

September 24th to 30th, 2000

Trip Report

If you have ever wondered what it would be like to live in Wyoming, you should have been on our September trip. We had winter, spring, fall and summer all packed into five action filled days.

Our trip started on September 24th with eight inches of snow and 15 degree lows each night. Crawling out of a warm sleeping bag into frozen boots, is sure a great eye-opening way to start the day. The rush from a double espresso at Starbucks does nothing compared to the jolt you get from jerking open your sleeping bag in the cold, mountain air. That was winter.

Each afternoon the sun was warm enough to melt the snow and frozen ground into that soupy, sticky, mud we trudge through each calving season. If you can imagine taking your shirt off and kneeling down in that slop to assist an unwilling heifer deliver her first calf, you have a pretty good idea what spring is like in the Wyoming foothills.

On day three we packed down the Little Horn to our Rock Cabin Park camp and, by now, most of the ground had dried and the crisp night air was more typical of our September. A few people may remember this camp as being “foggy”, but I assure you the weather was crystal clear and the only fog around was self-induced due to the celebration of a Connecticut guest’s birthday. In case you are wondering Al, you had a very good time.

At week’s end, we trailed through the foothills on our journey to the Double Rafter. The 85 degree morning baked the cows on the now dusty, gravel road, and after a full two hours behind the herd, we had only traveled a mile and a half. The summer’s drought had dried the spring in the holding pasture, and our cows were thirsty. Along the road, shaded areas still concealed small snow-drifts from Sunday’s storm, and the overheated cows would vacuum up the white slush in an attempt to cool down. Realizing you can only tell guest “thirty more minutes”, about fifty times before they turn violent, Dana made the wise decision to abort the mission and we threw the exhausted herd into a neighbor’s pasture. For the first time in eight years we were unable to reach our destination and had to overnight four miles short of our next camp. This “summer day” in September was tough.

On a side note, I was surprised to see the guests ride into camp that evening, and in spite of spending ten grueling hours in the saddle, everyone seemed to be almost giddy.

“Maybe we haven’t been pushing people hard enough on previous trips,” I thought to myself as the giggling cowboys rode by. Then I saw Rick.

Saying nothing, this buckeye cowboy rode in dripping wet, with mud packed in his right ear and green moss stuck to his hat. The streaks of gray through his beard and hair were either the result of being a small business owner during the Clinton years or Rick had just tasted more of Wyoming than most people care to. Only a shower would tell for sure.

After a hot dinner and a few cold beers, the story was told. Being hot and dry, Rick rode his horse to the bank of a large irrigation ditch to let her get a well-deserved drink. With her hind feet firmly placed on the dry ditch bank, the mare, facing downhill, placed her front legs in the soft mud and stretched her neck down for a sip. Ever so slowly, the horse's front legs sank lower and lower and lower. With the mare's back nearing vertical, Rick soon realized that the universal law of gravity was about to be enforced. Softly muttering the common cowboy battle cry, "oh shit," he very slowly somersaulted down his horse's neck into the stagnant waters of the Acme ditch. (Now for those of you having trouble picturing this; think back to the summer Olympics and imagine a 240 pound bearded gymnast in a cowboy hat and chaps doing a slow motion flip into a mud filled ditch.) Still in a sitting position, Rick disappeared completely beneath the water's surface. The crowd roared their approval. Dana, ever aware of the dangers of the wild west, quickly loped up and surveyed the situation and determined his water rescue skills would not be needed, as it was highly unlikely a mud-laddened cowboy the size of Rick could actually be swept away by the, not-quite-whitewater, current. Besides, even if he did wash downstream, he would never fit through the twelve inch, culvert where it passed under the road.

Yes, this was a trip for the history books.