

2018 Sept Trip Report

Sunday Sept 17th:

We picked up 21 guests in Sheridan and had incredible weather to start the week. There always appears to be a calm with us when we pick people up, but that is only because you really don't know what is going on behind the scenes. There is a lot of planning and hopefully some good luck in putting it all together. One of the biggest issues we have is that the horse pasture isn't big enough to hold all the horses all summer long, so we run the horses in another pasture on the 60,000 acres of mountain. We used to run them with the cow herd but the horses discovered after a period of years, that there was no fence on the southern border of the allotment and they could go wherever they wanted, going south. We actually had to fly the mountain once to find them. Anyway, we always send a couple cowboys out the day before the trip to gather the horse string and bring them into the horse pasture, so that when the guests arrive, it appears we are all ready to go. Well a couple cowboys spent all day looking and found most of the horses, but not all of them. Horses are just like people, they form a group that has similar interests, so out of the 35 horses we were looking for, they might be in 4 separate herds. Now I don't know if they sort themselves as to conservatives, liberals, independents, libertarians or just how they do it, but you will see similarities in each group. Anyway, we didn't find most of the horses until about 2 hours after the guests had arrived. Every time this happens some of the horses that we are short, are ones that are desperately needed in the guest string. This of course always causes some tension until we get finished with the horsemanship clinic because we have found how people rate themselves as riders, and how we rate them as riders, is not necessarily the same. There is so much more to riding a horse than just getting up there and sitting there.

After the horsemanship, we headed south out of the horse pasture making a couple hours swing, to sort of get people settled in with their horses and the tack adjusted to fit everyone. This also allows us the chance to sort of watch and see if we need to make horse swaps or not. It's a win win for everyone involved. You can't have a good week if you aren't comfortable on your horse. That first evening we had one guest who was having a hard time breathing so we were naturally monitoring his health. At 9000 feet, about once a year we always have to haul someone to the valley as they just can't get enough air. We find that people who come from lower elevations sometimes really struggle with the thin air, especially if they come with any sort of health issues before arriving.

Monday Sept 18th:

We gathered Lake Creek with the idea of meeting at the road that crosses the creek with the cow herd. Once gathered up, we had a couple of sick calves that needed hauled to the valley because they too were having breathing issues. They like some of our guests, just can't handle the high elevation and the only way to save the calf, is to haul he and mother to the lower elevations of the valley. We had two sick calves, so we cut the two of them out with their mothers and trailed them over to the horse trailer. Now lots of people like to do it the buckaroo way, which means you rope and drag them into the trailer. This usually accomplishes several things and none of them good, other than making some buckaroo think he has done something impressive. It is never easy or good for the animal being roped, it's hard on horses, cowboys, and equipment, so why would anyone who owns one want to do it that way?? We just open the trailer door and ease the pair or animals over to the trailer, give them a little

time to think things through and then they get right in the trailer. We have done it this way the last 5 years and have not had to rope one single animal to get them in the trailer. Remember this is out in the middle of the pasture with no corrals or panels. We work very hard to make our cattle gentle and easy to handle. By handling cattle this way you have gentle cattle, cattle that gain more weight faster, and give you the consumer, a better eating experience, putting more dollars in my pocket. Because they are gentle, they don't hurt themselves, tear up equipment or run off when they see you coming. After one of our guests who is an accomplished horseman watched us do this, he asked. "How long does it take to train your cattle to load this way" My response was that it takes longer to train the cowboys than it does the cattle. Cattle want to do what's right, you just have to be smarter than the cow to accomplish it! My wife left us at that point and rode back to camp to help with the dinner. When she arrived at camp she discovered that our guest with High Altitude sickness was not doing any better so she transported him to the valley to the hospital to be checked out.

As we gathered the herd we found 3 yearling steers in with the cows, which were supposed to be in the Bear Trap Pasture, so we took them with the rest of the herd. Yearling steers are just lovesick teenage boys, so that is why you find them scattered all over the mountain where they are not supposed to be. I might also argue that yearling steers have better judgment than most 16 year old boys. However, it wasn't too bad as they were only 3 miles from the correct pasture.

That night around the fire we had the White Bag nominations. Donald Gray from San Francisco was nominated for allowing a low hanging branch to take him out of the saddle and plant him on the ground. Now the reason he was nominated, was because everyone else in his group rode around the tree with the low hanging branch. Karen Bates nominated my wife for getting their group lost as they were gathering cattle today. Now my wife not to be deterred explained she wasn't lost- she knew the pacific was on her right and the Atlantic was on her left! Craig Mead was nominated by Roy. Craig had gone and looked for some more missing horses and when they found them, Roy rode casually up to the horses, stepped off and put his arm around one of the missing brumbies, and asked Craig to get off and get a piece of rope off his saddle and hand it to him. As Roy is standing there with his arm around this horse, the other horses are starting to think that maybe it's time to go somewhere, where there aren't any cowboys. They are starting to get nervous and Roy knows it's only a matter of seconds until the horse he is holding decides to leave. In a much more urgent tone he communicates to Craig to hurry and get off his horse and get that extra piece of rope. Craig in his haste has his feet go out from under him when they come down in the mud. This of course sets Craig right on his butt in the mud, so Craig was nominated for his unorthodox dismount. However, the winner was Mike Brown. Mike was a rather inexperienced horseman and reached back to get his lunch out of his saddle bags while still sitting on his horse. With reins, gloves and other items, he dropped his lunch bag on the ground when he pulled it out of his saddle bag. Mike was in a real predicament now, because he knew if he got off to get his lunch, he wasn't going to be able to get back on and Mike was sure his travelling buddies weren't going to help him, so he had a terrible decision to make. While he is contemplating this, his horse drops his head to graze and steps over the bridal reins. Mike started pulling the reins but the reins were between the horse's front legs. He pulled once, then twice and then a third time. Fellow guest Joe from Florida said, your reins are tied in a knot, Mike ignored and pulled again. Joe again says, your reins are tied in a knot. At about this time the 15 watt bulb lights up, and Mike realizes if he unties the knot in his horses reins, the reins can then be put back in place. Winner was Mike Brown-

Tuesday Sept 19: Gorgeous day. Rode down to Lick creek, then down Bear Trap to fossil tank and then straight up the mountain side to get to the top of the next divide. I will honestly say this route while faster is a little steep. As I looked back down the hill at the riders winding up the canyon side coming towards me you could see the tension is several by the way they were sitting in their saddles. Of course once we got to the top then we had to go down the opposite side which is just as steep only covered with timber. Came out just above the dry reservoir just like I told everyone we would. Just because I was in a very thick stand of pine tree's doesn't mean I didn't know exactly where I was. Scared the crap out of Mike Brown and Tony. Just because you are headed down hill and the horses tails falls up over your shoulder doesn't mean it's steep! We had lunch at the head of Taylor Creek and then up through Horse Apple Park and back to Dead Calf reservoir, where we picked up a few yearlings. We gathered this handful of yearlings and headed on up Bear Trap. (Just a quick little side note- most all names of places have a story to go along with the name) By the time we got to the suspension fence that separates Bear Trap from Dayton Gulch we had about 35 yearlings. Thirty Five is about half of the number that I had hoped to find today. Rode into camp around 5:00pm with lots of pondering, I wonder where the rest of the yearlings are?

That evening around the fire we had the White Bag nominations and there were several good ones. Rick Fender was nominated for his comment that by the time we got back to camp today everything hurt except his ears!

Chuck Holbrook- being from Alabama and with his drawl was having a hard time pronouncing Mike so that the rest of us could understand what he was saying. Someone got bold and nominated me for my trail blazing skills. This is really not a real bright thing to do. You must remember, I control absolutely every aspect of their lives for the rest of the week. They have no modern form of travel, have no idea where in the world they really are, and have no idea which way to go to get out of there! Fortunately common sense prevailed and I was not the winner!

Paul Byrne was nominated for saddling the wrong horse that morning. This actually happens on just about every trip. However, the winner was Donald Gray from San Francisco. While most people ride along through the timber and put their arms out in front to break or push the branches away from their body, Donald did no such thing. He used his entire body to remove the branches from in front of him. We discovered that the reason he was doing this, was that he had both hands securely hanging onto the saddle horn! It's okay Paul, it is said chicks dig scars, and I know your wife had the proud smile of one who was using her hands to push the branches out of the way! Mike and Tony were both nominated on a double just because the two of them were absolutely terrified all day long. I can honestly and proudly proclaim that we will gladly torture anyone!

Wednesday Sept 19th:

Woke up to one of those hazy overcast mornings that you really can't explain. Is it going to clear, start raining or snowing? This always makes it difficult to figure out how much clothing do you need to take for the day? By mid morning though it had cleared completely and we had a bright blue sky with fall crispness in the air. It was an absolutely perfect day for punching cattle and guests.

We rode out of the horse pasture and split into several different groups to go ride different areas and then join back up in the bottom of Dayton Gulch with hopefully all the yearling steers that we

were looking for. By the time we got all gathered up it appeared we had about 85% of the cattle found. On the mountain you always have to use the philosophy of a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, so we took what we had found and headed to the Little Horn with them. Jake took the Gator down into the Little Horn with his bedroll and groceries. Trent had gone down a day earlier to get the water tanks running and make sure the gates were all shut. When Jake showed up with the Gator Trent drove the Gator back to camp and left his horses in the Little Horn. Jake would just ride his horses and babysit the herd of yearling steers for a couple days until we came along with the rest of the cowboys two days later. The plan was to move the cow herd the next couple days to their next pasture in the rotation. We had to leave Jake down riding herd on the steers because it is like leaving your teenage boys at home over the weekend with a promise to be good. It just never happens. So Jake was keeping track of the steers until we showed back up on Friday to trail them off the mountain. We trailed the yearling steers to the other side of Elk Draw and then had the 3 hour ride back uphill all the way to camp. We rode back into camp around 5:30pm. People were completely spent by the time we rode back into camp. Something about sitting in a leather rocking chair all day long is very exhausting. Many people ate dinner and went right to bed. However, we had the white saddle bag nominations anyway! Stuart Fass from New York was the grand winner tonight. While Stuart put up a great rebuttal, it had little effect on the fact that he was the only one nominated, so was also the grand winner! When you have been saddling your own horse for the last 3 days and have done it right every time, why then do you decide on day four to not do it right? We honestly don't know the answer to that. Just before dark tonight it started to look like we might get a change of weather this evening.

Thursday Sept 20th:

About 1:00 in the morning, the thunder and lightning started popping and was shortly followed by rain. There is nothing more exciting than when one of those mountain thunderstorms start dancing right over the top of your tent. The clap of the thunder was so close, you could fill the ground rumble under your bed. At that point, you feel really insignificant in the scheme of things. You also realize there is no reason to fear it, because there is absolutely nothing you can do about it. The 16 oz. canvas tent makes you feel secure and safe because you know if you get hit, you will probably never feel it. The rain pounding down on the tent makes you thankful for all the small comforts in life that you take for granted on a daily basis. You are truly alive, you can feel the ground pounding with each clap of thunder and hear the rain running down the sides of the tent, yet you are still warm and dry! This went on for about an hour and then stopped and cleared, and there was nothing in the sky but bright clear stars twinkling away by 3:am. At daylight you could see that our camp at 9000 feet was above the cloud ceiling. As you looked West and North, you could see the clouds hanging in the canyons. Everyone in the valley looking up at the mountains thought we would be getting clobbered, but we were above all of it and it was crystal clear for us. As the morning rolled on fog rolled up and down the canyons we would be clear some and fogged in some. The plan for today was gather all the cow's and calves and trail them to the East Burnt Pasture. We gathered the cow herd and found 2 more cows with sick calves that had to be hauled to the valley. We loaded the two of them and then Craig and I headed to the valley, while the rest of the cowboys trailed the herd on down the trail to the East Burnt Pasture. As we drove off the mountain with the two sick pair, the fog on the face of the mountain gave you visibility for about 15 yards. It was very thick and the travel was slow. Once we dropped into the valley we were

under the cloud bank so drove on to the ranch and dropped the two sick pair off and then headed back up the mountain. It was obvious the valley had more rain than we had had.

That night we only had one white bag nomination and winner. Due to the rain the night before the branches were wet and some actually had snow on them. Brian showed Tony that if you bent the branch far enough back, and then it let it go sailing, the person riding behind you got soaked. Tony thought that looked like a good trick to pull on someone so he waited for just the right person to get behind him, (I'm sure that would be his tent mate) then pushed the branch ahead of him as far forward as he could then let it fly. Yes, you are correct if he pushed the branch in front of him, that meant he was the first one going to be hit by the wet branch, and yes he did! The skies cleared after dark and we had a clear cold night with the temperatures hovering in the mid 20's.

Friday Sept 21st:

The last day of the trip is always a big day as there are lots of moving parts that have to come together to finish up the week on a positive note. Today we split and the guests and some crew members gather the yearling steers that we had taken to the Little Horn several days earlier, and trailed them off the mountain to the valley. The rest of the crew stays in camp, breaks it down and packs it away, then loads everyone's luggage, then onto the valley. The trick is that we have to get vehicles off the mountain and taken to the foot of the mountain where the cattle and cowboys will show up. If we don't get the vehicles there, they have no choice but to sit and wait for us or it's another 3 hour ride a horse back to the ranch. However, the packing Gods were smiling today and everything went without a hitch. We had a beautiful day of fall weather got everything done that we set out to do. If everything goes as planned we will all meet up at the Holiday Inn around 5:30 pm. I will be there with everyone's luggage and they can go get a hot shower and remember what civilization is all about. These weeks have such an impact on a person's life, because they so appreciate all the little things that you take for granted every single day. Things like hot running water, you never give a second thought to, until you don't have it. When it is raining or snowing and you are in a motel room instead of a 16 oz. canvas tent. Those simple pleasures bring real joy to your life as you realize God gave you the chance to witness, to never take things for granted! Once everyone had showered and showed up for the final night banquet, we heard numerous people, who were experienced riders, say that had never witnessed a pucker factor like today's ride, anytime in their life on the back of a horse! I can't thank all of you enough for giving us the chance to show you what our lives are like and how God has so blessed us with you. Thanks and Happy Trails!

Dana