

JUNE 2006 TRIP REPORT:

SUNDAY JUNE 25TH: With the arrival of 17 clean smiling guests, we got the day started around 9:00am. It was amazing, but we already had our first white bag nomination before the bus had even left Sheridan that morning. I was certainly hoping that wasn't an indication of what was to come for the week. We completed the horsemanship clinic, and I believe it was the first time that we didn't make one horse switch since starting the horsemanship clinics. After lunch we did the cattle handling seminar and some team penning. As the dust rose and settled on people you could see their excitement climb. The anticipation for the next day to start was on everyone's mind. That evening around the fire it was time for our white bag nomination and as usual everyone was a little skeptical and hesitant as they weren't too sure what door they might be opening for themselves if they nominated someone. So I spoke up, and nominated first time guest Bill Klenke, from Ashland, Oregon. Bill had a friend who had driven out and camped at the Rafter the night before the trip and then drove in the next morning and picked Bill up. Now this was fine except they hadn't mentioned it to me so the bus was looking for Bill at the motel. OOPS!! As we arrived that morning my wife who was carrying her cell phone, got a call from the bus wanting to know if we knew anything about the whereabouts of a Mr. Bill Klenke. As much as it pains me to say, I was glad my wife had her cell phone, I'll say it certainly removed some stress to be able to answer and say "He's already here". So Mr. Bill won the white bags for the day.

MONDAY 27TH: The cooks were up and had breakfast ready at 4:45am. We ate a hurried breakfast and headed to Bonanza Creek to get cattle gathered and get the day on the trail started. Everything just about went as planned, which is pretty damn good for us. With only one little mishap, the trip to the Double Rafter went relatively smooth. As Kate McManus was getting on the barrel backed horse Amigo, here saddle slipped off. Now with the saddle at 3:00, Kate did the only thing she could, she jumped ship. Now every time I try to do this I always land on my head or my back side but not Kate. She landed perfectly on here feet and the judges awarded here a perfect 10 score. Everything went fine for the first 9 miles of the trip. As the herd crossed Twin Creek, with 1000 of the neighbors steers standing along the fence, staring google eyed at the heifers walking by, I thought to myself this looks like a wreck waiting to happen. Yup, I was right!! As the heifers spilled into the creek to get a drink, and as they were pushing and shoving, the first one was shoved through the fence, then another, and by then there was little fence left and we were on the verge of a major wreck. A couple of cowboys started barking orders and the guests followed the orders to a tee and stopped a major wreck from happening. Now as we loped out into the pasture that had a 1000 steers in it, to try and get our heifers back, panic seemed to hit all over. The sprint was on; all we could do was bend the group into a big circle (steers and heifers alike). One crazed heifer took off in a mad dash and we had to let her go or risk losing everything. Once the cattle settled down, we eased them over into the lane where we then had to work herd. It went much better than I anticipated, as everyone did their jobs admirably. We probably put 70 steers back into the pasture they came from, and got 19 of our heifers out of the steers, and back into the rest of the herd. This was only about a 45 minute delay. We got into camp around 1:00 pm, had lunch then headed to the corral and did our branding demonstration in the afternoon. Kate Yates won the White Bags that night for just about getting run over by a yearling that morning on Twin Creek. Now the White Bag nomination came

because she was completely oblivious as to how close it really was. Sometimes ignorance is bliss!!!

TUESDAY JUNE 27: We trailed the cattle the 12 miles to the Dipping Vat at the foot of the Little Horn Canyon. The temperature wasn't too bad but it was extremely dry. I really felt sorry for the cattle. We sat on the river, with the cattle and let them water up well, but when we kicked into the forty, it was obvious that between the grasshoppers, and one of our neighbors, there wasn't much left for feed. You have to feel sorry for cattle that have just walked 12 miles, had water, but there really wasn't anything to eat. I was a little concerned that it could lead to a slow day on Wednesday as the cattle might be so hungry, that they would spend more time grazing than walking. That night around the fire we had several nominations with Tom Veenendaal walking away with the honors. Tom hit a triple that day. As we were trailing up the road by one of our neighbors houses Tom stopped on the lawn to prevent cattle from wandering all over the neighbor's lawn, when his horse noticed a spot on the lawn that looked like it could do with a good dose of fertilizer. STRIKE ONE! When we dropped the cattle in the forty, and everyone was headed to the corrals at a walk, like we had discussed the night before, Tom just couldn't help himself and decided he had to beat everyone to the corrals. Tom put the heels to the horse and off they raced. STRIKE TWO!! Later that evening as we were waiting for dinner, we looked over and here is Tom, behind his tent with his cell phone to his ear. Now what part of my phone demonstration the first night didn't sink in? STRIKE THREE!!! However, I will say the day up the canyon is the day you want the White Bags. Maybe Tom was way ahead of all of us. I will say we have never had someone win the White Bags for 3 independent nominations the same day.

WEDNESDAY JUNE 28TH: We made some slight changes this year to try and avoid the heat. We trailed the cattle up to where the trail starts then started cutting the numbers we needed. We pushed the cooks harder to get out of camp earlier and were 3 miles farther up the canyon at 8:30 in the morning than we were last year. The trip up the canyon went smooth except for the switch backs. We had hell in the drags on Strawberry Corner. About 25 yearlings missed the corner and up the canyon wall they went. Now this old white haired cowboy had no choice but to go after them. The problem was, I had to get around them and bring them back down. I couldn't follow them because the trail they were on was pretty narrow, right on the edge of a 15 ft cliff, with a 140 degree slope after that. If I came up from behind, they would start pushing and shoving to get away from me, and maybe in the process push one or more off the edge. When there is \$20,000.00 worth of inventory standing on the edge of nothing, it does give you a little incentive to do it right. I started climbing straight up the hill using vines or roots or anything I could get a hold of. I was seeing spots, and my legs felt like rubber, and I didn't have a dry spot left on my shirt, but I knew if I didn't get ahead of the cattle soon the outcome could be a disaster. However, even with the set back we still had the drags at the lower drift fence by 12:30pm. It's been years since we had them there that early. Everyone did a bang up job that day. We were snoozing, waiting for the pack string to show up and sat there for about 3 hours when we decided to go ahead and go. Now every good cowboy always unsaddles his horse to cool his back off if you are going to be there for a while. Now I'm sure Kate Yates, was just showing us cowboys another way to do it. And it makes sense if you think about it. When we got ready to go, her horse was standing their tied to a tree with the saddle under his belly. I guess by doing this you

don't have to clean your blankets off before you put them on. Makes sense to me, anyway she won the White Bags that night.

THURSDAY JUNE 29TH: We had a leisure breakfast that day and took our swing over to Leaky Mountain. Some of the crew went to Taylor Creek to work on a spring, and a couple others went to the upper end to turn our leads around and bring them back. As we were waiting for everyone to get saddled so we could go, Rex was sitting on his horse lazily soaking in the sun, and thinking how good life, was with Piggy busy grazing. Now Piggy is a little round backed and if you don't cinch up good and tight you can slip your saddle right off. Now as Rex slowly started to slide off the right side (saddle and all) Piggy didn't even stop grazing. Rex reacted like any good cowboy, he decided he wasn't going down with the ship, and jumped at the last moment yelling DISMOUNT! And then he landed on his feet as if he had it planned that way all along. Piggy never missed a bite. We lined out and headed to Leaky Mountain. This is the day that you would think would be really slow and uneventful, but for some reason it always seems to leave memories behind. As we came out of Meserve and were climbing the steep slope we stopped to let our horse's catch some air. Rex stopped along side Michael, and naturally the first thing Piggy did was drop her head, and start to graze. Now Rex being the donkey whipper that he is, pulled her head sharply. As Piggy raised her head up in a hurry to take the pressure off, the rein and Piggy's head came up under the Vikings leg and managed to dump him off of his horse. Now Scooter just looked around and thought that was the most unorthodox dismount, that he had ever seen. We went on to Leaky and had a very peaceful and enjoyable lunch, then mounted up and headed to Emerald Hot Springs. As we rode down to the clear, green mountain spring you could see the swimmers eyes light up with excitement. I started smiling to myself in anticipation. We did have 6 swimmers make it across. As we rode away, the Viking built a crude Viking ship and set it to sail. Since everyone rode away in one piece, we didn't have to light it on fire as we left. Of course, Rex won the White Bags that night for his dismount off of Piggy, and for ripping the Viking out of his saddle coming out of Meserve. The other nomination was Kimberly for saddling her horse with Cody's saddle that morning.

FRIDAY AM: We broke camp, and started the peaceful ride to Lake Creek which meant the trip was nearing the end. It had been an extremely great week with incredible people. There is no doubt, the greatest resource in this country is its people. Steve Vohs won the drawing for the white bags and got to take them home. Tom Veenedaal from Louisiana, got nominated for the white bags, for giving Trent orders on how to cross cattle at the river. Now the funny thing about it was the fact that Tom could ride well enough, but it was the first time he had ever handled cattle. Maybe Tom didn't see the humor but the crew thought it was hysterical. I would like to thank all of you who made this a great week and I sincerely hope that we will see you again in the near future.