

September Cattle Drive Trip Report 2015

Sunday Sept 13th:

One of the things that ranchers do best is adjust and improvise to solve problems. There isn't a day goes by, that things go as planned. Sometimes it is a mechanical breakdown, white out blizzard conditions, a hole in a fence or something completely unrelated to the ranch in general, but it completely changes the dynamics of the day. Well we had one of those to start the week off with. We generally pick up people with a school bus. We hire a driver and bus from the local school district and it just removes one headache for me to deal with. Well the school district didn't have any busses or drivers available that particular day, so we had to resort to plan "B" which we do best anyway. We lined up a couple extra vehicles and took in a horse trailer to put everyone's luggage in and away to the top of the mountain we went. The only drawback was that I had to clean out the horse trailer before putting people's luggage in it. I know they call them a horse trailer, but I can promise, every rancher I know, hauls way more cattle in them than horses. When you just haul horses you just have to shovel out the bottom of the trailer and if you put a tarp down, you are ready to go with people's luggage. But since we haul a lot of cattle, you have to get out the power washer. This means you have it smeared on the ceiling as well as the walls. Cattle are not very orderly when it comes to piling the left over grass! By the time you are finished power washing, you have it in your ears, your eyes, your hair and splattered all over your hat, boots, pants, shirt and glasses. The problem with this is that your wife generally meets you at the door, points to the hose hooked to the side of the house, and says strip down. Now at certain times in your life, when your wife say's strip down, you might find it exciting, however, this is not one of those times.

We arrived at camp to a beautiful sunny 80 degree day and started the horsemanship clinic. My regular clinician, Chris Ellsworth was doing a tour on the west coast so wasn't available to make it, so Taylor, my youngest son, had to drive back from the University where is going to school to do the horsemanship clinic. Worked for me, as both Taylor and Chris are much much more knowledgeable than I am. After the horsemanship clinic we took off and did a circle into Lake Creek and back to camp after a couple hours. By then dinner was ready, so we had dinner and most people were exhausted, so went straight to bed at that point, so we didn't do any white bag nominations that night.

Monday Sept 14th:

Awoke to a beautiful day in the middle of God's wonderland. We had breakfast and started our gather in Lake Creek. We split about 3 different directions with the idea we would gather and throw the herd onto the logging road to have them ready for the next day's trek. We roped and doctored a few sick calves with pneumonia type symptoms. One calf in particular caught my eye, as he had two very droopy ears. Droopy ears are generally a sign of a high fever and an animal not feeling very good. So we roped this calf and as we were examining him, we discovered he had a huge abscess in each ear and not much of an indication of a fever. We lanced both ears, drained them, pumped him full of antibiotics and turned him loose. We still have the calf here today (2-24) and he is healthy as any of them, but from the abscesses he still has two very droopy ears. He looks like a very large French Lop Eared rabbit. We will probably end up keeping him and eating him ourselves, but I bet he won't taste like rabbit.

When we got back to camp we had dinner and then people started heading to bed before we got started with the White Bag nominations. What a bunch of light weights, it's only 9000 feet and we had only spent about 7 hours in the saddle! However, we gathered those still up and had nominations. Klara Austivil won the white bags as Bob spent all day riding behind her, picking up the things she dropped. She dropped so many things that Bob didn't have room in his saddle bags for everything. However, she discovered very quickly that if she was missing something, in all likelihood, Bob had picked it up. As soon as we finished the White Bags people headed to their tents to call it a day. The elevation always takes a toll on people as they just don't realize how much more work it is to just breathe at 9,000 feet, then add in the fact it is not a trail ride, and you have a great recipe for a good night's sleep.

Tuesday Sept 15:

We kept some horses in the night before as we knew we had a long day in the saddle the next day. Four cowboys pulled out of camp with their horses before daylight to get the herd gathered up from where we dropped them the day before. Daylight that time of year is a little after 6:00am. With 14 miles to go today you didn't want to spend half of it gathering cattle. As soon as breakfast was over the rest of the guests and crew rode out to catch up with the herd. We caught up with them in Garland Gulch, so they had made a couple miles before we caught them. This is critical to the length of the day. We stopped and had a short lunch at Lunch Break Park and then hit the trail again. Cowboy Stan Sharp went back at this point in time, as he had his horse go down with him in a slick spot and land on his leg. Well sort of landed on his leg, he also walked over the top of him. Stan doesn't know if his leg injury was from being landed on or stepped on. Not that it really matters, because to a cowboy it's all about the story anyway. We dropped the herd into the Dry Fork around 3:15pm. So we had gone 14 miles with the herd today and dropped about 2500 feet in elevation. Now we only had to ride back up hill for the next 14 miles to get back to camp. I would be willing to bet with the extra riding that we do with a herd we probably rode 33-35 miles today alone. We rode into camp at 7:35 this evening after having a very easy 12 hours in the saddle. I'm not exactly sure how many went to bed right after dinner but it was most of them. Al Bellefleur won the White Bags for coming off his horse during the day. We have a rule that states that if you yell dismount, before hitting the ground, you can then claim it was an intentional get off, giving you immunity from the White Bags. Now Al is a many times repeat guest who is close to double digit trips, so you would expect him to bellow out "Dismount". However, everyone around him swore up and down that what came out of his mouth, was not dismount. Everyone also said that what came out of his mouth wasn't really English either. They said it sounded more like rocking a chair over a cats tail! Al denied all of this. He actually sounded just like Bill Clinton or Hilary Clinton in his denials, the only difference is that people actually started to believe Bill and Hilary Clinton. But here, no one believed Al!!

Wednesday Sept 16th:

Well today is a camp move so most of the crew broke down camp, packed it up, moved it to the next camp and set it back up at the next camp. Dana and Tyler took the guests and did a reride of yesterday's circle only picking up about 15 head of cattle and trailing them onto the Dry Fork, where we had dropped the herd the previous day. Now today wasn't the most pleasant day, but it wasn't snowing so I was happy. However, the wind was screaming and as we rode up Kane creek many people stopped and put their slickers on as it was starting to rain. We were just about to the top of the steep pull when Jim Whitney and his horse went down. We had a great time teasing Jim and finally decided maybe the

wind was so strong and Jim so big that it just blew the horse over. They have high wind warnings on the highway's all the time, but we never thought you would need them while riding a horse. We had ridden about 13 miles of the 14 miles to the Dry Fork, when we were crossing through an area we call the Sand Dunes, when Jim Whitney decided to be the center of attention again. There are several spots on the mountain, at the same elevation, on some of those ridges that you end up with an area that has as fine a sand on it, as you have on the beaches. These area's are never more than an acre in size but still always cause some wonderment in your thought process. Well, when we rode through the area the horse that Jim Whitney was riding, decided it was time to roll and get the big lug off his back. He dropped and rolled. Jim jumped off and rolled himself. The horse looked at him as if to say "Now doesn't that feel better". We rode into the camp around 6:pm with a very exhausted bunch of people. Thomas Dwyer went straight from the corral to his tent, crawled in, and went to bed. He didn't even come to dinner when dinner was called. Matter of fact he didn't come done at all.

When we started that morning it is normal to have lots of horse swaps about day 3. We had several horses that had sored up from the previous day's hard ride. Repeat guest Paul Buehler got put on a horse we call Thunder. Now Thunder has some gaited horse in him somewhere way back, but he still has that prominent gate of the gaited horse, which is, I am pissed off if I have to walk slower than my normal pace. So the rest of the week it was, here comes Paul and there goes Paul. Paul rides well enough that he wasn't afraid of the pace, but he was exhausted, from holding him back all day. It was my mistake, I assumed because Paul does a lot of biking, that he would want a horse with 18 gears! When we closed up the camp for the night Thomas Dwyer had never surfaced as he was still sleeping.

Thursday Sept 17th:

We gave people a little chance to recover today and didn't have breakfast until 7:30am, however, Thomas Dwyer was still sleeping. According to his roommate he was just fine, just exhausted. He woke up with the idea of getting up for breakfast but just couldn't force himself out of bed and fell back to sleep once his roommate left. When we rode out of camp you could still see the movement of Thomas's tent sides, moving in unison with his snoring! We headed to High Park where we had lunch. It's an amazing place to have lunch because you can see so much of the country you have ridden the last couple of days. On the way up there we jumped up a cow and calf moose which most everyone had the chance to see, with the exception of Thomas who might still be sleeping. We then swung up "Oh Shit Trail" to go to where we were going to be gathering cattle today. We gathered about 250 head of cattle and shoved them off into the Moose Hole. The gather was pretty easy, but the steep push back off into the Moose Hole was real tough. The cattle were completely happy where they were, and they really don't give a hoot about the Forest Service management plan. Once we dropped the cattle where we wanted them, we headed on back to camp to call it a day. However, we ran into one slight problem. Here come Paul or there goes Paul was gathering cattle we didn't want or need, but we couldn't catch up to him to call him off. Paul did manage to win the White Bags that evening for gathering anything with 4 legs. It didn't matter, deer, elk, moose, rabbits, they were all in danger of being gathered by Paul! When we rode into camp that evening it looked like we were in for a slight weather change.

Friday Sept 18th:

We had a little weather in the night but nothing serious. The high country above us was covered in white and the rain we had during the night wasn't enough to interfere with your sleep, so who cares! The rain that came and went all night didn't even bother Rip Van Winkle (Thomas Dwyer).

We had to leave the tents standing as they were too wet to pack which actually made the packing easier. I would come in later the next week and get the tents. Rip Van Winkle did manage to come down to breakfast and was ready to ride out when everyone else was. However, he yawned all the way to the bottom. Maybe he is part bear and was actually wanting to hibernate for the winter. It's about a 5 – 6 hour ride to the bottom of the mountain so off we went. The down hill riding is actually the hardest riding on the body, as the knee's take a continuous pounding. We were about an hour from the bottom when Robert Ford came off over the front of Boots. It is a lot steeper than people realize, and as the horse sweats and labors, they get smaller around which can cause a loose cinch if you are not paying attention. I was fearful for a little while after this happened that maybe Robert had broken or cracked some ribs, but he made it to the bottom and showed up at the banquet all clean shaven and polished. When we arrived at the Rocky bottom that late afternoon, the horse Jim Whitney was riding ducked under some branches at the creek crossing, dumping him in the creek. Jim was completely soaked and said the hell with it, and walked the last half mile. I believe this is the 4th time Jim came off his horse this week. Paul could have actually had lunch in Sheridan, but he kept having to wait for the rest of us. Thunder could see no sense in standing still and taking in the scenery. The amazing thing is we really don't know how old Thunder is. He is at least 25 and would fool you with the energy that he has. He is completely gentle, just doesn't have much use for slow. Actually we should rename him congress, because he moves as fast as they spend money. That night at the banquet, Al Bellefluer won the white bags to take home with him. It was a great week and any week we don't get snowed on in the fall, is a great week. Thanks to all who made the trip so successful.

Let's Ride Donkey Whippers!