



Whoa, Dammit, Whoa

Out on the high wide and lonesome. By Hank Vogler

Remember how Forrest Gump, for no particular reason, was always there during historic events? Well, it is either that, or I'm having flashbacks to when I loaded the kids in the car and went to Disneyland. After taking the boat ride through the tunnel with all the dolls singing "It's a Small World After All" and the kids singing that same song for weeks after getting back home, the world couldn't shrink back to normal fast enough for me. Or, as in the words of that great philosopher, Yogi Berra, it's déjà vu all over again.

Hard to figure which it is, but I have history with the "wild" horses. Granddad, many a night at the dinner table, spoke of surplus horses. After the first World War, mechanization came to farming. One third of the crops used to go to feed the horses. Grain got so

cheap in the '20s that once they got a fire going in the stove, they burned wheat for heat. No money for coal. People left the farms, opened the gates, turned their horses out and looked for work in the cities.

Another memory was hanging around Sandy Anderson's saddleshop and having Johnnie Crow mind the time when, during the Depression, Miller & Lux Company sent the orders to gather up all the horses off the company ranches that weren't needed and trail them to Winnemucca to sell. Johnnie swore that when they got to town the horses never brought enough money to pay the buckaroos who drove them. The word came from headquarters to get rid of the rest of the horses on the ranches. Some were given away, some were turned out, and some were used for coyote bait.

In the local custom and culture, anyone who had a ranch had a few mares but most ranchers also loved having a fast horse, a cutting horse, or, like Jiggs Catterson, a horse that could drive your head in the dirt. Lots of work teams were still used. Pat Culp always fed in the winter with teams. No such thing as a *wild* horse. If you had a rimrock behind the house, with or without a BLM-sanctioned horse permit, you usually turned out some horses or a stud bunch to save feed. When you needed them you gathered, sorted and cleaned them up with the chicken buyer.

Out on the high wide and lonesome, even larger bunches of horses ran. Taft Miller, Tom Bailey, Sammy Boyce. They ran in Catlow Valley and back towards the narrows. Legend has it that to scare everyone out of Catlow, real or contrived, with a war going

over horses, Taft supposedly shot the saddle horn off Tom's saddle while Tom was setting a horse. When Taft had to answer charges of attempted murder, his rebuttal was: "If I could shoot the horn off the saddle, I could've just as easy killed him. I was just warning him." Truth or not, they kept a lot of people from nosing around Catlow Valley.

Bob "Beetle" Bailey was Tom's boy. Beetle and his brother Walt treated me great and for a little kid in a small town that was special. When I graduated from college in 1971, I joined the local Elks Lodge. Avel Diaz was in charge of the kitchen and Julio Urizar was the manager. They put me on the kitchen committee. It was great fun. Avel rallied our group. We had to prepare a fine meal for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. All the dignitaries were seated and the executive secretary was pontificating about how they had pushed the envelope in the last year and the world was their oyster.

I slipped into the bar to get away from the bloviating and there sat Beetle Bailey. He was white as a sheet. Thought somebody had tipped over. I said, you okay, Beetle? "Yes," he said, "but I got to give a speech." Now this is a guy who came within a hair's breadth of riding the famous bucking horse War Paint to the whistle. This is the guy who could look you in the eye and tell you that the horse you just bought was a good one, just needed a few more rides, only to find out that he had bucked the last three owners off.

So Beetle, what's the speech about? "Wild horse and burro act." He then, like a fortune teller, predicted the future of what was to be. It is absolutely uncanny how accurate he was. After running it by me, he went into the big room with the wheels and asked to speak. He repeated his tale of what was to evolve and begged for help to get it stopped before it was too late. As he finished the house was silent. Then a fellow hollered out, "Hell, Beetle, you just want to claim them all," and the house broke in half with laughter. Beetle, dejected, walked off the stage. A short while later the first horse gathers started right in Harney County and the BLM manager was put under the microscope. The newly found protectionists showed up flush with money and power. They fought tooth and nail with all the same poor-pitiful-horse-and-mean-nasty-rancher tales still in use today. Beetle was hired as a horse expert for the BLM. Ironic as it was, a horse tipped over on him and Beetle never was the same. Yet they at least allowed the use of helicopters.

Now here, all these years later, we are no closer to solving this dilemma than in 1971. We have too much money involved in the problem. The loss of revenue would be huge if we came up with a reasonable solution. With a sound reasonable solution, the money spigot slows to a trickle.

Before 1971, horses had ownership. Culling was at least every couple of years. The old, the deformed were culled. The young studs were cut and halter-broke. The fillies were sold or culled. Inbreeding was strictly verboten. The amount turned back matched the grass. If a dry spell got started, triage was performed. It wasn't perfect but when the government by an emotional decree with total lack of science is mandated and private property seized for the "public good," watch out. By the time unintended consequences start to sprout, it's too late. More people become vested in the problem than in finding the solution.

We should be ever vigilant to prevent cruelty. The good book speaks of worshipping other things. The Egyptians worshipped

cats. A mountain lion killed a lady jogger in California. A female cat it was. A fund was set up for the jogger lady's kids and the kittens of the mountain lion. Hard to believe, but the kittens received more than twice as much money as the children.

We are bombarded with pleas to harvest organs from humans when they die. Putting down an unwanted old horse and turning it into meat, leather and other things is pretty humanitarian. A hungry kid in a Third World country has more on his mind than if dinner used to have a nickname. Nothing is crueller than watching an old horse devolve into a pain-racked miserable hulk of its former self. Neither horse sanctuaries, holding corrals, or long-term holding contracts are the answer. Humane harvest and inspection comes closest. What is cruelty is the bilking of money from people under false premises.

Hang and rattle. ■

Hank Vogler runs a sheep and cattle outfit in eastern Nevada. He's surrounded by unwanted feral horses.



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More than 47,000 wild horses and burros are fed and cared for at short-term corrals and long-term pastures. As of August 2012, there were 13,800 in corrals and 33,600 horses in Midwestern pastures. Out on the range, BLM estimates that about 31,500 horses and 5,800 burros are roaming on BLM-managed rangelands in 10 western states as of Feb. 29, 2012. Appropriate management levels should be 26,545, so we are exceeding what the range can sustain by 11,000 animals. These are your tax dollars at work. Check http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html. FROM TOP: Horses awaiting adoption at the Litchfield corrals in Northern California. ▶ Adoptable burros, a pair amongst thousands. ▶ Mustang fans, observers and bloggers from all over the West watch a gather near Susanville, Calif., and report anything "nasty." They are being watched by the BLM. OPPOSITE: Mare Tag #9615. She's got a tattoo on her neck. No one wants her.