

June 30, 2002

Trip report

We are again in the clutches of a terrible drought. I've heard it said by the experts that we are in the fourth year of a two thousand year drought. Boy, I sure hope these are the same experts that said introducing wolves to Yellowstone would be a good idea. Wrong again!

Our June trip did hit one of the nicest weeks of weather all summer as we just missed the 100+ degree days of the first part of July. With the shortage of grass in the valley we decided to put the entire herd on the mountain the first trip. The cattle moved well and we reached each camp with very little excitement. About the only surprise we had to deal with was the loss of two horses just prior to the drive. Brendon rolled a horse over while chasing a cow through the pasture the week before the drive. The horse, Lloyd, suffered a potentially crippling injury to his right knee. He has shown some improvement over the past two weeks but we really won't know the outcome for several months. Unlike people, anterior cruciate ligaments cannot be repaired in horses as there is just no material made that we can successfully anchor to the bone to mimic the action of the ACL. Brendon is bruised but fine and thus our week began.

Day One

We pulled Badger from the guest string the first night as he was developing a nasty sole abscess. This forced us to bump wife Druann off her horse and use him in the guest string (more on this issue later). I dug out the abscess on Sunday evening in hopes that he may be useable by Wednesday. In my experience, searching for a sole abscess can be frustrating, as you need to take your hoof knife and dig through each and every black crack on the bottom of the foot. Sometimes this can take a sweat-drenched half hour of exertion and I dread the chore of exploration. I picked up Badger's foot and took one knife swipe at the bottom of the hoof and the abscess exploded in my face. Lucky me. Someday, there will be a game show featuring blindfolded people who try to identify the origin of a substance by its smell. I know I can be the kick-butt world champion of that game. After twenty-five years as a ranch kid and then nineteen years as a veterinarian I know things like, three-day old placenta smells sweet, every dead animal smells the same after seven days, cat fight abscesses smell like my mother-in-law's prune meatloaf, and horse sole abscesses smell like my fourteen year old son's basketball socks that have spent the summer hiding under his bed. Feedlot cowboys have an expression they use when a steer gives an unsuspecting cowboy a green-grass facial, "it's a good thing you had your mouth open or else you'd have gotten that all over your face." It's a good thing I had my mouth open.

Day Two

Monday morning surprised us with a guest arriving at the breakfast table complaining of a tremendous stiffness in his hip joints. Being trained in the medical field, I immediately thought of all the terrible diseases that could cause such an acute case of polyarthritis. Lyme's disease is endemic in the eastern part of the United States and this fella could likely be the very first case to be identified here in Wyoming. I offered two approaches to the problem: 1) We could start him on doxycycline, antiinflammatories, and pull blood for rickettsial disease titers as well as whole blood culture, or 2) we could turn his chaps around so they, himself and his horse are all headed in the same direction. He chose the later.

Day Three

More on Badger; Wednesday morning, around four-o'clock, we were packing three mules with kitchen supplies and readying Druann's and Patty's horses for the ride up the canyon to Rock Cabin Park. Badger, our sole abscess patient and now Druann's mount, was traveling fairly sound, so I loaded him up on the pain killer, Banamine, slapped another sweat on his foot, and saddled him up. Now, some husbands are not as considerate of their wives as I am, and wouldn't think twice about sending their spouse on a twelve-mile climb up the mountains on a lame horse. Myself, on the other hand, having been lectured by my female office staff about the "Women Are From Mars..." stuff, am much more in tune to the needs of my better half.

"You probably should keep your tennis shoes in your saddle bags just in case your horse goes lame," I lovingly warned.

I sincerely thought that such an admonition would have been welcomed by great acts of affection as I had just shown my wife that I "truly cared about her feelings." Such was not the case. I tried to explain that the reason she needed tennis shoes and I didn't, was that my horse wasn't lame. She was using female logic so therefore could not understand my point. Perhaps it would help if Dr. Gray changed the name of his book to "Women Are From Mars, Men Are From Venus But Their Horses Aren't Lame."

Day Four

Thursday found us celebrating Independence Day on the mountain, something we generally try to avoid for two reasons: 1) Many guests prefer to be at home with their families over the fourth, and 2) We really don't want to give the cooks another reason to celebrate while on the mountains. It turns out that not only was it Thursday, the "rest day" in camp, but it was also the Fourth of July and now only two days from cook Beth's birthday. What a reason to party. After dinner, cook Patty broke out some surprise

electronic fireworks, (we take fire restrictions very seriously especially when the higher-ups in the USFS are already planning on torching the Little Horn Canyon to protect us from a catastrophic wildfire.) Caught up in the jubilation of the moment, Patty gathered a group of celebrants and they charged up the hill, armed with their electronic sparklers, to where guest Gino was trying to sleep. Gino soon found himself out of his sleeping bag joining the revelers as they spelled out “America” with their illuminating devices. Picture this: Six partially intoxicated cowboys and one groggy New York Italian in his reasonably white underwear spelling out “America” while half of the group sang “America The Beautiful” and the other half sang “My County ‘Tis Of Thee.” It was truly a patriotic moment. I went to bed.

Day Five

Rather than ride back out the mouth of the canyon, as we usually do, we made the twelve-mile trek up to the Lake Creek Camp where we unsaddled and then drove seventy miles to Sheridan for a much deserved shower and our send off banquet. Guest Joel, attorney-at-law, remarked that going five days without a shower wasn't really as repulsive as he thought it would be. Just wait until you get home and open your suitcase; the entire week will leap out in explicit olfactory detail.