

## OCT 2, 2005 **CLEAN UP RIDE:**

I don't know if clean up ride is the correct name for this trip this year as it certainly had it's full slate of firsts. I picked up the guests in Sheridan and the first question I asked was "Do you have rubber gloves"? (Note that is gloves not glove for some of you) The answer was a unanimous **NO!!!** Since the weather was calling for a little moisture and I had gone through a major blizzard on the Sept 2004 trip I pulled into Shiptons and said I wasn't leaving until they had the proper rubber equipment.

When we arrived on Sunday at the top of the mountain I said get your house keeping set up, then report to the barn as we are making a circle this afternoon. I had talked to the game warden two days earlier and he had seen some cattle about 2 miles north of the cabin in a little park we call Rubber Boot. We trailered to Rubber Boot, jumped our horses out and started our circle. We hadn't been in the saddle more than 15 minutes when we came upon a little group of cattle. They certainly didn't act like there was a storm brewing as they were very content where they were. Since I had heard the weather report and knew what was coming I decided to jump the cattle off the rim in Rubber Boot so that we could get some more country gathered before dark. It was a real fight trying to get the cattle off the rim. We had one cow in the group with a 10 day old calf and she wasn't about to take off in the lead and leave her baby to the drags where Maverik was working. The yearlings (being teenagers) were waiting for someone to take the lead and show them where to go (even if it's wrong). We did finally manage to get them to the bottom and across the creek. Once this was accomplished the cattle headed up Lick Creek where we wanted them to go. We gathered as we went and kicked everything we found that evening into Dayton Gulch. I wanted the cattle out of Lick Creek because the fence at the bottom of Lick Creek is not real good and in the event of major snow I didn't want the cattle to be able to drift with the storm and end up in the Dry Fork. If they ended up in the Dry Fork there was probably going to be another clean up ride only it would be looking for us instead of cattle. We got into camp right at dark and Meg had a hot meal all ready. The quote of the week came at that time. John CRASH Thornton asked out English cook "What was for dinner? She replied Chicken Satay. A few minutes later John asked again "What was for dinner? Megs reply in here English brogue, "I see the wheel is still turning but the HAMPSTER IS DEAD!" The fog was rolling in and out and you could just feel the snow that was on the way. I was sure glad we had the cabin for cooking. About 9:00pm that evening people headed to bed and it was just starting to snow. At least we were headed to bed the first night with dry beds. At 3:20am the next morning my tent collapsed on Maverik and myself. Now Maverik thought the devil had him and while he was doing lapse on top of my head, the thought went through my mind, How much snow do we have to collapse my tent. I was going to just lay there until daylight but knew I would be soaked by then so decided to get dressed and head to the cabin for the remainder of the night. Now if you have ever tried to dress with a wet tent covered with snow laying on you, I will tell you, I think I understand what a baby must go through being born other than it wasn't 98.7 degrees. I was really having a good nights sleep until then. The snow had insulated the tent and I was as warm and comfortable as could be. As Meg came to the cabin the next morning around 5:30am she chuckled as she noticed my tracks in the snow. The thought went through my mind as I

wandered toward the cabin with my sleeping bag draped over my head to keep it out of the fast accumulating snow, I wonder if everyone else's tents stayed up?

MONDAY OCT 3<sup>RD</sup>. After breakfast I headed to the barn to get the horses in and get the day started. The snow had let up some and there were a few big lazy flakes still falling. Once the horses were caught and saddled I heard a vehicle coming and Chris Ellsworth showed up to help for a couple of days. I was so very glad to see him as the biggest problem I had with the storm coming was that I was the only one who knew where all the holes were that cattle would hole up in during a storm. With Chris there that allowed me to cover twice the country in the same amount of time. With the returnees I had plenty of help just not people who knew the country intimately. Once Chris was saddled we headed out and boy did it start snowing at that point in time. But since this was the real deal and it was very very important that we got the cattle out of the high country and into the Little Horn drainage that day, it was a go regardless of the weather. We rode back into camp around 5:00pm feeling very good about what we had accomplished. The storm had broken around noon and we really had a very nice afternoon. We had tallied 264 head through the gate which meant that we had missed about 75 head of cattle in our gather on the Sept trip. It just shows you how difficult it is to get a good gather up there.

TUESDAY OCT 4<sup>TH</sup>. It was snowing real hard this morning so it was time to look at plan B. After consideration of Plan B it was decided to look at Plan C. After reviewing Plan C. I decided it was time to invoke Plan D. Plan D was that my two packers, Dan Fuller and Craig Mead would drive the two pickups to the valley and have mom bring them back in the afternoon. They headed to the valley around 10:00am, by 1:00pm I decided it was time to go to Plan E. I called mom and told her to stay put and not bring the packers back at this point in time. I didn't want my mother driving out by herself. She just doesn't shovel as good as she used to. We spent the day in camp learning Cheese Head card games and boy did Amy kick our butts on every game we played. It was hard for me to concentrate as my mind kept wandering to the snow storm and just how severe was this storm really going to get. I wasn't the least bit concerned about our safety as we were at the cabin but would we be able to get my packers back in to help with the packing. Without the packers getting the rest of the week pulled off was going to be real challengeing.

WEDNESDAY OCT 5<sup>TH</sup>: The storm had let up but it was still snowing and it looked like we might be able to invoke Plan F for the day: I called dad and told him to haul my packers to Bear Lodge and if we could get Chris and his pickup to Bear Lodge he would pick up Craig and Daniel and bring them back to camp, and we would pack out that afternoon. Everyone started to pack with the plan of heading to the Little Horn that afternoon. I walked out to get the horses in and found the snow somewhere between ankle deep to knee deep just depending on where you stepped. My guess was around 14 inches of snow. Do to the wind the horses were deep in the timber on the Lick Creek side of the horse pasture. I really thought for a while they had left during the storm and we were in serious trouble. They finally showed up so I took them to the corral and shut them in and gave them the last of the feed which consisted of 3 bales of hay and 50 lbs of grain. After walking out in the deep blowing, swirling snow I decided to make another change of plans and go to Plan G. When I got back to camp I informed everyone of the change and they went from packing their belongings to unpacking their belongings and

planning on one more night at Lake Creek. The more I had thought about riding into the Little Horn after dark the more concerned I became about what the situation would be down there. What if Chuck Fullers' cows had torn the gates open and gone home and we ride in after dark and turn our horses out in the horse pasture not knowing that the gates have been torn open and we go out the next day and all of our horses are in the valley. We would then all be afoot in 14 inches of snow, a situation I didn't really want to get in. The only thing that would prove, was who had the biggest sense of humor!! Chris picked up Dan and Craig and they got into camp around 2:00pm. Boy was I glad to see them!! The skies broke about then and we had a gorgoues afternoon sitting in camp playing cards.

THURSDAY OCT 6<sup>TH</sup>. We started packing the next morning and everyone including the horses was wanting out of the high country. As we were packing the mules, Dos decided to see if Chris had a sense of humor and decided to take Chris for a little spin. She bolted as she saw the packers coming with her load. Now standing in 14 inches of snow, Chris couldn't keep his feet at that speed so decided a little body surfing would be the only way to keep up. Throwing himself down he figured he could body surf as long as she wanted to pull him. Dos finally got tired of the little game, stopped and Chris got up and with the snow melting down the inside of his shirt he announced that it had been rather enjoyable. The rest of the packing was rather uneventful. Chris left camp about 10 minutes ahead of us and hadn't even left the horse pasture yet when he found a lame steer standing in the timber in the horse pasture. I have no idea where this steer had come from or how long he had been in the horse pasture. He was to lame to travel very far so we left him hoping that he would stay put and I could get up next week and gather him up.

Chris, John, Shannon, Ken and card shark Amy were going to gather cattle on the way to the Little Horn, the packers were going to lead the pack string and hopefully the 13 remaining horses with Meg and I trailing. Well it went fine until we got to Lick Creek. Gizmo at that time decided he wasn't going to cross the ice on the creek and that he was going back to camp. Off up through the timber he went with me in hot pursuit, pulling down my rope as we were charging across snow covered logs and gopher holes. He ducked onto an old logging road and the horse race was on, with me building a loop saying unpleasant things about the genetic makeup of his ancestry. As we charged up the road I noticed up ahead a tree lying across the road about 2 feet off the ground and with branches sticking out all over. I thought, you are trapped now sucker, but Gizmo gathered himself and made a huge lunge that he was sure would clear the tree and leave me in the snow scratching my head. However, when the branches are 12 feet across you have to time your jump just perfect and not leave the ground 6 feet before the first branch, because that 12 foot jump then puts you landing perfectly in the middle of the tree, and that is just what he did. He came down with his front feet on the other side of the tree and his back feet on my side of the tree, landing with a mighty thud that knocked the wind out of him he struggled on across the tree. I went around the tree and at that point in time it was easy to catch him. When his wind returned he decided one more time to make a break for camp. Since I had a rope around his neck I let him go, then dallied up, and let him hit the end of the rope. With his eyes bulging out, and as air turned into a commodity he quickly became very agreeable. Meg and I picked up 4 horses that had stopped to graze on the west side of Lick Creek and leading Gizmo we caught up with the packers at the fence in the bottom of Dayton Gulch to find that the other horses had

disappeared. I told everyone to stay put and I would back track and find them. I caught up with them 2 miles later, Chris and his bunch of cowboys had found them and were holding them knowing that I would be coming for them soon. Once we had them gathered up it was a quiet trip onto the Little Horn. That afternoon we gathered the cattle in the parks and threw them into the lower park just above Robinson Crossing so that they would be ready to go the next morning without a lot of extra gathering. As we gathered the cattle John Thornton rode along beside the timber on the East side of the parks just incase there were some cattle in the timber. When we dropped the cattle Ken asked John Crash Lightning Thornton if it was as much fun to watch a cattle drive as it was to partake in one? I thought this was terribly funny.

FRIDAY OCT 7<sup>TH</sup>: We had breakfast early as we had a big day ahead of us. Right after breakfast Chris and I jingled the horses. Now I can honestly say, the horses weren't at all happy to see us. With the days of deep snow and hard work the horses looked pretty tough because they hadn't had a chance to really fill their gas tanks all week. But sometimes in the real world things aren't perfect. We saddled up and headed out to start the cattle down the canyon. I took the lower park swing and sent Chris and the others on the main trail. Going through the timber into Elk Draw, John Crash Lightning Thorntons' horse slipped on the greasy trail and down he went. John hit the ground pretty hard and Chris said it scared the crap out of him, but both horse and rider got up and the day continued. I'm sure with Ken and Shannon both being witnesses, John Crash Lightning Thornton wasn't about to give them any ammunition to make the story any worse than it actually was. The weather had turned nice and the cattle were hungry and most of the feed was up country, so we picked cattle up just about where we had picked them up the day before. When we got to Robinson I was concerned at just how tough it might be to get the cattle off the Beaver Slide. Yes, it was slicker than hell!! The cattle did take it pretty good though. Once the cattle were off, it was our turn. Everyone led their horses and down we went. And down we went is the appropriate term. Everyone, except the horses fell at least once. The horses never had to pick up their feet, they just slid. You can always tell it's slick when a horse is sitting down sliding and their back feet are in front of their front feet. I was sure glad to be off of it when we got to the bottom with everyone still up right. I was also very glad the pack string was coming down the Leaky Mountain side. The canyon was wet but not to slick and the trip off went okay other than like always the little group in the drags that never want to walk very fast. My understanding is that the drags had hell at the switchbacks as the cattle just wouldn't make the corners. Mother Nature certainly is a double edged sword. The snow storm gave a great gather but now that the storm was over the cattle were hungry and looking for something to eat. We didn't get the cattle into the road that day. As the cattle hit the bottom they were going to graze and it didn't really matter what we wanted. We kicked them through the state line and dropped them for the night.

We had a tough week due to the weather but it was the best gather we have ever had. A lot of that goes to the people we had that week. The following week I was on the mountain looking for the crippled steer that we had seen the last day when we left the Lake Creek Horse pasture. I found him in the bottom of Lake Creek but other than that the top is completely clean. Good Job People! I can't thank you enough for everything you do during the week.