

JULY 2011 CATTLE DRIVE TRIP REPORT

JULY 11th.

This trip was sort of a first as we had a small filming crew with us for the week. This is part of a program in Idaho & Utah called Quik Start. This little endeavor is put on by the Maverik Stores. They bring one guest and film a high adventure trip and then it is aired on TV in the states of Idaho & Utah. The narrator or host is Ron Duncombe and he is also the driver of Maverik's monster trucks. One of the very first things we did after introductions was to ask if there was anyone in the group who did not want to be filmed. Seems they never use to ask this question but on a previous "High Adventure trip" they ran the show after it was edited and some guy and some gal on this "High Adventure Trip" were in several shots during their episodes. It was obvious the two of them were rather taken with each other but there was one slight glitch. They both apparently forgot to bring their spouses on the trip.

Chris Ellsworth did the Horsemanship clinic before lunch and then we were off for an afternoon ride to work out any particular wrinkles that we might have with equine or guest. Other than having to wear our slickers due to some slight inclement weather it was a great way to spend the afternoon. That evening after dinner we started playing one of our little games called "White Saddle Bags". This is always a great ice breaker and really helps to kick off the week on a high note. This also gives us a chance to evaluate who has a sense of humor and who doesn't. Those that don't, well we target immediately to torture all week long. The first nomination was many times repeat guest Andrea West. I believe this was her 3rd or 4th trip. Now don't ask me to explain exactly how this happened or what she was intending but, somehow she managed to zip her pants (that she was wearing) into her suitcase while on the bus out to the ranch that morning. The second nomination came in the form of Anna Erbes. We were doing the orientation ride which lasted a couple hours. As we were riding along it seems her transportation for the week stopped, and stretched out to get rid of his morning coffee and she just wasn't going to allow the delay in the afternoon ride. I asked her if she could keep up with the rest of us while trying to walk with her pants around her ankles, at that point, she understood what her poor horse was trying to do!! However the winner was Andrea West. I really can't imagine trying to walk with a suit case zipped to your pants. Then to add a little frosting to the cake, remember what a woman can pack into a suitcase compared to what a man can put in one!!!

JULY 12 TH.

We had an early breakfast, got saddled in the dark and headed out of camp to gather the cattle that we were taking to the mountain on this spectacular week. It was about a 2 hour ride to where the cattle were. We had been out of camp about 20 minutes climbing a rather steep hill when I hear the camera man holler Whoa! Followed by a thud heard clear back to camp. Cody, his camera and saddle were all lying in a pile on the side of the hill. Now Dudley who he was riding, was probably thinking, "This is going to be a long week". Once we had Cody put back together we headed on West and gathered the two herds of cattle and headed them towards the mouth of the Little Horn Canyon which

was today's destination. We got into camp around lunch time which worked perfect as we were going to do a branding demonstration in the afternoon. It's always fun in the evenings because as the White Bag nominations start to fly you understand there was a lot that went on during the day that you hadn't heard about. For the second time in as many days Anna Erbes got nominated again. It seems she asked what time it was while wearing a watch. I'm not even going to guess on that one! I was sure though that Cody would be the winner; however I was mistaken as he came in a distant 3rd. Seems Ron Duncombe managed to allow his horse to go to sleep as they were walking down the road. Badger told me later that Ron was just really boring.

JULY 13TH.

This day is always the toughest day of the trip. We again have a very early breakfast as we have to break camp down, pack it away, pack the mules, get the cooks saddled and out of their with the groceries before we can start gathering cattle for the long day of 12 miles of single file trail up the extremely scenic Little Horn Canyon. Just as we were ready to start gathering cattle we discovered one of the horses had blown a shoe so we had to put on a shoe before we could go anywhere. Murphy's Law is always in play and this particular horse is a little tough to shoe on his back feet and of course it was a rear shoe that was gone. Then to make it tougher, because we have 20 guests sitting and watching I have to continue to smile as he jumps and kicks and tries to drag a horseshoe nail through my thigh! We trailed the herd the first 3 miles then have to split the herd into smaller groups leaving about 15 minutes between groups or we jam them up in the canyon and then it makes for a really long day. We stop the herd, work off whatever number we want, then drop a wrangler and group of guests in behind them and off they go up the canyon. We then sit and give the group 15 minutes before working off the next group. This is a perfect opportunity for people to step off, stretch their legs, and get rid of some coffee or whatever before the long day starts. Guess who made the first mistake of the day~~~ none other than Anna Erbes. As she stepped off her horse she didn't look first as to where she was getting off. Some cow while waiting her turn to head up the canyon had taken a moment to leave a pile of green grass and water right where Anna decided to step off. The pile was a rather large one and about 18 inches across and she managed to put her boot right smack in the middle of it. At first she cringed and stepped out of it, and then as she looked at it she realized there was a perfect imprint of her foot in the middle of the poo. At this point she grabbed her camera and started taking pictures of it. Here again please don't ask me to explain. A cow I can explain perfectly well, humans, no such luck. We had one other nomination for the White Bags that evening. Seems the chap from Australia stepped off his horse coming out of Robinson going up the Beaver Slide. Now horse took one look at Paul and decided it would definitely be easier going if he didn't have a passenger on top, so up the mountain he went by himself. However, rest assured the horse said he would wait at the top. I can attest, Paul was breathing much harder walking up the hill than the horse was that ran up the hill. As Paul caught his horse I did hear him whisper to his horse that he was taking him home and feeding him to the Aborigines!! We had a great day and were into camp by 6:00pm. The only glitch of the day was when we were about 2/3 of the way up the canyon and here came 20 back packers down the canyon. That herd of cattle had never seen so many brightly colored packs and protested by running part way back down the canyon.

Anna Erbes was the clear winner of the White Bags for the day though. We were 3 days into the trip and she had been nominated 3 times and was a one time winner with 3 days to go.

JULY 14th:

We always give people a chance to recuperate a little on this day and have a later breakfast around 8:00am or when the cooks have it ready. The distance we generally have to travel today is around 5 miles so it is a cinch compared to the other days. Even though the distance is shorter some of the terrain is extremely challenging. Elk Draw which is no longer than a half mile long took just about an hour to trail the herd through. We spent a great deal of it on foot crawling over logs after cattle. I came riding around a corner in the trail to spot guess who, sitting in the middle of the trail on her horse doing all kinds of strange movements. It looked like she was trying to Break Dance while sitting on her horse. Again, please don't ask me to explain but she had managed while backing her horse up to back into a tree and then twisting her hair in a branch and there she sat on her horse fastened to this branch on the tree. In 18 years we have never had that done!! Matter of fact in about 4 days Anna had managed to do 3 things that had never been done before on one of our trips.

JULY 15TH:

As just about always happens with the little slower paced day people have a tendency to stay up a little later and howl at the moon even when there isn't a moon. However, the nomination for the White Bags that night was the guest of the Quik Start program for bowing in to peer pressure from a 14 year old boy who talked him into jumping over the bon fire. We had breakfast around 6:30 that morning as we had a long way to go with the herd today and complicating it was a 2000 foot climb in elevation. However, you really don't mind the steady climb up through the Alpine meadows in full bloom with some of Mother Nature's most vivid colored flowers you can imagine. As you climb to the 9000 foot elevation you can tell the air is thinner even sitting on your horse. The temperature in the valley that day was projected to be about 70 which is pretty cool for mid July. My best guess that at the 9000 foot elevation the temperature was probably in the upper 50's. We had a long hard day pushing cattle as the herd was very tired from the many days on the trail and the thinner air. When the cattle hit the lush green meadows of the upper country they walked slower and slower trying to get as many mouth fulls of the lush feed as they possibly can. By now the cowboys are tired, the guests are tired and the kids were screwing around. I had been dragging a pack horse all day with salt for the herd when we dropped them. We were about 2 miles from our destination when I couldn't take it any longer. I rode over to the kids and threw them the lead rope of the pack animal and said if you are going to screw around you can lead the pack animal and rode off on my tired colt, to try and hurry up the cows. Once we reached destination we dropped the herd and took a shortcut back to camp down through some rims. It's real steep for the first mile and a half but the last 100yds are a piece of cake. It's always fun to ride into camp after coming off this trail. There is nary a word spoken coming down it but once at the bottom it sounds like a bunch of Chipmunks going off!!!!.

JULY 16TH:

We awoke to a white blanket of frost covering everything. My sleeping bag is a good one and I slept like a baby. You never have to ask if people were warm enough because the look in their eyes tells the story. They have this wild eyed look that says I hate you and where is the hot coffee all at the same time. There were several of those that morning. I will be the first to tell you it was about 20 degrees cooler that night than normal. We hustled up with the breaking down of camp, loaded the pack mules and headed to the high country to meet the bus that was going to transport us to Sheridan for the night. We arrived at Bear Trap about 30 minutes ahead of schedule so had plenty of time to turn the horses loose, pack all the saddles and get ready to head to the low lands. We loaded everyone and dropped Trent and myself off at Lake Creek to drive two vehicles off the mountain. Trent had a load of horses on and was headed to the valley with them. I had the suburban and had gone about 2 miles when we found Laurel's husband Bob sitting by the side of the road. He had been on his way up the mountain to get his horses and his wife (in no particular order) and dropped the transmission out of his pickup. I hooked my tow rope to his outfit and pulled him to a place that the wrecker could come and get his outfit. I then headed back off the mountain because now I was about 30 minutes behind the bus. I had traveled another couple miles and when I came around the corner here was Trent sitting beside the road. He had dropped the rear drive line out of the pickup. Luckily we had all of our tools so we crawled under the pick up and took the rear drive line completely off. We then locked in the front hubs and drove the pickup home using the front drive line only. (I have done this more than once) Of course by now I am just plain late. I arrive in Sheridan around 5:00 pm and haven't had a shower in a week and am supposed to be at the Fair Grounds in 20 minutes to get set up for the banquet. To say there was time to sit and relax for a moment would be an understatement. However, everything worked out just fine and we all had a great time at the rodeo. After we hit the rodeo we all headed down town for the street dance. Not everyone went as there were some who had a 6:00 am flight out of Sheridan the next morning. However like anything in ranching everything depends on the tally and we tallied everyone out so we had a very successful week.

