

Practice Tips

Dr. David McClary, *presiding*

Cows and Curves

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Dr. Jenks Britt requested a practice tip with plenty of Eastern Kentucky color. There are plenty of curves in this part of Kentucky and not a whole lot of cows! These are not the Blue Grass horse farms that you see on all the post cards from Kentucky. I'm located back in the hills, as you come into the mountains you also move back in time, people still plow with mules (there is not always enough room for a tractor) then in the Fall they harvest the corn by putting it in a fodder shock. Until the energy crisis of the early 70's this area was isolated from the rest of the country—I'm the 1st graduate in the county and only the second in the area. I knew my cow practice was in trouble when one of my first calls was to treat Mr. Ritchie's family cow with milk fever—and she was a Hereford. The majority of the cattle in this area are in herds of 1-5 animals. The biggest problem is poor management, not enough pasture and/or protein in the ration and filthy milking practices. Client education is number one item in my practice—not bill collection given the condition of the economy and the nature of the people to spend money til it's gone, my clients pay when service is rendered. This allows me to have time for education whether it is on a one to one basis or at a field day with a new, young and eager extension staff—to let me introduce what a veterinarian can offer in a herd health program.

Strip mining is the big industry in this area and given the use of big equipment and the implementation of the current Reclamation Laws—many acres of wonderful pasture land is opened up which are excellent for cow-calf operations. In East Kentucky, most of the roads are not 4-lane—if I'm lucky they are one lane paved or good dirt. I have to remember what my freshman anatomy instructor told me when I was in school—drive carefully—no animal is worth your life—fortunately I wasn't hurt, just the truck but it sure made me remember that bit of advice. This one trip I often remember as I round the curves.

There are several places in this part of the country where you just plain run out of road and get to drive up and down the crick (not creek) or even through the crick. Fortunately, the high waters don't usually last long or else you will be lucky enough to have a swinging bridge—that was a major adjustment that I had to make—learning to walk a swinging bridge where every step you make the bridge swings 2-3 times.

Then there was the one spring that I was called to a calving—there wasn't a road or a swinging bridge—just this sycamore log and a good long hike to the barn. It was dusk when I started the job and long after dark when I finished the C-section. Usually the clients, their parents, grand parents and all the young ones are out to watch the veterinarian and if they are not handy they get in the back of a 4-wheel drive and ride to see what is going on—other times it is just a short walk.

In town there are nice homes like in any neighborhood—but you get out in the country and we have some rustic but very nice homes—then there are real mountain shacks—at least 2 junk cars in the front yard—a coon hound, in this case a red bone—a laundry on the line—upon leaving this Hillbilly scene I could see how he earned his spending money—you will have to stretch your imagination just a little but there is a 55 gallon drum with a copper pipe coming out of it just under the chimney.

The spring, summer and fall are very picturesque. In the spring the wild red buds and dogwoods are in bloom—the summers are very humid and hazy and damp but the mid day sun produces lovely green grass and leaves. Then the fall is full of color—but winter is another story—the mud is everywhere and rarely are the roads covered with snow—but when it does snow—like all of you I get a dystocia such as a cow in the middle of the creek in the middle of a snow storm with a dead calf—in this area I do the best with what I have—in this case a small tree to tie the horns to.

Since the mining of coal (the primary industry in this area) has slowed I have hired a young but large man which has been tremendous help. As this practice has grown I also have a technician—Tammy—who has helped a great deal in extending my services with laboratory work and decreased my time on calls. My practice is mixed—I don't have any idea exactly what I will be into each day—I have some delightful small animal clients like Cindy—a High School music teacher and her dog Katie on Halloween—litters of Doberman ears, castrations of large boar hogs, litters of fuzzy kittens to vaccinate or even an elephant with a traveling circus—I don't know a thing about elephants—but a call to the circus veterinarian that had had Myrtle under his care coached me through Myrtle's bout with arthritis.

With the curving rough roads, lack of bridges, lack of real cattle farms—the advantage of this practice is the cash when service is rendered and chance to educate and develop the cattle industry in this part of Kentucky. Stop in and sit a spell if you are ever in this neck of the woods!