



Unusual Animal Deaths in Valparaiso, Nebraska

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- Animal Photos Upcoming -



Unusual cattle deaths occurred in Valparaiso, Nebraska,
about 25 miles northwest of Lincoln, on April 5 and 7, 2003, and January 9, 1994.

Earthfiles, news category.

April 19, 2003 Valparaiso, Nebraska - About 25 miles northwest of Lincoln, Nebraska, is the small ranching community of Valparaiso. There are some 145 residents and the Mike Benesh family has a ten acre pasture where they've raised 50 head of cattle. Until the early morning of April 5. That's when the Beneshes discovered three of their animals dead. Two were cows in their second year. The third was a 2-month-old bull calf. One of the cows was kneeling upright with all four legs under her. There were no cuts, bruises, blood or signs of struggle. But there were burn blisters in the roof of her mouth.

Nearby, the second cow was laying on her left side. In her udder where the right front teat should have been was a 4-inch diameter hole that penetrated into the mammary tissue. No blood. A second teat had apparently been chewed off by predators who had come upon the dead animals. Again, no other cuts, bruises or signs of struggle. But she also had burn blisters in the roof of her mouth.

The 2-month-old bull calf had been the family's pet. He would approach anyone to be petted. He lay on his side next to a pool of blood that had collected on the dry ground. A perfectly circular 4-inch diameter cut had removed his scrotum and some of the muscle.

All the animals had been seen alive and well the night before, so the family was stunned to see them down and dead only a few hours later after sun up. The ground was frozen in 22 F. temperatures, so it was hard to find tracks or signs of struggle.

Local veterinarian Randy Schwang, D.V.M., from David City, Nebraska, was called in by the owners to determine cause of death in all three animals. Dr. Schwang talked with me this week about the unusual animal deaths and what he found when he examined them externally and internally.

April 5, 2003

The 2-Month-Old Bull Calf

Randy Schwang, D.V.M., David City, Nebraska: "When I first walked up, I assumed it was all done by predators. So, the fact that there was no blood there didn't strike me as alarming initially.

WHAT CHANGED YOUR MIND ABOUT IT NOT BEING PREDATOR?

I guess wasn't certain it wasn't predator until we got to the bull calf, which was the third animal we looked at. The same size hole on the, removing the scrotum.

A 4-INCH DIAMETER HOLE HAD EXCISED THE PENIS AND THE SCROTUM?

Just the scrotum.

SO, THE PENIS IS THERE INTACT.

Yes.

BUT THE SAC WITH THE TESTICLES HAS BEEN REMOVED?

Right.

IN A 4-INCH DIAMETER HOLE APPROXIMATELY THE SAME DIAMETER AND DEPTH?

It took the scrotum, the skin around the scrotum and part of the muscles, not all of them, underlying the scrotum.

WHEN YOU OPENED UP THE BULL CALF, WAS THERE ANYTHING AT ALL THAT WAS ABNORMAL OR MISSING FROM THE INTERNAL ORGANS OR?

No, not that I saw. The bull calf, I guess I had a hard time determining how he died. Why he died. Could not find any real definite cause of death.

EVEN THE HOLE THAT HAD REMOVED THE SCROTUM, DID IT APPEAR TO HAVE HAD ANY CAUTERIZING AT THE EXCISION?

No, it didn't. And it's possible that they stunned the calf and cut off the scrotum and that's where the blood supply on the ground came from and that's how he died.

BLEEDING OUT.

That would be explained by exsanguination, but they didn't take the blood with them.

WAS THE RECTUM TISSUE STILL THERE?

No.

IT HAD BEEN TAKEN AS WELL?

I'm not sure if it was taken by dogs/coyotes, or by people/lunatics.

WAS ALL OF THE TAIL AND TAIL HAIR THERE?

No, it was gone.

HAD THE TAIL BEEN REMOVED UP TO THE BASE OF THE SPINE?

Yes.

DID YOU EXAMINE THAT CUT THROUGH THE LOWER SPINE?

Not through the bone part. I'm not real good at in retrospect I should have determined if the bone was chewed off or cut off, but I didn't because I didn't know anyone would be asking me.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY OF THESE STRANGE CASES IN WHICH BOTH LARGE AND CALVES, THE TAILS ARE REMOVED RIGHT AT THE BASE OF THE SPINE. I'VE SEEN SEVERAL OF THESE, ESPECIALLY IN PHOTOS, AND THEY ARE A VERY GLASSY SMOOTH FINISH. IT'S BEEN DIFFICULT, APPARENTLY, TO DETERMINE HOW THE TAILS ARE REMOVED.

I can assure you if it happens again, I'll be better at it.

Historic Example of Tail Removed At Base of Spine



Young calf found April 20, 1976 near Sterling, Colorado, with its tail cut off and rectum cored out. Photograph by Logan County Sheriff Tex Graves.

The Two 2-Year-Old Cows

WHAT WAS MISSING ON THE EXTERIOR EXCISIONS OF THE COWS?

The cow that had one teat removed and part of her mammary gland. The other teat was chewed off. The other cow the one I'm assuming they killed first had nothing removed anywhere.

SHE IS THE ONE THAT WAS KNEELING ON ALL FOUR LEGS?

Right.

YOU WERE NOT ABLE TO TIP HER OVER TO SEE?

I was able, but there was nothing removed.

THE OTHER COW IS THE ONE THAT HAD THE 4-INCH DIAMETER HOLE THAT REMOVED ONE OF THE TEATS FROM THE BAG?

Right.

THAT'S ALL THAT WAS MISSING FROM THAT COW?

That's correct.

THAT INCLUDES CHECKING TO SEE IF THE TONGUE WAS INSIDE THE MOUTH?

The tongue was inside, but it was burnt, appears to have burns on it.

COULD YOU EXPLAIN I HAVE SEEN CHARRED CARBONIZED BURNS AND I HAVE SEEN SORT OF REDDISH BURNS.

These were not charred. More of the reddish type, between the two probably, blistered. And not charred, not like burnt crisp.

THE TONGUE HAD BLISTERS.

More in the roof of the mouth than the tongue.

THE ROOF OF THE MOUTH HAD BLISTERS, BUT NOT THE SURFACE OF THE TONGUE?

The surface somewhat, but not as significant as the mouth, the roof.

WAS THERE ANY OTHER SIGNS OF BURN?

Not that I saw.

ONLY ON THE INSIDE ROOF OF THE MOUTH.

The two cows, but not the bull calf. With the first two with the burn marks in the mouth, or what appeared to be burn marks, I was fairly certain that the changes we had seen could have been associated with electricity, could have been associated with microwaves.

WHEN YOU OPENED UP THE COWS, STARTING WITH COW ONE

KNEELING ON ITS KNEES AND DIDN'T HAVE ANY EXTERNAL EXCISIONS, WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU OPENED HER UP?

It looked like she had been dead for two days.

MUSHY.

And warm. I mean, like during warm weather, yeah. I was really surprised at how much her post mortem autolysis had taken place.

WAS IT TO THE SOUP CATEGORY?

Not to the soup category, but it knew what the soup category was.

SO THINGS WERE LIQUEFYING, AND WERE ALL OF THE ORGANS INCLUDING THE HEART MUSHY?

The heart and the lungs primarily. The first cow the one I assumed they killed first her esophagus had actually either broken open or, - now you make me think had been removed in her thorax in her chest. Yeah, very mushy. I could push my hand in the intercostal space the intercostal muscles were basically gone, deteriorated already. That really blew my mind how a cow that had been dead for less than 12 hours and it was 20 degrees out how could it get that rotten that fast? And I would like an explanation if you've got one.

April 7, 2003

The Third Cow, 3-Years-Old

MOVING FORWARD TO APRIL 7, WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Cow # 72-K was her tattoo. Her mother was 455-D, if that matters. I have a rather close association with that cow because I'm the person who raised her and sold her to Mr. Benesh back in January 2003.

She was laying on her side in about 3 inches of mud where the other cows had been walking also, on the south side of a log pile.

IT WAS MUDDY BECAUSE IT HAD SNOWED?

Snowed and rained, yeah. Rain, snow mix. Most places there was 3 to 6 inches of snow. Where she was laying and all the cows were standing, the snow had melted. She was laying on her right side, cut marks around her front right teat.

THE SAME PLACE AS THE OTHER COW'S?

Right.

WAS IT THE SAME 4-INCH DIAMETER HOLE?

No. It looked like it might have been planned to be the same 4-inch diameter hole. My personal opinion take it for what it's worth. I don't think this was done by the same person as the others.

Nothing had been removed. The udder tissue had been partially cut, but not

removed. The cut went approximately half way around the teat. It looked like it was going to be a 4-inch circle if they had continued the cut the way it was headed. But nothing was removed. The skin over the mammary gland was cut all the way through in a few areas and just like half way through the skin in other areas, uneven

WITH THE GROUND WET AND MUDDY, COULD YOU SEE ANY SIGNS OF STRUGGLE OF ANY KIND?

No. There were no signs of struggle, but things were pretty tracked up by other animals. But it didn't look she didn't have any mud on top of her like if she had splashed around in mud. I've seen cows be down in the mud before. it did not look like there was a struggle.

SO, SHE WAS CLEAN ON THE UPPER SIDE WHICH SIDE WAS SHE LAYING ON?

Her left, the same side as the other cow.

WAS THERE ANY THING MISSING FROM THE HEAD?

No.

ANYTHING AROUND THE HEAD OR ON THE HEAD?

The tongue, the left front side of the tongue, there was a small bite wound like from her own teeth. The upper part of the gum without teeth, had another bite, like her mouth had been slammed shut. This didn't necessarily have anything to do with cause of death. She could have been eating and another came up and slammed her in the chin.

DID SHE HAVE BLISTERS IN THE ROOF OF HER MOUTH?

No, she did not.

THE AUTOLYSIS DID NOT HAPPEN AS FAST?

No, she did not. This cow had some hemorrhages in her heart which would indicate like an agony death, or one that didn't come easily, which the other cows did not have.

WHAT WOULD YOU ASSOCIATE THAT WITH?

Those could come from electrocutions that did not stop the heart immediately. We see that in animals that die from pneumonia or infections.

BUT YOU KNOW THOSE TWO WEREN'T THE CASE, SO IT WOULD BE WHAT KIND OF TRAUMA COULD HAVE CAUSED THAT?

I did not see any signs of trauma.

NO BRUISING?

On that cow, no.

SO IN THIS THIRD COW ON MONDAY, THERE WASN'T ANY OBVIOUS CAUSE OF DEATH, NO SIGN OF TRAUMA, AND ONLY THE BEGINNING

OF AN EXCISION ON THAT FRONT RIGHT TEAT?

That's correct.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT KILLED THAT COW?

No. Some pathologist I am. No, I don't know what killed her.

1994 Unusual Cattle Death

ARE THESE THE FIRST FOUR ANIMAL MUTILATIONS YOU HAVE INVESTIGATED?

No, there was one other.

WHEN WAS THAT?

January 9, 1994.

HOW FAR FROM THESE ANIMALS?

About 3 miles north and 1.5 miles east.

BASICALLY IN THE SAME AREA OF VALPARAISO, NEBRASKA.

Right.

WHAT WAS THAT 1994 CASE LIKE?

The burn mark in the mouth was even more crisp and burnt. A section of the lip was burned out, like a 1 inch by 1.5 inch gap where it had been burned. One teat was removed I think also either the rectum or vulva were removed, or both. But I think just one, just the rectum."

More Information:

To report information about these unusual animal deaths, or about newly discovered unusual animal deaths, please contact:

Nebraska State Patrol Office
Lincoln, Nebraska
402-471-0110

Saunders County Sheriff's Office
Wahoo, Nebraska
402-443-3718

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