

RUMINANT DIGEST # 18

HO! HO! HO! IT'S 7 BELOW! (it was last week anyway)

It's been a long time since the last newsletter. Much longer than it should have been but I have found as I try to write a newsletter, I need a fair amount of time to gather my thoughts and put them together. Gathering my thoughts is always a problem. You must remember, I own cows so just how many thoughts can there really be!! The issue seems to be the block of time. I have found I don't write worth a damn in the evening, nor when I'm in a hurry, nor when I have something pushing me on the ranch. So that gives me exactly 3hours, 42minutes and 12 seconds sometime in December to write. Well, on with my ramblings.

FAMILY NEWS:

Mom and Dad are fine and like myself, have had enough of winter already. Brendon and Erin bought a house this past August on the West end of Sheridan where there is very little traffic, so they are enjoying both the advantages of city water and sewer, yet close enough to out of town to have hay meadows across the street. They purchased the house and 5 acres from Kathy Barkers parents. With their 5 acres, I keep imposing and taking our injured animals that need to be doctored daily to him when Trent and I are on the mountain. This of course works very well for me and the injured animal. (usually a horse) Do you suppose there is any risk in an attorney practicing medicine?

Trent and Ali built a house on the outskirts of Dayton and are enjoying all the things that go along with home ownership, in, or next to a town. Mainly trying to keep Wrangler from eating somebody! They came back from Green River after Thanksgiving and driving down the interstate, hit a small piece of metal on the highway and of course ruined the tire. Now on an all wheel drive when you ruin one tire you get to replace all 4 tires. Trent's comment was, "Life was sure cheaper when I wasn't an adult".

Taylor is a sophomore at UW and seems to be doing just fine. He should be home shortly and I sure have lot's planned while he is here. I'm sure Trent looks forward to having someone who is a little younger and stronger than Me to work with. Taylor has been doing ROTC this fall and is really enjoying it. He was shocked at how good of shape he was in when he started, compared to the other kids in his class. (I wonder if running a post bar at 9000 feet had anything to do with it).

PS. Taylor got home last week and today slipped while cutting with a knife and cut his right index finger. We have surgery scheduled tomorrow to reattach the two tendons that he severed.

For you people who have been part of this operation while my brother Krayton was involved, his 3 kids are all married. Krayton and Druann have 7 grandkids and two on the way!

DOUBLE RAFTER BARN:

The family has decided instead of giving one another nick knock gifts for Christmas we are going to establish a fund for the continued maintenance of the barn. It was built in 1890 and Krayton restored it two years ago. We used it on the September Cattle Drive and the Clean Up Ride. We used it instead of the big heavy mess tents that we have put up in the past. The advantages are that the barn is dry and can be heated if the weather were to be nasty. It is a piece of our heritage that we wish to have continued for the family. We have had family Halloween parties, Christmas parties etc. etc. and it has a very magical atmosphere. I certainly have lots of memories as a child growing up in that barn, not all of them pleasant, but all memorable!

Blaine, Alice, Myself and one other teacher went up the face of the mountain to cut a Christmas tree for the teachers Christmas party that we had in the barn. Alice went along as she had the veto pen.

We walked up the face of the mountain and cut a tree that met her approval. She didn't like the one I liked, that was 30 yards from the pickup. Yes, it had a few flaws, but would have been a great conversation piece. The one we ended up cutting, we had to roll down the mountain, as it was too heavy to drag in the knee deep snow. Of course since the butt was much heavier than the top, it kept rolling in a semi-circle so we kept having to drag the butt back even with the tree. Trees don't roll as easy as you would think they would. Once to the bottom, we had to load it in the back of the pickup. There was no way we were going to lift it in the back of the pickup. With two of us lifting the butt up as high as we could, we then propped a busted fence post standing up under it. This post was about 4 feet tall. We then backed the pickup up as close as we could under the butt and standing in the back of the pickup, lifted the butt again and slid the post farther down the tree. This then created a fulcrum like a teeter-totter. Then by backing the pickup underneath it some more, we could then push the butt of the tree down into the box and by lifting the top we could kick the post out from under it and then slide it on into the pickup. The tree was somewhere in the neighborhood of 18 feet long and approximately 12 feet across. We were well camouflaged driving down the road.

THE CLEAN UP CLEAN UP RIDE:

After the Clean Up Ride we finally had a tally and it showed we were short 81 yearlings and about 30 cows. The first place to start hunting for cattle was back to the Little Horn and come back through the country that we had just gathered. We finished the Clean Up Ride on a Sunday and we waited until Tuesday to go back to the Little Horn. One of the big problems facing us, was, which horses are rested and sound enough to make the charge back through the canyon? Johnny, Trent and Myself left home way before daylight and trailered to the head of Dayton Gulch where I dropped Trent and Johnny off. They were going to reride Dayton Gulch, then East Burnt and then on down through the Little Horn Parks. I then took the trailer to Half Ounce Creek and jumped my horse out and went to the top of Burnt Mountain and was going to come down it to the forks of Wagon Box, then down the Leaky Mountain side of the river and meet Trent and Johnny somewhere in the vicinity of the Lower Drift fence. By going down Burnt Ridge this allowed me to glass all of East and West Burnt plus the Willow Basin country. As I got down towards the bottom of Burnt Ridge I could see some cattle in the Little Horn horse pasture. I swung over and picked them up. There was about 20 head of which half of them belonged to people on the other side of the mountain. Now under cowboy ethics, you never leave cattle on the mountain that time of year, so I took all of them with me. It was a real battle because the cattle from the other side of the mountain didn't want to go the direction I was taking them. It was completely against their instinct. Never in their lives had they gone home that way! They of course kept trying to climb high, then circle above me to go back towards home. The biggest problem was that the weather was absolutely gorgeous, so there was no weather incentive to go to a lower elevation. Every time I bent the cattle that were climbing high, the yearlings of ours would just stop walking and go to grazing. This made for a lot of up and down the mountain side on a horse that had no spare fuel in his gas tank. I also picked up some cattle that belonged to our neighbors so I wanted them to go to the bottom with us. The reason they had missed those cattle on the mountain is that they are rope happy, so you rope them for any reason. This of course creates very wild cattle that try and go hide anytime they see a human. On ranches where this takes place, it is generally an absentee owner, so the people doing the roping have no investment in the livestock. After a couple miles of fighting the cattle, they finally gave it up and started walking down the canyon with a little help from Murphy to keep them encouraged to stay in the herd! I was just about to Robinson Crossing when I ran into Trent and Johnny who had seen cattle above me under the rims and they had gone up there and gathered those. Once we had both herds thrown together, I headed back up country to take the pickup and trailer to the valley. When Trent and Johnny reached the bottom they had around 90 head of cattle including the strays. We had picked up about 45 of the 81 missing yearlings. I felt very happy about the gather. One

of the things going through your mind during these time of course is, where do I want to make my next circle. Two days later Trent and I headed back to the mountain. We had found about half of the missing cattle but the issue was, where was the other half? We had ridden the entire allotment at least once during the September Cattle Drive and the Clean Up Ride. Somewhere in there we figured there was another 40 yearlings and 10 cows. On the day before the Clean Up Ride started I had taken a load of supplies into the Kerns Cow Camp in the Dry Fork and standing right at the cabin, was a blue roan cow. This was on a Friday and the Tuesday before, Trent and I had seen this cow in Dayton Gulch. That meant she had walked that distance on her own and I had to wonder, how many cattle had gone with her and had all of them made it all the way through to the Dry Fork, or were there cattle hung up somewhere on one of those ridges? Those of you who have been in the Dry Fork as well as Lake Creek know it is a full days ride regardless of how you do it. This of course meant another ride down to Little Park. There was absolutely no sign of cattle being in Little Park this year. That in one sense was a good thing, but on the other, it also means, you have lots more country to ride.

The following week the early Elk season for cow Elk opened and Bob and Wyatt Main were hunting out of the Lake Creek camp. They walked to the top of the Little Horn rim and down by the Green Cabin they could see another little bunch of cattle. Bob called to the valley and got the message to us and up the mountain we went. I dropped Trent and Johnny off and Bob went with them and back through the canyon they came for the 4th trip through the canyon that fall. It was an all day joy ride as they couldn't find hide nor hair of the cattle they had seen two days earlier.

October 15 was the start of the regular Elk season and John Barker was in the Dry Fork hunting and looking for cattle. We got the message you need to come to the Dry Fork as there are cattle here. Trent, Johnny and myself left way before daylight, to get to be where we needed to be, to have enough time in the day to get home with any cattle that we might find. The snow on top of the mountain was close to 18 inches deep by now. We rode into the Kerns Cow camp in the Dry Fork around 9:00am and John had managed to gather up 16 head of mature cattle and had them in the hole right below the cabin. He also told us he had seen some cattle between the camp and Double Springs but was not able to get them gathered up. As we were riding up the mountain that day some hunters told us of some cattle they had seen in the bottom of the Pass. This left us with a quandary. We either had to split up or abandon one area that needed to be ridden and come back another day. Trent and Wrangler headed to Double Springs and Johnny and I gathered the cattle around the cabin and decided we would go up into the Pass and then instead of going up on top of the ridge, the way we had come that morning, we would go down the Pass with the herd and try and find the other cattle that the other hunters had seen. We had one hell of a long day. Not one cow had a clue where we were headed, nor were they in any hurry to go there. We pushed every step of the way. I used to hunt that lower canyon as a kid but the new fallen timber it gave us real problems. There used to be a good trail right up the bottom of the canyon next to the creek. The cattle seemed to want to take this route so I kept on pushing. Johnny lost his coat so had to leave me and head back up country to look for it. I went right down the bottom of the canyon until I was about ½ mile from coming out when the dead fall became so bad, I couldn't get through with the cattle. We were boxed in, so I had to turn them around and trail them back up the canyon for about a mile until I could catch another trail. Since it was single file, I got off my horse and led him the whole way until I had to intersect the other trail. My poor horse and I were both completely exhausted. By the time we reach October, you must remember the horse herd has had about 5 marathons during the summer. Their fuel tanks are completely empty and they are having to burn muscle tissue for energy to get the job finished. Then when you start the day before daylight and spend the first 5 hours walking in snow that is knee deep, you are just amazed they can even go at all. We rode into the X-X ranch just before dark. We had picked up the other cattle in the lower canyon but they belonged to the X-X and were actually on their way home. We dropped our cattle at the X-X ranch and rode back to the pickup. We loaded the horses and then had to head to the Rocky Bottom to pick up

Trent who had come out of the Dry Fork Canyon into the Little Horn. We were feeling very good once we picked up Trent as he had found 5 yearlings and one pair. The day was a huge success even though I felt like I needed a good stiff shot of whiskey. As far as we knew, we only had one group still in the Little Horn to get gathered. On the way home, Trent called Brendon in town and asked "How would you like to have a nice ride in the country on Saturday"? Brendon said sure, so back to the mountain one more time. We rode to the top of the Little Horn rim and glassed the country below us. After several minutes of glassing we had spotted 2 different bunches of cattle. Both were across the river from the Green Cabin and in two groups about ½ mile apart. I was almost giddy as I anticipated this to be our last trip gathering those 4 legged teenagers. It took the better part of an hour to ride over to West Burnt and when we were within ½ mile of the first group, we saw them coming toward us, but the way they were walking indicated they were leaving the country. We charged after them and the first half mile was wild and wooly, over logs, gullies, timber patches and muddy icy spots until they got winded and came to their senses. That meant we only had to find the other group of 3 and we would be on our way out the canyon with the last group. We trailed the cattle down to where we had seen the other group and left Johnny holding herd while Brendon, Trent, and myself spent two hours riding, looking for the other 3. We couldn't even find tracks. The elevation where we were now, was below snowline so we couldn't find any sign. Since we were trailing these cattle out the canyon, we were faced with a situation of either hitting the trail with them now or be caught in the canyon after dark. Johnny, Trent and Brendon headed down the canyon with 3 head. I was also hoping that maybe they would find more cattle. I headed back up country to get the pickup and trailer and head to the valley. We had delivery of the yearlings about 3 days later so I knew it would be at least a week before got back to the Little Horn to look for the other group of cattle that we had seen from the rim. Well it turned out to be 2 weeks before we got back. However, just before we left to go back, I had calls from two different hunters who had seen them. Seems they had moved about 3 miles west of where we had seen them. The second hunter who called me was Randy Barney and he told me where he had seen them. Since Randy knows the mountain as well as I do, he was able to easily convey to me where they were. The other hunter who had called was an out of state hunter from West Virginia and he said they were on the forks of Half Ounce and Duncom Creek. This I knew wasn't correct as Half Ounce and Duncom Creek didn't come together. However, I was glad to get a call that they had been seen. Trent and I trailered to Half Ounce, jumped our horses out of the trailer and headed to the forks of the Wagon Box. Once we were there we saw the 3 yearlings immediately. It took a couple hours to trail them out of there. They just really didn't want to walk up country from country that had no snow to an elevation that had snow. We reached the trailer with the 3 yearlings and figured it was still about 5 miles to the corrals by the highway. I said to Trent, "Lets just take our time and load them right here". It took about 20 minutes, but we managed to get all three of them to step into the trailer without using ropes, panels or anything to crowd them. We just used their natural instincts to help them convince themselves they wanted to load up. This saved at least 2 hours of riding across that high wind blown country and them maybe a whole bunch of shoveling to get backed up to the corrals to get loaded.

THE SLAP DOWN:

Some of you might have heard rumors of my demise and though greatly exaggerated, I did manage to have a horse wreck this fall, that left Trent saddling my horse for about 6 weeks. We were gathering some yearlings out of the cows on the Miller place, as we were trying to get all the yearlings put together for delivery about 3 days later. We had cut out 3 yearlings on the top of this hill and had to trail them to the bottom where we had left some other yearlings, we had gathered earlier in the day. It was probably 3/8 of a mile to the bottom and the other cattle. Yearlings, being the independent teenagers that they are, didn't want to leave the cows. We had gone off the hill about 200 yards when one of them decided to make a break for it back to the cows. We were on a slight slope and she took off

at a high lope. I had the angle on her and was just loping along above her, letting her run. It is amazing how smart and reasonable they can become once they are short of air. It's amazing how a shortage of air improves their IQ. Like any teenager, I knew once she realized I wasn't bluffing she would give in and go off the hill. As we are loping along on perfectly dry ground, it was like someone had a trip rope and jerked both front feet out from under my horse. We both went down to get a close up of Mother Earth. That was really the problem. If the horse had thrown me clear, I would have bounced and rolled. He went down on his right side and I was riding him all the way down. As his right side came down on the ground my right leg stayed right with him and he rolled onto my leg pinning me to the ground. I don't know how far we slid, if any at all, but there was sufficient force to snap two of my buckles off the back of my chaps on my right leg. When the dust cleared, the horse was on his right side with me still on him. My right leg was under him and my left leg was still on top of him. His 4 legs were pointed back uphill. With the weight of his body still on my right leg I couldn't feel if I was hung up or not, or if my right foot was still in the stirrup. I remember him trying to get up 3 or 4 times and each time rolling back onto me when he couldn't get up. I picked my head up at one point and motioned for Trent to come help me. Trent and Johnny were about 50 yards away when this took place. I remember my head pounding from the impact of the ground and generally feeling like I wasn't going to be able to jitterbug for a while. When I next looked up, Trent was standing there and the horse made one more effort to get up, and this time he was able to get on his feet. As he was stumbling to his feet, I knew he would probably step on me, it was just a matter of where? I guess I was lucky, as he only stood on the back of my knee when he got up. I just laid there letting my head clear. I hadn't heard or felt anything snap, so I assumed I was alright. There was a little blood on my forehead from where I had smacked the ground, but nothing serious. I'm guessing it took me a couple minutes to gather myself enough to be able to get back on. By this time I was having a lot of discomfort in my right shoulder and my left wrist. Now someday when you have nothing to do, I want you to try and get on a horse without using your right shoulder and left wrist. Once up there, we gathered the 3 yearlings who had decided to stand there and watch, however they were very good about it as we trailed them down to the rest of the cattle and then trailed them on into the corrals. There wasn't any pain sitting on the horse as long as he didn't move to fast. The next problem I encountered once mounted was "How do I hold my reins"? I could hold them in my left hand just fine as long as all I did was hold them. It was very painful to pull the reins any direction. I could hold them in my right hand I discovered, as long as I kept my right elbow tucked in tight next to my body. This allowed me about 4 inches of movement with the reins, however it was purely stop and go, there was no right or left without moving my elbow away from my body. I thought about holding them in my teeth but wasn't sure my shoulder could take that much body motion. I more or less just sat there and rode. Once we were corralled I discovered that riding was the easy part. Getting off was the challenge! We did go in for x-rays and discovered nothing was broken so I assumed it was muscles so I was going to have to just cowboy up and get through it. I did take the day off after the slap down, to help speed up the healing. Riding was tolerable as long as I didn't ride to fast. I was still having a terrible time with the reins and getting off. I even tried swinging my left leg over the saddle horn and sliding off the right side and it worked very very well until my feet hit the ground. I will say, I felt completely demoted as Trent has had to saddle my horse for me the last 6 weeks and Trent has me riding the beginner horses. I did try and rope a sick calf about 3 weeks after the wreck and I can say that was a new experience. Try swinging a rope without moving your shoulder! This happened the 18th of October and I have been able to saddle my own horse now for a week, as long as it is a short horse. I just don't have the range of motion to be able to throw a saddle up on Six Moons yet. However, I am getting there and no longer make a face like I'm giving birth while getting on or off. I feel I will be close to 100% sometime around the first of the year.

I want to wish all of you a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a happy NEW YEAR!! When I think of all the amazing people I've had the pleasure of spending a week with because of our cattle drives I know I am truly blessed! The people in this world are fantastic! God has given us the opportunity to share with you, a piece of life, that brings peace to one's soul. I thank you for that, and pray that your years are prosperous and eventful. It's amazing to me that other than my family, the second biggest sense of fulfillment in my life is the Cattle Drives. **THANK YOU AND MAY GOD BLESS!** Feel free to drop us a line sometime and bring us up to speed about your lives, or if you are driving through, we would love to get together just to chat and have a cup of good old black horseshoe floating coffee!

DOUBLE RAFTER COW BOSS