

A Day in the Life of a Working Ranch Dog

Follow these working ranch dogs from sunrise to sunset.

Lisa Hanks

Tres, an experienced and talented 8-year-old, female Border Collie, is the primary working dog on Mary Bowsher's 100-acre sheep operation. Bowsher raises about 200 head of Katahdin sheep, and depends on Tres, along with five other Border Collies, for everyday stock handling and chore work.

Here's an average day in the life of Tres, a working ranch dog.

Sunrise: Tres has breakfast with the other dogs at sunrise while Bowsher loads up a feed cart. Then they all head out to the back pasture to feed the Akbash guardian dog, Bubba, who patrols the pastures and prevents predators from attacking the sheep and lambs.

On the way to and from the back pasture, Tres can relax, sniff around and perhaps jump into the pond for a quick swim.

Mid-morning: Depending on the season, Tres may help feed the livestock; gather sheep from a pasture; sort, pen, and work sheep through the treatment pens; move ewes and lambs out to pasture; separate rams from ewes after breeding season; and load sheep destined for sale into trailers. If it's hot enough, which it often is in Texas, she'll trade off duties with the secondary working dog, Bob, taking every chance to swim and cool off.

If the livestock work is slow, Bowsher trains the dogs for 10 to 30 minutes each.

Mid-afternoon: The dogs all take a break while Bowsher does non-livestock work, including mowing, hay work, fencing and general maintenance. All the Border Collies retire to their 1/4-acre grassy pen, where they frolic, loll around or do whatever they want.

Two hours before sunset: Tres and the others gather the livestock into night pens for safety and help with the feeding, as needed.

It's dinnertime! Then everybody heads back out to the pasture to feed Bubba again and take one last dip in the pond before bedtime.