



Phone, Phone on the Range

By Doug Hecox

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From a saddle, looking out into the growing sunset -- an inferno in the sky of purple, orange and pink, perfumed by grasses blowing gently in the breeze -- a man can get some powerful thinking done.

That is, until his cell phone starts to ring. The ringer is usually too loud and is always poorly timed.

Throughout the West, ranchers like me are making cell phones as much a part of our daily tools as leather gloves and Vise-grips, partly for safety reasons but also because our wives like to pester us at a distance. Evidently, in generations gone by, wives would shout themselves hoarse trying to tell ranch husbands it was time to come in for lunch or to leave their muddy boots in the garage. Eventually, the iron triangle was invented so wives, hoarse with information, could spread the word without saying a word.

Technology has leapt forward yet again and, through cell phones wives now have a new pulpit from which to bully their husbands. Fortunately, my wife can't remember my cell phone number and, for the life of me, I really can't either. It doesn't bother me much, though. It's there if I need to use it. However, when the untimely ringing of a cell phone starts intruding on my appreciation of sunsets and other confirmations of God's handiwork, I get a little upset.

This is why I need to write a thank-you note to some folks in England. London's British Library has sold 40 sounds from its collection of 100,000 animal noises to two mobile ring-tone companies.

In other words, people can now download alternative sounds for the ringers on their cell phones. Cattle have never been too fond of the beeping and chirping sounds of my cell phone. They tend to look sideways at it, as is their custom, and lope off in the opposite direction. My son theorizes that they may be avoiding someone -- possibly bill collectors. It is hard to disagree. In all the months I've had a cellphone with me out in the pasture, cattle have actively avoided speaking on my cell phone. Pretty suspicious, really. Is it possible I'm harboring big beefy fugitives?

The ring-tones available for download currently include exotic creatures like screeching parrots and roaring lions, but it won't be long before guys like me can select from more conventional fare. My sunset watching wouldn't be bothered by a cell phone that moos like a heifer or hoots like a barn owl. In fact, it might make it more enjoyable.

In fact, a cell phone that sounds like a wounded rabbit could revolutionize coyote

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hunting. As soon as I start losing calves again, I could just place my cell phone in a good spot and call it from another cell phone while I take aim from a hiding place. A wounded-rabbit cell phone would attract coyotes as easily as the more rudimentary cassette tape player I currently use, and might even attract other predators interested in what kind of cell phone I have.

Everyone likes to see new cell phones I'm no geneticist, but I think it's one of the bonds that tie all mammals together. It's in our blood.

If I were smart, I would download the yips of a good cow dog. If I needed help moving cattle, my usual helper, Dog, could sleep in while I take care of things with a carefully placed cell phone

Come to think of it, a thank-you note may be a bit much for those Brits. Maybe I'll just give them a call.

After this sunset.

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Doug Hecox is a bona fide Western wit. Hailing from Wyoming, his column appears frequently in publications throughout the West. His forthcoming book, "Graze Expectations," is slated for release in August.