

SEPT 2013 TRIP REPORT

Friday Sept 13th:

I had received an email that the entire group was going to meet at the Rib & Chop House to have dinner the evening before the trip. Mark extended an invitation to all of us to join them. I thought this the perfect time to get to meet them and also get a jump on any problems that might arise. Since I already knew about half the people coming, I definitely was going to get a jump on things. (just kidding) I actually felt it would help with the week getting a chance to break the ice with the new people. I also was not concerned about the newbies because I did know those that were coming. At dinner that night they handed out shirts that they had made up for the entire group to wear including myself and Trent. The shirt called them the 2013 Double Rafter Dream Team and had their names embroidered on the front. I have to say the shirts were very nice and I was very flattered.

Saturday Sept 14th:

This was a private trip put together by many times repeat guest Mark Laberge. We had 16 Canadian's and 4 from the US. Now 2 of the 4 from the US were the infamous "Blue Heeler Sisters". I had no doubt, this was not going to be a normal routine trip. It didn't start out normal and was never normal all week long. The day the group arrived it rained off and on all day long. The group drove themselves to cow camp in their own vehicles because many of them had brought their own saddles and tents. The convoy arrived about 3:30pm and it was absolutely pouring when they arrived. We didn't even get their vehicles off the road which meant we had to pack stuff longer distances, but it was better than getting stuck in the mud. Right after the guests arrived the rain did let up while people were setting up their tents. After they had their tents set up, each driver got in their vehicle and off the mountain they went. I followed in my pickup and was going to pick everyone up at the Rafter and transport them in my pickup back to the top. We were about 30 minutes from takeoff to the valley when Mark pulled me aside and told me he had left his jacket at the Holiday Inn so he was going to take off early, swing all the way back to Sheridan, then come out and meet us at the ranch. I said okay we will see you there. The drivers got in their vehicles and I waited for everyone, since several of them had never been to the Rafter. I believe we had me and 6 other vehicles which meant 7 in my pickup coming back up the mountain counting me. Just as we left Lake Creek the rain really started coming down. When we arrived at the Rafter I noticed that Mark was already there. I thought man he must have really flown off the mountain to get all the way to Sheridan and then back to the ranch and be there ahead of me. When questioned, Mark sheepishly said he looked under his seat on the way off the mountain and there was his jacket. People parked their pickups and I said they either needed to leave their keys in the vehicle or give them to my folks in the house. People started piling into my pickup. Counting me we had 8 instead of 7. It was just slightly crowded and raining like a cow taking a leak on a flat rock. It wasn't a shock to me we had 8 because the one who didn't get the memo is from the other country called California. That night in the mess tent around the barrel stove we had the white bag

nominations. I'm sure you figured Mark would win but he didn't. Alain Werbrouck won for something he done on one of our trips 2 years earlier. We had had a long day in the saddle and when we arrived back at the Lake Creek Camp, Alain had decided to clean up and went down to the spring to take a bath. Sounds innocent enough, except he bathed right where we get our drinking water. I asked everyone to sign a disclaimer on the spot so that if someone came down with a good case of mountain dysentery they would know it was the soap in the water and not my cooking!

Sunday Sept 15th:

We awoke to bright blue skies and had breakfast and then turned the Horsemanship Clinic over to Chris. This group was rather experienced and since many of them were repeat people who brought their own tack, it didn't take nearly as long to get through the horsemanship clinic as it normally does. We knew how to mount most of them and their gear was all adjusted to fit them. We rode some outside circles because we needed to gather the Lake Creek pasture the next day. My group went south from the cabin and when we got to the head of Lick Creek we found some cattle up there. My plan was to drop off to the drainage to the west but could see lots of cattle clear up the head of Lake Creek which was on the east. So I split my group and Roy took part of the riders and headed down Lick Creek. I took my group and went and looked off into the head of the Little Horn and then swung back and dropped into the head of Lake Creek and started kicking cattle down country. This was going to save us a couple hours tomorrow gathering. After dropping the cattle at the forks my group headed back to camp for dinner. Roy's group came in and they also had found a few cattle. Everyone was excited about the day and were looking forward to the next one.

Monday Sept 16th:

Today was a big day as we split 4 different directions when we left camp with the idea we would throw the herd together at the bottom of Kane Creek where we could work out any cattle that weren't supposed to go to the Dry Fork the following day. We cut out several yearlings, and a sick pair. We trailed them back to camp, corralled them and I loaded the sick pair and headed to the valley. It appeared the cow had altitude sickness. We cut the yearlings out and Stan took his group and trailed them back to Lick Creek where they dropped them to be gathered two days later. The rest of the group who had stayed with the cattle at the bottom of Kane Creek then trailed the herd up Kane Creek to Garland Gulch. It got hot and even though they probably only had a mile to go, it is very steep and the cattle sure didn't have any desire to go up it. They had complete hell and it took them about 2 hours to climb the mile to Garland Gulch. There were many frustrated cowboys because it never looked this hard when Hollywood does it. Once they had the cattle to the top and stopped at Garland Gulch, Stan took any that wanted to come, back to camp. Everyone went back to camp except, Trent, Taylor, Robert and Chris, they didn't have any options, someone had to sit on the herd until dark. When they got back to camp we kept their horses in the corral that night because they were going to be leaving before daylight. Trent told me when he arrived back at camp after dark, that the cattle had never settled down the entire time and he was sure they were really going to scatter that night.

Tuesday Sept 17th:

Trent, Chris, Robert & Roy saddled in the dark, gulped down some breakfast, packed their lunches, loaded their horses in the trailer and left before daylight. They were headed to Garland Gulch to try and get the cattle gathered and started before we arrived. We had no idea how far out the cattle might have scattered that evening. Stan, Craig, Taylor and I would bring the guests and ride over and catch up with them somewhere. We had at least an hour ride to just get to where the cattle had been dropped the night before. As we were having coffee around the campfire that morning, Mario pulled me aside and said that Reggie didn't have his medication and hadn't been able to sleep. The old cowboy in me came forth and I said, when he gets tired enough he will sleep. Mario said, no you don't understand he has some medication that got left in the pickup down at the Double Rafter and it could be life threatening if he doesn't have it. That of course changed the picture and priority immediately. He said it was in a bag under the seat of the pickup. I pondered the dilemma for a minute and decided that I would send Craig off the mountain with Reggie as my fear was, what happens if Craig drives down and can't find it? Then what, we don't have easy communication. So after breakfast, Craig and Reggie drove off the mountain. Now Reggie doesn't speak much English so I'm sure there was not a lot of conversing going on. Craig said it was a good thing I sent Reggie because he said he would have never found it. It was in a hidden pocket in the pickup which is probably why it got overlooked in the first place.

As we rode out of camp Taylor took some guests and headed to the Lake Creek meadows and then was coming down country to meet us. Stan and I took the remaining guests and headed over towards Anvil Rock to pick up a small bunch of cattle that we could see. Our plan was to push them straight off the hill to the bottom. Since these cattle had evaded us the day before my group looped around them so as to come up from behind them. If they started to run I wanted them at least running the direction I wanted them to go. We approached them, bunched them up and noticed we had one very crippled bull in the bunch. There was no way he was going to walk anywhere, easily. Now the bull actually needed to go straight to the corral and be loaded in the horse trailer and hauled to the valley. There was no way he was healthy enough to ever walk out of there. I told Stan, Pierre, and Mark to make an attempt to trail him back to the corrals and shut him in the corrals. I said if he starts to fight you too much, just drop him and we will get him later. It was only about a mile back to camp and he was at the same elevation as camp so he wouldn't have to put additional pressure on his leg trying to walk up hill. I suspected the bull had a hairline fracture in his knee. Now remember this is the same group who didn't listen about how many people were going to drive off the mountain with vehicles. Well they didn't listen when I said if he starts to fight you just drop him, don't fight with him. When they finished they were a mile farther away from camp and 500 feet lower in elevation and the bull had won. I think it's the part about getting whipped by a dumb bull that made them stay after him much longer than they should have.

When the rest of us got to the bottom of Lake Creek we met up with Taylor and had about 20 head we had picked up. We started the climb with our small herd up out of Kane Creek. As we started up the trail a cow came running up from behind us in a panic like she was looking for her calf. We let her in and trailed to the top. Once arriving on top, we stopped and I rode through the herd. She had not found a calf in our bunch. It was obvious she had been sucked that morning, which meant her calf had to be in Lake Creek somewhere and we had just missed him. I cut her back and shoved her off the edge back down Kane Creek. The biggest problem she had right now was that instinct was telling her to go with the herd, but the herd was headed in the opposite direction from where her calf was. Had she been tight bagged we would have taken her with us assuming her calf was ahead of us with the big herd.

She certainly didn't want to go back. We trailed on down country and about 2 miles down the trail caught up with the other herd of cattle and Trent, Chris, Robert and Roy. At about a mile and a half charging up behind us, came the cow I had cut back earlier. I cut her out and chased her around a while until oxygen got short enough for her that she was thinking more about escaping than about joining the herd. I started her back the way she had come at a high lope. After several hundred yards she gave up all thought of the herd and was headed back down the trail towards Lake Creek. I stopped my horse, spun around and loped to catch up with the other herd. Just as I cut her out here came Stan and his group of whipped bull chasers. They had finally caught up with us so everything was right on schedule. We started the herd down the Garland Gulch trail to the Dry Fork. We hit Lunch Break Park just about 12:30pm. We stopped to let the cows and calves mother up and rest. This is about the half way point to the day's destination with the herd. We had lunch and all the Canadians decided they had had enough for the day so Craig took them back to camp. This left the two blue Heeler sisters and the two sisters from California still with us.

The rest of us got the cows back on their feet and started them north towards the Dry Fork. The cattle walked along just fine and we had a pretty easy 3 hours onto our destination. The only dark spot was the black clouds building in the west and looking like they were very very full of moisture. We were soon to find out just how much moisture. We dropped the herd around 4:00pm sat on them a while to let them mother up and then headed the 4 hour ride back to Lake Creek. We crossed the Dry Fork River and crawled up the steep trail to Mother Up Park. The black clouds had settled down with the tops of the ridges being in the clouds. They were extremely black and menacing. We rode into the Sand Dunes and the rain started to spit. We stopped, jerked our slickers off our saddles and put them on. We had just started riding again when the spitting rain turned into hail. We were winding in and out of a new growth of pine so you would get clobbered with pea sized hail then be behind a tree and get it blocked from hitting you. There was a lot of wind with it so it was coming in sideways, instead of straight down which was lucky for us. Chris stopped and took his slicker off during a lull and gave it to Cheryl too put on. She was very cold as she just didn't have enough layers on. For the next 30 minutes it rained and hailed intermittingly as we rode on. It wasn't too bad yet! We hit Lunch Break Park which meant we were about half way back when the hail got bigger and the raindrops came in harder. The ground was now wet and getting slippery on the slopes. As we climbed higher through the burned patch of timber you wondered how your horse could keep his footing it had become so slick. But you kept your head down and kept riding on, not wanting to shift in your saddle so as to make more work for your horse on the slippery slope or to open up dry areas for water to run in. Everyone made it to the top and no one was speaking, just riding, heads down, necks bowed into the wind. We were still getting 15-20 minutes of rain and then 3 or 4 minutes of hail and then more wind and rain. The hail was getting bigger and the rain drops larger. Lisa was riding in the middle of the group and with her head down just like everyone else and didn't see the tree leaning across the trail. She smacked the tree with her forehead and it darn near knocked her out of the saddle. With tears or rain streaming down her face she said she was fine and we trudged on. However with her weaving and bobbing in the saddle I wasn't so sure. Trent and I pushed our horses to the lead and kept pushing hoping that our horses walking faster would encourage the horses behind us to walk faster. We still had a long ways to go. We rode out of the timber, the hail had stopped but the rain continued with the thunder and lightning cracking and popping right over the tops of our heads. It was raining extremely hard with the drops hitting puddles and causing splashing with every drop. We rode next to the timber so as to not be as big a target for the lightning. However as wet and miserable as we were the thought of being warmed up by a little lightning really wasn't scary. When Trent and I reached the forks of Garland Gulch another big wave of hail, thunder and lightning engulfed us. We rode our horses into the timber and found a couple trees we could sit under while still on our horses. The grape sized hail continued to pour down on us. The ground turned white with hail and then stopped, but the downpour of rain continued. The temperature had dropped and I

was very concerned about the people behind us who didn't have the clothing they needed. Chris had given his slicker away and was just riding in a sweatshirt over his shirt. We were all soaked and completely miserable. Trent and I sat under that tree for probably 15 minutes and no one from behind had caught up with us. I was hoping they were doing the same as us and just waiting it out. I finally decided someone was going to have to go for help. It was an hours ride from where Trent and I sat to the top of Garland Gulch and then probably another 45 minutes from there on to camp. I was concerned about people and hypothermia by now. I was hoping that when we got to the top of Garland Gulch people from camp had brought us some vehicles. I knew once I arrived at the top of Garland Gulch I was going to ride down the middle of the logging road and the first hunter, was going to stop and give me a ride to camp, whether he wanted to or not so that I could bring vehicles back. After a quick discussion with Trent I rode out and headed up the long slope of Garland Gulch at a lope. I took off and the rain was still coming down by the bucketful's. The only place I could ride was right up the trail. If I got off the trail Crackerjack would sink in the mud to above his ankles. This was just too difficult to lope in. Since the trail was packed the water was gushing down it, but it was at least solid footing. I was loping directly into the storm and the driving rain was going right through me. I couldn't even look up to see where I was going it was raining so hard. I knew Crackerjack would give everything he had for me or die trying. The thunder and lightning started up again but by now I didn't really care as all I could think of was the group of riders behind me. It probably took 30 minutes to lope to the top of Garland Gulch and my heart sank as I didn't see a vehicle sitting there. I loped onto the logging road and just as I got there up the hill came Bob and Laurels vehicle with Craig driving it. Right behind them came Bob and Laurel with both pickups and trailers. I poured myself out of the saddle and told them there were more riders coming. Bob grabbed my horse and I jumped in the Toyota Highlander with Craig and said to head back down the road and maybe we could intercept some riders at the forks of Garland Gulch and get some cold cowboys into some warm vehicles. The black sky still showed no signs of letting up. It took about 20 minutes on the road to drive around and get to be where we wanted to be. However, we were to late, the group had already ridden on by. We turned around and headed back up to the top of Garland Gulch. When we arrived all we could do was sit and patiently wait for the poor wet cowboys to show up. As they showed up we would jump out of the warm vehicle, stuff them in one, with the heaters all on full blast, jerk their saddles off and shove the horses in the trailer. There were several who burst into tears as they climbed into the warm vehicles. Once we had everyone we headed back to camp jammed in like a bunch of sardines but there wasn't one complaint. All anyone could think about was dry clothes back at camp and the roaring barrel stove in the mess tent. I am just guessing but I believe in that 3 hour ordeal we had close to 3or 4 inches of rain which is unheard of in our country. I can honestly say, it was the most miserable rain storm I have ever ridden in, in my life. The driving rain, the thunder, lightning and hail and the temperature had dropped to about 2 degrees above where it turns into snow. Snow would have been much better. I really want to thank Mark Laberge for suggesting to Bob and Laurel that maybe some vehicles should be taken back for us. Bob and Laurel both agreed and decided dinner would just have to wait. After putting on dry clothes and sitting around the barrel stove, those cowboys who had endured one hell of an afternoon started feeling like survivors. It's times like this that make you think back on the early pioneer and admire how really tough they were!

Wednesday Sept 18th:

Since we had had such a grueling day on people and horses we backed off the start of the day. This would give the horses a chance to get a little more fuel in their tanks, allow people to get their wet clothes and beds set out to dry. One thing most guests don't understand is the amount of energy our horses expend during the week of a trip. By the time September comes around, the horses have used all the extra fat stored for energy and are down to burning muscle for energy. You just can't expect a taxi to run on an empty fuel tank. When you get those extreme weather conditions like we had the previous

day and night, the horses aren't out filling their tanks, they are huddled in a timber patch trying to conserve their energy and stay warm. So when you hustle out and get them in early the next morning, their tanks are close to empty. They give you what they have, but as soon as the tank is empty, they go to burning muscle to give them the energy to complete the day. There is no quit in these ranch horses. It is our responsibility to do what is best for the horse and the rider.

We rode out of camp and headed 4 different directions to do the days gather. Trent took one group and headed North West to ride the Bear Trap drainages and gather anything that was found and kick them into the bottom of Dayton Gulch.

Taylor took one group of riders and headed to Bull Elk Park which was 8 miles North of camp. We really didn't think he would find cattle but if you don't ride those areas you get to the valley and then when you tally is short wonder if you should have ridden that area. Since it's 8 miles north it also means it's 8 miles back, so it's a pretty good day's ride. Then if you find cattle the ride out is double in the amount of time it takes to trail cattle out of there.

I sent a group of riders out over the top of Antelope Ridge to drop into the head of Lick Creek and come down the drainage, gathering any cattle that might be found. Everyone had orders to drop their findings in the bottom of Dayton Gulch and come back to camp.

With the weather being in an upheaval Craig and I stayed in camp and cut firewood. Seems with the cold, wet, snowy weather the bonfire had been pretty much roaring, whenever people were around it. There was no way we had enough firewood to last through the next two days. When weather is like that you want flames shooting up several feet to generate the thought of being warm.

Everyone arrived back at camp at different times and some groups found cattle and some did not. But everything had been stuffed in the bottom end of Dayton Gulch so the yearlings were ready to start the trek to the valley the next day. When everyone arrived in camp that evening we turned all the horses out into the Dayton Gulch pasture as we were out of feed in the horse pasture. I wanted the horses to get a chance to put enough fuel in their tanks to be able to withstand the two very grueling days we had ahead of us. In actual distance we were probably going to ride over 50 miles in the next two days!

Thursday Sept 19th:

It turned white during the night but just barely. However everything was very wet. We had turned all the horses into the Lick Creek pasture the night before in order to allow them a chance to get a belly full of grass. I drove out at the crack of daylight to spot the horses before sending riders out to jingle them. The horses were in two different groups but very manageable. After a quick breakfast I trailered Trent and Taylor to the two different spots and dropped them off. Trent started in with his bunch and Taylor started in with his bunch. I figured they should show up at the corrals no more than 15 minutes apart. Obviously Murphy hadn't had breakfast yet and decided to interfere with our plans. Taylor rode in with his group and then Trent arrived shortly thereafter. The horses had no desire to go into the mud hole called a corral. It was a sloppy, soupy mess, with mud splattering 10 feet into the air as the horses ran around the corral. It was a very cold windy overcast day. You could tell none of the horse had a smile on. As we started catching horses it was obvious a couple horses had ducked out while coming up through the timber and of course they were horses that we had to have. With the different skill sets of the guests you can't just put anyone on any horse. Trent headed back out horseback to see if he could find the escapee's. Trent knew he had seen the two we were missing with his bunch when he started in. Those of us catching horses were in a bind because we didn't know if we wanted to start doing the horse swap just yet, because Trent might show up any minute with the missing two. We went ahead and caught the rest of the horses and it then became obvious we were

missing 4 horses. Of course 3 of them were horses that we needed. This really put a kink in the day's plans. We waited and waited for Trent to come back. He rode back in about an hour later to report no sign of them. This really put a kink in the day's plans. We had a couple people who volunteered to stay in camp as they decided the cold wind really wasn't going to be much fun to ride in. We swapped a few horses and out we rode, first thing in the morning at 11:00am. Only about 3 hours later than I had planned. We gathered Lick Creek Dayton Gulch and headed to the Little Horn with the yearlings. Once gathered, I realized we didn't have Robert with us. Trent told me Robert had a horse go down with him and landed on his knee. He was in a lot of pain so had gone back to the camp. What a day, we were missing 4 horses and now one cowboy! Once we dropped off into the Little Horn, a majority of the people decided it was a little on the cold side so they went back to camp. We were hoping to get to Rock Cabin Park with them, drop them for the night and pick them up the next day for the trip through the canyon. Everything went just fine except there was a cold wind blowing that seemed to penetrate right through you. However, on the bright side the cattle trailed right along because it certainly wasn't too hot! We dropped the herd at Rock Cabin about 5:30pm and only had the 3 hour ride back to camp. We rode into camp well after dark with our bellies growling loudly complaining about a lack of fuel in the tank. We stepped into the mess tent to discover the majority of the people had already gone to bed. It was just too cold and windy to enjoy standing by the bonfire. As I stepped into the mess tent Alain came up to me and started apologizing. I had absolutely no idea what he was apologizing for but laughed anyway. When you are hard of hearing and someone is profusely apologizing you certainly don't want to wait until they are done then say, "I didn't hear a thing you said, so say that again", so I laughed. The glare I got from my wife and cook from across the tent said it isn't funny and stop laughing. I still had no idea really what he was apologizing about. There had been something said during the apology about burning up a tent. Since no one had called 911 or there were no emergency light flashers going off when we rode into camp, I was sure it really wasn't all that serious. Seems what happened was that Alain had a little propane tent heater and turned it on while he went to the outhouse. So much for Cowboy Tough! When Alain came back his little orange back packer's tent was certainly orange, but it was orange flames this time. Alain ran around to the back of the tent, pulled out his knife and cut a slit in the back and reached in and grabbed his luggage. Everything else went up in a puff of melting nylon. As the story was told to me it reminded me of a safety poster I had seen in 4th grade. **"DON'T SMOKE IN BED AS THE BAG YOU BURN MAY BE YOUR WIFE"**! By the time we rode into camp my wife had things all taken care of. They had Alain and his wife moved into another tent, more cots set up for them and two dry sleeping bags for the night. Yup, we plan and stage everything that happens during the week.

Friday Sept 20th:

Today being the last day of the trip was a real big one. The cowboys had to ride all the way from Lake Creek to the Little Horn where they would pick up the herd and trail them on down the canyon clear to the Rocky Bottom, before heading to town for a shower and nights festivities. As the trail went the cowboys had over 20 miles to go today. With the pushing of the herd probably 25. It was a big day of all downhill riding, but in the scenic canyon no one really minds at all. The Little Horn canyon is always the highlight of any trip and probably the main reason the Sept Cattle Drive is usually the first one to fill up.

Since Robert was hobbling around like a 75 year old man he was swapped out just like an injured horse and went from the Cowboy Crew to the Camp Crew. The camp crew packed up the camp, loaded it and drove everything off the mountain. The banquet was supposed to start around 6:00pm with happy hour and followed by dinner around 7:00pm. The camp crew transported all the vehicles on over to the Rocky Bottom so that the cowboys would have a ride to Sheridan once arriving in the valley. I took all the guests luggage to Sheridan to have it waiting for them once they arrived. The cowboys arrived at the Holiday Inn around 6:30pm. We backed off all the nights events about an hour and went from there. We had an extremely great, very wet week on the mountain. Everyone handled all the challenges extremely well. I really have to laugh at the reality shows because reality is really too tough for them. I want to especially thanks Mark Laberge and Alain for everything they did all week, especially burning up his tent! We have been doing this for 21 years and the burning of the tent was a first. We have had a ceremonial burning of the underwear but never a tent. Rest assured, a bunch of French Canadians will always come up with something new!

The Trail Boss