

TV and the written media keep reminding us the Chinese are using all the steel in the world, scrap or raw, to build an enormous dam. Three-eighth inch steel rods, for example, jumped 300 per cent in four months. Fencing material has increased 10 percent a week for the past 90 days, hitting a rounded figure of a 40 percent increase.

Comes at a critical time on the Divide. Whitetail deer have developed a migratory urge that's affected the cattle. Deer knocked a hole in a good steel netwire fence last month wide enough for 15 head of our heifers to pass through onto our neighbor to the south. By the time the last of the calves were gathered, they completed three successful passages through and over the neighbor's cross fences, landing to the west of us.

The nearest sight or sound to disturb the cattle was the rattle of the windmill wheel at the Devil River Mill, or an old deer blind blowing over. The biggest distraction was a weekly handout of supercharged cottonseed meal, which set off a pasture-wide stampede to an ancient Chevrolet truck. The weaning date was far in the past. Bulls have been out since January. No wild beasts attack black heifer calves in these parts. And grazing conditions, native grasses, were the same on each side of the fence.

As for the deer, the breeding season ended in January. Traffic in the pasture, as noted above, is once a week. No one on the ranch hunts deer out of season. Browse is the same on either side of the fence. Water is close in each

pasture, salt and mineral available in troughs. So I am no closer to knowing why the deer pass through the fence than I am to explaining why the heifers fled.

The old saying, "Good fences make for good neighbors," applies. Lease contracts today on the Divide are based on an animal unit cost determined by fluctuation in the number of head added or subtracted during the year. We report sales and additions of livestock, is the way to look at it. Have to keep a running balance on the total numbers to figure the lease.

Understand that just as the heifers passed onto the neighbor's range, a steady drizzle refreshed a slow one-inch rain, ending four-wheeled travel and making four-legged travel cold and uncomfortable. Also, as the heifers spread out on the neighbor's outfit, driving the cattle home became more of a problem. (Don't do it now, but when you have time, recall the results when faced alone with both holding the herd and cutting it, or sorting the cattle and holding the gate. No rush to turn in a report.)

In order to keep my books straight, I deducted the 15 head of heifers for the amount of days the cattle ran on the neighbor's grass. Whether he reported the extra numbers was his decision. Over the wire, I told him I'd stand good for half the pasturage, or the cost of running seven and half head of weaned calves over 500 pounds, which is the way the category reads on the lease contract.

Splitting the lease is going to become a precedent now that we aren't able to afford fencing material, I said. Told

him that bulls belonging to the old boy joining my north side tore the fence down a month before, during the first rain. Explained that while he gathered five of my cows on a four-wheeler, we found five of his on horses. Tally showed us three cows short. His count came up either four or five head long, as the main bunch beat him to the brush before he got a count.

We thought we saw an off-color cow from an outfit further north in the lead of his cattle, but it might have been a deer. Anyhow, under the circumstances of too much brush and too few hands, we agreed to split the pasturage on the red cow and keep our counts the same until shipping.

Before I finished explaining over the phone about the bull I had running on the fellow on the east side, he said he had to go to town for his mail. Seemed a bit unusual to make a mail run at 10 o'clock at night, but maybe he was preparing for the time change.

In a way, I am glad the Chinese have run up the price of wire. We weren't able to afford fencing before the increase. Now I have a good excuse.

Whiskers and his hand put one of my calves off the highway last night. The hole was plugged with a thick piece of pasteboard. The wet weather must have weakened the paper. I am thankful for good neighbors. Guess the next thing is that the highway department will file a estray order against my whole herd.