

DOUBLE RAFTER X-MAS LETTER 2006 #9

Boy, does it look like Christmas out there. With 18 inches of snow and cold weather it is definitely winter. OOPS! My mistake, it's only the 16th of September. The last 3 years the heaviest snow fall of the year has come on one of our fall trips. We had a lot of snow and moisture for 30 days but since then it has been very mild and dry. I went over the mountain Monday the 11th and there isn't over 5 inches of snow on the level around Bear Lodge. There is actually less snow up there this year than there was last year. We have moved next years Sept trip a week earlier to try and get into some more summer like weather. All of last falls moisture did go into the ground so we should get a good start next year.

Well Kraytons election results were tied so a hand recount had to be done the last week of November. It was rather interesting to say the least. After the recount Krayton won by 3 votes. This turns the Montana House into being Republican controlled so there was a lot weighing on the outcome. The three judges who did the hand count were the three county commissioners from Yellowstone County. On one of the ballots both ovals were shaded in and then an X was drawn through Krayton's oval. The democrat candidate said that it was obviously a vote for her and should be counted as such. The republican lawyer pulled out a Montana Supreme court ruling done two years earlier talking about this identical situation, and the ruling said the ballot had to be thrown out and not counted at all. Even with this ruling in black and white sitting in front of the three county commissioners one of them still voted to count the ballot for Krayton's opponent.

Well with end of the year fast approaching we are still out 3 yearlings. At this point in time all we can do is sit and wait to hear something. We haven't been able to get the blue tag heifers sold so it looks like I will keep them and we will calve them out. I do have to say they are a little on the goofy side so calving should be wild and woolly!! I hope the weather cooperates because they are so wild that calving them through the barn will be real tough. There will probably be some of it done at the end of a rope which is never a good thing. The bright spot about it is that Brendon graduates from college next week so he will be here this spring to help. He is going to get an education far beyond anything he has had in school. Both Brendon and Trent we in high school when we got rid of the cow herd so they really haven't had any real exposure to calving. The learning curve will be fast and steep, and I'm sure there will be some real wild cowboy stories, so stay tuned.

HORSE SLAUGHTER BILL:

There is a bill that was tabled last fall until the new congress takes over banning the slaughter of horses for consumption. This bill has all of us in the west that use horses as a tool to perform a job very concerned. I guess maybe you need to see a horse die a natural death in the snow and ice before you realize how cruel nature can be. I know it's a shock to all horse lovers but guess what, all horses die!! People who ride horses purely for pleasure have know idea the feeling of care and commitment we in the livestock business feel for our horses. I have had many horses give me their heart and soul to do the job that I ask of them. I can guarantee the things a rancher asks a horse to do cannot be comprehended by the pleasure rider. These horses give us their heart and soul because they want to, not because they have to. I have on occasion had to shoot a horse and I hope I never have to again. I have hauled them to the sale where they are sold and that

chokes me up but nothing like shooting one. Then to think we are going to be pushed by some politician who doesn't know anything about a horse into doing something that appears to be kind and special for the horse but is really torture. There is no suffering the way these horses are put down today. It is quick and painless. If you have ever seen one die on it's own in the snow and ice there is nothing quick or painless. When that old horse goes down and can't get up, he knows he has to get up or die so he tries and tries. They are laying there kicking and struggling and in the process they beat their eyes out, cut them selves up with their struggles just to keep some politician happy. Does that sound painless!! It's time in this country politicians grew a spine and stopped worrying about getting reelected. This bill also has the brand inspectors very concerned because the number of abandoned horses are going to increase many times over and then what will the brand office do with these horses. Once this bill is passed many people will just haul their old horses out to the country and dump them off like an unwanted litter of kittens. Of course the brand inspectors will have to feed and care for them and of course someone will have to pay for the feed, so they can hit up the taxpayer again to cover the costs of another good feely government program. There was an eastern senator stumping for this bill recently and he proudly proclaimed that the horse was an American Icon like the Indian was and needed to be protected. I hate to burst his bubble but the American Indian used to eat horses.

Well we lost one of our horses who was turned out for the winter. We really have no idea what happened. He was fine and fat when we turned him out and dead a couple of weeks later. At least the coyotes had something to celebrate during Thanksgiving. Our best guess was that he either had colic or some sort of injury and an infection set in and killed him. I sort of enjoyed riding Patch but at least the argument is over between the cousins on what his name really is. Chelsie and Tyler called him Dent and Brendon and Trent called him Patch.

Author Allen Russell who was one of our past guests and has done two summer cattle drives with us, just finished a western novel and the setting he used for his story was the foot of the Big Horn Mountains. If you buy it you will recognize several places in the book that you have been chasing cattle. The title of the story is REVENGE AT EAGLES NEST and I have to say I enjoyed reading it. I would like to say Allen Russell flattered me beyond description. Of course the Double Rafter is in the book and I have to say "Thank You Allen Russell".

WOLF UPDATE! Well the wolf numbers have surpassed expectations by 300% according to the people who introduced the wolf back into our back yard. There were 150 wolves shot this last year because they were killing livestock. That is up 12% over last year in the states of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. The wolves that were shot killed 344 sheep, 170 cows, 8 dogs, 2 Llamas, 1 mule and 1 horse. I think the wolves are in for some very serious counseling because after the first of the year they can't consume horse or mule!!! Bad Wolf! Bad Wolf!

STRESS: One of the biggest problems with life today is stress and with our high tech society the stress seems to get bigger and bigger. With all of the whistles, bells, buzzers and beeps constantly going off it continually reminds us of what we haven't done for the day yet. Does anyone wonder why I don't have a cell phone? I figure I just don't need the stress of someone calling me when I'm out enjoying the bounty of this great land. God has truly blessed me with my dislike of tech gadgets. I would be willing to bet that

everyone who has ever come on one of our cattle drives when they really sit down and analyze the trip, what they enjoyed the most was the piece and serenity of their surroundings. Our cattle drives are truly a stress reducer for everyone (except me). That is what makes the people so incredible, it's that their stress is gone for a week and they can just enjoy everyone and the blessing of creation that God has bestowed upon us. It's funny how much we all have in common once we find that inner peace that can't be ruined by any tech gadgets because~ ~ we don't have them!!!

Right before Thanksgiving I was trying frantically to finish up the fall work so that I could take a deep breath. I was so close to getting done. All I had to do was load the 5 longhorn steers and haul them out to Spring Willow for the winter. Seemed easy enough except, I knew better. Those cursed Longhorns always seem to smile because they know something you don't. Last year I had tried to load them and gave up because the biggest one got in first and the rest refused to get in the trailer. Well I got lucky this year and the biggest one was last so they all loaded so peacefully and quiet. I should have stopped right there and just turned them loose. We were actually loaded and headed down the road at 7:30am. I headed east out of Sheridan and off the oil headed out to Spring Willow. It was fantastic fall day and they were calling for 63 so I was in a great mood. I pulled off the main road put the pickup in 4 wheel drive and low range and started the 700 foot climb of the first mile. The road was dry so I didn't have to worry about mud, snow or any other road condition. I finally climbed out on top about 10:00 that morning when thing went screwy real fast. I was traveling down the road about 30mph when I completely lost my tie rod end. Now when that happens you have absolutely no steering. At first it acted just like you were on ice, then you start looking for a place to crash as if you had any choice in the matter. If you don't believe in divine intervention you need to ride with me more, because you will in a short period of time. As the pickup started off the shoulder of the road, across the ditch and out into the neighbors pasture you realize that the only level place in that part of the country is where the pickup went off the road. You can't help but believe!! There are many parts on that road that if I had gone off they might not have even found us for several days. I'm sure it would have killed me, all three dogs and the 5 Longhorns. Matter of fact they probably wouldn't have been able to tell any of us apart by the time that they would have found us. Once I had a chance to asses the situation I shut two of the dogs in the cab of the pickup and took off walking. I left Maverik in the back because I knew he would stay there once I told him to. I started walking and stopped the first vehicle that came by and hitched a ride to the nearest phone. Oh, I didn't mention I walked 8 miles before the first vehicle came by. It is just a shade isolated out there. I called a guy in Sheridan and he came out and got me and we drove to Sheridan, bought the needed parts and went back out to fix the pickup. We finished by flashlight and headlights out in the middle of the neighbors pasture. Once running, I drove the remaining two miles to our pasture and dropped the Longhorns off. As I let them out of the trailer by flashlight I noticed the big steer's horns had about 6 inches of clearance from the tips of his horns to the sides of the trailer. The inside span of that trailer is 6'8".

Well I can't thank all of those enough who have come into our lives via the cattle drives. My family and I think we are truly blessed to have the privilege of getting to know all of you and getting to experience the trips with you. We do spend a lot of our winters reminiscing about the things that have happened on the trips. You have brought

so much joy to our lives and for that I am truly thankful. So many things have happened over the years that I couldn't even begin to mention them all. How can my family and I not sit back and just laugh at some of them. These were just this year!!

Bill McKarns needing ointment for his sore finger but it wasn't his finger that was sore.
Bob Gundrum for telling his wife on the phone that winning the White Bags was like a purple ribbon at the county fair.

Steve Burke for attacking his shadow with a stick in the middle of the night.

Craig Mead for for for for well he know's what I'm talking about!!!

Bill Wood for standing guard duty for his wife while she was taking care of nature, only he was watching for people coming from the direction they were going and people showed up from the direction they came from.

Blue Heeler Sisters for putting absolute panic into every animal in the herd and pretty much most of the cowboys too!

Rex Rountree for ripping the Viking out of his saddle as we came out of Meserve Crossing

Russel Pam for flying into Sheridan and leaving his itinerary back home and not having a clue as to where he was staying.

Tom Veenendaal for allowing his horse to add fertilizer to a specific spot on the neighbors lawn

Janise for landing on her nose while chasing Taylor and commenting as we are trailing the cattle down the Red Hill" Doesn't it look just like an old western"

Her husband Chip for talking to the squirrels.

**THERE IS GOING TO BE A PRICE INCREASE AFTER THE 1ST OF THE YEAR.
WE ARE GOING TO BE GONE A WEEK FOR CHRISTMAS BUT YOU CAN STILL
LOCK IN THE CURRENT RATES BY SENDING ME AN EMAIL OF YOUR
INTENTIONS PRIOR TO THE FIRST.**

**ANYWAY, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU AND HOPE THAT YOU
HAVE A GREAT YEAR. MAY THE BLESSINGS OF THE LORD BE WITH
YOU FOREVER! MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!!**

DANA