

The Bull and the New Hip.

I spent Wednesday through Saturday 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.

My right hip was six years ago.

I had things planned out so it would be easy to feed the bison, cattle and horses.

All I needed to do was drop big round bales over the fences with the loader on the 460.

There are enough steel hay rings that I only need to drop bales about every five days.

The herds were 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 was a major operation.

It had the tractor taken to the shop in Santiago.

It was badly in need of major engine work.

That tractor was out of service for two weeks.

That should not have been a big 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.

The tractor must carry the bales inside of the pasture.

Then 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 filling the hay rings on Saturday the 26th.

Because of extreme cold, the cattle ran out of hay on the 25th.

I was resting that morning in the library.

The library looks directly out onto the east pasture where the cattle are wintering.

The feeders were empty.

The cattle were hungry.

Cattle keep warm in frigid weather because their complex stomachs.

They produce a lot of heat as a byproduct of rumination.

If ruminants have hay in their 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.

I started the Allis and located the rear fork under the trees.

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 followed the hay bale as I drove to the feeders.

They were so hungry I didn't even need to close the fence behind me.

The bale feeder rings are made of three steel sections that are hinged together.

The rings sections were 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, invisible to me, as I backed in.

The bull realized that he was 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, the bull tried 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.

The bull 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 the riverbank.

He was still wearing eight feet of steel hay ring.

It occurred to me that the next time he struggled he was going to put himself in 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.

I figured that if I could tie that from the tractor to the top bar, right at his spine, the steel ring section would be forced upright, which might allow him to escape.

In fact, I was exactly right, but it didn't work the first time.

This bull had never been handled.

I approached him quietly, on crutches, over a sheet of hoof-packed ice.



I was just about to close the hook on the chain when he blew up again.
Armed with that ring section, he flipped me high 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.

Those stories include horses, cattle,
trees, chain saws, hay barns, and
tractors.

Back to this story.

I could not have landed worse.

My newly replaced hip hit the frozen
ground first.

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.

When I tested the leg, it seemed to be
intact.

I located my crutches and tried again.

He had traveled upstream along the bank, until he hit a few trees and again collapsed.

He wasn't used to traveling with an eight-foot-wide steel gate, and he misjudged his new 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.

The bull 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 noticed 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.

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.

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 bloody.

That gets us to a different story so I will break here.

Don't worry.

I lived.

Love. Dad.

2/6/2008

