

SEPT 09 TRIP REPORT

SATURDAY SEPT 12TH:

According to the weather, this was going to be the strangest fall trip we have ever had. They were calling for it to be warm and dry!!! That never happens!! Just let me schedule a trip in September and you can just about take it to the bank that we will have at least one day of cold, wet, foggy or snowy conditions. Granted, the first day was slightly cool, but by September standards, it was a heat wave!!! One of my biggest concerns was the amount of dust, that had settled in the cook tent over the course of the last two weeks. Every trip has it's rather unique ways about them and this one was no different. We had a group from Belgium and they really threw me a curve right off the bat. On their registration forms some of them put their surname first, while others put it last. I am generally pretty good with names but not this time.

Return guests Carley and her sister obviously hadn't changed any as they got off the bus laughing the whole time. It certainly helps to see people get off the bus laughing, rather than off the bus on the fight! Of course with the Blue Heeler sisters I didn't expect them to get off the bus any other way.

We headed to the corrals to start the horsemanship clinic. Once everyone was ready we had people saddle their horses and lead them around. We weren't going to get any riding done today but we did want to get all the saddles adjusted so that we could hit the ground running the next day. As I was adjusting someone's saddle, a horse walked behind me and it sounded like one of the blue heeler sisters, laughing as she rode by. As a 3 times repeat guest she should have known you weren't allowed to get on until someone gave the word. Carly tried desperately to laugh her way out of it, but I was pretty certain, we had our first white bag winner of the trip. As I reflect back on this, Carly just about got nominated every night. With the cool fog rolling in and out there was a real chill in the air. Mark Laberge from Canada, crawled on Bubba and Bubba humped up and acted like he was walking on eggs. Mark didn't seem too concerned though. It was obvious we were more concerned than Mark was.

SUNDAY SEPT 13TH.

Having Chris is such an asset because he also saw Bubba hump up and grab himself. Chris did some special things this morning to get Bubba warmed up real well, before Mark got on. Bubba was just fine like we expected him to be. We ate an early lunch, then headed different directions to start the gather. Trent headed South, over the top of Little Baldy to the head of the Little Horn. Chris took a bunch and headed North to Rubber Boot Park and I headed into the bottom of Lake Creek to do a reride in Lake Creek. My group went clear into the very bottom of Lake Creek, down through the jungle of trees and rocks. When we got to the bottom, Carly discovered she had lost here video camera somewhere in the trees. Jerry took her back trying to find it but didn't have any luck. Jerry did come across a sick yearling that we had missed on the ride down however, so that turned out to be a good thing. Carly did get nominated again for the white bags. After riding up through the bottom of Lake Creek, we went out the top of Lake Creek and back to camp. We picked up about 65 head of cattle on our circle. We trailed the cattle right down the jeep road behind the cabin to kick them into the Lick

Creek drainage for tomorrows gather. The drag came out from behind the barn and saw all the tents pitched, decided they didn't like the looks of that and crashed into the trees trying to head back up country. We chased 18 yearlings around in the timber patch for about 25 minutes before getting them by camp. It was real close to not getting them at all. As we sat around the fire that evening having the White Bag nomination I was certain that Carly would be the winner again. But according to the story, we had another many time repeat guest, that managed to lose is water bottle at least 6 times during the day. Two Shaves did accept the bags and wore them proudly the next day.

MONDAY SEPT 14th:

Since Jerry had seen the sick yearling in Lake Creek the day before while looking for Carly's camera, I decided to go make a swing that way, to try and find the sick animal. John Barker and I headed to Lake Creek and we sent everyone else to Lick Creek to gather and work the herd. After about 40 minutes of searching, we did find the sick yearling. She was pretty sick with Altitude Sickness, but still we had to try and get here to the valley. We took our time and slowly worked her to the corral where we loaded her with one that we had picked up the day before. John and I loaded our horses in the back compartment of the trailer and headed to Lick Creek to catch up with the rest of the herd. We doctored a couple foot rots and loaded them in the trailer. I took the sick cattle to the valley as well as three horses for John, Myself, and Craig to use the next day in the valley. Everyone else spent the day working the herd and getting them ready to go for the next day. The guests trailed the pairs back to Lake Creek, and dropped them through the horse pasture fence so they wouldn't get mixed back with the yearlings that we had just worked.

TUESDAY SEPT 15TH:

This is always the day we dread the most. We have to break down the camp, pack the mules and trail the herd to the next destination. John Barker, Myself and Craig Mead drove the 3 vehicles to the valley to set up the camp for Thursday. Trent packs up the cook mules, the cooks and heads to Rock Cabin Park. Chris and Jerry took all the guests out to gather the 600 yearlings that were still in Lick Creek and trail them to the East Burn Pasture. The rest of the crew, packs up all the rest of the mules with everyone's beds, clothing, tents and so forth with the idea of all being into Rock Cabin Park before dark. We had an absolutely gorgeous day for this with highs in the 80's. I have done this in a blizzard and it is really no fun. After John, Craig and myself had the camp set up in the valley we caught the horses I had hauled off 2 days earlier and rode up the canyon to Rock Cabin Park. It was absolutely a beautiful day. We got in slightly after dark but it was still a perfect day, or was, until I rode into camp and was told we were short somewhere around 150 head of cattle. Well that sure made the next day's ride obvious as to what we were going to do.

WEDNESDAY SEPT 16th:

We all headed up the Kerns Joslyn trail back to the high country to reride looking for the missing cattle. Two miles later and 1500 feet higher we topped out. It is so much fun to see everyone's faces once we break out on level ground on top. By the time you reach the top, you need to resaddle and recinch. After about a 15 minute delay to give the horses a chance to rest we headed 3 different directions looking for the missing cattle. We all were going to meet at the swamp at some point in time later that day. That was about 6 miles from here. My group arrived at the swamp first and ate our lunch. We

hadn't found any cattle, so we all got a chance to lay in the warm sun and catch a power nap, while waiting for the rest of the cowboys. About an hour later we could hear cattle bawling, cowboys yelling, so we figured somebody had found something. The next group showed up with about 100 head of missing yearlings. The amazing thing is that the cattle were found in the same pasture that everyone had ridden the day before. It's just that hard to find them all. The third group of riders showed up about 10 minutes later and they hadn't found anything. We gathered the cattle that had been dropped the day before and trailed everything down country. We had over 500 head but really didn't know for sure how many we had. We kicked them down country to below the narrows, so that we could pick them up the next day, to head down the canyon with them.

THURSDAY SEPT 17TH:

Today is another hard push, as we have to close up the Rock Cabin Park camp for the season and move to the next camp. I grabbed a couple pack horses loaded with food and as many tents as I could get loaded for the next camp and headed down the canyon ahead of the cattle. The logistics of the Sept trip is always the biggest problem. The pack crew and cooks stayed at Rock Cabin to tear the camp down and load the pack mules with everyone's gear and come out last. Since the weather was warm and dry, we folded up the big tent and put it away for the winter. The year before it had rained all night so the tent was soaked so we couldn't fold it up and store it. By the time Trent and I got back in to put it away, it had large amounts of snow piled on it and it had collapsed under the weight. When a big canvas tent comes down due to snow weight, it generally rips apart as it comes down and it sure had. Trent, Chris, Dan, Jerry and all the guests gathered all the cattle that we had dropped the day before and down the canyon they came. They had a really good day and had all the cattle onto the Rocky Bottom before dark. Lots of years it is dark by the time the drags get there. The pack crew got in about 3 hours after the cowboys and I always breathe a sigh of relief when we get everyone back together. The other side of the issue is that the canyon is no fun to ride down after dark.

FRIDAY SEPT 18TH:

This is the final days push and in all the years of doing this we have always made it the 12 miles back to the ranch except for one time. Well this was the second. It was just to warm. The first two miles of the trip the road climbs about 1200 feet in elevation and with the heat it was just too much. Next year, we will get an earlier jump on the cattle. We did get 85% of the cattle to the ranch but the remaining 15% had to be dropped about 4 miles short of our destination, which meant we would have to come get the rest of them the next day. It always makes you a little nervous leaving cattle on a public road overnight. Since I had to return one of our guests back to the airport in Billings early then next morning, I knew it wasn't going to be me gathering cattle in the morning. When I say early, we left Sheridan at 3:00am. However, I certainly enjoyed the drive and had a chance to really get to visit without any other concerns. I also really enjoyed Mother Nature being nice to us all week. I have done both the dry warm trips, and the cold snowy ones, I can tell you, I will take the dry ones any day. A day of snow isn't bad but when it snows everyday it's a long week. Thanks so much for a great week and we are looking forward to seeing you again.