

DOUBLE RAFTER NEWSLETTER#7

MAY 2006

I apologize for the length of this newsletter. Sometimes I get to telling a story and before I know it its several pages longer than I anticipated. There isn't that much new, fuel prices are high, the drought hangs on and the cattle market is really crappy at this point in time. The drought in the southwest has sent lots of cattle to the feedlots and this has caused the fat market to drop about \$15 a hundred or about \$200 per head. How this will affect next falls markets we aren't real sure. A lot of next falls markets will hinge on the price of corn in the fall.

Welcome to another addition of what's happening on the Double Rafter. It's not pretty, the drought continues to hang on with many areas 50 miles north of us getting all kinds of rain. We had a storm several weeks ago and got a ¼ of an inch and Jerry Jones got over 3 inches of rain. Jerry is about 45 miles north of us in country that generally doesn't get the amount of moisture that we get. We went to Miles City which is 100 miles north of us last week and took delivery on a pot load of yearlings and they were so covered in mud that we had to clip them before we could brand them. I am already facing water problems with my yearlings. Three springs have gone dry, and 4 more reservoirs are completely dry. That leaves two reservoirs with water and they won't hold past the first of June with the number of cattle that I have in that pasture. At this point in time we are exploring other options but they are all very costly. In the cow business Mother Nature can put you out of business in a hurry. Adequate water is so important to the amount of weight that the cattle gain each day. And of course in the yearling business your whole objective is the amount of weight the cattle put on from spring to fall. If it drops the gain from 1.5 pounds per day to three quarters of a pound per day at \$1.00 a pound you do the math. It gets costly in a hurry

THE PHRASE FOR THE SUMMER:

If you are coming back this summer we have a phrase we are going to use every time something goes wrong. (This means we will probably use it a lot) One of the loads of heifers I bought was from Jerry Jones. (His wife Kathy is one of our summer cooks and of course those of you who come on the fall trip all know Jerry.) So every time a animal gets away from us regardless of the reason the phrase will be **"those damn Jones heifers"!!!** Matter of fact we might even use it even if it's the snow that collapses the tents.

HARRISBURG WORLD HORSE EXPO:

Craig Mead and I attended the Horse Expo in Harrisburg the end of February and we were overwhelmed by the response. A great big thank you to Jan Huffman and John Spotts for recommending that we attend. I left very encouraged about the potential for the future as I would guess we had over 500 people stop by our booth and have had several bookings from it and really expect to see the main benefit next year. I plan on going back next year and hopefully I can stay a couple days longer and see some of the

local sights since there is all kinds of history in that part of the country that fascinates me. There is one story that comes out of the experience in Harrisburg but I promised “Craig flash Mead” that I wouldn’t tell the story in the newsletter. My lips are sealed but maybe with enough alcohol, on one of the trips, my lips could be pried open.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES:

The day was Saturday June 16, 1969 and we were headed to Lake Creek to see the new mountain permit that my father and his brother had purchased over the winter. There were 7 of us total, Dad, myself and my two brothers, Krayton and Blaine, and dad’s Brother Burton and his two sons David and Kevin. Our mothers dropped us off at the foot of the mountain and we were going to ride to Lake Creek, taking a trail my father had taken as a child. That should have been our first warning but my cousins; my brothers and I were all on an adrenaline high with anticipation. It was about 10:00 in the morning and Dad assured us we would be in by 5:00pm. Dad can’t tell time worth crap. I guess maybe it’s genetic. It was a gorgeous day with all of us kids racing our horses up and down the trail and having the times of our lives (or at least I was). Blaine would have been about 3rd or 4th grade so I was about 7th. I’m not sure Blaine enjoyed our adventure at all. Now the first day went pretty well. We only got lost once and managed to find our way to where we needed to be with a slight 3 hour delay. We rode into Lake Creek just before dark. Dad and Burton were tired but I was still on high. The high fresh mountain air and the feeling of being the only one on the mountain added to my exuberance. That period of time was way before logging roads and there had been a lot of snow over the winter so you still couldn’t drive into Lake Creek as the timber still had a lot of snow in it. The next day was Fathers Day and it was a beautiful spring morning. As we were packing the pack horses a plane flew over relatively low, tipped their wings and threw out a roll of toilet paper. Yes, we had packed toilet paper so we weren’t sure what this all meant. When we picked up the roll of toilet paper we discovered they had written a note on it. It was my Aunt and she wanted to know if we were going to be home that night. Now to this day we still haven’t figured out how we were going to respond to the people in the plane. We didn’t think writing the answer on the toilet paper and throwing it back in the air would probably work. So the day started out strange and continued to go down hill. The first thing we did was head down through the timber into Lick Creek and there was so much snow we just about didn’t get through the timber patch. We floundered our horses many times in the deep snow and hung the packs up on the trees and had to repack several times. It was still a lark to me though! Dad and Burton had a map of the allotment and we were headed to the northwest corner of the allotment where there was a reservoir. None of us kids new why we were headed there, we just were. When we finally found the reservoir, Dad announced that it was time for lunch. It was around 2:00pm. My uncle had announced at breakfast that morning that he would pack the lunches while we packed and saddled the horses. As we dropped our horses to graze anticipating a gourmet lunch for ourselves we were very shocked to find that my uncle had packed a loaf of bread and about a half dozen tins of Sardines. Now I can eat anything except Sardines, they just won’t stay down. They swim back up faster than they go down. So my cousin and I didn’t eat any lunch. (That’s how Sardine Lake

got its name). However, the bright spot was that dad promised us that we would be into the Little Horn Cow Camp for dinner in about **30 minutes**.

After lunch we got on our horses and headed north to the end of the park we were in. Dad and Burton had us tie our horses and told us to get off and wait as they were looking for a trail that an old timer had told them about that went off through the rim and came out in the Little Horn Parks below. Dad and Burton were sure they could find the trail pronto. Now 5 kids, ages 10-15 is always enough to get into some sort of trouble. We had been told to stay off our horses so we looked for some other way to entertain ourselves. The pine trees that we were waiting under were the kind that produced a pine cone about as big as a baseball so shortly we had a very fierce pine cone fight going. Of course kids being kids, someone got hurt, then mad, then the fight was on. I don't remember exactly who the fight was between but I remember when Krayton got his knuckles bloodied by a hard pine cone, that I think was thrown by my cousin, fun in the game vanished and pine cones were being thrown as hard as you could throw them and if the head was visible that was what you threw at. I know when the fist fight that ensued was over neither camp was talking to the other. The short wait turned into 2 long hours. Finally Dad and Burton showed up and said they hadn't found the trail but they thought we could pick our way off if we were careful. It got steep real fast and with lots of loose rock it was terribly treacherous. Everyone got off and led their horses except me. That just wasn't the cowboy way of doing things. I can't believe to this day that dad allowed me to ride off of that. Of course I was only about 70 lbs. could ride anything and was riding an Arab/Thoroughbred horse that was as graceful as a cat. We did have to repack one of the pack horses as we tipped him over backwards as we were coming out of the bottom of one of the many canyons we crossed that afternoon. We crossed the trail that Dad and Burton had been looking for just as we came out into Rock Cabin Park. As we broke into the parks we knew that we would be at the Little Horn Cow Camp in about "**30 minutes**" and we were already looking forward to the gourmet trail meal that Dad or Burton would fix on the "Old Majestic" wood burning stove when we got in. To say I was hungry was an understatement but fierce pride wouldn't let me announce it. As we rode up to the river crossing it was just about dark and you could make out the cabin but the time of night was where sometimes you had to look twice to see if you really saw what you thought you saw. The river was really crashing off the boulders and was swollen with the day's runoff. Now my belly was really starting to let me know that I had forgotten a very vital part of survival. Dad and Burton just sat there conversing in low tones with us kids thinking, let's just go eat! Dad turned to us kids and announced that the water was too high to cross this time of day. There was another crossing about 2 miles up river and by morning it would be lower and we could cross it early the next day. That meant a night out with what for dinner, I wasn't really sure. But what doesn't kill you will make you stronger. We rode up to the woven wire fence, unsaddled, hobbled our horses and turned them loose for the night. Dad rummaged through the packs and came up with a 2lb package of bacon and a smashed partial loaf of bread. We soon had a fire going and camp pitched. It was full dark by then and there was water in a low spot in the grass that was about 6 ft across. Hey, we had bacon and water, what more could a kid ask for. We grabbed the first stick we found in the Quaking Aspen patch, wrapped the bacon around the end of it and roasted it over the fire. Now we were so hungry, that just as soon as the grease started running we swallowed it. Finer tasting pig I've never had!!

After a meal of floppy pig, and two or three slices of dry bread, we headed to the low spot in the grass for water to wash it all down. We lay on our belly and with the shadows of the flames dancing on the water it was a magical evening. We took our tarps and laid one of them on the ground and pulling the other over the top, Dad myself, and my two brothers were soon sound asleep. It was the greatest nights sleep until about 1:00 in the morning when a good case of Montezuma's revenge hits my little brother Blaine. Now maybe it was all the grease but all of a sudden he sits up and yells, "Dad, Dad I've got the scours"!!! Of course this concerns both Krayton and I due to the close proximity that we were sharing. However, he jumps up and heads off into the trees with Dad right behind him. Krayton and I go back to sleep for a short 30 minutes when Mother Nature decides she hasn't had enough fun yet. It starts to rain. Krayton and I pull the tarp up over our heads and try to sleep through it. At about 4:00 that morning, when you can just about start to get a hint of daylight we can't tread water any longer. Now kids being kids we expected Dad to do something about our situation. I remember sitting up and seeing that Dad had a roaring fire over under the pine trees and was trying to keep Blaine humored, while drying their sleeping bags. Krayton and I got up and headed over to the fire to sit and wait for daylight so that we could continue on with our journey. About 6:00am it stopped raining, so we packed the camp, saddled the horses and headed up country to the next crossing. As we rode out the next morning the low spot in the grass where we had watered the night before was nothing more than a Buffalo wallow. It was really just a big puddle from all the rain. No one was very jolly that morning but at least it had stopped raining and the skies had turned blue. Dad had promised us that we would have a big breakfast once we got into the cow camp. We rode up to the creek(just above the Green Cabin) crossing and Dad and Burton went back to having their low deep conversations that adults have when they don't want to worry the kids. Now we kids aren't stupid and we were trail savvy enough to know that the river still held a huge concern for my Dad and his brother Burton. The jocularities stopped and we just sat their starring at the dark murky swirling river as it crashed over the boulders and on down the canyon. Dad turned to us kids and said "If your horse goes down crossing the river stay with him, don't turn loose". Now that managed to scare the living hell out of us kids. Is what he was really saying, was that it was easier to find something the size of a horse bobbing in the current than it would be to find one of us kids. Burton took Dads rope and rode off into the crashing river and on across without any trouble other than he had soaked feet by the time he got across. When he reached the other side he took his rope down and tied it into Dads and threw it back across to us. Dad put the rope around my waist and told me to ride on across. I have to say, my heart was in my throat and my hunger had completely vanished. We continued this relay until we were all safe on the other side then headed to cow camp for BREAKFAST! When we got into camp all we had was Bisquik but it is without a doubt the best breakfast that I had ever had in my life. After a fast breakfast we got back on our horses and headed on down the canyon. When we reached Leaky Mountain I remember seeing a dead elk calf lying over a log. I am sure he had drowned trying to follow his mother across the creek. The rest of the day was uneventful but still overflowing with fun. After that adventure I have been hooked on the mountains and will always feel more at home up there than any place on earth.

SOMETIMES THE WILD WILD WEST IS STILL PRESENT:

This might sound like a cowboy fairy tale but “No sh—this really happened to me” In April, I was headed to the pasture about 2:00 in the afternoon when one of my neighbors, who also happens to be a crew member, came driving out of the pasture as I was headed in. He had his trailer on and I noticed just one horse in his trailer. He had a two year old colt running in the pasture that he had planned on taking down to Chris Ellsworth to break. I had mentioned that when he got ready to catch that colt to let me know and I would help him. He also drives school bus so he had to get back for his evening run. Well he drove out to the pasture and caught the mare. As he headed back to the trailer the colt followed right along. He thought that maybe he could just drop a rope on the colt, load her and the mare and head home. Good luck certainly appeared to be with him today. Now at what point does the good luck turn into bad luck? Was it good luck or bad luck that he managed to drop a rope on the colt on his first try? You would normally think that’s good luck but that was not to be the case. The colt panicked and all hell broke loose. I’m not really sure what happened but when I talked to my nameless neighbor that day he said the colt had gotten away from him and was still dragging 30 ft of nylon rope. He didn’t want to leave the colt, but with a bus deadline he had know choice.

When Les and I unloaded our horses to go move some of our yearlings, I told him that when we were done we would slip over and see if we could catch that colt. I could envision all kinds of bad things happening to a colt dragging 30 ft of nylon in rough country. I knew my neighbor would be back the next day to try and catch the colt but I knew I couldn’t come and help him for at least two days. When we rode up to the 30 odd horses that were running together for the winter, it was obvious from a distance which one was the two year old dragging 30 ft of nylon. He was the one who would stop and graze a little then start to walk and the rope would move and he would streak through the horse herd and out the other side running and kicking as hard as he could go. He would run out past the herd about 100 yards then make a big circle and come charging back to the safety of the herd. You would also see the other horses scatter out of his wake as the rope went singing through the grass and sagebrush. They would jump, then spin and snort and stare at the colt as if to say “damn kids”. I told Les that we would just ease the horses over to one of the corners in the pasture and then maybe he could slip into the herd, step off and hand me the tail of the rope so that I could dally up and we could remove the rope. The plan worked pretty well or at least until Les started to hand me the rope. The colt jumped and ran and I had a half dally which wasn’t enough to hold the colt so the rope twanged and through the grass it went. I was riding Lakota and the sound of the streaking rope through the grass was all she needed. She was then sure every stick on the ground was a snake and she would snort and go sideways, backwards, or any other direction. I knew at that point that I was never going to get her close enough to get dallied up on the rope. Most of the horses had gone thundering off by know, except my war horse who was still standing staring at me with one other horse. I jumped off stepped in front of him, said “whoa” and Scooter let me walk right up to him. I quickly swapped my saddle and bridle to Scooter and handed Les, Lakota. I told Les that we didn’t want this to get into a horse race. When the rest of the Brumbies stopped running we would just ride up again and try the procedure all over. He would walk into the herd and hand me the rope. We tried this for over an hour, but couldn’t get lucky enough to get close

enough to grab the rope. All of the horses were starting to get nervous and starting to get flighty. I managed to pin the herd against a barb wire fence and hold them by riding around them hoping they would just drop their heads and go to grazing. It was like trying to put the guts back in a gut shot animal. As you turned one back into the herd two more would leave on the other side of the herd. Les and I could hold the herd but that meant know one was able to catch the colt. I realized that the only way to catch this two year old colt was going to be to rope him. As I built a loop I could feel the adrenalin surging through Scooter as his every step was a pumped up one. We had about 6 horses held along the fence with the colt milling through them. My fear was that the dragging rope would cause one of the horses to panic and try and jump the barb wire fence. I gave the horses an avenue of escape in front of me and when the colt came charging by, I roped him. Because we were charging along side of a barb wire fence I knew that if I dallied up it could cause the colt to end up in the fence and severely injure her so down the fence I charged on Scooter waiting for the colt to turn away from the fence. My only area of concern was the length of Scooter toes since he had been running out all winter. I knew they desperately needed a trimming, before using him as a high speed chase car. I also knew that if he went down the colt would now be dragging two ropes.

Finally, the colt swerved to the right and I let her go until we were 30 yards from the fence, then I dallied up. I was sure glad that I carry a 48 ft rope. The colt hit the end of the rope with an explosion of hair, spinning in the air, she landed on the ground facing me from 45 feet away. With the whites of her eyes showing, she took off running back towards the fence as hard as she could go. I knew she wouldn't reach the fence and I could feel Scooter bracing himself for the shock that was to come. When she hit the end of the rope, all 4 feet were parallel to the ground except they were five feet in the air. She hit the ground and it took the fight out of her for about 3 seconds as she gasped for the air that wasn't in her lungs. When she got to her feet she set back as hard as she could.

With her eyes bulging out she started to stagger a little due to a lack of air. I didn't want to hurt her so I stepped Scooter forward a step to allow her to get some air. I knew that we would just have to take our time and let her learn that when she just stood there she could have all the air she needed.. I also knew that she would need to get comfortable with our presence before we were going to be able to get close enough to her to retrieve both ropes. The process started, I would side pass Scooter over a couple of steps taking the slack up in my rope so that I was getting closer. She would rest for 10-20 seconds then explode again but each explosion was a little less dramatic as she became exhausted. With her sides heaving, the sweat rolling off of her, and the whites of her eyes showing, I just continued to talk to her and work in closer and closer all the time. With the dust flying and the colt fighting every chance she could, the battle continued. There were many times that I would only gain 6 inches of slack but we were continually getting closer. Now after 45 minutes of this going on I had made it to within about 8 ft of the colt. I could also tell that Scooter was getting tired as he wasn't responding as quickly as he had been earlier. But remember, he has had this colt pulling on him for 45 straight minutes. I would guess this colt probably weighs around 800 lbs. and with fear motivating her, she was afraid to quit. (If you want to get some idea what this is like see how long you can grip a brick without dropping it.) Once we were within 8 feet, I told Les to ride up on the opposite side so that we would have the colt between us and just sit there and let the colt get used to both of us being there. I continued to side pass Scooter

into her and soon we were within 2 feet. I told Les to just reach over easily and start to rub the colt's neck. Soon Les was able to rub her neck without the colt exploding. Once that was accomplished Les was able to start the process of taking off the first rope. Once he had it off we were then able to start with mine. By now the colt was standing, so getting mine off was relatively easy. I really wanted to take and load the colt and take her on home but we had been working to get the ropes off for an hour and were still 3 miles from the trailer. I knew the colt would be halter broke by the time we got to the trailer but I also knew it would be dark. I didn't want to try and load a scared colt into a black hole in a trailer for her first time so we just turned her loose. In today's world, horse trainers have a 60 ft round pen to work colts in. We were in a 2500 acre round pen and had to do it like the old timers used to do it. I felt sorry for the colt but she came through it uninjured so we couldn't ask for anymore than that. I haven't given my neighbor back his rope yet, and when I do, I will probably glue it together so that it can't be used again. He and I sort of have a practical joke relationship and this one looks to perfect to pass up. Les commented to me after the dust had settled, "Something exciting always happens when I ride with you".

This is a poem written by Chris Ellsworth that I think is so true.

TRAILS YOU SHOULD'VE TAKEN

Someday, way down in the fall of your livin'
When your summer hopes have all grown their winter hair
When you're pullin' shoes from the chances you've been given
And the snow tastes like copper in the air

You'll understand then, what regret is all about
While all your wish-you-hads to trottin' by
And you're in the gate to count'em out
Life's if onlys with tails held high

You'll never see a more lonesome sight
Or have a harder lesson taught
Than when your last loop comes snappin' tight
And could've been is all you've caught

There's always one horse we're scared to ride
We swing aboard but step back down
And a higher pass to reach the Great Divide
But near the top we turn around

But if you'll dare to ride beyond the further bend
Before you kack sits curlin' on it's peg
You'll find broncs make better riders in the end
So toe the stirrup and throw your leg

For someday, when your last camp you're breakin'
Your unused life will make the load
You'll pack down trails you should've taken
On horses you should've rode

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MEANDERINGS:

It's always strange from one year to the next and how the bookings come in is as unpredictable as the cattle market. A year ago we were 90% full by Thanksgiving and this year there is still some room on a couple of the trips. There is a lot of room on the Aug trip so we have put a special price of \$1500 on it for this season. We bought one group of 219 yearlings who are as goofy as any bunch I've ever been around. It will be interesting to see if they settle down as the summer goes by or get faster. Even though these aren't the heifers I bought from Jerry Jones the phrase is "**those damn Jones heifers**". I meet with the USFS in two weeks and will find out our pasture rotation at that time and what other things that I was a bad boy with last summer. I so look forward to it!! The battle continues with the tree huggers over the right to graze these public lands and up to this point the tree huggers are winning in areas like Idaho, Arizona and Nevada. Is what they are doing is looking for any little rule that the government agency that handles that allotment isn't following then take them to court on it and they have won most of the time. The enviro's are the biggest bunch of legalized terrorist in the country. I have read so I can't validate the truth in this but OPEC is the largest contributor to the environmental movement in this country. Does the price of fuel in this country make you wonder? Maybe they have shot themselves in the foot though because the biggest reason for our high fuel prices is the environmentalist. All of the republicrats are terrified of the enviro's. We need to throw every one of those republicrats out of office. This country is not headed in a positive direction. We need people who will stand on principal !!!

I was headed out to Jerry Jones this morning and as I was loading my horse in the trailer about 5:00am Maverik was bounding around me with excitement and anticipation and it made me think of a bumper sticker I saw recently. "Lord let me be half the man my dog thinks I am"

May 13, 2006

I am sorry to say, but this is a real sad story:

This was Jerry Jones second branding and Trent and I were there to help him brand and vaccinate the cows. We witnessed a freak accident in the corral that day that was the saddest, sickest thing I have ever witnessed. One of Jerry's neighbors was their helping and this particular neighbor always rides good horses. This horse was broke well enough that Ian was riding him with just an Indian bridle. (just a loop around the lower jaw) Ian would open and close all the wire gates we encountered that morning without ever getting off as the horse would side pass either way just as freely as he could walk forward. My understanding is that Ian uses this horse as a pickup horse in rodeo's. (for those of you who saw Brokeback Mountain that is not a pickup line). Anyway, Ian told me he has

roped many 2000 lb bulls on this horse. Ian had roped and was dragging a 125 lb calf to the fire. Their wasn't one thing going wrong in the corral that could make you think that something else caused this wreck. The horse was headed to the fire, head down pulling, the calf was just laying their as he was being dragged. I was standing looking right at the horse admiring what a well broke horse he was when the horse tripped and caught a back toe as he was just walking in. The horse went down and snapped a back leg right above the knee. Everyone around the branding heard the sickening sound of the bone snapping. It was so loud that people looked up from what they were doing. With the bone protruding through the hide everyone knew there was nothing that could be done for the horse. My heart absolutely collapsed for the horse and Ian. Hard old cowboys that have been through hell in their lives were crying. The horse was led out of the corral and put out of his misery as it was the only decent thing that could be done. I wish all of the animal rights people could have been their to witness the reaction of all the people who raise livestock.

May 12, 2006

Well I met with the Forest Service and had our annual meeting, discussing last years problems and next summers plans. Their was only one real problem and it has potential to be a major one in our future. Western Watersheds, and environmental group that I have talked about and has won many lawsuits in Idaho, Arizona and Nevada to stop public grazing has targeted about 20 allotments on the entire Big Horn National Forest. We are one of the targeted allotments. We have one area that has been overgrazed the last two years. It is in the Bear Trap pasture and about 2 acres in size according to Forest Service documents. When there is an area that is overgrazed two years in a row there is supposed to be some action taken by the USFS against the permittee. There has been none taken since the area is around the only fresh water in the pasture and 2 acres in a 70,000 acre allotment is not really much of an issue. However, it is enough for Western Watersheds to bring a law suit if they so choose. At this point in time it is just a wait and see approach as to what the bark babies will do. We are going to try and prevent this from happening again this year on the allotment in this area, but livestock do need water. The thing that really upsets me is the fact that if a 2 acre area can be of that much concern then why not 50 sq. feet or hell 10 sq foot area. We don't know where this will end up but in a worse case scenario it could force a complete sell out of the Double Rafter. The fact is that Western Watersheds is no more concerned about the resource than pigs can fly, they just want livestock grazing off of public lands, and so far they have been very very effective. Western Water Sheds got started because the founder had a piece of land in Idaho and he couldn't keep the neighbors cows out. The neighbors cows were grazing public lands and a feud started between the two land owners. He is completely driven by hatred as are most terrorist! The other side of the problem is the fact that I have laid out a very comprehensive plan to help solve this problem. We would be looking at putting in at least 9 different water tanks to give cattle good clean water in other areas so that they won't need to congregate in that one little area. We would use Solar Pumps to get water to these tanks but the landlord (USFS) really likes the plan but they don't have the funding to pay for it, but I am still held responsible for the livestock congregating at the water holes.

Well until next time, adios.

