

JUNE 2010 TRIP REPORT:

JUNE 27TH:

I knew this trip was going to be one for the record books because when we picked up the first groups of guests we had to go find one missing person. Now we have never had this happen in 18 years of dealing with strangers to this western land. We were missing one **JOHN LOPEZ!** Witness who were on the trip said they had seen him the night before at the MINT BAR. It turned out to be just too much western hospitality I guess because he had been having such a good time he forgot to go to bed. Well I should probably clarify that just a little bit. I think when the sun came up John realized he hadn't been to bed and figured a couple hours sleep was better than no sleep. As Taylor walked up to bang on his door, he heard the sound of a hibernating bear in the room. Sure enough here was the missing hibernating cowboy drooling all over himself! Of course it doesn't take much guessing to figure out who won the White Saddle Bags that night.

After the horsemanship clinic we took a quick lunch and headed out on a ride to just let people get accustomed to their horses and start to relax. The sky was getting darker as we rode and after about 30 minutes into the ride, it started to spit so we stopped, put slickers on and proceeded on our way. After about 30 minutes of rain it started to let up and looked like the skies were going to clear. We stopped at a water tank to water our horses next to a brushy draw and out of brush ran a yearling black bear. He ran down the draw and back into the brush. We assured everyone that it had taken years of training to train that bear to do that on cue.

Once back to the ranch we did a quick cattle handling seminar and demonstration and cut off a small group of about 20 calves and roped and branded them. These were just baby calves about 3 weeks old and wouldn't be making the trip this week. It's a long walk when you are only 3 weeks old.

JUNE 28TH:

We had a big day ahead of us so we told people it would be a good idea to get to bed early and catch as much sleep as possible. Of course we have discovered through the years that the new people don't sleep at all well that first night. They are as excited as a bunch of 6 year olds at Christmas. We were planning on breakfast at 3:30am so that meant the crew would be up around 2:15am getting the day started. We were moving camp to the Rocky Bottom that day and the herd would join up with camp once the cattle had walked the 12 miles they had to go to get there. The crew got right after it and by 6:00am the camp was broke down and packed and the move to the next nights camp commencing. It's always a big challenge to get everything moving in a timely matter. The cowboy crew rode away from the barn at 5:12 am, a good 30 minutes later than I had hoped for. We had to ride about 3 ½ miles before we even got to the pasture that the cattle were in. Once we arrived at the area we split into two groups as we had two different pastures to gather. The plan was that at some point in time during the day the two herds would join up with one another. If not that meant one group was probably having a really good day and the other group was having pure hell. It was supposed to be hot so you always hope to be to the top of the long uphill grades with the herd before it gets hot. Cattle don't sweat like a horse they pant like a dog. The more they pant the

slower they walk and of course since this is reality, the longer the day is for us. One thing I can say for certain, people sleep the second night.

As we sat around the fire that night nominating the eventual winner of the White Saddle Bags, it always gets a good laugh when people hear some of the things that went on during the day. Pepper won the white bags hands down for doing something really stupid. He decided to ride his horse backwards and promptly got bucked off. Since he was riding his own horse there wasn't a lot I could say. Howard Carter from England ran a close second. It seems as the heat got higher and the horse worked harder the horse naturally lost some water weight. When enough weight is lost of course, the saddle can slip under the horse's belly. We're really not sure if Badger lost that much weight, or if it had more to do with the English not knowing which side of the road to drive on.

JUNE 29TH:

With the addition of the New Dry Fork allotment in order to make the transfer complete to me from the previous owner, it actually isn't completely completed until the cattle are put on the new allotment. This meant that we were doing something entirely different than we had ever done before. Instead of trailing a separate herd to the Dry Fork we decided the best thing was to take both herds of cattle to the Rocky Bottom and we would work the herd and trail the Dry Fork herd to the Dry Fork and then the next day take the rest of the herd up the Little Horn Canyon. This would save us days of trailing a separate herd to activate that allotment. We were headed to the first pasture in the Dry Fork which is just up from the last cabin in the canyon for you repeat guests. However, it is a 3 hour ride to the other end of that first Dry Fork pasture and we knew that gate would be open on the main trail. The week before our trip they have the 100 mile Big Horn trail run and it runs right up the same trail that we use to take our livestock to the mountains. I knew there was no sense in trying to get some distance runner from Kenya to stop and close the gate so I just resigned myself to a 3 hour ride up to close the gate and a 2 ½ hour ride back. This 3 hour ride up is about a 2000 foot climb in elevation. The plan was that anyone that wanted a day of just scenic riding could go with me and the rest would stay and cut the herd horseback and then trail them to the Dry Fork allotment in the afternoon. It was only about 3 miles to trail the herd. It was a beautiful warm sunny day and most of the guests elected to take the scenic trail ride. They wouldn't miss any of the Little Horn Canyon because that was the next days journey with the herd.

As I took my group up the North Slope of the Dry Fork the next day on our scenic journey Helen Kanian kept complaining that she was sure having a hard time keeping her saddle straight on her horse. After we had climbed about 750 feet in elevation we stopped to drop some salt off of the packhorse for the livestock, I went back to take a look at Helen's situation to see if I could solve the problem. Since she was riding Scooter I knew it had to be something with the saddle because he holds a saddle exceptionally well. Sure enough it took me about 15 seconds to diagnose the problem. Her right stirrup was 2 inches shorter than her left causing her to sit leaning to the left all the time. The next problem popped up because I had shortened her left stirrup, she couldn't reach it to get on so Kimberly went to give her a boost up. As Kimberly was struggling to help her, everyone got to laughing including Helen and it went from bad to worse. Pretty soon the two of them are lying in a pile at the horse's feet laughing. I can only imagine what

Scooter must have been thinking. The comment was made that it looked more like Kimberly groping her than helping her get on. Helen won the white bags that night because we don't know if she had ridden that way for the whole first 2 days and wasn't aware of it or exactly what might have happened.

Trent and the rest of the people worked the herd of cattle on the Rocky Bottom and trailed them the 3 miles to the Dry Fork Allotment that afternoon. Now working a herd of cattle takes a hell of a lot more skill than what most people know or understand. When you are working pairs out of a herd, which is what we were doing, you have to get mother and baby together and cut them out together. Cutting them out separately works just fine if you have two weeks to do it. If they are cut out separately they don't always realize that mom has been cut out or that their calf has been cut out so they continually try and get back in the herd to look for one another because that is the last place they new where they were. Some people in the cow business still do it the hard way. It is a slow moving process if done properly but in the long run is much faster than trying to do it the fast way and charging your horse all over the place. Yes, it's a lot more fun at a fast pace, but very difficult to accomplish anything, plus it does nothing but excite your cattle which is exactly what you don't want. Several of the guest who stayed with Trent said it was the best day riding and working cattle that they had ever had in their lives. Trent instructed each person and took turns giving them a chance to do it themselves. They went away realizing it is a real learned skill.

As we sat down for dinner that evening around 5:00 there was some major black thunderstorms building off to the west. We kept one eye cocked on them as we ate dinner. When the storm hit, it hit fast and furious, for about 30 minutes and then was over and done with blue skies behind it. However, when it hit it blew 5 tipi tents over!
JUNE 30TH:

This morning is another early one with breakfast around 4:00 am because we have a long way to go today and it will take all day to do it. We were blessed this morning though, as there was a cool mountain breeze blowing down the canyon. It was a good thing because while we didn't have any trouble with the cattle, most of them didn't know where they were going so they walked very slowly. We arrived at Robinson Crossing to cross the herd onto the west side of the Little Horn around 4:30pm. We noticed big black clouds building on the horizon and looked like we were going to get another fast furious thunderstorm. At that elevation they make the valley thunderstorms look like child's play. We could feel the temperature dropping and see a white wall of rain coming down the canyon towards us. I yelled for everyone to slicker up while they were still dry. It looked like the type where if you don't have your slicker on when it hits, you are wet before you can get it on. The wind hit with a big blast as the trees started swaying violently in the wind. The thunder and lightning hit just seconds before the sheets of rain dumped on us like we were standing in a shower. Since we were in the bottom of the canyon we were relatively safe because we were the lowest thing around. You could see the lightning bouncing off the rims and hear trees being blown over. It damn sure makes you know you are alive because you can feel the rush of adrenalin as it courses through your veins. It took us about an hour and half to get the herd across the river which was very swollen with the snow melt, from the heavy snowfall we had in May on the mountains. We had one purchased cow that took one look at the river and decided she wasn't going to cross it. Now I know in Hollywood they would have roped that cow and

dragged her across. Now in reality, if you had done that with the river that high and the footing being rather treacherous, in that situation, you probably would have drowned the cow and pulled a horse over drowning cow, horse, and possibly the cowboy. I knew there was another herd coming up the canyon in a couple days and we would let them pick up our cow and we would get her back once the water had subsided. I only had one other quick moment of panic and that was when Tianne Main was carrying Jake's dog across the river because he is terrified of thunder and lightning and only has 4 inch legs. Because she had the dog in her arms, she had no control over her horse, and her horse was drifting with the current instead of walking across it. Just below Tianne was a huge pile of dead logs and if her horse got caught in that, it could be a disaster. I yelled at her to dump the dog and grab your reins. She didn't dump the dog but did manage to pull her reins enough to get the horse walking across the current instead of with it.

When we arrived into camp the pack crew had just arrived, and they had been riding out in the open when the torrents hit. They were wet, some beds got wet, but people took it for what it was...reality! Some people were a little on the tired side and Kimberly won the white bags because of it. She tied her bridle and reins onto her saddle like she had been instructed, then grabbed the ends of the reins and walked away expecting the horse to follow. I'm sure the signal was a little confusing to the horse. We did have a close second for the white bags as Chris Shannon dropped his peanut butter and jelly sandwich while it was still in the bag then managed to step his horse right on top of it. The amazing thing is it left a perfect hoof print on top of the sandwich and didn't break the bag open.

JULY 1st:

Since we had the cattle most of the way and it wasn't a real hard push we gave people the chance to sleep in a little more the next morning and didn't have breakfast until 8:00am. However, most people were up around 6:00am. One of the reasons for the later breakfast however is to let the horses have several hours to graze. We really don't give a damn if you tired. (just kidding) The day up the canyon is a long day and when you get in late the horses don't have a chance to fill since we tie them up at night. You can't expect them to work all day on a half full tank.

After breakfast we packed our lunches and headed over to take a look at Leaky Falls, and Emerald Hot Springs for those that wanted to swim. We always sore some horses up coming up the canyon so there is generally several people on different horses this day this time was no different. We headed up country to cross the Little Horn several miles upstream from where we had crossed yesterday. There is much less water in the creek there and so we are a little more comfortable with the rocky crossing. We had everyone across and the last person **JOHN LOPEZ** managed to be the only one who had any problems. I really think since he is from Las Vegas and the desert he really just has a fascination with water or maybe he thought he needed a bath, we really don't know. Anyway, John is 2/3 the way across when he and his horse both went down. It was a complete submersion for both of them. Nothing like a cowboy baptism in the icy cold waters of the Little Horn River. After John came to the surface he was standing in knee deep water with a very shocked look on his face. Turns out the look of shock had nothing to do with himself, but just before crossing someone had asked him to carry their camera over for them so he had put it in his pants pocket. He was scrambling trying to

get the camera out. John had to take off both boots and wring his socks out and dump the water out. From the dirt in the water or off of Johns feet, it was dark enough to mistake it for coffee. However no one was really in the coffee drinking mood! We rode up to Leaky Mountain and I don't know if I have ever in my life seen that much water coming out of Leaky on the first of July. I'm starting to be referred to as one of the old timers by some so that says I've seen a lot of Leaky in my life time. We had a really great day as it was fun to sort of relax and just enjoy the sun and blue skies. There were very few swimmers in Emerald but we did have a few waders. Of course when we were around the fire that night it goes without saying who won the White Bags. We had a first on this trip as every winner of the White Bags was from Las Vegas.

JULY 2ND:

The week is about over and after breakfast we closed up camp, packed the mules and headed down the canyon to the valley for the nights festivities. We held the banquet at a mountain lodge called Bear Lodge and everyone is so looking forward to a hot shower and clean clothes. Remember this is reality and you are out west where we don't have the conveniences of the city. We checked into our motel and then found out that they had a breakdown with their boiler and there wasn't any hot water. The parts were on there way up the mountain and just as soon as they could get it put back together we would have hot water. Bear Lodge is 8000 feet and a cold shower is the same temperature up there as rolling around in a snow bank naked. When I got out of the shower I went and fired up Alice's hair blow dryer and put it on my feet they were so cold. Shaving was definitely out of consideration. Those things are the trade off of our life style to living in the city where all it takes is a phone call to solve your problem. I was shocked when they told me someone in Sheridan actually had the piece in stock. It's about 1 ½ hour drive from Sheridan to Bear Lodge. About the time we started the banquet they had hot water. During the banquet Kimberly and Pepper announced their engagement. That's two engagement announcements on the June trip in two years.

JULY 3RD:

As we returned people to the airports the crew went over to the Rocky Bottom where we had left the horses from the day before to trail them the 12 miles back to the Rafter. The horses were trailing up the county road just fine when Hoot decided to turn North and ran into a barb wire fence laying her chest open. Of course it took a trip to the vet and \$400 dollars of stitches to put her back together but other than that everything is just fine. **THANK YOU ALL FOR SUCH A GREAT WEEK AND ALWAYS KNOW THAT YOU ARE WELCOME AT OUR FIRE, ANYTIME!!!**