

Ruminant Digest #24 (2017)

If I am writing this as fake news, I would just say that this is just a change up from the normal Trip Reports that we do at the end of each trip. However, that would be false so I guess I am just not main stream. Actually, I was injured in a rope accident in July and spent the next 10 weeks on crutches. It is rather hard to write trip reports when you are confined to camp because 98% of the good stuff to write about, happens away from camp. Hearing it 3rd or 4th hand while peeling potatoes, makes it very difficult to write about. Actually, that is fake news also, as my cooks wouldn't even let me peel potatoes! I really don't think it was me and it was more a fear of my wife, but none the less, it made for a very long summer.

There really isn't a lot to tell about the rope accident. I was on the ground afoot, but ended up tangled in the middle of a rope with a rider less horse on one end and a calf on the other. After the horse dragged me about 30 yards through the sage brush and rocks, he got bored with dragging me and spun around to see if I had had enough, and of course, I had. Before the horse could come to a different conclusion, someone jerked out a knife and cut the rope. I do remember a huge sigh of relief crashing over me when I felt the tension go out of the rope. After convincing people to just give me a minute to allow the pain to subside and my head to clear, I stood up and attempted to take a step. It was at that point I knew the leg was broken. We were at the Dry Fork Cow Camp when this happened so they loaded me in the Gator and Tianne drove Alice and I out to the car, to make a trip to the local hospital. Since I hadn't been in the ER in over a year, it was sort of fun to see everyone again. None of the breaks needed to be set, but I was going to need screws in my ankle to reattach the tendons. This of course meant 10 weeks on crutches in a boot and no weight on it. Consequently, no Trip Reports.

My little accident really compounded the summer because Taylor and Cathryn had decided to get married at the Rafter on Sept 3rd. My accident created a huge burden on Taylor and Cathryn because the original plan was that I could run the mountain stuff, allowing Taylor and Cathryn to get the Rafter in shape for the wedding. With me out of the picture, this doubled Taylor's responsibilities. All I could do was stand on the sideline and yell encouragement. I have never been good at standing on the sideline so this was very tough on me. However, we got through it and had a beautiful wedding and they are still married today. Besides there's an old ranchers saying that says, every rancher should host something major every 7 years, so you clean the place up! That's actually a very accurate statement.

Taylor and Cathryn got married on the Saturday before Labor Day which was right between trips for us. Taylor and Cathryn were both aware that a honeymoon right after the wedding was out of the question. However, they decided that going to cow camp the day after the wedding would have to suffice, at least temporarily. They thought that maybe they would go into the Dry Fork to have a little solitude but we had pulled all the horses out of there because we had the farrier coming, and since I was on crutches, I certainly couldn't shoe any remaining horses. I suggested they go to the Little Horn instead, but Taylor said they didn't want to go down there, because he knew there was some fencing that needed done in the Little Horn and didn't feel fencing was very romantic. So they went to Lake Creek instead for a couple days. Since Taylor has been in college all these past falls, he didn't realize that the Labor Day weekend is the second busiest weekend on the mountain behind the 4th of July. I can't imagine they had much of a romantic weekend, as the Main's always have a big get together over Labor Day weekend and use our mess tent as command center. We are always glad they are using it so

we have someone there keeping an eye on things. However, with a couple hundred ATV's going by the camp daily and 40 people camped 100 yards from you, I don't think it was the romantic getaway they were envisioning. Taylor is still accusing me of setting him up on this.

In October, Taylor and Cathryn took a load of horses to Colorado and sold them through a horse sale. They were horses that just wouldn't work for us or were mares we wanted to get rid of. We are trying to get rid of most of the mares unless they graded out real high. We certainly have fewer horses injured, the fewer mares we have. It's no different than humans. Get a pretty face in the picture and half the guys aren't worth a damn! However, Taylor also bought 4 more horses while there. We think most of these will work in time, just don't know how or when that will be. One of the new revenue streams we are pursuing is that all horses will have a price tag on them. If someone wants one of them, they will be available. In order to make that work, we have to have a large enough horse pool, to be able to replace the horse that get sold, with something that will work. Taylor is in charge of the horse program and one of the issues we are dealing with right now has been this severe winter that we have had. The plan, was to be able to work these new horses most afternoons after we were done with the feeding. However, with the extreme cold we have had this winter and all the snow, it has taken much longer to get the feeding done. Then who want's to work a horse outside when it is 10 below zero? So we are way behind, but what limited work we have done with them, we do feel they will all work in time. That's based solely off of, if the horse doesn't buck when turned out for a couple weeks, he will learn to handle most situations without panicking.

Winter is always a challenge as you never really know what you are going to get until it's here. I understand lots of places have had drier and warmer than normal winters. We have had more of a winter that I remember as a child. Lots of cold and snow. We had an absolutely gorgeous fall but when winter hit in mid November, it turned winter in a hurry. We always try and not feed the cow herd until after the first of the year. The snow got so deep and drifted in early December, that we had no choice but to start feeding the cow herd. The month of early feeding was very expensive. The cost of the hay on a daily cost of \$1.50 per cow per day for just the hay and then multiple that by 450 cows and all of a sudden in a month's time, you have spent a lot of money that was not in your budget. You still have grass, it's just cattle can't get to it in the deep snow.

December 5th about 3:00 in the afternoon I was sitting at my desk doing some paperwork when the phone rang. It was someone from Montana who said they had a semi-load of calves headed to Kansas and had just received a call from the driver, that he had been hit by a snowplow on the interstate about 2 miles from us. It had flipped the snowplow and forced the driver and load of calves off the road into the ditch. The semi had not flipped and was still upright and they were looking for someone with a portable chute, so they could get the calves unloaded from the truck. They were then hoping we could load the calves into horse trailers and haul them to a corral, to take care of them until he could get another semi and driver to come down and pick them up. I said I had both a portable chute and would be more than happy to shuttle the 95 calves to my corrals and take care of them until another truck could be found. I called my neighbor Bob Main and asked if he was free to come help me. I headed to hook up to my portable chute and Bob said he would drive over and assess the situation and meet me at the wreck. By this time of year we have about 30 minutes of daylight left by the time I arrive with the portable chute. However, when I arrive and look over the situation, it's not as simple as it sounded on

the phone. The semi was still upright but about 50 yards down in the bottom of a big steep draw. With a foot of snow on the ground, it was obvious that once we got the chute down to the truck and hooked up to the truck, there was no way a pickup loaded with calves, even chained up, was going to pull a load out of the bottom of that draw. It was just way to steep and the snow too deep! We still can't believe the luck or skill the driver must have had, to have not rolled the load. There were several places had he been to the right or left 5 feet he would have rolled it for sure. I'm sure his adrenalin was still gushing the next morning. A little side note on this. The driver was about 35 and this was his second run in with a snowplow, so he hung up his CDL driver's license after this close call. By now, Bob had chained his pickup on all 4, hooked to the portable chute and drove off into the bottom while I headed back home to get some portable corral panels, because it was obvious the only solution, was going to be to unload the calves and put up corral panels so that when they came off the truck it could bend them into one of our neighbors pastures. By now it is totally dark. We cut the fence and attempted to manually turn the portable chute around and push it back up to the truck. Now in a foot of snow, 15 degrees and the semi sort of leaning to the downhill side, we worked for over an hour getting the chute put in place. We hooked a winch to it and jacked it back into place but the problem we had, was that once we pushed it back to the truck, because of the design of the truck, we had a gap between the truck and the chute which could be a real leg breaker. After going to this much work we weren't about to break a leg. We kept maneuvering and looking for something to stuff in the gap. We were digging through the snow looking for big rocks or rotted off posts by the fence lines. Chutes and trucks are all designed to be loaded or unloaded on level ground. We finally found a piece of board and hoped it would be enough. We sort of pounded and jammed it into place. We knew it would work great as long as the calves came out of the truck one at a time and stepped over the board. We knew the calves had more discipline than the democratic party, but still expected them to rush out in a mad melee. We had no idea if the pasture we were dumping the calves into had all the gates closed, or even how big it might actually be. But we knew it was better than calves running up and down the slick interstate. The calves actually handled it pretty calmly and we managed to get everything unloaded and into the pasture without breaking a leg, put the fence back up and called it a day. We got back to the house about 8:30 pm and the phone rang. The owner of the calves, was now wanting to hire some cowboys for the next day, to go gather them and get them corralled. Taylor, Jake and Bob all said they would go. We had put the calves in a pasture belonging to the Padlock Ranch so they sent a couple cowboys to help also. It was zero the next morning with 15-20 MPH winds. They got the calves found and gathered the next morning in about 3 hours of saddle time and had the whole bunch tallied. So all in all, a very successful morning other than we still had the day's feeding to do.

I missed the ride that morning as I was scheduled for knee replacement surgery. I have not been on a horse since December 6th due to the knee replacement. I asked the doctor in January when I could start riding again and he said I could as soon as I wanted, as long as I stayed off slick ground. He may have well have just said NO, as this time of year, it is either ice or mud and they are both slick! I have found our cattle in lots of strange hard to get to places, but I have never found any in an indoor arena, so couldn't see where riding in one would be worth it.

I have always felt I had about 70 days of real winter in my system, but it is somewhat scary when you reach the 70 day point by the 1st of February. However, I missed most of it myself as I was recovering from knee replacement.

It's not very often that down here in the valley you actually worry about cattle starving to death if you don't have them in on hay. You do on the mountain but not here in the valley. But this was one of those winters where it might be possible if it stayed that way. The local game warden said they had big bucks dying standing up. By January most of the draws had 6-10 foot of snow drifted in them, so trying to cross one with a horse was a real challenge. When you hit a night of 39 below zero you start wondering if there is another body part that maybe you should go have cut off, so as to miss the rest of the bitter cold. However, that thought was short lived as Taylor and Cathryn decided it was time to take their Honeymoon! They headed to Peru for 2 weeks in early January and had a fantastic time as they were missing all the cold and snow of Wyoming. Jake, Nash and I did get the calves weaned during this time so we did get some things accomplished. However, I discovered that walking through a frozen corral with lots of frozen cow pies, with a new knee, was a rather unusual experience, as none of the physical therapist could really relate to what I was telling them. Wrenching the knee all different ways on frozen cow turds and then going in for physical therapy, I found to be a most unpleasant experience. I used to feel I had a rather high pain tolerance, but the physical therapist proved me wrong in relatively short period of time. However, due to low intelligence or stubbornness, I did everything that was asked of me at physical therapy and on the ranch. I did find getting down on the ground to put on a set of chains the most difficult thing to do. I had orders to stay off my knees as the knee cap was the delicate part and if I broke it, I would be starting all over with physical therapy. That didn't appear to me to be something I wanted to do again, so I was cautious in getting back up after being down on the ground putting on chains.

The weather broke in mid February and has been seasonal since then. We haven't had any more extreme temperatures and the snowfall has actually been slightly less than normal. However, with all the early snow the fences are a complete disaster and are going to take a lot of time to get fixed before turning cattle out this spring. Most fences on the back side of the hills, where the snowbanks sit, all the wires are broken and flat on the ground. Some neighbors are completely understanding, while others have no sense of humor at all. I don't anticipate that the mountain fences will be any better. The problem with the mountain fences is that some of them we can't get to until late June because the snowbanks haven't melted off the fences yet. Ah the romantic life of a cowboy!

2017 is shaping up to be a very busy year with the cattle drives since 2017 has been full since last August. So if a spot interests you, you need to get moving on something for 2018 as I am sure it will fill up early again.

I spent my first day in the saddle on April 10th since the rope accident in late July. I had only been in the saddle one other time in October and that was after I go off crutches, and it was obvious the right knee had to be replaced or give up riding. I spent more time in the saddle when I was in diapers than I have the last 9 months. It sure felt good to be back and am so happy that I don't have any issues. I have absolutely no knee pain and the broken leg seems to be 100%. I did experience some soreness but not much, as I knew it was just muscles rebelling from riding. Even with that I wasn't nearly as sore as some of our guests have been.

Looking forward to another year seeing our old friends and making new ones. Thanks

Dana