

INTERVIEW WITH JACK VOGHT AND BEN COLVIN, JULY 28, 1995

Ben Colvin and Jack Voght are neighbors. They both ranch in Esmeralda County. Jack operates out of Lida which is close to the California line, while Ben operates mostly around Goldfield.

Ben Colvin; The outfit we have is the old Jim Danials place. I bought it and moved down here from Oregon in 1968. It's a place that will run about 900 head of cattle year around. That is, it used to run that many cattle, but now with all the wild horses in this country and the government being what it is, we have pretty well been put out of business. We still have about 50 head of cattle out, but we're only keeping them here for the purpose of holding our water rights, hoping things will get straightened out.

When I first moved here, there weren't a lot of horses in this country. I don't think there were more than about 50 head on our allotment. The boys that were in this country before I got here pretty well kept the horses down.

A lot of my problem has been being situated next to the Nevada Test Range. From the time the wild horse act went into effect in 1971 until 1990 - almost 19 years - they never removed one horse from this country - neither on the test sight or our allotment. And since the government people never kept the water holes up on the Test Sight, a lot of the horses that should have been over on them ended up on our allotment.

Because of the increasing number of wild horses, we took non-use for 150 head of cattle in 1987, but of course ~~that~~ wasn't enough. The horses were simply taking all the feed. It was so bad, we finally made a decision and moved all but the few cattle I mentioned off the range early in 1988. We started shipping our cattle on the first of April and finished the middle of June. We have had them on pasture in Oregon ever since.

I don't care what anyone says, whenever you have wild horses in a country, your cattle don't do well. The horses seem to take the best of the feed to where the cattle just don't do as good. But in our instance, it was a lot worse than just the horses taking the best feed, they were taking it all.

The year after we shipped our cattle the BLM counted 1,300 head of horses in our allotment. Our permit was for 905 head of cattle year around so you can see what they were doing to us.

They finally did get around to gathering some of the wild horses after we removed our cattle - about 300 head in 1990, and another 250 head in 1991, but never enough so we could bring our cattle home.

The range was so overgrazed, horses that would normally weigh around 750 to 800 lbs, only weighed 500 to 550 lbs. when they shipped them. Before 1990, the BLM was receiving a lot of complaints from people who were concerned, but the BLM people did not listen to them. That's why I believe that they don't really care about the horses.

From the time I bought the ranch until 1990, the BLM never gathered one horse or burrow from our allotment. They made no effort at all to remove any of the wild horses until after we moved our cattle off the range. That's why I'm convicted they intentionally used the horses to drive us off our allotment.

We tried to get representatives from different wild horse groups to do something. We finally did get Dawn Lappen of WOA and Susan Witiker of the Animal Protection Institute to tour the allotment with us in 1990, but it didn't help. When they were here, Susan Witiker made the remark that as far as she was concerned, even if the range was eaten down as bare as a table top and all the horses died but one, she didn't want any management of the wild horses.

To me that's cold blooded, for them not to care if the horses were starving or not. She wanted to know why we were finding horse skeletons on the range but no cattle skeletons. I don't know, maybe she thought someone was shooting them or something. I know they don't want anything blamed on management.

Jack Voght; My wife and I moved down from Oregon and bought the place we have in 1978. It had gotten too expensive trying to operate there around Bend where we were from. There were getting to be too many people. They were leaving the gates open - people were shooting holes in our water tanks - some of our cows were shot. We thought that if we got out on the desert we would get away from the people.

Jack; I believe when we moved down here to Lyda, there were probably about 150 head of wild horses on our range. Since then the number has increased to about 650, or maybe 700 head.

We haven't had as big a problem with wild horses as Ben has had. I've seen Ben hauling water until after midnight, trying to keep his cattle watered - and the horses drinking most of it. After Ben quit hauling water there were a lot of horses that died for lack of water.

Ben Colvin; They didn't die just from the lack of water, the range was so bad at that time, there just wasn't enough feed. The BLM people were doing use pattern mapping at that time, determining all the areas that were overutilized - they'd put a red dot on their maps, wherever they found over use. The map for our allotment looked like someone spilled a can of red paint on it. It got so bad the horses would just lay down and never get

up. There were a lot more horses died in this country than people realized.

The coyotes were so thick they would clean them up in three or four days. You just didn't see a lot of carcasses around. We have a tremendous number of coyotes in this country right now. When we moved our cattle out in 1988 we were losing a few calves to coyotes, but I think there are even more coyotes now than there were then.

There was a guy trapping coyotes here three or four years ago who caught over 100 coyotes within a mile or so of Goldfield. When you have that many coyotes they'll clean up a horse or burro in no time at all. They eat practically everything - and what they don't eat they scatter. I've seen places where an animal was killed where all you could find was hair and maybe part of the paunch. The rest, they either ate or scattered. There's a lot of lions in the country too. The lions have been bad for several years now, but I think there are more lions now than there have ever been.

Jack; Lions are a big problem all right. I estimate that over the last few years lions have been taking anywhere from 30 to 50 head of our cattle each year - cows, calves and yearlings. You wouldn't think that a cougar would kill a full grown cow, but we have seen evidence that they just run them until they drop.

Being located next to California, is a lot of my problem. After California instigated their ban on hunting lions, the number lions increased dramatically. And of course, when the lions had eaten all the game in California they started moving into our country.

To give you an idea of how bad its been - I talked to a wildlife management person out of the Bishop Office a couple of years ago - he told me that when the lions got thick, the deer herd in his management area dropped from an estimated 16,000 deer to an estimated 1,100 deer in just eight years. We used to see deer constantly in this country, but last year I never even saw a doe all summer.

We tried getting a lion hunter in here. The man was supposed to be a good hunter, but we didn't have much luck. Our biggest problem was, there were so many cats, they were continually crossing each other's trails and the dogs were constantly going from one cat track to another. In thirty days, we only got one cat. We did find cow parts in the cats stomach.

The only good the Cougars have had is the effect they have had on the horses. The way its been these last few years, by the 1st of October there's not a colt left on the mares. There's evidence that the lions are taking some older horses too. We found a six year old stud that we think was killed by a cougar.

But now we have an even bigger problem. The government has issued us a full force and effect decision, stating that we will remove our cattle from our allotment from the 1st. of March until the 1st. of September. Can you imagine that - how in the world can anyone run a desert outfit when you are not even supposed to have your cattle out for six months? It can't be done.

Ben; Ninety nine percent of the problems we're having is caused by the government. Before the government became involved, there were problems with drought and so forth but nothing like now. On a lot of years there would be a shortage of feed, but grazing the country didn't hurt it.

In a desert country like ours, we don't have a lot of grass. When our rainfall is less than four inches a year, there is hardly ever any grass, only shrubs, and that's what the cattle in this country live on. But on good years - when the rains come, ricegrass grows all over this country - and the shrubs do good too.

If we get the right kind of rain, we can have indian rice grass a foot tall. That's why the theory of overgrazing is so false. If overgrazing was such a problem, why is there such a resurgence of growth on the good years? And if overgrazing is such a concern, why do they let the horses overpopulate as they do? This overgrazing thing is nothing but a hoax, perpetuated by the government for their own self interest.

*Ben Colvin* 8/14/01

*Joseph Vogt* 8-14-01