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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Most of our bulls have been out with the cows since the eighth of February. "Most" is used to open the phrase, because "some" of these high bred oxen have been off on extended tours of the neighboring herds, and others have been treated to trailer rides to a nearby veterinary clinic.

Had not all of them torn out their ear tags rooting under water gaps, these strong urges to travel and inclination toward crippling and underpinning deficiencies could be linked back to their ancestry on the registration certificates.

Plenty of evidence confirms their wanderlust. Registry number 11687 refers to: "Wandering Creek," "Pathfinder," and one that is nearly too self-incriminating to list, "Old Traveler." Closer scrutiny uncovers a very suspicious sire named "Early Sunset." However, at no time at a sale or on a certificate has there been any reference made to "Old Fence Challenger of the Cedar Breaks," or "Wild Mystery Man," or "Stump Stumble of Lump Jaw."

With the records so mixed up, by the time we can tell sire performance, quite a number of the present bull herd will be being served up in the better equipped hotdog wagons around bus stops and train terminals up north. Calving ease or rib eye measurements count little to a commuter roaring

down the tracks, reading the baseball scores and dripping yellow mustard and red sausage casing dye on the upholstery of the seat cushion.

Forced by own inefficient identification system, my desk calendar records a private EPD method: "Moon-eyed bull tore up 55 feet of 10 gauge net at Middle Well fighting Crumpled Eared bull, resulting in both bulls being brought in for rest and restoration after six calendar days of service."

Each bull was scored a plus 38 for hostility and property destruction. Combined breeding costs, including depreciation on fence and excluding weight loss on bulls, was a minus 6, meaning 6 times the normal cost for range breeding costs.

Hard to keep from envying outfits using artificial insemination. Had these royal black ringmasters tuned out like their records claimed, big banks from Fort Worth and Dallas would have moved out here years ago.

Last night on the way back from town, a neighbor's bull was pawing down the ground wire on his electric fence. So not much is left to do but to go back to the days of open ranges.