

SATURDAY 3:00 pm

As always getting ready for one of these major trips is always something someone has to experience in order to really understand it. As everyone gets off the bus and you are visiting with all of your new friends and even the old ones, it appears on the surface that everything is in perfect order for the week. No one has any ideas as to the question marks in my mind or the concerns that we had to deal with to put on that appearance of perfect order, with no cares in the world. Let me give you a quick over view of what transpired the week before the trip. Aug and early September had been warm and dusty with absolutely no moisture. I have learned that the most sure fire way to change that is to schedule a cattle drive. On Tuesday before the trip started we had a front blow through and leave about 6 inches of wet heavy snow at Lake Creek. Trent and I drove in to camp on Wednesday morning with the idea that we were going to pack a load of groceries to Rock Cabin Park for the up coming trip. I had purchased a brand new mess tent in the spring and the tent was 18'x 35'. We had used it all summer and it had worked great. I had purchased the aluminum frame that was designed for the tent so I felt I was adequately covered to handle the snow load. I was concerned when we put up the tent because the rafters were on 4 ft spacings. I had questioned the manufacturer in Bozeman Montana and he assured me that lots of hunters had purchased them and had great success. However, none of the hunters had purchased ones the size of what I had ordered. As Trent and I pulled into the camp, to say my blood pressure went through the roof would be an understatement. My new \$3500 dollar tent lay all twisted and mangled. Parts here and there were still upright but the ridge pole and supports were busted and twisted. At first I thought well maybe once we got the snow and ice off, we could put it back together and get it up somehow. All of the low parts of the roof had collected the melting snow so we had to get buckets and bail the water out before we could start to assess how much damage we really had. Once the water was bailed and the snow shoveled, we managed to pull the wet canvas tent off of the remaining frame so that we could see exactly what we were dealing with. The more of the tent we got pulled off, the madder I became. I grabbed the sat phone and called the company in Bozeman and told them my problem. It was Wednesday afternoon and I had to feed 30 some people for a week starting in 3 days and the tent frame was destroyed. The owner of the tent company said to let him know what pieces we needed and he would get them shipped to me the next day. I thanked him and Trent and I kept dismantling the tent. Once I had it taken apart, it was obvious that it was going to take a little more than a few pieces. I called the manufacturer back and said I wanted a whole new frame, and that you will replace it at your expense. I said you have some structural flaws in your design because you have no upright supports for the ridge pole. He said he didn't have a frame of that size on hand but would keep crew there and build one, so that they could ship it on Thursday. If they shipped it on Thursday that meant it would **probably** get into Sheridan sometime late Friday afternoon. I didn't like the sound of that at all. I said you have it ready by noon tomorrow and I will drive up and get it. It took all day to drive up and back but I had a new frame to put up first thing Friday morning. As I listened to the weather I was glad we had taken the approach we did because they were calling for unsettled weather on Saturday. Trent and I spent most of Friday putting up the new tent and getting it ready to feed everyone the next day.

At 3:00 pm the bus pulled in and we acted like we had been waiting for weeks with nothing to do until everyone had arrived. It's actually a relief once everyone is there because anything that isn't done, or is broken, is just going to have to be lived with during the week. We got everyone saddled after arrival and the saddles adjusted to fit and went to dinner. It was the most relaxed I had been in weeks.

SUNDAY AM:

Well we awoke to fog swirling and the temperature hovering right around 25 degrees with snow flakes lightly dancing in the air. Chris took everyone to the horses to start the horsemanship clinic. Some of the southern Californians had every item of clothing they had with them, but were still shaking like a wet new born calf. The ground was semi frozen so without something extra on your feet it didn't take long to be chilled. Hollywood never shows any of the reality of cowboying. I'm glad they don't, because in those conditions, romance soon leaves the thought process. Around noon we broke for lunch which gave everyone a chance to get warmed up. It was hard to do but we gave everyone an extra 5 minutes for lunch. We had cattle to get gathered that afternoon!

We rode after lunch and the ceiling of clouds, had lifted a little and things were looking up. I thought about leaving my slicker in camp, but at the last moment changed my mind. We had been out about 30 minutes that afternoon when Mother Nature laughed, rolled the fog back in and the snow along with it. Boy, was I glad I had my slicker on and my rubber gloves in the pocket. Of course riding in the fog is not the most conducive to finding cattle. You could ride within 100 yds of cattle and not see them. However, as the afternoons gather proceeded we ended up with slightly over 100 head of cattle. I was rather pleased with the gather. Everyone had cowboyed up and done a good job of gathering cattle in the fog. By the time we rode back into camp with the snow and damp chill in the air, most people were starting to chill. It's so amazing that something like a semi warm tent is looked at as a luxury in those conditions. Once we had the horses turned out and everything put away for the evening I headed to the mess tent. The people huddled around the stove in the tent reminded me a litter of puppies trying to nurse. As soon as one moved to get something, someone crowded into their spot immediately enjoying the warmth from the stove and fellow bodies. It's surprising how quickly you don't care if that person you are snuggled up with is a stranger. The weather was calling for a clear warm day tomorrow, I was sure people weren't going to believe it until they saw it.

MONDAY:

After Breakfast we split people up and gathered Little Switzerland, Dayton Gulch and Lick Creek and trailed the herd to the head of Bear Trap where we would hold herd and work the cattle. Once we had the herd gathered up we had 3 or 4 footrots and one sick animal with High Altitude disease. We roped the footrot animals while we were waiting for a few people who hadn't shown up yet from the morning gather. We were short about 5 or 6 people. I've always felt it was better to be short 5 or 6 guests than 5 or 6 head of cattle. After the footrots were roped and doctored, Trent started giving the guests a lesson on cutting cattle out of a herd. This is something that appears easy, but takes a lot of skill and patience. Just like a marriage you have to learn to read body language or it's never going to work. The body language of the animal you are cutting out, will tell you exactly what they are going to do, and when they are going to do it. Now the trick, once you recognize what that animal is going to do is to convey to your horse in a manner so

that your horse can react and keep the animal from doing it. Most guests and lots of cowboys find this rather difficult to achieve. Working a herd is a real skill and generally the slower and quieter you are the better. I have cowboied with some people that I just shutter when they ride into a herd. I know a wreck will soon follow even though they have 30 years of experience.

We loaded the sick yearling which turned into a slow process as we really didn't want to rope her and drag her into the trailer. She was having a hard enough time just breathing without us choking her. We tried for about 40 minutes to load her and she just wouldn't step in the trailer. Finally, we had no choice but to rope her and drag her into the trailer. Once that was accomplished, I was getting rather concerned because we were still short 5 or 6 riders. I headed back to camp and came across the lost riders. They had gotten confused as to where we were holding the herd and were in the wrong part of the pasture looking for us. Once that was straightened out, I jumped in the pickup and to the valley with the sick animal. I pulled back into camp at dusk just as the guests were dropping the cattle into Lake Creek. From the looks of how many of them were slumped over in their saddles, it was obvious there wouldn't be any complaints about not getting enough time in the saddle.

TUESDAY:

We awoke to a beautiful clear sky and I knew it would be a great day. It's always amazing how a nights sleep puts the smile back on people's faces. As I walked into the mess tent about an hour before daylight, Don Lorton and Karen Lewis were already there. It seems there sleeping bag had gotten wet the day before and I think they spent most of the night sitting and dozing around the fire trying to get their sleeping bag dried out. Today is a huge day as we have to break down camp, set up another one and gather and move the herd to the nights destination. The guests always enjoy this day as most of the crew is packing, and setting up another camp. It's always amazing to watch how much improvement the guests have already made in their skills in just 3 days. By now the soreness is leaving and with the improvement in their skills they have more of a bring it on attitude. Which is always great because they have no idea of what is still ahead of them. Craig, myself and Kathy headed to the valley to set up that camp so when we arrived in the valley with the herd on Thursday, we would have a camp all set up, ready to go. This is always a brutal day for me because once the camp is set up in the valley, we go back to the mountain, catch our horses and head to where the rest of the group is camped. We always ride into camp sometime after dark thirty. The trail we come off of to get to Rock Cabin Park is a little steep and it might actually be better if you can't see it.

WEDNESDAY:

On this day we are always kind to people and give them a chance to recover by having breakfast about 30 minutes later than normal. After breakfast is eaten, lunches packed for the day, we head out for the days gather. We split into two groups with one group headed back up country to gather the herd that had been dropped the day before and the other group headed to a neighbors allotment where we had some cattle that had strayed during the summer. This group then splits up many different directions to ride the country they are in. It was an absolutely gorgeous day when we left. Everyone's spirits were high in the fresh crisp mountain air.

As we headed to the horizon we could see the cloud bank starting to build and bunch. I was sure that anyone who hadn't brought a slicker today would be willing to pay a lot for one in a couple of hours. As anticipated the herd had scattered with many of them climbing up under the rims. People scattered in different directions looking for cattle. As we threw the herd together it was impossible to tell if we had all of yesterday's cattle. We sat and waited until everyone was accounted for and it looked like we had most of yesterday's cattle, if not all of them. The chances of having all of yesterday's cattle was real slim but you can always hope. As I sat at the bottom of the hill waiting, the fog rolled in and the temperature dropped about 10 degree's. I grabbed my slicker and put it on, as it looked like it was going to get wet. By the time we were ready to take off with the herd it was raining and spitting some of that damned white stuff called snow. By the time we had traveled about a half mile the trees were soaked from the rainfall and you were getting wet from the trees even with a slicker on. As branches slap you in the face while chasing cattle through the tree's you realize you have a clean face for the first time in a week. After about 2 hours of trailing the herd we had the cattle where we could drop them for the night. By now it was about 3 hours from dark and my group of people were ready to call it a day. We headed to camp, where I was looking forward to a roaring fire and a stiff belt of whiskey. By the time we rode into camp it was really starting to rain hard. We left our horses tied on the hitch line so when the other riders arrived they wouldn't have to get off and drop the electric fence. When you have been riding in the rain all day, the only dry spot left, is exactly where you are sitting. If you get off to open a gate, or drop the electric fence, your one dry spot is gone before you can get back on. I quickly unsaddled my horse and headed to the mess tent to build a fire in the barrel stove. We soon had one roaring and the temperature in the mess tent went up about 15 degrees. People stripped off there wet gear and we were hanging wet clothes anywhere we thought they would dry. Everyone's spirits improved as the steam lifted to the top of the tent. About 30% of the guests had gone with me and the rest had gone with those on the other circle. I knew it was going to be a while before any of them would return. About an hour before dark, the rest of the riders came riding into camp. It had really been pouring the last hour. People quickly put there horses away and scampered to the mess tent. It was obvious there wasn't one person who felt that this was anything but reality, of the cowboy way of life. On days like this, it really dawns on them just how tough the early settlers were, and how difficult it really is to make a living in the cow business. As we sat in the mess tent that night having birthday dinner for the twins from the east we soon discovered there had been a murder. Our creative head cook Patty had put together clues for the group to discover who the culprits were. It was a lot of fun as the rain continued to beat down on the tent. Here we were, a group of people from all over the US and Canada in conditions that were down right miserable and there wasn't one person who didn't have a smile on. I really can't say enough about the character of this group of people. About the time people started going to bed, the rain started to let up. I was sure we had at least an inch and a half today. I headed to my tree for the night, and hoped the rain was going to stop and not just let up. The trick is to crawl into bed and not accidently kick off part of your tarp so that you have your bag exposed and not know it. If you do, you will know in a couple hours as the wet spots show up in your bag.

THURSDAY:

I crawled out of my bed about an hour before daylight to start getting the mules saddled and ready for the days pack. Today we move to the next camp. It was fantastic to look up and see all the stars shining. I knew it would be another great day to be alive. After breakfast, Craig, the cooks and myself took off with the cook string to the valley. Closing up camp was going to be a little tough since everything was so wet. The cowboys took off with the herd, and the pack crew did the best they could closing up camp and packing the mules for the trip down the canyon. The cooks and I had a great trip down the canyon. With the loads riding well and no cattle, I got terribly sleepy riding along in the warm sunshine. As I was riding along I couldn't help but wonder what complications each group would encounter during the day. That's the way it is when one cowboys for a living. The herd coming down the canyon did really well, until they got to the few bad spots and then it was total hell. The biggest problem with the herd was when they got to Strawberry corner they didn't make the corner, and started up a game trail that heads up through the rims. It's way to nasty to ride a horse on, so you jump off and run up the mountain side, as best you can, until you see spots before your eyes. Then you huff and puff for a few minutes, then run like hell uphill again, slipping and falling on the rock as you go. Once you are above them, you have to get them to turn around and go back down the trail they just came up. If they don't go back down the way they came up, they will get out on some rims and then you have to hope that one doesn't push another one off over the edge. You can always tell how tough it really was by the attitude of the cowboys, when they get into camp that night. It was obviously very tough. This is always a long day. A person is always amazed at how exhausting riding down hill all day is.

FRIDAY:

Last day of the trip was a gorgeous day with only 12 miles more to go with the herd. Obviously the herd didn't want the trip to end as they walked about as slow as they could go. The herd arrived at the ranch around 4:30 pm and we were supposed to be in Sheridan for the banquet at 6:30pm. We still had to unsaddle and turn the horses loose. I arrived in Sheridan at 6:15pm and hadn't showered or shaved yet. There was no doubt in my mind that everyone wanted me to shower before showing up for the banquet, not only the crew and guests but also hotel management. When the week was over, and I reflected back on the week I realized we had the second wettest week of all the September Cattle Drives. I also realized it was as good a bunch of people to share the adversity with as there was anywhere. You were all amazing and I am truly thankful for being given the chance to spend a week with you. Thank You!!!