



Agustin Silva Corona, of Piney River, arranges crates of sweet scarlet peaches picked by workers Friday.

AP PHOTO

IN BRIEF

Spring frost deals blow to peach crop

LYNCHBURG — A string of frosty nights in April set farmers on edge about their peach crops.

And now the damage is coming to fruition in central Virginia, where some farmers anticipate a significantly smaller harvest than usual.

"It's going to be a little light," said Danny Johnson, who runs Johnson Farms near the Peaks of Otter in Bedford County. "Some varieties we won't have at all."

The effects were especially felt in southwestern Virginia, Elaine Lidholm, communications director of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, said.

A lot of the production in that area is down 30 to 40 percent from normal, said Lidholm.

Saunders Brothers Farm Market in Piney River also took a hit. Owner Jim Saunders said the Easter freeze is cutting his peach production by 75 percent.

Bacteria blamed for sheep deaths

BOISE, Idaho — Biologists at Washington State University say they have isolated a bacteria that may have contributed to the deaths of thousands of bighorn sheep in the West over the past five decades.

The biologists say they found mycoplasma ovipneumoniae in tissue taken from dying lambs captured in Hells Canyon — a chasm that borders Idaho, Oregon and Washington. They believe it inhibits the ability of hairlike structures in the sheep's airways to eliminate bacteria that lead to pneumonia — a leading cause of death in bighorns.

"This is the first problem I've worked on where there is quite a bit of evidence piling up where the agent is a mycoplasma," said Tom Besser, a professor in WSU's department of veterinary microbiology and pathology.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Big plans for a Nevada ghost town

I usually try to generalize my columns where I can, rather than make them too specific to one place or person.

However, this week I am going to make an exception to that rule, since we have had such a wonderful time with our host Dr. Larry Milham and the Old Yella Dog Guest Ranch in Vya, Nev., that I just have to tell you all about it.

Vya is an old ghost town that lies almost on the border of Nevada and California, and the path of the historic Lassen-Applegate emigrant trail crosses at its southernmost borders.

First off, let me explain that we are talking wilderness here — real wild-west wilderness.

We're still talking dust, dust and more dust, of course, coupled with unusually high temperatures (112 degrees at one point) and the occasional strong winds.

While we were there, we had what they call "dry lightning" storms, where the thunderstorms are such that the rain never actually hits the ground, but the lightning sets off fires where it lands — usually on trees.

There were some fires, but they were at least 80 miles away and the only evidence we saw of them was an unusual "mist" over the hills one afternoon which reduced visibility to just a few miles instead of the usual 20 miles or so.

Anyway, the views from the ranch are amazing, especially from the top of the surrounding mountains where we rode on a couple occasions like real cowboys — or "Buckaroos" as Doc would insist.

Buckaroos are very similar to the western cowboy, only they tend to wear a flatter hat, dress a little more sharply and spend more time on training their horses! The term is derived from the Spanish "Vaquero" and tends to be used more in the area of the Great Basin country of northern Nevada, southern Idaho, northeast California and southeastern Oregon.

Let me tell you more about Doc and the ranch. Doc is a well traveled man, having lived in every state in the U.S. at one time or another, and in 38 countries around the world so he is getting on a bit, but he is very fit and agile, working hard as the site manager to help build the ranch into the "new" town of Vya.

The owners of the ranch plan to create a new "west-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

David and Anita Hasbury-Snogles, seen with horses Max and Roo, passed through Vya, Nev., recently, where they stayed for a time at the Old Yella Dog Guest Ranch.



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

ern" town, complete with saloon, 18 new cabins, a general store, dance hall, Sheriff's office, fire station, church, etc. where people can come and stay and enjoy life as it used to be in the days of the old settlers, but with all mod cons of course, except one — the motor vehicle!

The idea is for people to park their vehicles a little way from the town (in an allocated lot), and then be transferred by horse and buggy/covered wagon to their cabin, from then on they get about on horseback or by "shanks' pony," as we say in England, that is, walking!

These grand and commendable plans are a few years off, but there are a couple of cabins available for rent right now, and the Doc will look after you and entertain you with a million different stories from the local area, as well as from his experiences around the world.

You'll need to speak up though as he is a little deaf now and again, from a military experience in Vietnam, but generally hears most of what you say — although when you talk with a funny accent like we do, I'm not so sure!

One thing Doc. generously allowed us to do was to



Doc is seen at the Old Yella Dog Guest Ranch in Vya, Nev.

practice shooting with a couple of his personal guns. One was a Winchester 30/30 rifle, the sort John Wayne always carried in his western movies, and the other was a very special black-powder Colt Walker revolver that his great-great-great grandfather used in the Civil War.

Now that gun really does make a loud noise and puffs out tons of smoke when you fire it — boy was that fun, especially for a couple of Brits who hardly ever get near a gun back home, if at all.

There is a grand cattle drive going on down in Surprise Valley in September (26-29) which is sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce and

which passes through Old Yella Dog Ranch — we would love to participate in it ourselves, but we'll probably be on the other side of the country by then.

Still, if you do get to go, be sure to send us some pictures — you'll find the scenery stunning and you'll be making a little bit of history come alive once more.

Ride 'em, my little Buckaroos!

Until next week ...

David and Anita Hasbury-Snogles are British residents riding across the United States on horseback to raise money for charity. Visit HorseQuestUSA.org for more information. David can be reached at david_hasbury@yahoo.com.

Fumes from ethanol plant offensive to Wisconsin dairy processor

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPARTA, Wis. — Farmer David Rundahl looks around a field of pine trees and weeds on the edge of this western Wisconsin city and sees the perfect location for an ethanol plant.

He points to nearby railroad tracks and Interstate 90 — ideal for shipping corn and fuel, making some farmers rich and reducing the country's dependence on foreign oil.

But the \$115 million project proposed by Rundahl and others might come at a high price: Sparta's largest employer, a dairy processor located less than a half-mile down the tracks, is threatening to leave along with its 350 jobs if the plant is built. That would be an economic blow to Sparta, a town of 9,000 in the heart of dairy country.

Century Foods International, a subsidiary of Hormel Foods Corp., says its

dairy-based food products would be contaminated by the ethanol plant's pollution. Worried workers and others opposed to the location are trying to kill the project.

While many towns have faced similar fights as ethanol plants pop up across the Midwest, Mayor John Sund Jr. said nobody's seen anything quite like this.

"It's a real mess," Sund said.

The City Council earlier this year approved permits to

allow an investment group to begin construction, but the city acknowledged it made procedural errors in approving them after Century Foods filed a lawsuit challenging the process. That required the council to start from scratch.

The council recently re-approved the annexation of 82 acres for the site.

Later this month, it will consider whether to allow the land to be rezoned from agricultural use to heavy manu-

facturing. In August, the council could give final approval by granting a conditional use permit for the plant.

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