the mare stayed on his grass that I may quit the horse business.

Whiskers is like his old daddy. He thinks the world should pivot and then curtsy for every wish. I'll show him a thing or two. Next time I want something, I'll go somewhere else.