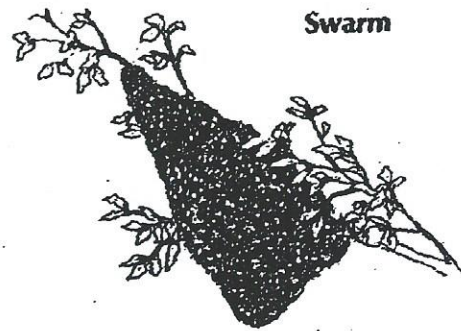


Honey Letter 2000

Today is the eighth of December and it is cold and clear. The three hives are snug and together we await the approach of winter. Because we will be moving to Cedar Run next summer, we will have to move the hives during the winter to their new location. Now they are nice and quiet and light, whereas if we wait until spring or summer, they will be active and heavy with honey. So they will greet the spring in a new location. It won't confuse any of them since few of the bees present now will make it through the winter. New bees will be born in the late winter to supply the hives with workers in the spring.

We will put some big staples in to keep the hive boxes together and stop up the holes for the journey.

Nature has a more interesting way of moving bees around. When a hive's population has grown to the point where enough bees are present to start a new hive, a new queen is grown for the move. We try hard to give the bees enough room and enough to do to keep them from thinking about swarming, but it happens. It is Nature's way of multiplying the bee population, since bees exist not really as individuals, but as a colony. Casting a swarm creates a new colony.



In preparation the bees stuff themselves full of as much honey as they can eat. The new queen and a bunch of the workers, maybe even more than half, then fly out of the hive and land in a swarm on a nearby branch or fence rail or whatever is handy. Then the scout bees fly off to look for a suitable new home. When a new home is found, the scout bees return to the swarm and lead the swarm to the new home, whether it be a hollow tree, or wall, or bait hive set out by a beekeeper in hopes of catching a wild swarm. The bees' tummies are full of honey and with no honeycomb in their new hive to store it in,

the honey is converted to scales of wax which is then formed into comb. The reason that swarms of bees on branches or flying together through the air are so harmless is that their tummies are too full to bend in an arch to sting. Bee beards seen on late night talk shows consist of bees who are full of honey.

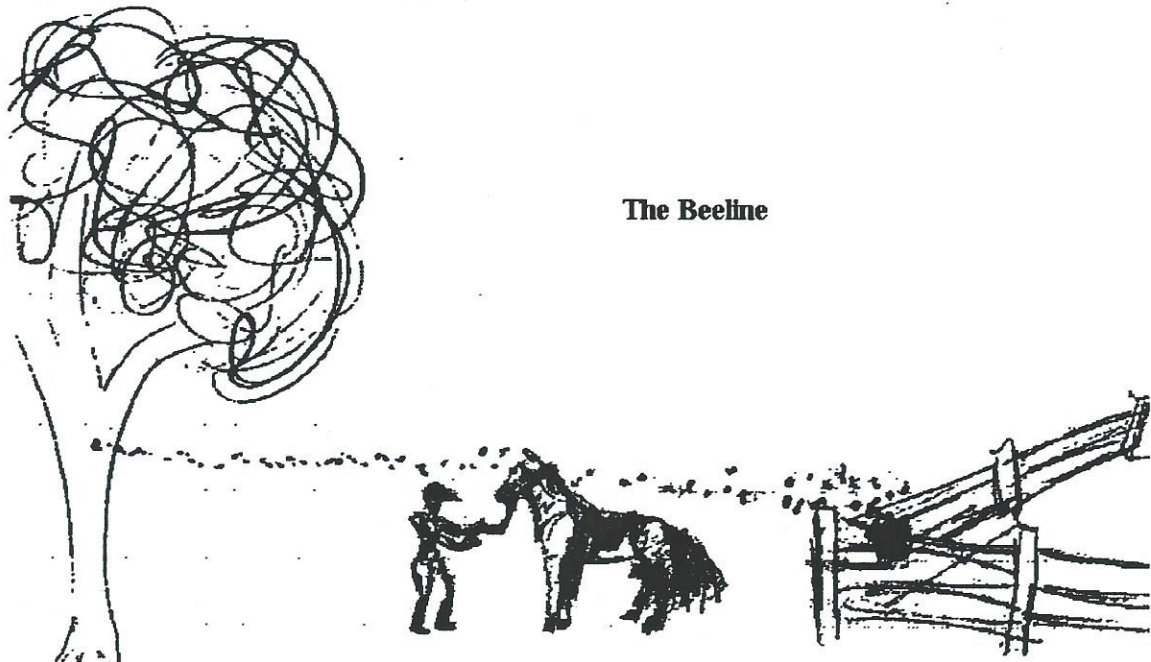
Although the finished product is a glorious feat of art and engineering, comb is made in a random, seemingly careless way with lots of different bees giving a pinch here and a squeeze there as they move by the comb in progress. A hive started by a newly cast swarm produces prodigious amounts of comb in no time at all.

For the first time in our lives we had an opportunity to see a group of swarming bees flying in their "beeline" to their new home. It was during a horse show and the bees flew through the crowd of horses and humans clustered together on a hill in a huge

pasture at a farm called Wind's Reach. Although the sight elicited some gasps of concern, of course no one was harmed by this rare glimpse of a natural phenomenon. Because almost no wild populations of bees exist anymore, this swarm most likely escaped from a beekeeper's hive.

Here is hoping that you have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and none of your worker bees try to get away!

LYSE and TOM



The Beeline