

SEPTEMBER 06 CATTLE DRIVE

WOW, WHAT A WEEK!!!!

This trip actually started the week before the trip started, as it was a series of one problem after another. On Monday before the trip started I packed down to Rock Cabin Park with the beer, groceries, chain saw and other assorted items that would be needed when we were in Rock Cabin Park. The dust was so thick that you kicked up a plume of dust riding out in the grass. It was very discouraging, because nothing had greened up after we had grazed it in the spring. With the dust and sweat caked to me, I lay on top of my bed that night and slept the sleep of the overwhelmed. I had worked till I couldn't see that night and knew I would be at it shortly after daybreak again. One thing about working by yourself you can do it how you want to and when you want to. I had packed a loaf of bread, and a chunk of meat to eat so dinner and breakfast were going to be the same. At least I wasn't going to waste any time washing dishes or setting up camp. When I finished I headed back to the Lake Creek Camp and then onto the valley. Meg our English cook was supposed to have arrived the day before. When I arrived home I discovered that she had arrived that day, as she had had some heart problems while in the Denver Airport, so consequently spent the night in a Denver hospital. They released her more on her demands than on their choice. They weren't sure yet what had caused the heart palpitations but she said she was fine and told the doctor "he was a silly boy" and she was going on to Wyoming. When I arrived home the weather was calling for a major storm to hit that weekend. This didn't surprise me since we had the Sept Cattle Drive starting on Saturday. When I got home I also found out that Stephen and Denise weren't going to be able to make it that week because they had to bring their cattle home that same week.

FRIDAY NIGHT: It started raining around 9:00pm and poured all night long. At 5:00am the phone rang and it was my brother calling saying that Patty had just called them and she had swerved to miss a deer on the wet highway and flipped her vehicle so she wasn't going to be coming. She thought she was fine and was calling from the accident site. The highway patrol was there so we thanked the Lord for looking out for Patty, but this meant I now had one cook with heart problems, one cook who wrecked her vehicle on the way up. Two of my packers weren't going to make it. Stan Sharp took a job selling cars and wasn't going to be able to make it. I was not at all excited by how the week was starting off. I swear these cattle drives are going to give me grey hair!!!

SATURDAY AM: Stan Sharp called as the rain was coming down by the buckets and said he felt real bad that he wasn't going to make it. The problem was there just didn't sound like there was any sincerity in Sunshine Sharp's voice. We took several vehicles up to the Rafter where we were meeting one of the guests and she was going to ride up the mountain with us that morning. It sounded like she was sick with pneumonia, and she wouldn't let me give her some LA 200 (oxcetetetracycline) to get her back on her feet. (I even offered to do it IV). Anyway, she headed back home and it's a good thing she did as they hospitalized her and she was in the hospital until Wednesday. We headed up the hill after breakfast and I called Dad who was meeting the guests in Sheridan and told him to not take the bus off the highway. We would meet them at Bear Lodge at 3:00pm. We arrived at camp around 10:00am to discover one of the cook tents down, due to the

weight of the snow and all the moisture. There is a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch rod that runs through one of the ridge poles and it had bent that into a U. I headed to the anvil to try and straighten it out and it took about 15 minutes of heavy pounding to get it to some semblance of straight. After getting the camp put back together we sent 3 outfits to Bear Lodge to pick up the guests. Naturally they had buried themselves in the bar and the repeat people were contemplating not coming out. I promised them that it would clear by Friday. It was snowing so hard that we just moved people in and decided to wait until morning to start the horsemanship clinic. I was hoping that the storm was moving fast and that by daylight we would have clear blue skies. One of our repeat guests had gone off and left his overshoes at home so all he had were his boots which would keep his feet dry and warm for all of 1 minute and 37 seconds. He was lucky that one of our crew members had packed a spare pair of boots so we were able to save his life. By the time we went to bed that night there was 10 inches of fresh white fluffy snow on the ground and it appeared that it was going to clear up to your knees before it stopped. I won't deny that this all added just a tiny bit of stress to my night's sleep. About 2:00am Alice and I were in the midst of a conversation as to how were we going to get done what needed done and still keep everyone safe. With only 26 letters in the alphabet, we were already on plan W, and only just starting the week, I was just a little uptight.

SUNDAY AM: With 14 inches of fresh snow we got the day started. Of course the first thing was to get the fires going in the mess tents and then the snow shoveled off of the cook tents. With the barrel stoves roaring, if the snow isn't off of the tents, you have a rain forest inside the tent and that can lead to grumpy cooks, and soggy pancakes. (Trust me this is not a good combination). After breakfast, I told everyone to just sit tight and I would take 3 wranglers out to gather the horses. With the storm, we hadn't gathered the horse string out of Dayton Gulch the day before, like we had planned. We loaded 3 horses and I headed to the suspension fence to let Chris, Randy and Daniel out to find the horses. I knew bringing the horses in wouldn't be that hard once they found the horses. With the wind screaming, I knew the horses would be timbered up in the bottom of Dayton Gulch but where? With the wind blowing and making drifts, we were blowing snow up over the top of the pickup on the way to the suspension fence. I remember Daniel commenting "I'm sure glad you are driving". He just didn't want to be the one driving when we got stuck. I headed back to camp and it didn't take long for them to find the horses and in they came. We corralled the horses, caught what we needed, had lunch, still sort of waiting for the weather to clear. Everyone's spirits seemed fine but then what other option was there? I called the valley and had Dad call the vet and cancel the next day's plans, which were to preg test the yearling heifers. There was no way the vet was going to be able to drive in the next morning the way it was drifting. I had several conversations with my crew on plans-X, Y and Z. It was looking rather grim. About 2:00pm we decided to go ahead with the horsemanship clinic. As Chris was doing his thing, we looked over and walking by camp were 25 yearlings headed in the exact opposite direction they should have been headed. They were hungry and looking for something to eat. They probably hadn't been full since Friday and it was Sunday afternoon. We had planned on doing the horsemanship clinic and stay right there at camp since the timber around camp gave us wind protection. It was really howling outside the timberline. I walked up to Chris and said put plan X into action. Gather all the cattle in Lick Creek and kick them into Dayton Gulch; this at least will have them headed in the

correct direction towards home. I guessed this should take about 2 hours. We announced what we were going to do and gave anyone that wanted to the option of staying in camp. The next problem I had was getting my wife to the highway because she had school the next day. I put two chains on and with my wife following headed the 16 miles to the highway. It was mind boggling that once we got 8 miles east of there the snow fall was only half of what we had at camp. That night around camp when the white bag nominations came up it was a slam dunk, as Gino Carfora won, as we had caught him on a CELL PHONE. Now you all know my feelings about cell phones. If I didn't know that Gino rode for the brand I would have accused him of trying to call to get someone to come get him off of this white wonderland.

MONDAY 18TH. There was 18 inches of snow on the ground and we were into plan Y. We were going to gather everything and take them as far down the Little Horn as we could that day (Hopefully Elk Draw). I knew the cattle would be ready to go since they hadn't had a chance to eat since Friday. As we gathered Lick Creek that morning the snow was right to my horse's knees. I knew they were going to be tired by the end of the week. Around noon the storm lifted and blue skies broke through and the thermometer went up about 20 degrees and everyone's attitude right with it. When we dropped 2000 feet in elevation there was only a few inches of snow on the ground. With the drought the snow was just disappearing into the ground at an incredible rate. It was the first measurable moisture in about 75 days. I was guessing that there had to be 2-3 inches of moisture going into the ground. We dropped the cattle at Elk Draw and you could tell they were happy to be out of the snow. The only problem was that there really wasn't anything to eat in the Little Horn because there had been no regrowth during the summer. That night, Craig Mead won the White bags, as he lost one of the guests on his way back to camp. However, we were still above 70% so we still had a passing grade. After all it was only one person and she didn't eat much so what was the problem. Craig asked her Dad if he had seen her and since the other daughter was at his side you would assume he would say yes or no but instead replied~ ~ which one? So Craig decided it was no big deal and on up the trail they went. As we were riding back to camp that afternoon I was wondering how everyone would react to plan Z which is what the next day was going to bring. I hoped it would be the last change of plans because we were fresh out of the alphabet. No one other than the crew knew just how long the next day was going to be. I'm sure once I mentioned what we were doing most of the repeat people would know exactly what they were in for. We were going to do two day's ride in one day.

TUESDAY AM: We awoke to the most fantastic blue skies and mild temperatures that you could imagine. It was at least a perfect day for what we were going to try and do. I knew everyone was in for a 14 hour day the next day. All compliments of Mother Nature. Right after breakfast the wranglers and donkey whippers mounted up and left at a trot. I told everyone it was going to be a brutal day but they would thank me by the end of the day for starting at such a fast pace. We finished breaking camp down and getting it loaded; and then to the Rafter we went to set up the camp for the rest of the week. We arrived at the Rafter around 1:30pm and I was never so glad to see the Kirby Rodeo Queen waiting there to help us set up camp. We were in a mad scramble trying to get the camp set up. We had to take the vehicles over to the Rocky Bottom so that when the cattle and people got to the Rocky Bottom they would have a way to get back to the Rafter. We finished setting things up at 7:30pm, just before dark. As I was sitting there

feeling the sweat drying on my body I felt the slight twinge of exhaustion setting in. I could only imagine how tired the rest of the group would be when they arrived. They arrived a little after 9:00pm very tired, hungry and quiet. Dinner was ready and it was amazing as they took care of a good case of hollow belly how much better they felt. The mood immediately picked up and people gravitated to the fire instead of bed and started to laugh at the goings on of the day. You must remember it is Tuesday night and it's the first time they have gone to bed since Saturday on bare ground instead of in 18 inches of snow. I called for the white bag nominations and there was one that as soon as it came out everyone knew it was a lock for the white trophy. A husband and wife team from Kentucky was coming down the canyon with their bunch of cattle and Mother Nature surfaced and said if you don't let me empty my bladder I'm going to pee my pants. Now the husband, being the chief of police, in his town is known as a fierce protector of our laws and rights, and will defend to the death, the rights of others privacy. His wife asked him to stand guard while she took care of business. He stood there proudly, taking his job very seriously looking intently down the canyon for anyone who might be coming **up** the trail. There was only one little problem, ~ ~ ~all of the traffic was coming down the canyon, not up the canyon!! You guessed it; the next group of cowboys came riding down the trail, right upon the exposed full moon. And to think, they all thought you couldn't see a full moon at high noon!!!!

WEDNESDAY: We started at the Rocky Bottom on a clear crisp morning and headed the 12 miles to the Rafter up the county road. The cattle were hungry and looked like they had dropped 50 lbs. I really thought they would walk real slowly up the road since I expected them to want to graze the full 12 miles. However, they walked pretty well considering their condition. We arrived at the Rafter around 3:30pm and everyone was glad to have a short day. I heard the weather that morning and it was a shame to say it, but the rest of the week looked wet again. As we rode into the Rafter you could see the storm clouds building for the next bit of cowboy adventure.

THURSDAY: Well we had a few showers during the night but at breakfast it was overcast and cloudy but not doing anything yet. Like all good storms it waited until we were in the saddle, and gathering the cattle to try and work the herd so that it could be as miserable as possible. We went into arena with everything and split up into groups of 3 to start working the cattle. Everyone had a great time, and other than a little slick, it went really smooth. People were laughing as the Kirby Rodeo Queen showed off the style that made him famous from the Rockies to the Gulf of Mexico. Just about the time we finished it stopped raining. We tied our horses and headed over to camp for lunch. The ceiling lifted a little bit and we wondered if maybe it was over for the day. After lunch we headed to the corrals when the vet showed up to do the preg testing. It was amazing to watch the people work. I am always amazed at just how much progress the guests all make in a week's time. It was obvious that a couple of the repeat guests have a natural aptitude to work livestock. That is also known as the cowboy's curse because it is a consuming skill that doesn't pay worth squat. Hollywood makes chasing cows appear as though anyone can do it. Once you spend a week with us you realize what a skill it really is. We were about 2/3 finished when it started to rain again but know one really cared by now. We were all too busy being entertained by Hans Hannus doing his bird man imitation in the corral to really care. As he would flap his arms holding onto the sides of his oilskin coat it looked like a giant Pterodactyl trying to pick up a horse. I think the

cattle thought as long as the Bird Man was attacking that horse, he wasn't bothering them, so they sort of ignored him. Needless to say Hans won the White Bags for his poor imitation of a Pterodactyl.

FRIDAY: The ceiling was low but it wasn't raining and it was relatively warm out. We had breakfast, caught out horses and took off with the cattle. We had been on the trail for about 30 minutes when it started to rain. We were just far enough away, that we couldn't run back and get some wet weather gear, that maybe we hadn't brought with us. At about the one hour mark, the rain was coming in level, with a 20-30mph wind with it. The only saving grace was the fact that we were riding with the storm instead of against it. We only had 3 or 4 more hours to go until the day would be over with. When it's raining that hard you won't stay dry. Water runs off your hat, down your neck and shirt and your boots slowly fill up. With the wind roaring you couldn't hear anything and people being tired, wet and cold a couple of sisters decided they were going to hurry those doggies up regardless of the conditions. The BLUE HEELER SISTERS went to work. I wasn't sure if they were mad or just disturbed, (definitely disturbed, but otherwise normal). They would scream at the top of their lungs, charge the cattle, and then laugh in hysterics. Now this went on for two hours! It had a much bigger impact than the Pterodactyl imitation of the day before. I do think everyone owes them a thank you, since my guess is they helped speed the trip up by a good hour. I would like to give Kim and Caley's husband and future husband a little word of advice. They are fantastic people but keep them dry!!!

That night at the banquet it was so refreshing to see everyone cleaned up, dry and warm for the first time in a week. The rain was still pounding down outside and it was so nice to be inside. Bobbie Kuykendall won the Double Rafter Belt Buckle in the cowboy trivia game and Bobbie also won a Double Rafter Jacket for her ability to think like a cow. Mary Keating also won a Double Rafter Jacket for the same reason. I don't know if they know it or not, but it's a compliment in cow country to be told you think like a cow!! Bill Wood won the turd of the week trophy for his gallant sentry duty.

When the banquet finished we normally walk the 4 blocks to the Mint Bar for our night cap. It was raining so hard out, not one person wanted to walk the 4 blocks, so we stayed right there.

Just a little side note- We had another 16 inches of snow at Lake Creek, on the Friday and Friday night, that we were in town. Chris, Daniel and myself went back to Lake Creek on Saturday afternoon to get the portable chute. We had to chain up the pickup just to get in. We hooked to the portable chute and pulled it about 40 yards and were stuck. We unhooked from it and went home. Next year we are going to move the Sept trip up a week earlier to try and avoid the Sept snow that seems to follow me. It will start on the Saturday after Labor Day, so mark your calendars. I can't thank everyone enough for what they added to the trip. The most amazing thing to me is how brutal it was yet, everyone seemed to have a good time. What great people there are in this great country of ours.