The Bull and the New Hip. WC 1437

Well, I had a setback. Here's the story. 2/6/2008

I spent Wednesday through Saturday of last week back in the hospital.
I was being careful, honest; sometimes things just don't work out the way I intend.
My left hip was replaced on January 14th and I came home on the 16th.
I had things all planned out so it would be very easy to do chores and take care of the bison, cattle and horses. All I needed to do was drop big round bales over the fences with the front loader on the 460. There are enough steel hay rings that I only need to drop bales about every five days. The bison, cattle and horses are each in separate winter pastures because things just work better that way.
Unfortunately on about the 22nd, the fan belt broke on the 460. Because it has a front mounted hydraulic pump, replacing it is a major operation. It had to be taken to the shop in Santiago and since it badly needed major engine work, that tractor was out of service for two weeks. That should not have been a huge problem because the D17 Allis can also be used to haul the big round bales. The difference is that the bale fork for the Allis is rear mounted and does not lift high. That changes the whole scheme for feeding as the tractor must then carry the bales inside of the pasture and the three piece steel feeding rings need to be opened and the bale backed inside. No more simply dumping them over the fence into the rings.
There were other complications. Because I had not been opening the hay rings during the previous months of feeding, they were frozen into the hay and manure. Also, since I had not planned to be driving into the winter pastures every week the gates were not set up for easy opening.
I was hoping to get some help to fill the rings on Saturday the 26th but the cattle ran out of hay on the 25th. I was resting that morning in the library that looks directly out onto the east pasture where the cattle are wintering. There feeders were empty and they were hungry. Cattle keep warm in frigid weather because their complex stomachs produce a lot of heat as a byproduct of rumination. If ruminants have hay in their stomachs (they have four stomachs) they can be comfortable in virtually any weather. Without hay they are in trouble. It was running about 20 below each night. They needed hay.
Still, that should not have been a big problem to take care of.
I started the Allis and located the rear fork under the trees, west of the garden. I hadn't used it for a couple of years so it was frozen in pretty good but it broke free ok. I loaded a bale onto the fork. Drove to the cattle pasture and opened the gate. They were so hungry I didn't even need to close the fence behind me. They followed the hay bale as I drove to the feeders.
The bale feeder rings are made of three steel sections that are hinged together. Remember they were more or less frozen into the manure .I struggled until I got one that would swing open enough to give me space to back the bale in.
Getting the bale inside of the ring can be a little tricky. With this tractor and fork it must be backed in. Since the bale is directly behind the tractor it takes some guesswork to hit the opening just right. That is not normally a problem. I've done it many times. What I didn't see was that a young bull had gone into the ring to scrounge some hay. He was behind the bale and when he realized that he was about to be trapped by the incoming

bale he bolted into a section of the hay ring. Although I don't believe he gave it a lot of forethought, his intention was to jump right through the opening in that section. He hit it directly in the center and got his head and front shoulders through. His belly and hindquarters did not fit however. He probably weights over 800 pounds and he was moving fast so he tore the steel section free from the rest of the ring. He made about 50 feet, jumping and bellowing until he collapsed near a tree on the riverbank. Still wearing eight feet of steel hay ring. It occurred to me that the next time he struggled he was going to put himself into the river. It might be hard to picture but when he fell the section fell with him and the top steel bar was pressing directly on his spine. His hind half was out the back of the section and weighing it down against himself. His spine had a 90-degree bend where the top bar was pressing down. I waited a few seconds expecting to hear his spine break but it didn't.

I had a 30-foot log chain on the tractor and I figured that if I could tie that from the tractor to the top bar, right at his spine, it would be forced upright when he struggled which might allow him to escape. In fact I was exactly right, but it didn't work the first time.

This bull isn't bad tempered but on the other hand he has never been handled so my wrapping a chain next to his back was sure to add to his panic. I approached him quietly and as I was just about to close the hook on the chain he blew up. I'm not sure just how he caught me, but armed with that section he flipped me clean into the air. I hit the ground about ten feet away and three feet lower on the riverbank. It was an awful hard hit. I told Gail it was one of my fifty hardest hits. That seemed to amuse her, which makes me think that I might write about some of those hard hits. At least the ones that I can recall. They might be interesting as they include horses and cattle and trees and chain saws and hay barns and rolling tractors.

Back to this story. The surface was hard frozen ice that had been packed by cattle hooves. I could not have hit worst. My newly replaced hip hit the ground first and took all the force. It was an "Aw Shit" moment. I was concerned that I had either crushed my pelvis by driving the steel prosthesis into it or broke my femur where the steel insert ended. But when I tested the leg it seemed to be intact. I located my crutches and tried again to free the bull. He had traveled upstream along the bank until he hit a few trees and again collapsed. He wasn't used to traveling with a ten foot wide steel gate and he misjudged his dimensions. He was exhausted anyway. I positioned the tractor behind him again. This time I tied the chain to the tractor first. He blew up again just as I finished tying the chain to his steel bar. This time I was better prepared and my scheme worked. He kicked himself through the section and walked off without permanent injury. I dragged the section back to the feeder, closed it up and drove the tractor out. I notice while closing the fence that I was soaked with a mostly clear fluid. Through my bandages, shorts, pants and insulated Carharts. In fact there was a puddle in the tractor seat. I had sprung a pretty good leak through the fresh wound.

The horses were low on hay too so I hauled a couple of bales for them.

I cleaned up when I got back to the house and lay down. There wasn't much else to do. Other than the obvious pain, I didn't feel too bad systemically.

The next day, Saturday, I set up for and gave my lecture to the Historical Society on Ancient Bison in Sherburne County. That went well.

Sunday I felt pretty good too, and there had been no leakage since Friday.

Monday I went to work. My leg got really tight after eight hours of mostly sitting at my desk. On the way home my wound ruptured and this time it was blood.
That gets us to a different story so I will break here. Don’t worry. I lived.