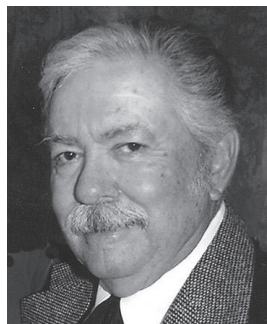


# Those cattle gates from Hell

BY BOB FISCHER



I love the sights, sounds and smells of western sagebrush that make up our desert cattle country...In this type of parched land is where my hunting buddy Rick Montoya and I love to hunt quail and the desert cottontail rabbits. If it weren't for the dad-blasted inventions man uses to control cattle, my love affair with western lands would be perfect.

It's not the fences that bother me, it's the gates. Not sturdy wood or metal gates found in suburbia that swing freely on well-greased bearings with locks that even a New Yorker can figure out. I'm talking about "cattle gates from hell!" They are loosely constructed barbed-wire contraptions designed not so much to impede the progress of cattle, but to embarrass anyone who is not a fourth-generation cattleman.

These gates connect barbed-wire fences across roads through public and private land. The typical gate consists of three four-foot poles, joined together by three or four strands of barbed wire. The wire points are sharpened on a weekly basis by cowhands who talk in low drawling tones and secretly wish they could install claymore mines instead. When properly installed and adjusted, barbed-wire cattle gates are an effective means of closing roads.

They are also the most humiliating mechanisms ever devised by man. Montoya and I thought it would be a great idea to bring Ron Furtak along since he took to deer hunting so well and we figured we could use his intellect to close those pesky wire gates. On our last trip out west Rick and I had partaken in the manly art of chewing tobacco like most cowpokes do.

The first fall morning out on the Oregon-Nevada border was crisp and downright purty. Rick and I rolled out of our bedrolls after we had let Furtak get the fire and breakfast going. Montoya was complaining about losing one of his socks again (he always misplaces one on our trips and usually we find it in our coffeepot).

After breakfast we came bouncing to a stop near the first gate. Ron got out, secure

in his abilities.

He began to work on the gate and it almost opened accidentally. Furtak appeared to be proud of himself but maintained his customary air of dignity. That was when the gate fell on his foot. He yelled in a controlled fashion. To keep from laughing, Montoya and I turned our heads and pretended to be busy with the cud between our lips.

We drove through the gate and after several minutes, Furtak couldn't get the bar to lock. Finally, Montoya took pity on him and wandered back to help, spitting tobacco juice and smiling. (*Spit*) Montoya said, "The guy who built this gate only had a fourth-grade education." "That's too bad," Furtak said. "Perhaps if he'd finished grade school the gate would work." (*Spit*) Montoya made two quick moves and the gate practically jumped to attention, quivering and singing in the wind. (*Spit*)

"A boy genius," Furtak raved. "Certainly he didn't need any further education." (*Spit*) The rest of the day was a rehash of that first gate. There are seven gates out here, each one slightly different from the first, with its own unique type of locking system. Each one would stump Furtak in a different way. Finally, while we were on our way back, Furtak began to understand the intricacies of the locking mechanisms. The last gate was the most difficult to put back together. Furtak called out to us, pointing to the quality work that he was now doing, and locked the gate.

"Great," Montoya called out, looking backwards through the rearview mirror with a funny squint to his eyes. Furtak smiled, waved and walked into three strands of horizontal barbed wire. Furtak had locked himself on the wrong side of the gate. Montoya and I began to smile, then giggle, then guffawed uncontrollably as we staggered out of the truck. Furtak says that Montoya and I got our money's worth out of the laugh, but he had never seen anyone laugh so hard that he swallowed his tobacco juice! (*Spit*)

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