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OPINION | LETTERS

Young College Dudes Home on the Range a World Ago

Modern technology has removed most of the physical labor opportunities that I experienced.

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Landon Jones's reminiscence about "On the Range Where the College Cowboys No Longer Play" (Cross Country, Aug. 15) resonates with me. It was 61 years ago that my cousin and two of his friends from Missouri and I from Iowa headed for Montana and the wheat fields. I found a job just outside of Lewiston, Mont. A young farmer and his wife, with their six-year-old child, furnished housing, meals and my employment. My job was driving a diesel Farmall tractor. I was assigned the chore of feeding the chickens. One evening, in the fading sunlight, the six-year-old accompanied me to the coop. I entered the fenced area preparing to feed the chickens. The child ran screaming back to the house. I stood there transfixed. His mother emerged, calmed him down, and he said, "rattlesnake!" As I slowly turned inside the fenced area, I heard the unmistakable sound of a rattle. A cold chill ran up my back. To this day I don't know how I was able to leap over the fence to escape the confines of the coop. The rancher emerged with a hoe, but the rattler had slithered out of harm's way.

Modern technology has removed most of the physical labor opportunities that I experienced and with it the discipline learned to persevere in the face of tedious hours and repetitious work. When I became a professor, the manuscripts that I published required the same ethos that I learned while working on ranches.

Ben Plummer

San Antonio

Landon Jones writes of spending a summer wrecking ranch equipment. This confirms what any number of seasoned ranchers warned me when I ranched in eastern Wyoming in the early 1990s. “One kid,” they said “is worth half a hired man. Two aren’t worth a damn.”

Kevin Kilty

Laramie, Wyo.

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