

Death On The Prairie

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Death on the prairie is not very pretty, especially at 100 degrees. Biological processes tend to be very obtrusive, odiferous and pungent.

Bull 305 is missing. The drive through the pasture started, and just around a butte, there he lies. Nothing remains of common decency. Flies and other members of nature's burial regimens are busy at work. Buzzing regimens are closer to the truth, especially when the task is to dispose of a 2000 pound bull.

The cell phone does not work. A search for a tall butte begins so a call can be made to summon help. The call for help is really a call for cleanup and information. It certainly is not a day for profit, but hopefully the information from a postmortem will provide some explanation of why the bull died. The search for professional help is not easy, as miles often make difficult any face to face help.

Death, although not a topic anyone really wants to discuss at length, is part of life and is never on time. The cow herd is grazing at the opposite end of the pasture with the bull's calves at their side. The herd is oblivious to the loss. All are reaching for a morsel of grass, to add a pound, to add the needed nourishment for survival.

The veterinarian, already trying to make up lost time from a wrong turn at the wrong butte, scans the scene and gathers up a mixture of thoughts. The Dickinson Research Extension Center veterinary interns are also gathered at the site. For some, this is the first view of the state of decomposition brought about by summer heat. The experience, not too often found around paved parking lots, provides some insight into life on the prairies.

The veterinarian maintains a certain calm as he tunes in to the best diagnostic tool available, ears. A general discussion of the potential scenarios, lots of questions, lots of thoughts and gradually the slow process of elimination on why the bull died. Standing on the hilltop, cooled as much as possible by a slight breeze, cars pass quickly by. Lots of thoughts come to mind. The cattle have the essentials: food, water and a dry environment. The herd, standing by, alerted to the presence of strangers, contin-

ues normal activity. Vaccination records are up to date; the herd health program is intact. There are no similar problems in the area. There are no obvious signs of stress, other than the 95 degree heat. The water fountains are full, the water source clean and no known mineral problems.

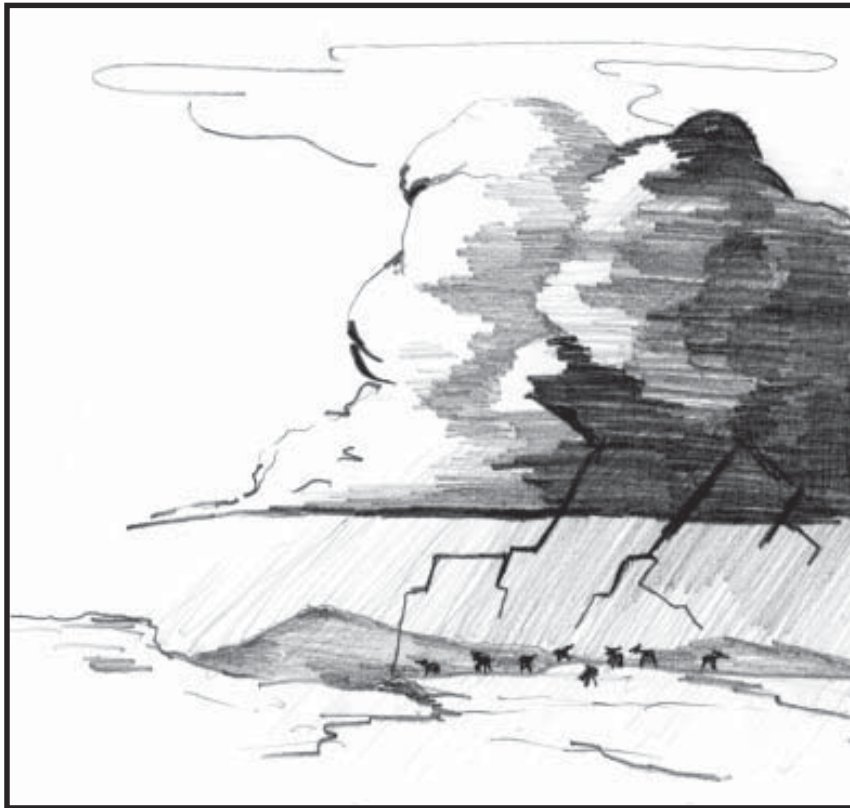
The herd is monitored regularly, checked daily, although not counted daily. There are no new arrivals, no new feeds and no other deaths. Allergic responses are not evident, the cattle breathing normal. There is no need for alarm, no need to panic; it is just a bull, dropped dead in his tracks with no obvious gunshot. The grass is still standing where he was standing with no sod shoved aside from attempts to stand up and no death straddles evident in the dirt.

A thunder storm is brewing in the east, the clouds reaching beyond their limits, the color only found in Mother Nature's book. Lightning, moving across the prairies, routinely kills. There really is no antidote, no vaccination, no help, just common sense. Stay off the high ground and away from anything that conducts electricity. Cattle have no common sense, no lightning intuition.

The bull did not have a chance and only felt a brief sensation of moving hair as his life ended. The bull lays at rest on his knees, head still up. Current value, nothing. The crew arrives to move the bull. They ask if 'doc' will cut him up. I say no, no need. They give a sigh of relief; it is late in the day, he will be easier to load, a practicality of life. May LS BONANZA 763 42408305 rest in peace.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0205.



No Antidote to Lightning!