

OCT 4, 2003 CLEAN UP RIDE

This is an unbelievable story and it goes way past the week of the clean up ride. We had approximately 18 pair in Lake Creek that were so wild we couldn't capture them the week of the clean up ride.

SAT OCT 4, 2003

I picked up John (crash) Thornton, Shannon Osbourn, Ken Oberst, and Wes Buckner at noon laying on the sidewalk waiting for me at the Holiday Inn. It was a very warm sunny day and the weather was perfect. To say they were a little anxious to get started was an understatement. But the great thing about return people is it's so much fun because you already know them. After arrival I let them get settled in their canvas motels before I got the horses in to make our first circle of the week. One nice thing about repeat people is that you already know what type of horse will work for them. We got mounted and decided that we would slip into Lake Creek and gather that little bunch of cows that we had missed the previous week. I knew that the cows that we had missed in Lake Creek were not cows we hadn't seen but cows that had sprinted to the bottom of Lake Creek and we had never gotten them out of the timber. I knew that if we were going to be successful we would have get below them before they saw us. We headed down the upper bench to Thomspson Springs and caught a game trail that would drop us below where I had seen the cattle earlier in the day. When we dropped off it put us in behind two pair and off they ran up the canyon. Now that was the direction I wanted them going so I said we have to keep them in sight and they should run themselves out by the time they get to the other cattle. We took off through the slide at a very fast clip and I thought what a way to start the circle. I kept glancing back to see if everyone was still coming. They weren't about to let me get away and they were coming along as fast as their blood pressure would let them. I knew once we gathered the cattle we only had to trail them about a half mile to kick them into Lick Creek for the next days gather. As we broke into the park where the rest of the cattle were there heads came up and they got that wild look in their eye and off up country they ran. I knew I had to bend the lead back to the drag in order to get them together so I gave scooter his head and off up country we flew. With branches popping and pine needles flying I managed to bend the lead just as they got into the timber. Cattle scattered in every direction as I was bending the lead. It was every cow for herself and she wasn't waiting for any calf either. After bending them back into the park with John and Ken and Wes coming up with the drags we only had 6 pair. About that time 6 more pair came out of the trees below me. I hollered for them to hold the ones we had and I would try and bend the next bunch up to theirs. I charged off the hill with

the horse straining to stay on his feet as the gopher holes were really soft and challenging for a horse at that speed. When I bent them back I look back up the hill and it looked like cowboys trying to stomp on cockroaches. Each cowboy would chase this one then that one and then another one with the cows winning every time. The cows headed around the timber patch and I shouted to stay behind them and I would try and get ahead of them to bend them back up the hill toward the logging road. I went around the timber patch and sat on the trail waiting for the cattle to show up. I stayed hidden behind a pine tree so they wouldn't see me until they were right on top of me. I heard one of the lead cows coming. She came within 20 yards of me then just stopped. I think she smelled me. She stood there for probably two minutes and as other cows showed up they stopped waiting for her to make a move. She acted just like a lead cow with a elk herd. She decided she didn't like the smell of things and down into the timber patched she charged with the rest right behind. Crash showed up about then with two pair on a dead run right ahead of him. I tried to bend them before they got to the timber but to no avail. At about this time with my horse laboring very hard knowing we had a whole week ahead of us I decided to punt the circle for the day. The frustrating thing was that every timber patch we went into we came out the other side with less cattle than we went into it with. Everyone showed up except Shannon and know one really knew where he was. But as Crash showed up he had a gleam in his eye and a smile on his face and he said "Damn that was fun"!!! It was cows 18 and cowboys ZERO. When Shannon showed up he said he had had a stand off with a cow and every time he got to close she would charge him. It wasn't even 343. We headed back to camp with me being concerned about the disposition of that bunch of cattle wondering how were we going to get them captured. The rest of the bunch was chatting like a bunch of excited teenagers.

Sun Oct 5 2003

I mulled over several ideas on how to go about the capture of the wild cows. I even considered gathering Lick Creek and throwing them into Lake Creek and then regathering the whole thing again. But I decided that a cow in the hand was worth two in the timber. We gathered Lick Creek and trailed them to the Little Horn the next day. We picked up about 100 pair or 200 animals. The weather was beautiful and we had a easy day. Our circle consisted of about 17 miles for the day but we had accomplished what we started out to do.

Mon Oct 6

We mounted everybody hoping that with more cowboys maybe we could get the cattle where we wanted them. (that means the cooks had to double their jobs and be cowboys, but don't let that fool you. My cooks are pretty good cowboys.) We made the same circle as we had on Sat except we only saw two pair and they again gave us the slip in the timber. When we got back to camp for lunch I said the cattle must have gone into the bottom of Lake Creek and that after lunch we were going to take a trail that starts below Anvil Rock and stays high so that we come out below the cattle. As we dived off the trail at Anvil Rock the quote of the week came from Crash Thornton as he said "Are really riding off of that"? As we broke out in the bottom expecting to see cattle there was nothing there but scenery. We did stop at the bottom to let everyone shift the pine needles that were now engaged in our underwear. But that happens when you ride where the Bull Elk run. I decided that a bunch of elk would be easier to gather

Tue Oct 7

It was Tuesday morning and I drove down the logging road into Lake Creek glassing to see if I could see any cattle. I couldn't. I felt certain that we had either scared that bunch of wild cattle so bad they were staying in the timber or they were doing like the elk and had left after too much hunting pressure. We decided to head toward the Dry Fork and Little Park. We had a great ride than morning but didn't find any sign of cattle, which was a good thing. If they had gone clear north I don't know how we would have ever gotten them out of a 5000 acre patch of Lodge Pole Pine. Late that afternoon I dropped Crash, Ken and Shannon off with directions to go ride Ice creek while I took the pickup to the valley as the next day we were loading the pack mules and headed to the Little Horn. Alice brought me back that evening and dropped me off and they said they had a great ride but saw no sign of cattle but that Crash had let his horse get away from him and they had a real horse race to get him caught. I never did get it straight. Was Shannon chasing John's horse or John?

Wed Oct 8

We packed the mules, cleaned up camp and headed to the Little Horn. When we arrived in Dayton Gulch we found some cattle that we had missed on Sunday so Patty and Meg took the two pack mules and went on to the Little Horn while we punched cows. We had 30 some odd head of pairs and yearlings with a mix of Longhorns. We kicked them off the open face and when we got the other side of the Sheep Bed ground I noticed we were missing one Longhorn and one dry cow for sure. I made a swing back up country and picked up 3 pair we had missed but not the two I was looking for. We kicked

those we had on down country into the Little Horn Parks and went on into the Little Horn Cow Camp. The cooks had somehow managed to lift the packs off the mules and had them all unpacked. (a little hint: If you put there bottle at the bottom of the pack and don't tell them which one it is in it's a great motivator). We pitched the canvas motels and settled in for the day. The color in the Little Horn was unreal and the weather was perfect.

Thur Oct 9

Being that we were trying to get all of the cattle off the mountain I said that we were headed back to Dayton Gulch that day to find the dry cow and the Longhorn whom I had decided had gone back to Dayton Gulch. We rode clear to Dayton Gulch but no sign of the two outlaws we were looking for. I decided they had swung high on East Burnt and were under the rims with the Elk. We rode back through the rough boulder strewn ridge and sure enough right ahead of us was the speckled butt of the Longhorn sticking out from under the shadows of a pine tree. I pointed to them and told everyone to get ready for a wild ride. It was everything and more that I promised. All three stayed right with me until I shouted back for them to go around and not follow me into the steep slide that the cows went into at a run. I wasn't about to be skunked by any steer from Texas. I'm not saying it was steep but sitting in the saddle with your up hill arm straight out at your side your finger tips were only 18 inches from touching the side hill. When the two old hides stopped running we were having a standoff around a big pine tree. I new if I went one way they would go the other. So all of us were standing there huffing and puffing with the sweat rolling off my horse. Somewhere in the process I had torn off my stirrup skirting and it was hanging down almost to the ground. I slowly stepped off my horse to try and fix it and readjust the pine needles in my shorts and yell for the tree Amigos as I had know idea where they were. As we had sprinted off the rim after the two wild things I had glanced back several times and all three were white knuckled and no blood was gushing out of them so on we went. Pretty soon they came riding back looking for me and with the four of us the two wild things went to the main trail and down it they went. As John rode up again he says "You looked just like the Man from Snowy River". It was one o'clock in the afternoon by now and we had only just started the day as we had every intention of gathering all the cattle we had gathered during the week and kick them down into the canyon. I swung into the Little Horn Cabin as we went by and picked up Wes who had wisely decided to keep the cooks company in camp that morning. The Tree Amigos kept going with the cattle. By the time Wes and I caught up with the Tree Amigos they were kicking the drags across Robinson Crossing. This wasn't good because now we were ahead

of schedule and I knew what that would mean. Murphy's law would soon rear it's ugly head. After kicking the cattle through the lower Drift Fence we ate lunch and headed up country. After we had gone about 1 mile here laying in the shade were 13 head who had crossed Robinson and then turned South instead of North, so we picked them up and headed back down the canyon because who knew where they might be the next day. As we turned around and headed back up the canyon towards camp we had gone about 1.5 miles when we ran into another group of 8 head so back down the canyon we went with another bunch. But this was okay because we were now behind schedule so I knew things were just right! We rode into camp just before dark. We had done over 23 miles that day.

Friday Oct 10

I went out to the corral the next morning at daylight to catch the jingle horse and found that Murphy was already busy. The jingle horse had jumped out and torn down the top rail on the corral. So I grabbed a bucket of oats and took off on foot in the one section size horse pasture in the Little Horn (640 acres). I was hoping that the jingle horse wasn't crippled because if she was we were one horse short and I figured there was going to have to be a poker game to see who would walk. Luckily she was fine, however my once easy bunch of horses to catch were rapidly growing tired of the daily treks and were a little hard to catch that day. As we were packing that morning I kept glancing at the sky and it sure looked like a weather change was in route. I sent the tree amigos and Wes down the park side and I took the cooks and pack horses down the Leaky side. By the time we reached leaky mountain there were dollar sized flakes coming down. Oh well, it was the last day! We caught up with the tree amigos and Wes at Camp Rock where I had told them to wait for us. They had a blazing fire going and were trying to dry out there gloves and get warm. After a short stop for lunch we were again on our way. It was snowing and raining off and on but everyone's sense of humor stayed the course. We reached the bottom around 4:00 and much to every ones delight we had the Longhorn steer and the dry cow that had given us so much hell. It also appeared we had most of the cattle knowing there was still one bunch in Lake Creek. We kicked the cattle into the county road and loaded all of our wet stuff into the pickups and headed to town. It wasn't nearly as loud on the way into town as it was on the way out of town. Everyone was tired including myself. We had a great week with some great people and it was very successful from a cow standpoint.

STAY TUNED FOR THE FOLLOW UP STORY ON THE LAKE CREEK COWS!!