

JULY 19, 1984

Big runs of cattle and sheep continue to hit the San Angelo market. Ranchers stop over every day in Mertzon to take a break from herding their pickups and goosenecks toward Angelo. In the past 90 days there's no way of guessing how much gasoline and rubber has been burned and used unloading the drouth merchandise. Expenses are high in all categories. Next it's going to be the people that begin to wear thin at the tread lines.

Dry weather is already making the herders scrooch up into tight balls. The guys that roam through Mertzon are so far in under their hats that they look like they are wearing a diving helmet instead of a straw sombrero. I noticed one the other day who'd slipped down in his pants so far that he'd had to take up extra slack in his suspenders. Don't ask me how far a hat crown will stretch or a pair of Levis. They just keep pulling the brim down harder and bitching up their pants to higher levels. It'd take some hombre like Sir Issac Newton to judge that kind of limits.

Once they get over to the auction they aren't any better off. I waited on an old boy the other day at the auction's unloading station. He was so drouth weary he just wrote off the receipt, signing his own name. After he'd unloaded his stock I got to looking at the counter where they keep their receipt pads. It looked like where a bunch of grade school kids had been writing on their desks.

Last Sunday afternoon, of all the wonderful things to happen, eight truckloads of cattle headed to the rain-belt out west stopped for a while in Mertzon. The whole caravan was shut down waiting for instructions. Before I thought what I was doing (I guess it was from habit) I'd joined in and was talking to these drivers just like we were waiting at the ranch.

I didn't let on to these fellows how jealous I was of anyone who had some grass. They'd try to get on the subject of how dry it was in our country, but most livestock truckers spend so much of their time talking to fresh waitresses and the lead goats they have to haul around in the sheep country, that it doesn't take much skill to keep them rattling on to other things.

For over an hour, we talked cattle. I bragged on those tiger stripes like I was going to buy some of the same kind. All the while I was hoping they'd let it slip where they were headed. I'd sure like to have a new friend that had enough grass to winter our saddle horses. I'd be too polite to move in on him, but it'd sure be nice to know that our horses were going to be around once it did rain again. Even if that old horse story is worn thin, I bet it'd still open the door to maybe getting on the subject of pasturing a few cows.

About dark the trucks left town. I trailed behind as far as the ranch turnoff. If I had a lot of grass, I'd share with everyone. Maybe it'll rain before our old ponies have eaten up the mesquite beans.