July 21, 2001

Trip Report

The second herd made the trek to the top of the Big Horns on July 21st. Our guest list numbered 17, with a group of 12 from the Seattle area, 3 Detroiters and, of course, our father-son team from Omaha. We had an interesting group and here are the highlights:

Gary rolled his horse about an hour into morning one. Unfortunately, no one saw the incident so I am unable to testify as to exactly what happened. Gary did suffer the remainder of the week with a black and blue, badly sprained ankle, so if he was making up the whole story and actually the horse just ran got away from him, he deserves an Academy Award for special effects.

Monday afternoon, while we were lounging in camp, we were belted with nearly an inch of rain, and drifts of grape-sized hail. It was a real downpour, impressing the contingency from Seattle, where it rains 387 days a year. The vinyl floors of our new tepee tents did a fantastic job of preventing the rain that leaked through the roof from escaping into the ground, so everyone experienced the joy of watching their sleeping bags float around their canvass bedrooms. Ain't it great being a cowboy!

Maverick did it again. Tuesday morning, as we trailed to the Dipping Vat, he taught Rocky the bad habit of chasing calves through fences. Another cowboy ruined by a delinquent Australian Shepherd.

Preparing for the trip by watching old Gene Autry movies, on Thursday Steele attempted to demonstrate a Hollywood style running-leap-to-the-saddle over the horse's rump. Before Dana or I could suggest a safer method of mounting, off he sprinted. Lady luck was with us, as a clump of sagebrush grabbed Steele's spurs and to the ground he crashed safely beyond the kicking range of his horse. Dana and I grayed early for a reason.

As a reminder of why we discourage guests from running their horses, on Thursday we witnessed a real horse race in Rock Cabin Park. Dr. Josh, a psychologist from Maryland, negotiated his runaway mount to a stop by shearing off four pine trees and then finally colliding with Dana's horse. Again, we are unsure of exactly what happened but there are numerous reports of Josh counseling Ginger with threats of "time-outs" as the two blasted past. The sudden stop would have cast a normal cowboy to the ground, but the muscular tone of Josh's anal sphincter wrapped around his saddle horn kept him astride his pony.

There are hundreds of unwritten "Codes of the West." The violation of some carries the death penalty, which is generally enforced right on the spot. On Thursday, after we dropped the herd above the woven wire fence, we led the guests past the Little Horn Cow Camp so they could get a peek at some real history. In the camp was the rider from the Holding's ranch. Now for those of you who don't know, being a rider in a mountain camp is a lonely existence that generally attracts poorly recovering alcoholics who carry large handguns, bull whips, and knives long enough to scratch your toes without removing your boots. Some have a criminal past, others, a criminal present. Their one common thread is that they despise greenhorns. Imagine my horror, as I rode up to our mounted group and saw H. Adam, attorney at law, nonchalantly sitting astride his saddle shooting videotape while his horse ate all the oats out of the bunk that the rider had generously placed for his own horse. (Not only was Adam's mare stealing the grain, she would lay her ears back and bite at the rider's horse each time he edged towards the feed bunk.) Realizing it was only a matter of time before the rider, who was intently visiting with Dana, would turn, discover the theft and then start shooting. I quickly suggested we should all ride on. As we disappeared over the ridge, I rode up to Adam and asked if he knew why he came close to getting killed. He wondered if it was because of his last name being Jewish. "No," I said, "that's not it." Do you suppose that entire problem in the Middle East was started by someone letting their camel eat someone else's oats?

One thing is certain; no two trips are ever the same.