

20. CORRALS & A BRIDGE

We wanted to build new improvements for AI (artificial insemination) and feeding, but expensive new materials were not in the budget. Central to our alternative materials strategy was a tough old 'wood-tick' named Leo Miller (1911-1987).

A buddy of Evan Roberts, Leo was one of the 'wags' at the Forks and the founder of the Forks Lumber, originally located about a half mile east of The Forks on the north side of 287 on land owned by Evan.

Evan liked to make mischief and Leo was a bit of a scoundrel. Not long after Leo started the Forks Lumber, he sold it to Dale Moon (1933-2011), an erstwhile executive who was looking for a retirement enterprise.¹

No sooner had Leo sold to Dale, than Evan rented Leo another piece of ground immediately adjacent to Dale's sawmill and Leo set up another sawmill to compete right next door. Shortly, Dale got fed up with the joke and moved to the present location near Ted's Place.

After a while Leo, lost interest and shut down his second sawmill. I guess when Dale moved, it wasn't so much fun anymore...but I'm getting off track.

Hard drinking, totally bald and usually attired in a dirty white tee shirt with old red suspenders hanging on to his worn jeans for dear life, Leo cut a marginal figure - but looks can deceive. He was about seventy and way too spry for true peace of mind. He lived for a while in the house below the Bennett Meadow on the Roberts place. I don't know if he was married or not, but the nice woman he was living with and who answered the door every time I knocked was a good thirty years younger (probably needed to be, to keep up with Leo).

Leo was logging with a team of draft horses in a burn up on Deadman, west of Red Feather. He charged us \$1.25 for 6" to 8" diameter by six-foot

long posts and cut several hundred of them for us, together with any other lengths we needed. The posts were fire hardened and dry, so they were easy to home treat against rot.

I welded up a dipping vat out of a six-foot piece of 24" diameter steel pipe and outfitted it with a sediment screen about 18" off the bottom and a steel lid that could be padlocked when not in use. Then Kent and I buried it vertically up to its eyebrows. Over that we erected a trestle frame with a hoist (opposite page). Every day for months we put a new batch of posts to soak in a mixture of diesel fuel and wood preservative.

For a \$15 fee I got permission from the Forest Service to cut corral poles on our Eaton Permit. Kent and I cut hundreds of 16-foot corral poles and hauled them thirty-five miles back to the ranch.

We built corrals and feed bunks at our place sufficient for wintering 300 calves on feed. At Rabbit Creek we built corrals to dry-lot and AI 200 cows. Later at the Ferree Place we built corrals for 400 cows, also for AI. At Meadow Creek we built a light duty corral for sorting and pregnancy checking preparatory for our trail drives to Eaton, Sheep Creek and George Creek.

Because of Stonewall Creek's propensity to flood, we were able to find a deposit of very clean water-washed sand and gravel suitable for making concrete that only needed screening. For that we built a small portable *grizzly*² that we could dump a load of gravel onto from our tractor loader.

We fitted our grizzly to the top of a wooden hopper that could unload directly into our tractor mounted cement mixer. So, we had our own 'ready-mix' setup. We poured a lot of homemade concrete for feed bunks and aprons, floors, slabs, retaining walls and bridge abutments.

Our experience with high water in Rabbit Creek convinced Kent and me of the need for a bridge³ just east of the buildings. Kent and I designed and poured

concrete bridge abutments 30-feet apart. Leo cut and delivered four 27" diameter logs thirty-two feet long for stringers and milled 3" planking for the deck.

Kent built the bridge in his spare time. It was impressive. He pronounced it "*hell-for-stout*." But as stout as it looked, we knew there was a limit to its load capacity, so we graded a bypass ford across the creek on the west side for heavy equipment.

Not long after the bridge was completed, we engaged a contractor with an earthmover to dig silage pits south of the corrals. He used the bypass ford when he moved the earthmover in, but inexplicably used the bridge when he moved out... Bye, bye bridge. I think we collected about \$12,000 from the contractor's insurance company.

Alan Morris rebuilt the bridge later using steel girders from two old highway bridges we had bought from Larimer County. That second bridge is goin' nowhere (opposite page).

I'm more or less done laying the groundwork for the Phantom Canyon Ranch saga. In short, Jeanne and I had planted ourselves in the Livermore Valley, and unbeknownst to us, were about to reap the whirlwind.

After the New Year, we'll get started with the story in earnest...

¹ Dale's granddaughter, Amy Mowen, now owns and operates the Forks Lumber, located near Ted's Place on US 287.

² A grizzly is a sloping screen made of heavy steel for sieving large rocks out of gravel.

³ Sub-zero weather made an equally good argument for a bridge. After an early winter snow, (before the bridge), a kid helping us part time drove his 4-wd pickup across the creek at 20 below zero (the live water in the creek had not yet frozen) then he stopped on the other side to get out and check something. Water had gotten in the brake drums and then frozen while he was out of the cab. When he got back in and put it in gear, it tore up the drive train - front and rear.



Post treating



Rabbit Creek Bridge