

MARCH 12, 1981

Great wealth has spread across the Shortgrass Country. Soft, deep, penetrating rains have seeped down to the wet subsoil. Spring is going to come six weeks ahead of schedule. Hombres who hadn't smiled since their baby pictures were taken are in grand humor and great shape.

Southwest winds normally blow so hard in March that were it to rain it'd be too dusty to read the gauges. Some chance a weatherman would have of recording vertical wind driven raindrops. We just usually write March off as misery and let it go at that. So you can see why the past rains have cheered the countryside.

Often I've wished the San Angelo weathermen were stationed at the ranch. I'd like to have them around on some of the mild winter days that they call out over the radio. I have an awful time convincing the hands that they ought to follow the weather forecast instead of allowing the chill factor to make them miserable.

They get so bundled up in heavy clothes in winter that we must lose 20 percent efficiency. Just the amount of time that's lost pulling heavy gloves off and on is meaningful. Not to mention the holdups looking for lost gloves or fumbling with cigarettes that shake from their mouths, or wandering off the roundups hunting for windbreaks to ward off the chill.

For over 30 years I've had a standing argument with the oldest hand on the ranch. He wants to take the lowest reading of the day as a point of issue. On cold days he comes in grumbling that the defroster won't keep the ice off his windshield and the sun won't come out and thaw the water troughs. But never once does he admit that in a day's feed run he's in spots where the temperature may run as high as 35 degrees.

I'd estimate that from the time he gets up on a winter morning the average of his exposure will run about 24 degrees on a 10-hour feed run. By that, I mean that part of the time he's out of the wind where he can warm up and the rest of it just doesn't lower the average that much.

Naturally he's going to be cold if he doesn't chop ice with his back to the wind or if he gets clumsy and splashes a little water on his pants legs. For that matter, and I've told him I don't object to him stopping to warm up on the sunny side of a concrete tank as long as he makes up the time working faster later on in the day. He's just got in the habit of fussing. He knows that our weather isn't bad compared to the Dakotas or the Great Plains.

Anyone that works on a ranch learns to play the winds and use the thickets for protection. He's forgotten how the old Boss used to send us off horseback to gather dry cows in weather that'd close a modern interstate today.

I have to watch the weather in this office. Even though sunshine dries out my typewriter ribbon, I don't set up shop in a shady corner. I keep the room warm and take advantage of the sun. It's not my job to baby-sit a cowhand through the bad spells. Charles M. Russell started his career as an artist feeding thin cattle in Montana. Other folks could do the same if they'd stop thinking so much of their personal comfort.

We have it made now. Sheep are already scattering out too far to feed them any corn. Cattle are working hard and fast for the new greenery. Winter will be forgotten in a month. Next thing I'll be hearing it's too hot to have to work livestock outdoors.