

CLEAN UP RIDE 09 TRIP REPORT

Monday Sept 28th.

I picked up Craig Mead, Pierre Leonard and John Faille and headed to the mountain to get the week started. Since I was doing the cooking that week, I needed to get into camp and get things set up in the kitchen. Since we started the trip on a Monday, instead of a weekend, the guests weren't going to get the luxury of my wife's cooking for the first couple of days. It was a beautiful day and as we started up the last hill to the cow camp we looked off to the east, and right under the road was a cow of ours with a 2 week old calf that we had been missing. When Trent had found her 2 weeks earlier she had a brand new baby, and it wasn't strong enough to keep up with the rest of the herd, so he left mom and baby. He had ridden and ridden, but hadn't found hide nor hair of cow and calf the next two weeks. This created a slight problem for me. So many times on the mountain, that time of year you need to go by the old saying "A bird in the hand is worth 2 in the bush". If we grabbed horses and rode off into the bottom to get her, then dinner was going to be very late that night. Since it was the first night and we had several new people on the trip, that first impression can go a long way towards setting the mood for the rest of the week. We plan on tormenting them all week long so why start off on the wrong foot. I was sure since she was a 10 year old cow who had been up here since she was a calf, that she wouldn't be too hard to find. BOY WAS I WRONG!!! I decided to wait until Trent arrived with the rest of the guests and then let him and the guests go gather her. Once they all arrived, they saddled up and headed into the bottom of Lake Creek to find momma. They rode until dark and couldn't find her anywhere. I still wasn't overly concerned since she knew the mountain as well as I did. I wondered if maybe, she had drifted on over into the next drainage and we would find her the next day.

As Trent and the guests saddled up we did manage to get in a few laughs at the expense of return guest Matt Morrin. Matt had ridden Amigo the year before and had requested to have him again. Now Amigo is a little round backed, so a little hard to get a saddle cinched up tight enough to hold good and solid when you go to get on. As Matt climbed aboard, the saddle slid off to about 3:00 o'clock. Matt did try to defend himself, saying that he was really a member of the polish brigade and was just getting ready, incase he had to shoot someone from under his horses neck as he was traveling along at a dead walk. Somehow this didn't surprise us at all.

TUESDAY SEPT 29TH:

Trent took 6 people with him and headed up country and dropped into the head of the Little Horn for the big circle of the day. It took a little longer to get out of camp that next morning as one of the guests saddled the wrong horse, so we had to wait for him to switch, before taking off. Now the interesting part is that he was also Matt Morrin's traveling partner. It's easy to understand how Matt and Warren are friends. The scary part is that they had hiked into the Wilderness Area a couple days earlier. Now it is

rumored that when they left Connecticut his wife took him out to the interstate, set his odometer at 00 and told him to drive 1427 miles west and then take the first left.

The rest of the group, rode with me and we went to the head of Lick Creek and came down the creek to the bottom of the pasture. Sure enough the cattle we picked up were as far away from where our gather had started as was possible. We picked up about 65 head of cattle, but not the cow and calf we had seen the previous day. We trailed our cattle to the bottom of Dayton Gulch. I then headed back to camp, to put on my apron and see what I could burn for the nights meal. I have learned the key to cooking at 9000 feet is the alcohol. A few drinks after a long day in the saddle and everything tastes just fine.
WEDNESDAY SEPT 30TH:

We had a good gather yesterday so the decision was made to pack up the mules and head to the next camp in the Little Horn. Craig and I took the pack string and headed to the next camp. Trent took the guests and rerode Lick Creek and picked up the cattle we had dropped in East Burn the previous day. They rode into camp slightly before dark. Craig and I had the camp set up and dinner burning! The weather had turned slightly ugly, it was intermittently raining, snowing and doing everything possible to make the ground slick for riding. When Tim Wood from England rode in, he announced it had been the best day of riding that he had ever had in his life. I said, "Have a drink, dinner is just about ready."

THURSDAY OCTOBER 1ST:

We awoke to new snow, overcast skies, with the look of more snow in the air. The ground was wet under the new fallen snow so it was rather on the slick side. We needed to ride the country west of the Little Horn Cabin to try and find some yearlings that we were short. With the new snow it appeared that all of the neighbors cattle had drifted onto the Government fence and were just waiting for someone to open it for them and they would head to the low snowless country, of the valley. Of course if you want to tick your neighbor off, you open the gate and let the cattle go. Out here in the West though, you work with your neighbors so you would never consider doing something like that. We made a big swing and ended up on the Government fence where we could see some of our yearlings mixed in with the neighbor's cattle. We tried to slip through the herd and pick up just our cattle and leave his behind but by the time we got to the gate, we had about 20 of ours and about 50 of his. We held the cattle at the gate and were going to try and work his off and hold our yearlings. Since everything on that mountain is up and down, you never are aware of how much slope you are riding on until it's slick underneath. As your horses feet are sliding 3 different directions at once, all you can do is pucker up and think, "damn this is going to hurt if he goes down". We had about 20 cows and calves of the neighbors still mixed with ours when it became obvious we were going to have to change our approach. It was just getting to wild and wooly! The goal is to get the job done, not to have to wait a half day for a helicopter to land and take someone to the hospital. We decided we would open the gate, let the cattle we still had captured, on through and try to work Chuck's cattle back through the gate, leaving our yearlings on one side and Chuck's cattle on the side they were supposed to be on. This really turned out to be the best approach. After getting the cattle through the gate we held them against the fence and continued to work the herd. Tim Miller and Warren Robst did an admirable job cutting. It looks easy, but reading a cow is not as easy as it appears. The whole approach had to be done slowly with the slick hillside conditions, goofy

yearlings, and calves that don't have a clue. I breathed a huge sigh of relief once the herd was worked and we could head down country with our 22 yearlings that we had picked up. At that point, Trent slipped off and went South to ride some country we had ridden through yesterday. He was on his long circle horse and was planning on a very fast paced circle. As I wasn't sure what sort of problems we were going to encounter, I took everyone else with me. I was rather shocked to see that the cattle lined out and walked right down the trail. The skies cleared and with the snow on the trees, the blue skies overhead, it was extremely scenic. Even though the temperatures were around 30, there was a bone chilling wind blowing at our backs as we went down the canyon. As we neared Leaky Mountain with the herd, we jumped a herd of Elk and everyone enjoyed seeing god's wonders in the wild. When we reached Robinson Crossing we crossed the herd to the other side, and headed up the Beaver Slide. We had to drop the yearlings with the cattle we had gathered the day before, or they would be right back with Chuck's cattle the next morning. It was amazing but the Beaver Slide wasn't to slick going up it. Sometimes things do go right. We topped out at the top of the Beaver Slide around 3:00pm. We had never stopped for lunch because of the bone chilling wind and the IQ of the yearlings. We just had our cowboy picnic as we rode. As we headed back to camp we were riding directly into the wind. It was anything but pleasant. Just as we reached Elk Draw, here came Trent with about 6 yearlings that he had picked up. We gave them a kick and headed back to camp. He stated to me, that Elk Draw was a little on the slick side, boy was that an understatement. We started across the timbered hill side. Since it was in the timber, it hadn't gotten cold enough to set up the mud underfoot. I slid to the bottom of the first little hill and went forward about another 30 yards with my horse taking one step forward and 3 feet going sideways. I was just waiting for the horse to stop, get stabilized and then I was getting off!! I hollered back for everyone else to do the same. With our weight on top of a horse under those conditions, I knew we wouldn't make it through without someone ending up under a horse. It was more high adventure than I cared to be part of. Once we had walked about ¼ mile we were able to get back on and ride to camp. I know getting off and walking isn't the cowboy way, but neither is a helicopter ride.

Once we got into camp, I jumped off my horse, went into the cabin and opened the oven door to check on tonight's dinner. I was concerned that the stove hadn't been hot enough when we left that morning. I took one look at the roasts and potatoes and told everyone to have another drink! Dinner was going to be a little more than one cocktail away. No one seemed to care and we had a great time sitting around and discussing the days ride as we waited for dinner to finish cooking.

FRIDAY OCT 2nd:

Trent grabbed the guests right after breakfast, and headed out to start gathering cattle while Craig and I closed up camp and packed the mules. We did have a bright sunny day and my guess was that we would hit highs on the mountain of around 40 for the day and should reach the 50's in the valley where we were headed.

Once Trent and the Wild Bunch had the cattle gathered up, they opened up the gates at the top of the Beaver Slide and down it they went. Everyone needs a good pucker after some of the coffee that I had been serving all week. With everyone at the bottom and the herd in front of them, it was hard to keep up with the cattle the rest of the way to the valley. The cows had had enough winter in the high country and headed to greener

pastures. We actually all met up on the Rocky Bottom loaded up the pickups and trailers and headed to the Rafter for dinner.

SATURDAY OCT 3rd:

I was expecting a relatively easy day and it wasn't too bad. We gathered the cattle on the Rocky Bottom and went to the fence corner by the state line to work out the strays. As we worked the herd I kept looking up the canyon and wondering where the two riders were that hadn't shown up yet from our mornings gather. This always makes me just a little bit apprehensive. Once we had the herd worked, I opened the gate and headed everyone else on up the county road with the herd. I headed up the canyon to find the missing cowboys. As I dropped off the hill onto the Rocky Bottom, I could see a couple cowboys coming with a small herd of cattle. It looked like about 20 head or so. I rode up and couldn't have been prouder of Tim and Warren. They had seen some cattle on the other side of a fence, thought they were ours, and not the neighbors, slipped in, gathered them up and were bringing them right along. They had done a phenomenal job as they didn't have one stray in the bunch. They certainly earned an extra bean for dinner!! We trailed the herd home. The group had really come together and were working like a bunch of real hands. It was absolutely a delightful trip. This group of people had been a great way to end the season. With these kinds of people you just can't wait until next season to get started again.