

2018 Early August Open Range Trip Report

Saturday Aug 4th:

In order to meet Forest Service standards, we cannot run the horse herd in the horse pasture when we are not having a trip because there is just not enough feed, to feed 40 head of horses for very long and still meet standards. However, finding the horses running out in a 60,000 acre allotment is no small challenge. While we have 5 pastures, with the terrain the way it is, you can ride within a couple hundred yards of animals and never see them. A couple riders headed to the Rubber Boot pasture to find the horses for tomorrow's trip. The riders made several swings and by dark on Saturday night were still short 9 head of horses. What are the chances that the nine we were short were ones that we didn't need that week. It's about 00000.0001%. This of course really complicates our week, but then that is reality, and that is what we do best.

Sunday Aug 5th:

Alice and I headed to Sheridan to pick up the guests who had stayed in Sheridan and then we would swing into Bear Lodge on the way to cow camp and pick up the rest of the group. The cowboys headed back to Rubber Boot shortly after breakfast to look for the 9 missing horses. They did find them and had them all at camp by the time we arrived with the group of new and return guests. However, the little jaunt the 3 miles to the Rubber Boot pasture made it so we were somewhat behind schedule with some of the camp things that needed to be taken care of, before the arrival of the guests. These trips do not just happen as there is a lot of planning and preparation work that goes into each one of them.

Taylor did the horsemanship clinic and we fed everyone lunch before taking off for the 14 mile ride to the Dry Fork camp. Because of the 9 missing horses we were about 2 hours behind schedule. We didn't ride out of the Lake Creek Camp until around 2:15 pm. Since it is the first day out, there is always lots of saddle adjustments that have to be made as we go, which means we have to stop to do the adjustments. We rode into the Dry Fork camp around 8:00 pm both tired and hungry. The cooks had dinner all ready, but with the mishaps coming down the trail it took about an hour longer to get in than I had planned. To give you a little better idea of how some of these mishaps happen, let me explain the first one that occurred. As we were doing the horsemanship clinic we could see big dark clouds building on the western horizon and we were lucky enough to have gone about a mile before it started to rain. We stopped to put our slickers on and this is where the first chuckles started. We always ask that anytime you put on a coat or take one off, for safety reasons you should get off your horse, put the jacket on or off and then get back on. Trying to get 20 guests to all get off, put on their slickers and get back on without taking a lot of time is like trying to get a litter of puppies to stop wrestling. It just isn't going to happen. Brenda and Tracey being very attentive to everything we said, stepped off their horses and put their slickers on. They were the brightest orange and lime green slickers I have ever seen. I was afraid any passenger jets flying overhead might think it was some sort of landing strip and think that Tracey and Brenda were the flaggers to direct them to land.

We just had that finished, when Will Blair decided that maybe he should put his slicker on so he stepped off his horse to do so. Well, he had seen all the western movies and knew that there was no

way he could be a cowboy without wearing chaps, so had rented a pair. Now Will had never had a pair on before and really didn't have any idea how to go about fastening them, but figured it couldn't really be that difficult. He puts his pants on every day so what the heck! He stepped off his horse to put his slicker on and his chaps fell to his knees. Not really wanting to look like he didn't know what he was doing, he quickly bent over to pull them back up. When he bent over to pull them up his shirt fell off. So there he was bent over trying to grab his shirt and when he did and stood back up, his chaps fell off. It was about then that in my mind, I moved the time that I thought we would ride into camp that night back about 2 hours! The great thing about all of this is that at about this time, Will realizes that he is in the wilderness and the only thing to do is laugh. We all laughed with him and at him as it was hilarious!

The next 8 miles went pretty smoothly and the rain stopped after about 20 minutes so it was a pleasant ride. When we got to the last mile we had one last hill to go down before arriving at camp. We call it Screamer Hill. It is about a half mile to the bottom and on the previous trip we had trailed one bunch of cattle up it. However, in the week between the trips we had a major wind come through and knocked down 3 trees across the trail that were about 2 feet in diameter. The only way to get to camp is down that hill, on that trail. This meant we had to jump our horses over all of them. Going down this always causes an increase in the respiration rate even if you don't have to jump your horse across downed trees. At this point in time, every single person who had seen the movie City Slickers realized what a difference there is between Hollywood and reality!. Our mountain horses handled it beautifully with ease and grace. Actually, they handled it much better than the riders. We only had one mishap going down the hill. Rick Leeson from England had the only injury going down the hill. His horse jumped over the log and a tree standing upright beside the trail, caught the tip of Rick's foot as his horse jumped. This bent Rick's foot to the outside and back with the impact of the tree against his foot. There was an immediate surge of pain up through Rick's leg, but he had badly sprained that ankle a couple weeks earlier and was pretty sure he had resprained it again. He never said much other than it hurt. Once at the bottom we rode on up to the corrals, where everyone unsaddled and turned their horses loose into the horse pasture. Rick hobbled onto camp, said it was just sprained and went on with dinner. His wife and daughter's never said to much about it as they set up their beds for the night.

Later after dinner, we had the White Bag nominations and of course Will Blair was the runaway winner, except he really couldn't run with his chaps down around his ankles!

Monday Aug 6th:

It was a beautiful day and as guests came out of their tents and headed to the roaring fire for a cup of cowboy coffee they could smell breakfast lingering in the air. The one big notable difference today was that as Rick Leeson came down the hill he was walking backwards, down the hill to camp. His ankle was sore and the only way to keep from bending it too much was by walking backwards. However, he had a smile on and said he was riding. He had come all the way from across the pond and was not going to miss anything. After breakfast he walked backward to the corral to saddle his horse and figure out how he was going to get on. There was no doubt, he had plenty of grit and was one to ride the wild trails with. Once mounted, he and his family were off for a full day of gathering cattle and get the experience they had come for. There was no way a little pain was going to derail the chance to spend the week with his family, in the middle of nowhere chasing cattle all day long on the back of a horse.

We gathered herd and had some sick calves to rope and doctor. On the mountain when you find a sick calf you need to doctor it today because you might not find it the next day. We doctored 6 calves and had one bull with what we call "Foot Rot". It is a break in the skin between the toes and an infection sets in causing him to go lame. Well this is a real problem when it is a bull because if his feet are hurting, he can't mount or breed cows, which is why we have him in there in the first place. We trailed mister bull to the corral with the cattle that we were going to start trailing out the next day. Since we were trailing the cattle to the horse pasture to leave them in for the night, it made sense to put the bull in the corral, rope him in there instead of out in the open. A bull is unbelievably strong so out of respect for your horse, your safety, and your horse's safety, as well as the animal you are roping, you do it the easiest way possible which in this case was in the corral. Roping is a dangerous job with lots of possibilities of things to go wrong, so any time you can lessen the risk you do so. Two years earlier, by divine intervention, I survived a roping accident that should have left my carcass scattered for miles over the timbered hillsides, so I don't take it lightly! We doctored Mr. Bull easily without any mishaps and turned him out.

Taylor and Jake took the chainsaw and headed up Screamer Hill to cut out the three trees that we had jumped our horses over the day before. There was no way we were going to get a herd of cattle to jump the logs going uphill and get them to the next pasture in our rotation without removing the trees.

We unsaddled our horses and headed uphill to camp. Rick was able to walk back to camp because it is an uphill climb. Once back at camp he sat on the walking bridge that goes over the little spring and hung his foot down in the ice cold water. He sat there as long as he could take it, which wasn't very long, but it is very cold so did what he was hoping it would do and that was numb it. He of course chugged down a couple cold barley pop's to help with the pain. The pain subsided and the smile got bigger.

That night around the fire there were several nominations for the white bags. Will Blair out of desperation, realized that he might be guilty again, so he nominated Jake for splitting wood and a sliver of wood hit him on the ear. He then said, another one hit him, so that make two and Jake should be nominated for unsafe handling of an axe. However, Jake turned the nomination back on him and asked him how many times, would he have to be hit before moving to someplace safer? That caught a few chuckles from around the fire. However, the winner was Blair again for the night but it was not for the wood chips, but for wearing the white bags today and having them backwards on his horse. The Cowboy Code of Conduct plainly states they will be worn proudly and correctly. Some people are just rebels!

Tuesday Aug 7th:

Today started out as you would expect, with Rick walking backwards down the hill to camp for his morning coffee. His smile and determination were still all intact so we didn't even ask if he was going. We all knew he was.

Today can be a very challenging day as the plan is to get the cowherd up Screamer Hill. After several years of doing this, the cattle have some idea as to what we are attempting to do which can make it easier or make it tougher depending on what the cattle want to do. About daylight the cattle started stringing by the cabin headed down the creek to the gate in the bottom of the horse

pasture at the bottom of Screamer Hill. Once saddle and everyone mounted, Taylor started gathering the remaining horse pasture while I rode to the bottom of Screamer Hill to open the gate. If you attempt to go up a single file trail with the herd all at once you end with a real problem as the cows push the smaller calves off over the side of the trail, which makes the calves all end up in the back with no idea where mom is, or has gone. Their instinct says to go back to where they last nursed. However, when I rode down to open the gate expecting to see a couple hundred head of cattle, there was only a handful of about 50 head. The gate was still shut so I searched for tracks to see if maybe the cattle had gone around the gate, but did not find any tracks. I opened the gate and dropped in behind about half of the cattle and told the others with me to drop in behind the next group and bring them to the top. I cautioned people that cattle don't have lungs like a horse, so you need to move the pace they want to move, which is very slow up a steep hill like Screamer. Once I got to the top with my group, we would enter Mother Up Park and wait and hold my cattle until the very last animal was up the hill and in Mother Up Park. Mother Up Park is called this because that is where we let the calves who have lost track of mom, find mom so that we can continue on up the trail. I sat there about 45 minutes before the drags showed up. However, there was one slight problem. We were missing half the cattle that we had had the day before. I was pretty sure I knew what had happened. I took half the people with me and we continued on up the trail to Lunch Break Park with our herd. I sent the other half back down the trail and told them where to go to look for the missing cattle. Those that didn't want another couple times up and down Screamer Hill, went with me and those that loved the adrenalin rush went with Taylor and back down the hill they went. Taylor and his bunch did find the lost cattle and got them caught up with the rest of the herd at Lunch Break Park.

These trips have lots of things happening that people see as well as about as many things going on behind the scenes that people don't see. We had one happen this trip that maybe we are the only one's who will see the humor in it, but I am going to tell it anyway.

On every trip, one of the things that my wife is a master at, is figuring out how to improvise for something that is missing for the cooks. Maybe it is an ingredient, a food item, or a piece of equipment needed to cook something, but she is a master at solving the problem which is no small task, when you are 8 hours from the grocery store. Well on this trip we were missing something, but she knew where to go to get a replacement for it. We were in the Dry Fork camp and whatever it was that was needed, we had at the Lake Creek Cow Camp. Since the cowboys were going to be gone all day, she had all day to solve it and it was only going to take about 3 hours round trip to get to Lake Creek and back. My wife, with 27 years experience doing this, knows you never waste a motion. Since at the end of the week when we leave, everything has to be packed out and since you are going, you take something out so you don't have to account for it on the last day. There is always garbage that can be taken out. A group this size creates a rather large amount of garbage, even though we try and burn what we can. She threw two bags of garbage in the back of the gator as well as a fly trap that we had hanging outside the cabin which had filled with flies. There is a liquid inside the bag which attracts the flies, the flies crawl in and can't get back out. Well in the process of loading the garbage she punched a hole in one of the fly bags and the liquid seeped out into the bed of the Gator. As Alice drove one Gator out and Gracie the other, Alice smelled this horrific dead smell, that smelled like a very dead bloated cow. Once Alice realized where the odor was coming from she stopped, picked it up and put it in another garbage bag she had, and in the process, managed to get the wonderful smell of rotting flies on her hands. It wasn't

too bad driving out of there, because the speed she was traveling kept most of the smell going behind her. As long as she kept going it wasn't too noticeable. Once on top, she and Gracie unloaded the two bags of garbage and shut them in the horse trailer so bears can't help themselves. The leaking bag of dead flies they threw on the back of the flatbed pickup. Gracie and Alice got in the other pickup and started driving to the Lake Creek Cow Camp. As they headed up the road, Gracie's face was starting to turn red at this horrific smell that was radiating from her boss. She rolled the window down and leaned her head out the window. Apparently, my wife had become somewhat nose blind to it by now, or was inwardly chuckling to herself at Gracie's misery. Finally Grace couldn't stand it any longer and begged my wife to stop and let her ride in the back of the pickup. When Alice stopped laughing, Gracie said the outhouse actually smelled better than Alice did so she would never complain about having to clean the porta potties again. Alice stopped at the first spring they crossed and washed her hands.

Crew member Brian had not been with us yet this week because he had been attending his grand father's funeral. Alice and Gracie had left the extra Gator on top for Brian so that when Brian arrived later that day, he could drive it back down to camp and join us for the rest of the week. When Brian pulled up to the pickup, the sack that contained the fly trap was swarming with black flies. Brian could smell it from 30 yards away. Before we had left home that week Taylor's dog had gotten into some mouse poison and we had been treating her all week with Vitamin K, not knowing if she would be okay or not. When Brian left, he knew that she had eaten some mouse poison and when he pulled up to the pickup, he assumed she had died and it was a dead dog in the bag covered with black swarming flies. He just left the bag sitting on the back of the pickup because he assumed if they had left her there they obviously wanted to take her off the mountain to bury her. I can only imagine what went through people's minds driving by the next couple days.

That evening we had the white bag nominations. By day three people generally give up any loyalties to anyone, so all is fair game. Todd Skaggs was nominated for walking up to one of the outhouse tents and throwing the flap open to go in, only to discover it was already occupied. Seems the occupant forgot the international occupied sign, which is leaving your hat outside the door on the ground. So Todd was nominated and called Peeping Todd the rest of the week. There were not many nominations tonight, so a vote was called for and Peeping Todd was the grand winner for the day. Once he realized he had the White Bags, desperation took over so he squealed on his wife. Now that is truly riding for the brand! As he retold the nomination and nominated his wife, and we heard the very serious charges, it left me with no choice, but to reopen the nominations for another vote. In each of the outhouse tents we have a bucket of lime. The bucket has a lid on it and periodically, we toss a scoop down the hole which helps the breakdown of solids, as well as keeping the flies and odor down. Well Michelle used the facilities and assumed it was a bucket of real lime's, so that when the odor got bad enough, you opened the bucket and put a lime slice under your nose! With a revote, Lady Lime as she was known the rest of the week was the hands down winner. I do not know if Peeping Todd and Lady Lime were on speaking terms when they went to bed or not. Actually Florida gave us the idea that you can vote as many times as you want and change the rules anytime you want from us. Todd, I have to admire you, because I am not tough enough to nominate my wife and didn't, for her traveling fly circus.

Wednesday Aug 8th:

Today is always a hectic day for the camp crew as we have to break down camp, load it, transport it to the next camp, set it back up and have dinner ready when the cowboys come riding in. On top of all that, we have to have a smile on our faces when the cowboys come in and look like we have done nothing all day. My crew is absolutely excellent at that! We have had pretty much the same crew for the last several years so everyone knows their jobs and just put's their head down and do it. We all know that the heavy stuff has to be set up for the kitchen and cooks before anything else is done. The great thing is, I don't have to do any instruction as to how to go about it or set something up. Man I love my crew! The only slight glitch we had when we got to camp was that we had discovered a bear had been visiting and from the looks of the sign he had been there more than once. Since we hadn't yet seen the bear we didn't know whether to be concerned or not. Generally a black bear is a garbage hound and that is the only reason they hang around and they generally are not dangerous, as long as you don't leave food or garbage out. As we were setting up camp the kitchen crew happened to look up and here was mister bear standing in the timber just watching. He appeared to be just a yearling so not very big. He came and went off and on for a couple hours and then we never saw him again.

Taylor and the guest picked up a small bunch of cattle right in the horse pasture so there trip was a little slow right from the start, but you must remember a cow doesn't walk very fast in the first place. Our cattle are extremely gentle and quiet so they might walk a little slower than most cattle. The cowboys picked up cattle as they trailed on from the day before and the numbers kept getting larger as they went. Which was exactly the plan. Once the cowboys reached Lunch Break Park they stopped to eat their lunches and soak up the sun for a few minutes before continuing on up the trail. It was at that time they noticed a mustached stranger amongst them, sitting and eating lunch. Turns out it wasn't really a stranger but Rick Leeson's youngest daughter who just happened to have a fake mustache in her saddle bag. For the rest of the week she was known as Moustacha Jones. She looked like a bonafide cattle rustler!

The cowboys rode into camp around 6:00 with a tired droop to their shoulders but a smile running ear to ear. The horses were tired, but their steps quickened the closer they got to camp as the horses new exactly where camp was and that the day would soon be over. The cooks had dinner ready and a cold drink and both were welcomed by all. Some just sitting in a chair around the fire enjoying not feeling the rocking of the horse underneath them. However, after a cold drink most got up and headed to the chow line.

There was lots of chatter around the fire and good natured ribbing as people relived the full day of gathering and looking for cattle. And of course Moustacha Jones came up in more than one conversation. That night around the fire, the nominations for the white bags were Alyssa Brugman for trying to saddle someone else's horse that morning. Gracie one of our cooks was nominated for going to the spring before daylight that morning to fill a coffee pot and grabbing a string out of her bag that she thought was attached to her flashlight. When she arrived at the spring she reached down the string to grab her flashlight and discovered she had grabbed a pair of socks. I am guessing like mittens, she keeps them tied together so she doesn't loose them. She claimed exhaustion was the reason, but college students never get the chance to claim to little sleep, otherwise why would they stay up all night?

However the nomination and the winner was the Leeson family with no particular individual in mind. 4 of the 5 Leeson's had worthy nominations so we just gave the bags to the entire family. Just like Florida, justice will be served!

Thursday Aug 9th:

After breakfast the cowboys saddled up and rode to the bottom of Lake Creek to gather the tired herd that they had dropped the day before. Cattle once hitting the lush pastures of Lake Creek generally don't travel very far so the gather didn't take to long. Then the long uphill trek to the top of the divide and over into the next drainage where the next pasture in the rotation was. We were guessing the cattle would stay in this pasture about 3 weeks before being moved to the next pasture. The cowboys rode back into camp around 3:30 to unsaddle, put their saddles away and say goodbye to their mounts. People always go away with a new found respect and admiration for the horse. They realize how tough and athletic they really are and that those horses, kept them more safe than they could have ever imagined and the whole time acting like they wanted to do it! There is always a tear or two shed at this time. However, the thought of a hot shower is a pretty good motivator to get people finished and on to Bear Lodge. Matter of fact one of our guests won the white bags that night because of her haste to get to Bear Lodge.

After a hot shower and putting on clean clothes it makes people think it's time to kick their heels up a little and celebrate. That night after dinner Dee May won the white bags for the evening as Allyssa was going to ride with her to Bear Lodge and Dee took off before Alyssa was all the way in the car. Dee hit the window button to roll up the window but Alyssa still had her arm out the window, which got rolled up in the window as Dee took off. We could hear Dee saying, hurry up and get in the car which was rather hard, when your arm is rolled up in the window.

Nick Bates won the Double Rafter Buckle playing the cowboy trivia game we always play. We always have a drawing for the white bags so that someone can take them home after we have all autographed them. Will Blair won the drawing for the white bags and got to take them home. It was an amazing trip with a great bunch of people and many of them have already booked another trip in the future. People become very close during these weeks. Thanks to all of you! Stay safe!