

Oct 16 2003

It was the day after the first day of elk season and so I headed to the mountains to talk to hunters to see where they had seen cattle. Lots of hunters had seen cattle but not a lot of them remembered where or exactly what they had seen. Glassing from the rims on the East side of Lake Creek I could see a few cattle in lower Lake Creek. I went home and got on the phone to my neighbors and told them to ride good fast horses. I set up a set of portable corrals right on the logging road where it crosses Lake Creek as I figured we were never going to get cattle up that hill out of Lake Creek. On Friday I drove in again to the rims and spent some more time glassing. I could see a couple cows but no 15-18 mature head which is what I was guessing. On Sat morning 5 of us rode in and snuck down into the bottom of Lake Creek. When we got most of the way to the bottom we saw a cow and calf above us on the hill side. Up went her head and off down country she took. We slapped the iron to our horses and the race was on. As soon as the cows realized we were going to beat them to the bottom they veered up the hill towards the timber as fast as they could run with 5 cowboys and a pack of cow dogs in hot pursuit. We were neck and neck entering the timber and we bent them back up country. They dived straight off the hill then towards the creek but one of the cowboys had anticipated this possibility and was sitting their waiting. Imagine their shock! They turned and started running up country as hard as they could run, some back up to the timber and others up the trail. We turned the dogs on those that headed for the trees while a couple of cowboys sprinted to get ahead of the charging cows and stop them so we could get the whole bunch together. It worked very well. By the time we had run a mile up hill the cows were willing to slow to a walk. We had 11 pair and one sick extra calf we didn't have a mom for. It was obvious he had been bummed and didn't have a mom. As we entered the next timber patch the cows tried one last ditch effort. It almost worked. I left Taylor following the sick calf and the rest of us continued. When we came out of the trees on the far side we were missing one calf. We had his mom but not him. We stopped and held everything while a couple of us went back with the dogs to try and find him. We looked and looked but didn't find him. After a while I decided we had better go load what we had. We trailed them up to the corrals and loaded them and hauled them to the valley. It had been a profitable day. We only had two calves still in Lake Creek. The next day Alice, Taylor, Brendon and myself headed back up sure we could find the two calves. I sent Brendon and Taylor to reride Lick Creek and take everything they found to the Little Horn and Alice and I looked for the two calves. We were sure the one calf would be bawling for his mom and easy to find. We looked and looked but the only thing we found was the one cow

that Shannon had tried to get the first day on Sat the 3rd on the clean up ride. (remember she was the one that kept charging him) When I saw the cow the reason was obvious. She had altitude sickness. She was pretty far along with the sickness as her brisket was already full of fluid and she sloshed when she walked. I knew her chances of survival were probably less than 20 % but we ranchers always try to do what we can for a sick animal regardless of the chances. I got her to exactly the spot I had last seen here and Shannon when she played out and wouldn't go any further. Anytime I got within 10 yards of her she would charge me. I was riding a colt that day and I was afraid of getting her hurt so I sat and waited till my wife showed up to help me. I got off a foot with my rope and charged her swinging my rope and popping her on the end of the nose. All she did was charge me and pop me on the end of the nose. At this point I knew it was pointless to fight her any longer. I pulled my pistol and decided to put her down. The only problem was that it was only a 22 and you needed to be about 4 feet from her to have enough knock down to do any good. Have you ever had to stand your ground when a 1500 lb cow is charging you, waiting to let her get to that 4 ft mark before shooting? The problem was I would start moving at 5 ft and wasn't putting the bullet right where I needed it. I knew if she knocked me down we were going to find out how brave my wife was. The 5th time she charged me I got the bullet right where I needed it and it was over. The following Tuesday I came back to the mountain looking for the calves. I glassed and spotted one calf below Anvil Rock. I snuck over there and got below him and when he saw me the sprint was on. He beat me to the timber and I didn't see him again that day. It was like chasing a coyote through the trees. He would go under the branches and I had to go around the trees and within 20 yards I would lose him. I decided I was going to have to wait for some snow so we could track him.

Sat Nov 1, 2003

Well we had snow during the week so the calf hunt move up to the front burner. I was a little concerned because at the Rafter they had a foot of new snow. That could mean 20 inches or better on Lake Creek. It turned out to be a freak snow storm and there was only 3 inches at Bear Lodge which is 16 miles from cow camp. So I drove up to check out the snow conditions and see if I could spot the calf. There was only 3 inches of snow but due to the wind it was rather drifted. I assumed with hunting season the rode would still be open. One track was open and I didn't have much trouble driving in other than I knew I would need to chain up to pull the horse trailer in. I went to the overlook above Lake Creek and walked to the top of the rim with my glasses and went to looking. Sure enough after a period of studying the tree line on the West side

of Lake Creek there was mr. red calf. I was elated except as I sat there pondering and glassing one became two then three then four until I counted 8 animals. In one sense I was glad because I had thought when we were chasing the cows on the clean up ride there were more than 11 pair. This bunch put my estimate at a run much closer. I headed to the valley to put together a crew for the next day. Being it was only 8 animals I decided Brendon, Alice, Myself, Taylor and my brother Blaine could probably do the job.

Sun Nov 2,

We put on four chains and with 5 horses in the trailer headed in. We took both pickups so we would have one to always pull the other if we got stuck. We also took some hay in and scattered it around the corral to help coax those wild cows into the corral. We went to the bottom of Lake Creek and it was the same scene as before. As soon as they saw us the sprint was on. The 8 old hides made a mad dash for the timber and we were in hot pursuit. We got around them and headed up country with the 8 at a dead run. I was sure they would play out pretty soon. They ran the first mile and as we came to the timber they dived off into the thick stuff. I gave Blaine my horse and I went in a foot because I couldn't even lead my horse through the stuff they were going through. I said I would keep them going up country and we would come out of the timber on the other end. I had 6 of the animals and had last seen Brendon chasing a pair towards the rims. The 6 head actually trapped themselves in their. They got caught between a rim and a bunch of fallen pine trees in the shape of a v and the only way out was the way we went in. I held them there until Alice and Taylor showed up looking for me. They were on the other side of the creek which had opened up enough that you could at least ride through it. I had Taylor tie his horse up and make a trail through the snow over to me then had him go out around the cows and bring them back and I would try and bend them to the other side of the creek where Alice sat to continue the chase. Everything went according to plan for 30 seconds. We did get the cows across the creek to where Alice was. They did turn and run up the creek bottom for 30 yds then they saw a little crack in the boulder patch and they turned and went up through it as hard as they could run. I screamed don't lose sight of them. The footing was treacherous at best and up the draw Alice went but not at the same speed as the cows. I was doing my best Jesse Owens impersonation (or anyway the best one that a short fat white boy can do) but running up hill with chaps on and twelve layers of clothing with the rocks, snow and ice covered, I put on a hell of a sprint for 20 yards. We never saw the cattle again that day. They went into the next timber patch and split everywhere. As everyone else was waiting for the fat Jesse Owens to catch up, and it took a while. I had to

walk 1/2 mile before finding my horse and the rest of crew. No one had a clue where they had gone. The had seen Brendon once still chasing the pair he had over under the rims as they went through a park. We sat there until Brendon gave it up and came looking for us. Then back to the valley. Due to the time of year this was really starting to become a serious problem. There was \$5000 worth of inventory still trying to commit suicide on the mountain, and they were calling for snow on Monday. We couldn't get back to look for the cattle due to the weather conditions for the next 12 days. Not a lot of snow but the wind was either blowing or the mountains were fogged in.

Wed Nov 11

I drove back up to glass the country again and see if I could spot the cattle. Looking from the rims I could see one cow and 2 calves 1/4 mile from the logging road. I thought perfect, the rest are probably still there and I just can't see them. If not we will capture those 3 then go look for the rest. By now there is at least a foot of snow on the ground with many 2-3 foot drifts. As I got into the diesel pickup to go home it acted like it was only running on 2 injectors. There was no way I was bringing that pickup back to the mountain the next day and have it break down in there. I decided to use my flat bed pickup instead.

Thur Nov 12

Five of us went in. I chained up on all four and another neighbor had his pickup and trailer and chained up all the way around and in we went. Three of us unloaded where the logging road crosses Lake Creek and were going to the area I had seen the one cow and two calves the day before. I sent Brendon and Doug with the 2 pickups and trailers on up to camp and have them ride back and help us. As I told everyone we would try and gather the cows and trail them up to the corrals but if not they would do it at the end of a rope. When we got to where the cattle were supposed to be there was nothing there but tracks and it looked like they had gone down Lake Creek. We waited for about 15 minutes at the spot we were supposed to meet Brendon and Doug but they didn't show up. I rode towards camp wondering what had gone wrong. When I got to the horse pasture here they came and said the transmission had gone out of the pickup. Well, one problem at a time and the first was the cattle. So we hightailed it to lower Lake Creek where we saw one cow and two calves and it started just like the others. A wild dash for the timber. Again we were able to bend them back up country but at a run. Randy took off at a sprint to try and stop the cow to slow the whole bunch up and settle them down. As he was sprinting his horse stepped into a snow covered wash out and head over heels they went. Like all good cowboys as soon as everything was through bouncing

he bailed back into the saddle and off he went again riding for the brand. We were up country about a mile when momma cow decided she had had it and dived for the timber. Her calf went another direction to the timber and the 3rd calf was trying to follow. I jerked down my nylon and roped her. At least we had one captured. As everyone went over a little rise after the escapees I sat there and waited for them to show up trying not to choke the calf I had on the end of my rope. About 10 minutes later one of the cowboys came riding up and said the last he had seen three of cowboys were chasing the cow back down country trying to get a head of her. I handed him my rope and said hold the calf and I will go help them. He gave me his rope and off I went in search of the remaining animals and cowboys. As I entered the timber on the east side of Lake Creek I heard yelling and lots of swearing. Three cowboys were a foot and had clubs in their hands and the cow was chasing cowboys around in the trees then the dogs would chase the cow and back and forth it went for several minutes. I built a loop and just sat there and waited. Pretty soon momma cow had had enough and came charging out of the timber headed to the next timber patch. There was about 20 yards to the next timber patch on a real steep hill side. I knew if she got in there it was going to get real ugly so I roped her. Now I was cinched plenty tight to rope a 500 lb calf on level ground but a 1100 lb cow on a steep hill side is another thing. When she hit the end of the rope, saddle and I went forward and I started slipping rope to try and lessen the pull. Scooter recognizing something wasn't right put his head up or saddle and I were going to come over the front end. As the cow hit the timber she sucked around a tree and when she hit the end of the rope it sucked Scooter and I right up snug to a pine tree. Of course I was hollering for someone else to get a rope on her because I was in a very bad situation, but I didn't want to turn her loose either. I wouldn't take \$10,000 for that horse. How he kept his feet under him I have no idea. We got another rope on her and with someone else holding her I was able to get off and resaddle. Then the work started. She wouldn't follow our trail down through the timber so with two ropes on her one person would hold her from behind as we would pass the other rope through the trees to the other horse, then turn her loose and down the hill she would run until hitting the end of the rope. Then do it all over again. Remember, she was mad and would take you any time she had the chance. Now it takes a little nerve to walk up to a cow who wants to kill you and take one rope and pass it on down the hill, knowing that if the cowboy holding the cow lets go you're dead! Remember you're on a steep hill side with at least a foot of snow on the ground and 12 layers on. It took 30 minutes to get her down through the timber to the open ground and it was no more than 60 yards. Once down on the bottom where we could work with her we roped her hind feet and put her down on the ground and built halters out of our lariats and put them back on her and let her up. This

was about noon. We headed up country with her and she wasn't about to lead and every time we gave her a little slack she either tried to take you or run to the trees. She fought us all afternoon. At about 4:00 we had made it about a mile up country with her. That's two people dragging and two people pushing from behind. We were about 3/4 of a mile from the logging road when I sent one of the cowboys up to take a look at my pickup to see if by chance it was something simple. We kept working with the two animals we had roped. By now the calf had given in and was totally halter broke. But not old momma. We would make about 20 yards then have to wait 10 minutes for her to rest as she would throw her self down and we couldn't drag that much dead weight up hill. Randy showed up about then and said he had managed to get the pickup into 4 high and that it was the transfer case not the transmission. By now the cow was so tired we couldn't get her back on her feet. The only options left were to drive the pickup down there and put a tow strap around her and drag her to the trailer, or tie her to a tree for the night and come back the next day. We fastened a 30 ft tow rope to her two hind feet and with the pickup chained up on all fours took off up hill. We found we could only go a few feet at a time and then have to back up 4 or 5 feet and hit it again. We would make 15 -20 feet at a time doing it this way but it was the only way. We finally pulled her onto the logging road and hooked a horse to her and with 4 of us pushing managed to roll her into the trailer. We quickly took the ropes off and shut the trailer door. In about 5 minutes she was on her feet and man was she on the fight. We put 3 horses in my trailer and I started out of Lake Creek. I got half way up the hill when the transfer case went completely out. I had nothing other than brakes. I was lucky we weren't coming off the mountain when this happened. We unloaded the trailer and Doug and Brendon rode the horses to the top. The other pickup unhooked from his trailer leaving the trailer right in the middle of the road. There was no other option. We couldn't turn the trailers around with this much snow. It was dark by this time and starting to snow. The pickup that was running pulled my pickup to the top of the hill, then went back down and hooked to my trailer and we loaded all the horses in it and pulled it to Bear Lodge. He then went back and hooked to his trailer that still had the mad cow in it and pulled it to Bear Lodge. The wait certainly hadn't cooled the cow off though! While Randy went back for his trailer and the cow one cowboy caught a ride off the mountain to his ranch where he got his pickup to come back up the mountain to get the trailer load of horses. To say the least Brendon didn't make it back to his night class at the college that night. But we did get the cow and calf and the horses off the mountain that night. That still left one calf in Lake Creek, 5 animals somewhere and my pickup on the mountain. I wasn't sure we were making progress.

Sat Nov 15

By now my neighbors are seriously considering getting unlisted phone numbers. Remember the diesel pickup went down the day before this all started, so I was completely at the mercy of my neighbors because I didn't have a vehicle that was running. Doug who still had a sense of humor said he would go in with me because we were sure we would find that calf right in the same area we had last seen him and with the new snow tracking him would be easy. We were also hoping we would see the 5 others as I had no clue where to start looking. On the way in that morning which was the last day of hunting season we talked to a hunter who said their were 10 or 12 head 3miles west and 2 miles north of Bear Lodge. As we questioned him more we found out he hadn't seen them but had seen their tracks crossing fools creek. Now everyone who has gone on the fall trip that came from Sheridan crossed Fools Creek about 3 miles after getting off the oil. We stopped and looked at the tracks and they were cow tracks but it looked like a lot less than 10 head. They were also 13 miles east of Lake Creek. I didn't think they were probably ours. We went on to Lake Creek and rerode it. We didn't find anything. We decided because we still had about 4 hours of daylight to follow those tracks on Fools Creek. As Doug and I were driving over there he commented about a hunter who had told Brendon on the previous Thursday that he had seen 5 black animals in Fools Creek. It just so happened the 5 we were missing were all black. What were the chances? Anyway we followed the tracks headed east until dark. The only thing we were sure of was that the cattle were lost. They would walk down a fence line until 50 yards from a gate then turn and go the other direction. We were in country I had never been in so I didn't have a clue where we were going to come out. But we never saw anything but tracks. The next day found us again in behind the tracks, sure that we would get sight of the unknown cattle. We tracked them until about 2:00 in the afternoon when they finally went over the top of the mountain and were headed down the face. At this point in time we knew where the cattle would show up on the bottom. In the Amsden Creek elk winter refuge. (about 4 miles from the town of Dayton). Being it was the day after hunting season the gates into the elk pasture would be locked so we couldn't get the cattle out if we followed them all to the bottom. So back to the pickup and off the mountain we went. We drove to the game wardens house which is located by the elk pasture and sure enough here were the 5 black animals that we were missing. **TWENTY FIVE MILES EAST OF THE LITTLE HORN CANYON.**