

2017 July CD trip report

Sunday July 2nd:

Alice and I caught the school bus and rode into Sheridan to pick up our guests that were scattered at various locations around Sheridan. Everything went real smooth until the very last stop. Generally it goes wrong right off the bat, so it causes a ripple effect throughout all the new guests. The new guests still aren't 100% convinced it isn't a con until you pick them up, so when they assume you are late to pick them up, my phone always goes to ringing. Picking up 20 guests scattered around Sheridan at 5 different motels always takes a little longer than you might anticipate. Well we got to the last stop on time, with everyone accounted for. One guest had stayed the previous night out of town and had driven over that morning. Aaron was there in plenty of time but made one little mistake with her rental vehicle. As she was getting her luggage out of the trunk, she set the keys down inside the trunk, pulled out some of her luggage and shut the lid without thinking. The problem this created was that she had only gotten a small part of her luggage out of the trunk before shutting it. Of course everyone is being courteous and acting like it's no big deal, but I am sure the shadows were telling a different story. We called the car rental company and they said they could unlock it remotely, which was fine and dandy, if here keys had been inside the car and not in the trunk. The button to unlock the trunk would only work if the keys were in the ignition. So unlocking the car remotely did nothing other than unlock the car. Of course, it is Sunday morning and the closest dealer is a 2 hour drive north of us in Billings MT. There are no Nissan dealers in Sheridan. We decided the best way to handle this was for Aaron to call a lock smith and see if he could help. However, there was a glitch in this and it was that the local lock smith was on the mountain for the weekend, but they would make some phone calls and see if they could run someone down. The rest of the guests are still being polite, but getting rather antsy or they all had to go to the bathroom at once, I wasn't real sure. Anyway, we loaded them on the bus and Alice and I headed out of town with them. The plan was to drop Alice off at the car when we went by Ranchester and she would drive back to Sheridan, and worst case scenario, she would take Aaron shopping for what she would need for the week. Now Aaron appeared to be very calm and undeterred by this little snag.

However, when Alice got back with the car, Aaron lost it and started banging on the trunk (my guess is she was jumping up and down on it) anyway, the trunk said uncle, and popped open. She retrieved her stuff, plus her keys and off to the ranch they came. She got there in time to join us for the horsemanship clinic.

After the horsemanship clinic and lunch, we decided to do something different this year and instead of doing a trail ride, we would trail ride the horses to where the first bunch of cattle that we would be gathering the next morning. We generally do a small herd push, or trail ride and then haul the horses to the next day's location. This was a great way to get the ride in and not have to spend time trailering the horses. The only draw back to this was that it delayed dinner until about 7:30pm. After dinner we had the White Bag nominations and I really don't think I have to explain who won them. We did tell Aaron we had put an extra set of keys for her horse in them just in case she got locked out of her saddle.

Monday July 3rd:

Cattle don't walk well in the heat so we have an early breakfast. With breakfast at dark thirty, there is always a look of, what kind of a sick joke is this, breakfast at 3:45 am. We hauled people to Bonanza Creek where the cattle were located, caught horses and started gathering cattle. With only about 40% of the cattle in today's gather we did not expect much trouble. The logistics on our trips are always the difficult part, so after about 5 miles, Alice and I dropped out and rode back to Bonanza Creek, to pick up the vehicles and trailers and we would meet the herd at the Rafter, sometime in the afternoon when they got in. Things had gone pretty well so far, but Murphy was lurking at the first washed out creek crossing. During the spring rains and snow melt, the creek had swollen to the point the two culverts under the road, couldn't take all the water, so the water flowed over the top of the road washing out a huge ditch between the two culverts except for an area on top that was 4 foot wide. Now we had to cross the cow herd over this 4 foot wide path. This of course meant that the cowboys had to be patient and wait for the cattle to string on across. In cattle circles the biggest and strongest get the choice and the weakest get what is left over or pushed aside. If a cowboy pushes too hard on a single file trail, the strongest animal will generally push the weaker one off over the side of the trail. Many times I have heard people say that stupid animal would not walk on the trail and was off continually. Generally this is caused by the cowboy pushing too hard, so the stronger animal pushes the weaker one off the trail as it is giving ground to your presence. Well this time, the weaker animal happened to be a younger cow and the problem was that the wash out, was about 5 feet deep and about 6 inches narrower than the width of this particular cow. So when the smaller cow got pushed off from behind, it pushed her hips off over the edge first. This meant that when she wedged herself between the two culverts that were 6 inches narrower than she was, she was also now facing into the bank or the path where the cows above her were walking. Her feet weren't touching the ground so she couldn't push on anything to try and lift herself out of the wedge. When Aaron rode up and saw this she thought maybe she had caused this mess. Aaron has sheep of her own so understands animals and how their brains work. If she was from the normal world it would have never crossed her mind that maybe she caused this. She felt terribly guilty all day about it. Anyway, back to the cow with the wedgie. Taylor rode up, viewed the situation and was not real sure how in the hell they were going to get her out from between the two culverts. By now the heat of the day has hit and it's about 95 degrees with dust from the herd in the air, the sweat drying running down your back. There was no way to put a rope around her and pull her out because she needed to be lifted up. You couldn't pull her out backwards because of the direction her ribs are pointed. Somehow she was going to have to be lifted up and over to get her out. After several attempts of different things that didn't work, Taylor jumped down into the hole in front of the cow. His hope was that maybe he could lift her front end up and over in order to free her. His first attempt of pushing up on her head didn't do much other than make him sweat. His next attempt, he got physically under the cow and with his legs on the ground, and his shoulders against her chest, he pushed up with everything he had. Lights exploded in his head as he pushed, but he felt the cow starting to move. He kept pushing and the cow finally came up and over out of the wedge. Taylor felt like his body was on fire from the exertion and when he went to speak, he couldn't form any words, nothing would come out, his head was spinning and he felt like he was going to pass out. There was a small trickle of water still coming out of the culvert so he staggered to it and stuck his head under the cold water. This immediately refreshed him and brought his body temperature down. After a few

moments he was able to at least form words. His legs were still like rubber as he had nothing left, as he had spent it all lifting the cow out of the culvert. Well I am sure Murphy was chuckling, but Murphy still had another trick up her sleeve. They had another half mile to go with the herd before the next creek crossing and of course Murphy had another plan.

The cattle crossed the next creek without any issues at all, but one of our guests from California, decided to lope to the top of the hill as they came out of the bottom of the creek. As the horse lunged to the top of the hill, his latigo snapped and off he came, saddle and all. He was in a lot of pain and the medical person was summoned to size up the situation. Upon an exam it was decided that Bill had had enough and should probably be taken to the hospital for a more thorough exam. One of the wranglers was sent ahead to get transportation for Bill as his riding was definitely over. It was feared he might have broken ribs as he was having lots of pain along his spine. Once Bill arrived at the hospital it was determined that he had numerous broken ribs and had punctured one of his lungs. His trip was over that was for sure. I received a phone call about this and when I heard his latigo had snapped, I thought how in the world did we miss a bad latigo. We make it a point to go over every saddle every winter to check for these types of things. I hate to say it, but a huge sigh of relief went through me when it dawned on me that he had brought his own saddle and equipment. When we talked to Bill at the hospital, he was adamant that his grandson finish the trip and he would see him at the end of it. So his grandson finished the trip and I have to say, Bill your grandson is a fine young man.

However, when it came time for the White Bags this evening, one might think that either Aaron or Bill would be the winner. But no, they didn't even come close. The winner was Vic Hewitt. Now Vic has spent plenty of time in his life chasing cattle in Australia and is a very good hand. He made one tiny mistake that all cowboys fear, and that is being left afoot. That's the real reason cowboy's ride horses, so they don't have to walk. We train all of our horse to be able to be mounted from either side, so whichever side is the uphill side you can mount from. Vic being an experienced cowboy walked around to the right side, which was the uphill side, wrapped his reins around his saddle horn (there is the mistake) and proceeded to get on. With one leg in the air reaching for the stirrup, one leg on the ground and both arms spread out wide like an eagle gliding in the air, the horse took one look at this and wasn't sure what creature was getting ready to attack, but using one, of two methods of defense, he took off running, leaving Vic standing there with one leg in the air and his arms stuck out wide like a gliding eagle and looking completely ridiculous. Here's your sign!

Tuesday July 4th:

We had another early breakfast as we had to move the herd about 12 miles today but also had to break the camp down and set it back up at the next day's location. We split up into two different groups, with one group gathering the cattle and taking them to the Rocky Bottom where camp would be and the other group was headed out to gather another herd of cattle and they also would be showing up at the Rocky Bottom. Whether the two herds would actually mix today or not we weren't real sure as you just never know how things are going to play out. Well apparently Murphy was still laughing from yesterday's events because he never showed up today. We had a very quiet day and a very good successful 12 miles. The only glitch was that Taylor's friend Brian helped us that day and caught up with the herd as we were in route. Brian is a top notch hand but is a supervisor at Home Depot so goes to work at 4:00pm. When he arrived at the Rocky Bottom with the leads, it was time to head to town to

his regular job. We still don't know who told him to take our car but he did, which would have been fine, except our bedrolls and personal gear were still in the car. Since Brian was running late he took the car all the way to Sheridan with the thought he would be back the next morning to help, never aware that he had our stuff, and if we didn't get our bedrolls, there was probably going to be one mad mamma bear that would be greeting him first thing in the morning!

Wednesday July 5th:

Well today is up the canyon and there is no other way to describe this day, other than it is always a long day regardless of how well or bad the day goes. The scenery is incredible, with the rims looming overhead and the rolling roaring river cascading down the canyon, as you climb about 3,000 feet in elevation. Murphy of course had some plans to add a few wrinkles to the day. The first thing that went wrong was that as we kicked the cattle out of the pasture we had overnighted in, I see a cow walking along that had stuck a rear foot, into a empty family size tomato soup can that had been standing up. I watched her walk for a ways wondering if the can would wear off in all the rocks. As I watched her walk the first quarter mile, it became obvious that she was going to be major lame by the time the can wore through or off. This meant we had to rope her and take the can off, before her foot became to sore to walk on it. I will get back to this cow in a moment. In order to take a herd of cattle up the narrow single file trail, you have to have them strung out for a long ways. So we hold the entire herd and work pairs off together and when we get about 40 pairs worked off, we drop a group of riders in behind them and they start them up the canyon. We generally wait about 15 minutes before working the next group off. Then proceed like this until we have worked through the entire herd. It generally takes a couple hours to get them all worked . The goal is to get the cattle strung out so they are not bunched on a trail that is only a couple feet wide. If the leads don't walk on a single file trail you don't go anywhere. This creates a problem because the rest of the crew has moved camp to the top of the mountain to where you are supposed to be tonight so staying another night in this camp is out of the question. Okay, back to the soup can. We held her until the last bunch and I roped her head and Taylor roped her heels and we laid her over. We sort of assumed that Brian would just grab the can and pull it off. Now Brian is a bear of a man but couldn't pull it off. I gave Brian my fencing pliers and my leatherman. He couldn't pull the can off with the pliers, which meant he had to cut part of the can off with the leatherman. It took a little while, but he did finally pull the can free. I am not sure the cow had the appropriate appreciation but I was glad to have it off and glad we had made the correct decision to remove it. We started up the canyon with the cattle and they didn't seem to be of any mind, to go to walking and get to the mountain. We ended up mixing several bunches about a third of the way up the canyon which made for a very slow pace up the canyon. It is exactly what we are trying to avoid by working the cattle into smaller bunches. In all the years of doing this I believe it was the longest day we have ever had. We didn't ride into camp until about 9:00pm. That's about 15 hours in the saddle. No wonder we have never had any complaints about enough saddle time. I have to say this bunch was a gritty bunch as we never had one complaint. There is a point where we are about 2 hours from finishing for the day that we can give people the option to go onto camp or stay with the herd until it is completed. Those that go into camp get in about 2 hours before the rest of the group. The majority of the group stayed with the cattle until the very end. When we arrived at camp, most people ate dinner and then went straight to bed. The jocularities had completely left them. We did the white bag

nominations the next morning and Masten was the winner. Seems he promised to saddle someone's horse, if they would get him a beer and then he didn't saddle their horse. The other nomination was Charlie Cockrell for breaking and losing one of his reins. He was nominated for senior driving as he could only make right hand turns all day.

Thursday July 6th:

Wranglers, Jake and Josh headed out to jingle the horses before breakfast. On the way back Josh came out of the saddle, hit the ground and ended with knee pain and rib pain. We decided the best thing to do was take him to the hospital to be checked out. He ended up with a strained knee and a couple cracked ribs, but other than that was just fine, nothing real serious.

Today if the cattle work was achieved the day before, we do a trail ride to memorable Leaky Mountain. We can actually have a leisure morning and get out of camp a little later than normal. Since we had sent Josh to the hospital we were a lot later than normal and didn't get out of camp until around 11:30am. Coming back from Leaky Mountain around 4:00pm the big black thunder heads that had been building, decided to see just how miserable they could make us. It started out as a light rain for the first 15 seconds, then just dumped on us for about an hour with rain and hail. If you stopped riding the horses immediately stopped, and turned their butts to the storm. On the mountains there is no such thing as warm rain. It is generally about 5 degrees warmer than snow and then add a 20 mph wind to it and it is miserable. Poor Charlie Cockrel was the only person who did not have a slicker with him. So consequently he was both cold and wet. I am sure in New Zealand the rain is much warmer than it is here. On the Leaky side of the canyon, the trees are all balsam wood fur, so the branches go all the way to the ground, not exactly trees that you and your horse can get under, to get out of the storm. When it really started pouring with mixed hail in the storm, we spurred our horses to the edge of the trees and huddled as close to the trees as we could get, this at least broke the wind. There were about 6 riders who weren't able to keep up and their horses just turned their butts and stood hunched up and took the beating of the downpour. One of the guests unsnapped the yoke on their oil skin and gave it to Charlie who gladly put it on so he at least 6 square inches on each shoulder with a covering. When the storm stopped, it completely broke and the skies turned blue. Vic took off his heavier parka that he had on under his slicker and gave it to Charlie who was more than happy to put it on. I was sure glad Vic had the extra coat. Since it was a warm summer day when we left, no one had anything other than their slickers and I was concerned about hypothermia. That evening, Charlie won the white bags not for what you would think, which was not taking a slicker, but telling one of the guests how to check the sex of his horse. He explained it and then someone produced a picture with Charlie standing behind the mare he was riding, holding up the tail and explaining which locked in his being the winner.

Friday July 8th:

Today we just break camp down and ride on to Lake Creek where we transport the guests on to Bear Lodge for the night's festivities. I was on the camp moving crew today, so didn't even saddle up a horse. Taylor led the group to Lake Creek and when he got to Lick Creek, he looked at his watch and figured he had plenty of time to go up Lick Creek, come out on top and come down the bald ridge into camp. Great plan except for one little snag, about half way up the bald ridge, the black clouds started building in the west. Murphy waited until they were on top of the bald ridge with about 3 miles to ride,

when the black clouds decided to nuke a bunch of cowboys. The hail and rain pounded down on them just like it had the day before, only this time the ground turned entirely white. My grand niece, got so cold, she fell off as they were riding along. I was waiting at camp with the cowboy bus to transport them to Bear Lodge and the windshield wipers couldn't even take it off the windshield fast enough to be able to see. We had a group of very wet miserable people when they rode into camp. There was not one single word spoken when they rode in. Taylor won the white bags that evening for that little stunt. At the drawing that evening Alisa Zillio won the white bags and was able to take them home. It was a great trip with lots of wild uncontrollable situations, that really drive home the reality of what we do. Thanks so much people for joining the Double Rafter family. Happy dry trails!!

Dana