



San Carlos Saga

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Arsenic Tubs is a ranch on the San Carlos Apache Reservation where several times a year Apache cowboys and ag college faculty members gather to burn out their sinuses with deep breaths of dung-laced dust.

This comes from dashing around powdery corrals, separating calves from their mothers, coaxing and bullying the unwilling animals into chutes, innoculating them, doctoring them, weighing them, delousing them, being stepped on (and, sometimes, run over) by them, poking and whacking them with lengths of plastic pipe (Apache cowboys prefer a stout stick to get the brutes' attention), and shouting at them "Heeyahhh! Haaahhh!! Gitover-therecowdammit!!!"

As a place, Arsenic Tubs won't make any four star lists. But the location—a vast, high valley, bounded on the south by the Gila Mountains and on the north by the ponderosa-topped Natanes Plateau—is great. It is a place to chew tobacco, squint in the sun, develop deeply-etched eye wrinkles, and spit.

It's primitive range kitchen turns out vast quantities of belly-filling beans, beef, fried eggs, and sausage, with much dutch oven cookery of biscuits, and glutinous, cheese-heavy concoctions (once cook Max Young, affected by culinary psychosis, prepared crepe suzettes for the crew, prompting bitter comments of, "What's this stuff? Where are the fried eggs?").

For 20 years the College of Agriculture's Animal Science Department specialists and agricultural extension agents have teamed with San Carlos Apache Indians to maintain a breeding herd of purebred Hereford cows at Arsenic Tubs.

Last month—as in each roundup—Carl Roubicek and some 20 other UA specialists, county agents, and Apache cowboys used horses, corrals, ropes and squeeze chutes to cajole one other group into cooperating with the project: the herd itself.

The days at Arsenic Tubs are long, with work frequently beginning at 6 a.m. and ending at 6:30 p.m., and herd manager George Stevens benefits not only by the expertise of the UA personnel, but by their numbers—cowboys are hard to come by these days.

Now, he looks back, recalling:

"I came here in 1924 and we just got the land back from the white ranchers and we brought over some heifers we paid \$20 a head for.

"We had 30 to 40 cowboys at that time—now we can't even hire one. Times are changing."

"Some of them didn't like me too much, because I was sort of the assistant head of the outfit. On roundups we used to decide where we were going to meet and then we would ride there at a lope all the way. The cowboys used to ask me, 'Hey, don't you know how to ride anywhere slow?'"

Today Stevens, in his mid 70's, moves slower than he used to, but he moves, and there is no doubt who is boss of this herd.



“He’s been great to work with,” observed one faculty member. “He’s been with us from the start and I hope he’s still with us when he’s 90.”

Directed by herd manager Stevens, the San Carlos Tribal Agency breeds the animals and Stevens and several Apache cowboys live for much of the year there performing the constant chores attendant with an approximate 2,200 head herd and 150 square miles of fenced rangeland.

But on frequent small forays and several major roundups during the year UA personnel assist in evaluations of the herd and aid in one-by-one examinations of herd members.

In the middle of May the UA joined Stevens and his crew in a four-day roundup of some 1,200 mother cows and nearly that many calves from more than 18 separate breeding pastures at Arsenic Tubs.

Cows had udders, eyes and weight checked and recorded and calves were vaccinated for bacterial diseases like “blackleg” and malignant edema. Each calf, cow and bull is identifiable by number tag for later analysis.

Roubicek, professor of animal sciences and a participant in the cattle improvement program since UA became involved in the operation, explained that because each calf is marked by number at birth, a record of genetic performance and a history of growth and results of treatment have been kept.

George Stevens and his wife, Sarah, (above) check the condition of registered herefords, keeping records on each animal in the herd. At noon, after a six-hour long morning, chow is devoured in short order (below). Innoculation against black leg and other diseases requires close work in a squeeze chute. County agent Terry Wheeler (right) does the honors.





Over the years Ag College technicians and students alike have benefitted from the cooperative project by having an "extension ranch" to use for research, teaching, and demonstration, he said. The San Carlos Tribal Agency owns the herd, but UA has been able to help determine how to increase calf crop percentage, improve genetic merit and eliminate dwarfism in the herd.

Roubicek said more than half of the breeding cow herd is actually registered and the others are purebred but nonregistered. The herd is segregated in nearly 20 separate pastures where specific mother cows and selected bulls reside year-round.

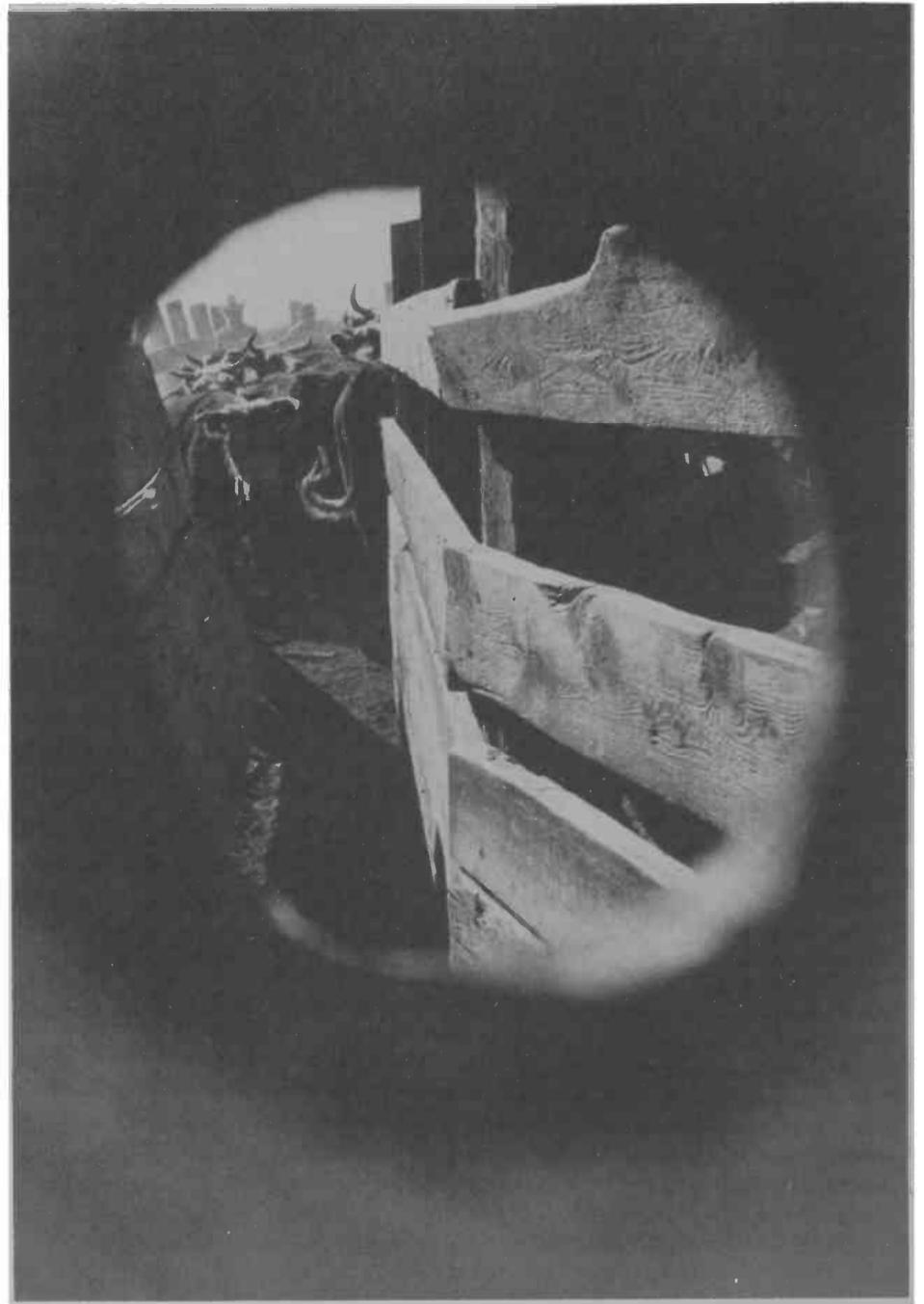
Calves are born early in the year and May's activity was a pre-weaning roundup, said Albert M. Lane, a livestock specialist with UA's Cooperative Extension Service. Lane, an Arsenic Tubs veteran, has helped evaluate animals for conformation, condition and defects.

Lane agreed with Donald E. Ray, professor of animal sciences, that the San Carlos herd, designated as "R-100," is one of the best herds in the state. Ray, who helps evaluate the progeny performance, said much of the practical performance and the data gathered on the herd have industry-wide application.

Roubicek said since the program began the cooperation between the university and the San Carlos Apaches has been "tremendous."

"The Indians get veterinarians, geneticists, and physiologists to help work with their cattle and we get the real place, the real situations, and the living conditions of an operating ranch for our research and demonstration. It's an excellent management plan."

He said the project has been broad in scope, long-term in nature, and has continued successfully to date without administrative difficulty. The cooperation has been one of the best rewards, he added. ●



KNOTHOLE VIEW of cows being herded towards the squeeze chute (above). Sleeping dogs are allowed to lie in the warm sun at Arsenic Tubs (below). The days work (right) is a dusty, bone-crunching one, with lots of trampled feet and mashed fingers.



