

Aug 23rd Open Range Trip report 2015

Sunday Aug 23rd:

Picked up the guests in Sheridan, Bear Lodge and a few other assorted places and arrived at Lake Creek around 11:00am. Many of the guests had decided to follow in their vehicles to the cow camp so it looked like a gypsy caravan pulling into camp. We got unloaded, did camp procedures introductions and then headed to the corrals to get the day started. We did about an hour of horsemanship, broke for lunch then back to the horsemanship. The horsemanship is so important, as it helps people get adjusted and relaxed before they get up on their leather rocking chairs for the day. Once we had people set, we did a late afternoon trail ride and headed out south of the camp on the barren ridge behind the cabin, where you can see for miles. With the crisp mountain air and the clear skies, people are always amazed at how far they can see and the clarity of what they see.

That night around the fire we did our famous White Bag nominations. We had two nominations but could only have one winner. The winner was Tim Parent from New York, who after spending days getting everything laid out to bring with him, left his sleeping bag. Isn't that a little like getting up in the morning to get dressed, then forgetting to get dressed! The other White Bag nomination was Mark Didway from Texas. He is a rancher from Texas, owns 500 mother cows, but wanted to pay to come help us do it. The only way I would be riding on a Ranch in Texas would be if some of our cattle got away from us, and I thought they had them.

Monday Aug 24th:

The goal for today was to gather the cattle that were in Little Switzerland, and lower Lick Creek, throw them together and trail them up the Lick Creek divide, to Upper Lake Creek where we planned on dropping them for the day. We gathered the cattle, doctored a few sick calves, roped one foot rot bull and doctored him while people ate their lunches. We then started the process of trailing up the Lick Creek Trail to the top of the divide. Cattle never trail easily up out of there and today was no exception. We knew we would spill some and sure enough we did, but for a bunch of damn green horns, they did all right. Once we made it into the horse pasture, we sat on them and let the cows and calves get mothered up before trailing them south out of the horse pasture towards the head of Lake Creek. We were trailing the herd up along the edge of the timber when I glanced to my left, and saw one of our guests all tangled up in a tree. Seems as she started to ride under the leaning tree it snagged on the corner of her shirt on her shoulder. As the horse attempted to push through the resistance, this caused the tree to actually spin and wrap itself tighter into her shirt. Well as her shirt tightened, it also tightened the collar of her shirt. Without air, Hilary couldn't scream, shout or do anything but turn red. Now if she had been bleeding profusely, the tourniquet around her neck certainly would have slowed down the flow of blood. However, she wasn't bleeding so that excuse was out the window. Luckily the mare she was riding stopped pushing and just stood there. We jumped off our horses and ran into the trees to try and untwist Hilary. We were a little uncertain how to go about getting Hilary untwisted. Because Hilary wasn't very heavy, we didn't think leading the horse out from under her would do anything but leave her hanging. If she had been a great big person their body weight would probably cause the shirt to tear and down she would come. However, her face was only red, not blue yet, so

there was no panic setting in. Nothing like a good game of Cowboy Twister to make sure you know you are still alive! Oh, by the way, by leading the horse and sort of lifting Hilary and doing a little twisting at the same time we were able to get her unsnagged and safely back on the ground. Since Hilary started talking just as soon as her feet hit the ground, we knew she was alright!

Tuesday Aug 25th:

Today we split the group into two and headed different directions to go get the days circles completed. Taylor took those that wanted to help him, go gather the cattle we had gathered up yesterday. They were going to corral them and then vaccinate the calves with some pneumonia vaccine. This meant they would need to corral the cattle, then work the calves off, then one at a time push the calves up into what is called a calf table where they would be given their shots, then put back out with momma. Now pushing calves up a chute is a lot easier sounding than it is doing. By now the calves are stronger and quicker so it is very common to take a beating when you do this job. There are lots of tricks to doing it, to keep from getting kicked, stomped on and run over, but there are always a few guests who really want to give it a try even though they have been cautioned. They want to try and whole thing and so we generally let them. Other than getting slightly beat up it isn't life threatening so we let them have a go at it. Those that give it try, just about always have some war marks to take home and show their wives when they get home. Tim got to take home a perfect hoof print on his stomach to show his wife. Joe who took a shot about 8 inches south of his navel didn't have to go home to show his wife since she was on the trip with us. We did happen to notice Joe sat up a little higher in the saddle the rest of the trip though. After vaccinating the calves, they gathered up the cattle and trailed them to the bottom of Kane Creek to have them set, for the next days 14 mile push. I can promise, 14 miles is a long day pushing cattle, because you then have a 14 mile ride back to camp.

Dana took the other group of people and headed Bear Trap and Sardine Lake to gather any cattle they could find and trail them to Lick Creek, where we would then pick them up two days later. As we rode down Bear Trap all we discovered was one lone lame bull. It took us about an hour and a half to baby him up out of there. Finding this lone bull changed the entire day's circle. Once we got the bull to where we could drop him, we glassed down in the Little Horn and we could see cattle by the old Green Cabin. We had to make a change in plans, so we headed to the Little Horn and never did get to Sardine Lake today. When we got to the drift fence in the bottom of Dayton Gulch the top wire on the fence was broken and there were fresh signs of cattle being on the wrong side of the fence, so off we went on a completely unplanned circle. We rode down into the Little Horn and found about 25 head of cattle. We gathered them up and headed up country. Now the difficult thing about gathering East Burnt is that it is a big steep side hill with lots of pockets, timber, swamps and meadows. I swung up high into the real rough country and sure enough here were some cattle. If the people aren't paying attention that are riding the low trail, they get so far ahead of you that if you just kick cattle off the hill, cattle come in behind the riders and are never seen, so no one picks them up. I ended up following my bunch off that steep mountain side at a very brisk pace so as not to lose sight of them. Once on the bottom, my shouting caught the attention of a couple other guests who came back to get my group so that I could climb back up the mountain to the rough high breaks. It took several hours to get everything gathered up and out of there but we did it. Once we got the cattle to where we could drop them for the day we had about an hour and half on back to camp. We were 300 yards from getting off our horses for the day when the wreck occurred. None of us yet today, know exactly what happened.

As always, when returning for the day from a long ride, the leads might ride into camp 15 minutes ahead of the drags. We were riding single file and Tim Woodville was directly behind me. Since the day was about over people were just riding along, tired, and not really talking, just wanting to get off the horse for the day. All of a sudden Tim's horse snorted, jumped up in the air and Tim came out of the saddle. Tim had his reins tied in a knot and as he came off, his artificial limb caught in the reins. Tim hit the ground with his foot tangled up in the bridle reins which were around the horse's neck. The horse moved sideways away from Tim's dragging body. The horse dragged Tim across the width of the gravel logging road, about 20 feet. The horse then started to spin away from Tim. This is when the blessing took place, as the straps that holds Tim's leg on, snapped, and off came the leg, so Tim came to a stop. Bruised and sore, a little road rash, but okay. The only thing we can think of that might have caused it, was maybe a bee or bug of some sort, flew up the horse's nose, causing him to snort and jump. After putting Tim back together, we put him in the back of the pickup and drove him on into camp. We thought maybe Tim had a broken rib, we didn't really know. Tim said he was fine and he was the only one who could decide if he needed medical attention, he said not. I suspected Tim was done for the week. The horse really couldn't have handled it any better, as he didn't bolt or try and spin and kick this thing that was dragging from his side. He just moved sideways away from it.

Wednesday Aug 26th:

Four wranglers and 5 guests left at daylight to start gathering cattle and walking on down the trail. The rest of us would catch up with them somewhere along the trail. Today was just too long to not get a early jump on the day. People get nervous when they see the crew saddling up and making sure they have their flashlights with them!

However, I was very mistaken as Tim showed up for breakfast the next morning and said he planned on riding today. I cautioned him that it was 14 miles down there pushing cattle and then 14 miles all the way back. He decided to give it a try and he figured that when we stopped for lunch, which is about half way he could go back at that time if he needed to. Tim also insisted that he wanted the same horse he had been on all week, as it wasn't the horses fault and he liked riding him. I was again shocked after lunch, Tim said he was going to complete the day and he sure did.

We had two guests today who decided to not ride because in the middle of the night, as the husband got up to slip outside of the tent for a moment, he managed to step on his wife's glasses, bending them into a rather unusable shape, so they headed off the mountain to get her glasses fixed. She did put the glasses on before leaving and it was obvious they were either going to have to reshape her face to fit the glasses, or reshape the glasses to fit her face. Tim and Becky were very good natured about it by breakfast, but just a hunch, might not have been so good natured at 1:00am when it happened.

We rode into camp after 12 hours in the saddle as it was just turning dark when we rode back into camp, a very long, but successful day and Tim had gone all day. Man what an incredible person he is. Getting to know Tim Woodville was one of the highlights of my summer.

Thursday Aug 27th:

Today we headed back to where we had left the other half the herd two days earlier, to gather them and kick them from the Lick Creek pasture into the Lake Creek Pasture. Trailing a herd up over that divide through all the timber is always a challenge. Cattle are not as dumb as people are led to

believe. They have no problem using the trees as cover to duck out behind you. Generally when that happens, it's always hard for humans to admit they just got outsmarted by a cow, but that is generally the case.

Gathered Dayton Gulch and Lick Creek and trailed the cattle to Lake Creek. We knew it was going to be a big fight and it certainly was. The timber patch up out of Lick Creek is just tough. However, people did a fantastic job and were twice as good as they had been two days earlier with double the number of cattle. We knew we would spill some and did, but we got 95% of what we started with. The hardest part is when a couple of calves broke back and a couple of guests went after them. The rest of us were holding the rest of the herd, that were wanting to leave and go back with the couple of calves that people were chasing. It was very difficult holding what we had, so we didn't dare send a couple riders back to tell the others to give it up. The difficult thing is there is no way to communicate to the people back there chasing a couple calves, to let them go. If we go back to get those couple calves, there is a pretty good chance we lose the whole herd and accomplish nothing for the day. It takes years of experience to be able to recognize when you need to take what you have, and forget the rest. I have to say, this group of people really put forth a lot of effort and got better as the week went on. So many times people who don't do this for a living and watch Hollywood, thinks it's just a matter of chasing the calf. Since a calf is a prey animal, the more you try and chase it, the more it is convinced you are going to eat it, and of course the calf doesn't think very highly of that situation. So chasing the calf has just the opposite effect of what you are wanting. We finally got the big herd somewhat settled so I could send a rider back, to tell the others to give it up. Momma cow will come find her calf and we will get them gathered on the next circle. Cows and calves will generally always go back to where they last sucked. It is sort of their built in GPS system.

It certainly was an enjoyable week and we had a great bunch of people to spend it with. The weather was perfect as it was brisk in the mornings and pleasant in the afternoon. The other big plus is that we tallied everyone out, that we tallied in last Sunday, meeting the trips highest priority! Once back to camp, the horses were put away and everyone headed to Bear Lodge for a hot shower. What a great week we had with a great bunch of people to spend it with. We are so very blessed to be able to do what we do.

The Trail Boss