

July 23, 2000

Trip Report

Our second drive of the season ended on July 28th with the exhaustive push of the entire herd high to Lake Creek. Originally, we had planned to leave the herd in the Little Horn for another week but, a change of our neighbor's grazing plans prompted us to take both herds clear to the top. After explaining the option of a 36 versus a 50-mile drive and the elimination of the rest day, we asked the group to vote. The Kerns kids said "NO"!!!! For the guests, the tally was one "yeah" with nine abstentions. The way Dana and I counted it, the trip was a go.

The first few days were rather routine as we paralleled the Big Horns. Our early spring moisture had made for a great grass year and all the hills were just as green as they had been in June. Once we made Rocky Bottom, the nice summer weather prompted 15 dusty cowboys and cooks to stage a "cannonball" competition in a deep swimming hole under the Little Horn Bridge. Dr. Nate from Tennessee demonstrated his "Wabash Cannonball" with a force sufficient to blast most of the river well beyond its bank. Dry and disappointed, the rest of us had to wait for the pool to refill before we could continue the contest.

On day four, as we climbed through the upper regions of the Little Horn, the trip surprised us with our very first hanging. Caitlin, cook Beth's ten year old daughter, accompanied us on this trip and as she rode through the broken timber she would "limbo" under the saddle-horn-high tree limbs. Annoyed by the game, one of the tree branches grabbed Caitlin's hood and jerked her from the saddle. Suspended like a snake on a pitchfork, Caitlin kicked and screamed that she "was choking." Dr. Nate, who was riding nearby astutely pointed out that she could not be choking because she was talking. Before the debate could be settled, the tree loosened its grip and let her tumble to the trail. After drying a few tears, Caitlin was back on Cinch and headed back after the herd only now she was sporting a dandy red mark across her neck. At last, something to go home and show Dad.

The last day's push was from Lick Creek up over the divide to Lake Creek. It is odd that this last patch of timber can give us such a challenge. It seems we can trail the herd successfully for 49.5 miles but that last half mile gets us every time. As we gathered the herd on Lick Creek, I rode over to each guest and crew member and explained the importance of forcing the herd to make that sharp climbing right hand turn in the center

of the last timber stand. As our leads disappeared into the forest it appeared that everything was under control. We had the usual calf or two try to run back once we were in the timber but the effort by all the cowhands seemed to keep everything in check. Relieved once our drags broke out into the open park on top, I rode up to the leads to see how they had done. A quick visual survey of the herd showed everything was fine other than the fact we had lost over 100 head somewhere in the last half-mile.

As we rode back down through the trees to find our 100 mistakes, I was reminded by something a guest had said years ago as we were fighting an exceptionally difficult herd up through this same spot. Starting with 300 pair, we spilled cattle behind every tree. Determined to get a lead started, we left the strays and continued to push what cattle we had left in front of us. As we neared the gate and realized our herd was dwindling rapidly, Dale, from Missoula, Montana, said, "I sure hope when we get to the top we have at least one cow and not all horses."

My sentiments exactly.

P.S. Unbelievable as it sounds, after re-riding the Lick Creek country for seven days, Dana found that we had not spilled a single animal. The entire heard had been successfully moved to Lake Creek.