

I'm sending this newsletter out early because I just don't see how I will have time to get one done in July. From the 16<sup>th</sup> of June until we get the steers shipped my time belongs to the USFS. We certainly are looking forward to the season and seeing all of our friends who are returning for another week of chasing 600 teenagers all over the place. We have repeat people coming on every trip, and the June, July, and Aug trips are full. You repeat people really make the week so much easier for us and really pick up a large portion of the work. I have really come to rely on you. I also get to smiling about some of the past things that have gone on during the week. Some accidental, some intentional, but none the less memorable.

This is without a doubt the most bizarre year I have ever experienced in my 48 years of living in the boonies. We had the driest, most open and warmest winter that I can ever remember. We never had to chain up one time to get in to where we live. The first year we lived here we chained up every day for 6 weeks to get in and out. I will bet we had 25 days of 70 degrees and only a few below zero this year. With no snow I was sure the spring was going to be extremely early and dry. The grass got a great start in late March and then about the 12 of April it turned cold and stayed way below seasonal and the grass just sat there. I will bet that Feb temperatures averaged warmer than April. Then right at the end of April we had 2 inches of rain and everyone started to smile again as we were already better off than the year before even if it never rained again. The 7<sup>th</sup> of May another shower turned into a 2 dayer and we had over 3 inches of rain and the snow closed the highways on the mountains.

We are hoping to get the yearlings branded tomorrow because Trent is home from college, so I now have some cheap help. Brendon has another week and is hoping we will have the job done before he gets home. Of course we are going to save some for him just so he doesn't feel left out.

MAY 9<sup>th</sup>: It was a great day to brand yearlings and we finished up the day around 7:00 that evening and had branded around 300 yearlings. I had trucks ordered for the next day and we were hoping we were going to hit the window between the storms because they were calling for a major storm to hit that next afternoon. Well Mother Nature certainly was enjoying herself as it started raining about 16 hours before it was supposed to. We had to cancel the trucks because we had so much mud we couldn't back up to the chute to get loaded the next morning. On May 11 it was still raining and I had two more pot loads of steers coming in. A pot load is basically 50,000 lbs. It was still raining on the 12<sup>th</sup> and the cattle were tired of standing in the mud and cold rain. We were out of feed but until the steers were branded we didn't dare go to grass with them. In the first 12 days of May we have had over 6 inches of rain and over 3 feet of SNOW on the mountains. Maybe, just maybe the drought is starting to relinquish its grip. The weather broke and we had a nice day on the 13<sup>th</sup> so we scheduled branding for the remaining steers on Sat the 14<sup>th</sup> with trucks ordered for Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup>. We loaded three pot loads Sunday and trucked them to pasture and loaded 4 more loads on Monday. The cattle looked tough from all of the cold rain and mud that they had been standing in for about a week. We had to doctor 8 calves for pneumonia but I think they will all live. We rode on the cattle on the 17<sup>th</sup> and were surprised at how much better they looked when they are standing surrounded by all the groceries that they can eat. There is water standing in every hollow. The steers don't have to go more than a ¼ of a mile to water right now in any direction.

IT WASN'T BRENDONS DAY: May 19th we headed out to ride on the yearlings again. We hauled a trailer load of cows with us as we went and figured we would catch 4 horses out where the steers were to ride for the day. These were the horses that had been turned out all winter and were feeling fat and sassy. We caught one horse before the lead horse decided running wild was much more fun than the pickup full of saddles appeared to be. Off up the hill the rest charged leaving the one horse we had captured to feel very left out. (I'm sure his self esteem was deflated and he will need counseling.) I had Brendon hold him while I saddled him as he was going in circles around us. I grabbed my bridle to bridle him when I thought I know just what he will do when I drop the halter, he will bolt for the high country with my saddle then we will spend the rest of the day getting more exercise than I bargained for. I fastened another halter around his neck and put my hobbles on his feet then handed Brendon the lead rope of the halter around his neck. He did just as I thought he would, when I unfastened the halter on his head he bolted for the wild bunch, hobbles and all. Now Brendon being young and fleet of foot with me yelling encouragement and his feet only hitting the ground about every 20ft managed to stay with him for about 100yds when the horse tripped himself enough to come to a stop. I quickly ran up and got him bridled, took off the hobbles and took off in pursuit of the running brumbies who had disappeared over the horizon. After about fifteen minutes I caught sight of them on top of the next hill standing in a fence corner looking back wild eyed, the way they had just come from. I rode up to them and held them until the boys got there with the pickup. They slipped in and caught the horses we needed and this short story comes to an end. However, the day hasn't ended for Brendon yet.

After we got saddle we went out and gathered about 150 yearlings and took them to another pasture and kicked them into what we call the North Hole. It's pretty steep going down into it and there is water at the bottom so we had to kick the cattle down onto water. As we are trailing the cattle down the ridge Brendon notices a steer that looks a little staggy. I mentioned if you get a chance, drop a rope on him and we will see if a good sharp knife won't cure his high level of testosterone. Now in all my years of roping and doctoring cattle out in the hills I've never seen this happen before. The soon to be steer, was walking down the jeep trail on the edge of the herd and Brendon had a shot at him so he took it. The loop settled around the steers neck so nice and pretty and he jumped and bellowed as he felt the rope tighten around his neck and off down the hill he flew. Brendon calmly went to dally but missed his 4 inch dally horn by about 1 inch. As the coils sizzled through his fingers he decided to save his hands, and he pitched his rope. That's exactly what you are supposed to do but, the last coil tangled up in his bridle reins and jerked them out of his hands. The reins went off over the horses head and now we have the steer leading Brendons horse off this steep hill at a speed that is only meant for the interstate. Brendon thought about jumping but the ground flying by at that speed made him decide to stay seated at least for the moment. HE LOOKED JUST LIKE WHIPLASH THE TACO MONKEY except his eyes were bulging out farther than Whiplash's and I think Whiplash enjoys himself more. He had both hands on the horn and was just riding. As they charged off the hill, Rose started to gain on the steer. When Rose got close enough the steer decided he was changing directions. Rose didn't follow. Now Brendon being a pre law major figured that when steer A was going one direction, and horse B, was going in another, that exhibit C (the rope) was going to get tight in a

hurry and maybe there was going to be some sort of wreck. Just as A and B got tight Whiplash jumped. Now the sudden change of direction to exhibit B caused the ejection of Whiplash. To be 21 again would be so nice. Whiplash landed on his feet running and never missed a step until he was safely out of the way. Other than we had to rebuild his bridle out in the pasture and go ropo a steer that was dragging 35 ft of rope it was a rather quiet day.

#### 2005 BOOKINGS:

It's funny how things continue to change. We have had a couple of people move to the clean up ride and couple more move to the Aug trip, another couple move to the 2006 Sept trip and another back injury move to the 2006 trip so all of a sudden we have room for 6 more on the Sept trip. I turned down a booking from a fellow who wanted to know if we provided prostitutes. That is certainly a request that I have never had before.

Our trip to Tennessee went fine and we took a day and went down through the Smoky Mountains. We had a great time but it was hard getting my bearings with all the trees, I got completely turned around a couple different times. We hiked one of the trails in the Smoky mountains and it was very enjoyable other than in our country it would have been called a road. It certainly was wide enough to take the Chuck Wagon on.

We are in full stampede around here trying to get everything ready for the first trip. The end of April the snow pack on the mountains was 59% of normal. By the end of the second week in May the level was 97% of normal. We had over 3 ft of snow the first 10 days of May. I have heard that there have been several mud slides in the Little Horn Canyon. Just remember, there is no such thing as a closed trail!!! Because of all the snow this has put us way behind schedule because we have to have **all** of the fences up on the mountain before the cattle arrive. We also have to get our camp set up in Rock Cabin Park, plus two new water tanks put in before the cattle arrive. The corrals at Lake Creek still have 2 ft of snow in them and all of the low spots are still filled with snow and the fences are under those. We got a certified letter last year from the USFS for not having all of the fences up when cattle arrived. We had one fence that we hadn't gotten too yet. If it happens again, they will delay our on date next year. This is all brought on by the tree huggers. It's never a problem to get your improvements fixed if your permit is at 6000 ft because it's all melted out by the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. But if it's 9000 ft it's another matter, but the policy is still the same. Anyway, I have about a dozen people lined up to go in and spend 4 days setting up camp, cutting firewood and putting in the two water tanks. It's going to be a real push to get it all done.

#### ONLY IN WYOMING:

Tuesday June 14, found Alice and I headed to Gillette to pick up some more pack animals and try out my new saddle that Clair Ellsworth is building for me. I sent the boys out east of Sheridan to ride on the steers. They had my old flatbed pickup and the horse trailer and were going to bring back some more of the horses that were still running out from the winter. This country is a long way from nowhere and of course the pickup quit on them leaving them more or less stranded. They decided to ride north as there is

lots of methane development going on North of the property we have leased. (Matter of fact that is why Wyoming had a 800million dollar surplus in last years budget.) They rode up to the first drilling rig and borrowed a cell phone and called and left messages in about 5 different places with neighbors and friends but couldn't catch anyone. They decided the next thing to do was ask if they could catch a ride back to civilization when ever the driller was going. He said "Just take my vehicle over there and use it but have it back by 4:45 when I get off work. He reached in his pocket took out his keys and tossed them to Brendon, turned around and went back to work. He had never seen my kids before or they him. They took him up on his offer and drove his Cadillac Escapade back home to get an outfit to come tow our broken pickup back to town. I wish the story on the pickup had as happy an ending as the kids had. It looks like it's the engine. I don't believe I'll have another engine put in it as that pickup has about 170,000 ranch miles on it. Of course having this pickup go down right before the June trip is a major problem, but then again that is normal ranch life. If it had waited three weeks to commit suicide I would have had some of the steers contracted for fall delivery so would have a much better idea as to the amount of dollars that I would have available to spend, but then again, that is ranch life.

We are just having a hell of a time getting to the mountain to set up our camp in Rock Cabin. There is so much snow still in the timber at 9000 feet that the roads are still closed. We have been attempting to go since the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. We are estimating but we think we have around 20 pack loads of stuff to take in. That's too many to take up the canyon. We are going to make another try on Saturday. We hear that the people who put on the Wild and Scenic trail run through the Little Horn Canyon are going in today. They are going to chain up two pickups and hope they can pull one another through. There is only one major drift and it's about 3 ft deep and ¼ mile long. They tried to go in with 4 wheelers but broke through in the first 10 feet and were buried. They claim they will go through even if they have to shovel their way in. They have to get their first aid stations set up for the suicide runners. Once you get below 8500 feet you are below the snow and will have no problem. Anyway, I'm going to send this and head out to the Rafter to get the arena worked up. I really don't know when the next newsletter will be sent out. Excuse the grammar and spelling as I put this together in a hurry and did a quick scan but am sure I have missed many.

Dana