

Poetry

Poems from “The Bell”



Mattie Ellis lived on New Mexico's legendary Bell Ranch (www.thebellranch.com) for twenty-seven years with her husband George, the fifth manager (since 1875) of this sprawling 390-square-mile property in eastern New Mexico. A perceptive observer of working rangelands, her out-of-print poems speak to never-ending cycles of rain and drought, hope and disappointment, duress and renewal familiar on rangelands worldwide.

In 1953

Through all the hot and windy days of June
We rode the dusty pastures,
Watching the waterholes
Along the drying creeks;
Watching the thunderheads pile up
Each sunny afternoon,
Raising our hopes for needed rain.
Watching the red dust rise and go
Sweeping out of the dry creek beds;
Hearing once again the wind
That blows away both cloud and hope.

October in Drouth

October's days are blue and fair.
I think that we have never
Loved them more than now.

All the burning summer long
We watched the faithless,
Promising clouds,
The vanishing grass,
The drying water,
And said each disappointing time,
“Maybe tomorrow...”

Now the last tomorrow is gone.
Grass wouldn't make
Even if it did rain.

Gone, too, the waiting and the worry.
Time now to cut the cows
To fit the grass.
Shoe the horses.
Ready the wagon.
Order the trucks.

1954

The brown and bitter summer has gone,
And early autumn, too.

Late, late rains have fallen,
And all the countryside is green.
The grama grass knows
That tomorrow, or even tonight,
The frost may come.
On slender, fragile stems,
Scarce three inches high,
Its purple flags are waving
With seed for a better year to come.

Rain After Drouth

A cloud came by today
Pouring water unbelievable
Over all this dry and dusty land.
The borrow-pits are running full,
The rocks and trees are dripping wet,
And on the Flat below the Hill
A sheet of shining water goes
Hurrying down the draw.

The creek is coming up,
The air is sweet and cool and clean;
A rainbow shines on Gavilan,
And soon the frogs will all be singing
Songs our grateful hearts repeat.

—By Mattie Ellis

Compiled by “English Majors on the Range,” Jim Thorpe and Bob Welling, charter members. Poems by permission of the Ellis family.



Photo courtesy of Bell Ranch.