

June 24, 2001

Cattle Drive Report

Boy, it sure has been a hot and dry June here in northern Wyoming. If there is anyone around the country with some extra rain please send it our way. For the first time in my memory, Canyon Creek and Elk Horn, two tributaries of the Little Horn, are completely dry. We are all closely watching the forecasts, as it is only a matter of time before the Forest Service issues fire restrictions. Can you imagine surviving a six-day cattle drive on cold Pop-Tarts and beer? Enough whining, here is our June trip report.

Our first drive brought us 13 guests all from the northeastern United States. As we are staunch cowboy conservatives, we are always skeptical about New Englanders, and this group turned out to be fiercely independent and slightly sick and twisted. Yep, they fit right in with the rest of us.

Day one tested us, as we threw the herd out of the Parkman pasture onto the highway for the one-mile trek south down the pavement to the Parkman Bar. Here is what went wrong. First, Dana's banker wanted to count cattle so, by squeezing the herd into a countable single file, she unmothered us as we trailed through the gate. Second, the summer-calving cows took the lead, blew off the hill, and bolted north up the highway before any cowboys could get through and get them turned. Third, once we were finally through the gate and headed south, a local resident, who chose to plant his garden on the shoulder of the road, turned our leads around again as he stood to protect his vegetable patch. We were soon trying to drive a ball of snakes, as the herd just milled in circles, unsure of what we were trying to get them to do. It wasn't long before the 100 calves bawling in the drags decided they liked things better back in the pasture, and every few seconds another group of calves would bolt towards home. With 90% of the crew now fighting to hold the drags, we retreated three times as we tried to reestablish our defensive position. Miraculously, things stabilized and we sat for twenty minutes in the middle of the highway while everything quieted down. I'm not sure any guest realized the severity of our perilous situation.

Dana rode by and whispered, "that was almost a FUBR,"(Fouled Up Beyond Repair).

Well said.

From a cattle-moving perspective, the remainder of the week went very smoothly. The guests and cowboys teamed-up well and we reached each successive camp in record time. There is really not much cow related excitement to report. However, around camp we had a few events worth mentioning.

In the very early hours of morning three, guest Ron from Massachusetts, was performing his eye-opening ritual of gargling with Listerine as a prelude to brushing his teeth. In the darkness, he fumbled through the bag he was sharing with his wife and located the tube of what he thought was toothpaste. Now, keep in mind that Listerine itself is one of the foulest tasting disinfectants that the practical jokers at Colgate-Palmolive have to offer so it is entirely understandable that Ron would have performed 15 to 20 good strokes with his toothbrush before he realized that something was awry. Ron reported that his mouth suddenly shriveled up into a permanent pucker that quickly sucked all available fluids from his body. Now frantically searching for a flashlight while he performed nonproductive spitting exercises, Ron at last discovered he had just polished his enamels with “Bikini Zone.” According to the label, you are to apply this ointment to your bikini area after shaving to eliminate “unsightly red bumps.” Having never shaved my bikini area, (actually I’m unsure as to its exact location), I was unfamiliar with the proper use of this product, but, after watching Ron, I was fairly certain it’s not to be taken orally.

Day four found most of the guests enjoying the soothing waters of Emerald Hot Springs. The swim record at the hot springs has been tied again as Steve, Ron, Gary, Eddie and James all swam across and back without getting badly scalded. There was a moment where it looked like Ron was going to set a new record and swim it twice in the same day, but, as he had already experienced so many new things on this trip, he decided he was satisfied to let the record stand.

The magical draw of Leaky Mountain did it to us again. Remember how on our June 2000 trip the Mountain lured guest Scott away from the group, and then tormented him with seven hours of outdoorsman pranks and practical jokes? Well, this time ol’ Leaky ate my nephew. Driven by the desire to explore the source of the main spring that supplies the falls, Brendon grabbed his lariat and lead rope and staggered off across the slippery moss-covered rocks at the base of Leaky Mountain. Two hours later, and without his lariat or lead rope, Brendon sheepishly snuck back amongst the guests who were impatiently waiting his return. His younger brother, Taylor, suggested numerous times, “Let’s just leave him, he can ride home by himself.” Brendon just meekly smiles when you ask him what happened, and since only he and the Mountain know the whole story and neither is talking, we will never know exactly what happened. Leaky Mountain scores again.

One thing we have learned on these adventures is that people will take extreme measures to prevent that malady that all cowboys fear—chaffing. As an example, one year the rumor circulated through camp that some cowboy in the group was sporting ladies panty hose, (versus gentlemen’s panty hose which all cowboys wear). Everyone spent the week wondering who was wearing the Victoria’s Secret chinks but no tent mates would reveal the truth. Sure enough, the last night when the group held a ceremonial burning of the underwear, there draped over the pine branch was a well traveled pair of nude Haines “Tummy Tuck” panty hose. It was a strange group.

This trip we had Tom, a cowboy from New York who chose talcum powder to keep his inner thighs and backside, dry, healthy, and friction free. His secret remedy would have remained a secret if it weren't for the fact that he brought along a "16 ounce Super-Duper-Diaper-Rash-A-Thon-Family Size" container with an ill-fitting lid. We packers were quite surprised by the puff of white powder that enveloped us as we gently jumped up and down on this duffle bag we were stuffing into one of our blue panniers. Not sure of what just happened, we glanced at each other nervously wondering why one of us smelled so baby fresh. It was far too early in the week for a clean underwear day. Shortly after arriving at Rock Cabin Park, Tom's secret was out and he will now be forever referred to as "Talcum Tom."