

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Twenty

A photograph of three horses grazing in a grassy field. On the left is a white horse, in the center is a brown horse, and on the right is a dark horse. In the background, there is a large, rounded mountain under a blue sky with white clouds. The entire image is framed by a decorative blue border.

**BELLE, THUNDER, SPANKY
AND
MATTHEW MIDGETT**

“What lucky rescue horses -- a dream life! It makes sense that you call them 'your family'. You brighten your reader's days (certainly mine)!”

Jaune "Quick-to-See" Smith



Come along and ride with us!

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XX

Part 2 of 3

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to Randy Clarke-Ianiero and Clem Ianiero-Clarke
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made this publication possible.

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window).

Our new neighbors have been stopping by . . .

A tom with a couple of his hens.

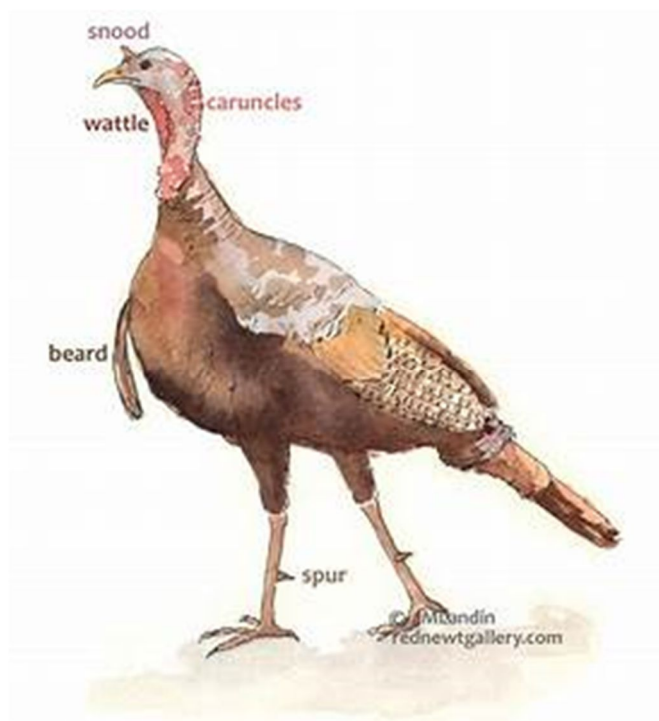


They sure are fun to watch - even the cats are entertained by them.



2020-07-13 - Wild Turkeys

This tom's 'beard' (or 'tassel') indicates he is about 2-3 years old.



MM

Our mild four-season climate means each season lasts just about 90 days - which encourages us to appreciate whatever it offers. So far, our summer monsoon rains have been scant - but we enjoy the green shade of trees, and the happy sound of birds as they go about their business during the long hours of sunlight.

Summer skies during a ride near Fort Stanton.



On a warm summer's day, Thunder leads us to some cool shade along a little stream.



He always knows the best way.



Looks like Spanky is ready for a nap in the shade. "Zzzzzz . . ."



Nope. Too much grass to enjoy.



The stream flow slows, waiting for monsoon rains to replenish it.



A refreshing drink is always welcome.



Farther along, lazy trout gather in a pool.





A little meadow provides a summer salad bar.



"Hey Spanky, I think this is the tastiest grass yet!"



Thunder gingerly picks a delicious musk thistle off its spiny stem.



It's a pleasant summer's day.



A quiet walk through the sheltering woods on the way home.



More summer news: friendly Mommie Doe looks like she will be giving birth any day now.



Yup.



"To be close to the earth, with the sweet smell of apples, and the owl in the pine tree a-wink'in his eye. The green leaves of summer . . ."

Paul Francis Webster

MM

New Mexico monsoon rains can be very specific - we've seen it rain on one side of the road and not the other (literally!) So when a wall of clouds formed overhead today, we thought it might be a good idea to head east - away from the storm - for our ride (of course, you never know which direction it might go).

The sky was split overhead.



Getting darker over the barn.



Just on the other side of the ridge, rain was falling on the Tularosa Valley below.



We started our ride at the old Salazar Ranch apple orchard (now State property), just west of Lincoln town. No rain here.



Some nice green meadows under cottonwood trees.



The horses enjoy a late lunch . . .



. . . and grazing along a shallow stream.





Come'on boys! We're going this way! They come a'running.



Sometimes we discover interesting examples of nature's creativity. Like this little flower 'bouquet', growing in the pocket of a boulder.



Away from the water, the terrain becomes classic desert Southwest.



Billy the Kid knew this canyon. Little has changed here since those days.



It's nice to get back to the stream.



To cool off . . .



Before heading home.



Thanks for joining us!
MM

Most afternoons, an interesting variety of species get together during happy hour here at the ranch.

We have deer, of course (that's Mommie Doe and her son, who usually comes along with her). If you look closely you will see Wilcox in the tree, and a turkey enjoying some leftover corn.



Apparently, Wilcox is saying something to the young buck, as his (very) pregnant mom enjoys an apple.



Wise Wilcox.



Wilcox was raised with deer.



That's his look-alike mom ('Mommie Cat') on the lawn . . . and some more turkeys who are not concerned about deer or cats.



This was cute. An apple rolled to just below Wilcox.



It was as though the young deer didn't want to eat in front of Wilcox, who seemed to say "Oh, for Pete's sake, cats don't even like apples you know!", but then turned around so not to make the deer self-conscious.



It worked.



Some people wonder if I get bored here.
MM

It appears that our annual monsoon season has finally arrived. Unlike monsoons in Asia and other places (which can rain for days on end), ours are relatively modest.

Mornings are clear and beautiful (and enjoyed by the deer).



Around noon, skies over the mountain begin to cloud up.



Quickly turning dark and ominous.



The horses know and seek shelter under the trees.



"Uh, I think we should head to the barn . . ."



Suddenly the rain comes down. "Hurry! Hurry!"



Cozy inside as rain pelts the tin roof like a Tommy Gun.



The brief torrent doesn't bother our visiting turkeys.



"Whaddaya mean Thanksgiving is just four months away?"



When the rain ended an hour or so later things were pretty muddy at home, so we headed for someplace drier. A 20-minute drive away, we found it. Although this looks like an irrigated pasture, it's just natural grass in a meadow where rainwater gathers (that's Thunder and Spanky grazing in the distance).





Belle hardly knows where to start. "Yummy! Yummy!"



On a dry plateau, cool temps made the horses frisky.



Summer rain brings bright flowers, like these Desert Four-O'clocks.



Next day, the process begins again.



MM

This time of year, especially, we keep our eyes on the sky.

Mornings are always clear and bright - great for getting chores done. Then as the day progresses . . .



. . . big, beautiful monsoon rain clouds begin to appear (sometimes forming a 'gateway to heaven').



I'd promised the horses a ride, and as the sky darkened, we weren't sure which way to go.



As we left the ranch, rain began to fall.



Not only that, the temperature dropped 20 degrees in just minutes.



Looking back at 'our' mountain, now shrouded in rain.



At Belle's suggestion we headed down into the valley near Carrizozo, where it might be clear. She was hoping to see her cow friends (I explained that the cattle were likely up at the high pastures by now).



"Damn. You're right. No cows . . ."



. . . but it was beautiful in the desert - with the rain clouds hugging our mountain in the distance.



Less than 30 minutes from home - a different world.



Even though the rain has been miles away, drying mud indicates some water recently seeped along this 'dry' wash bottom.



So, no deep arroyos like this one today! Sure makes a beautiful scene with those clouds in the background.



We limit our arroyo riding - and keep to those which have good 'escape routes'.



Nervous Spanky encourages us to hurry up. "Do I hear water?" No, Spanky, you don't. Stop worrying.



We knew the storms were just too far away today. Still, Spanky kept us moving.



Recent rains dislodged part of the arroyo wall on the right, sending it tumbling down. That is how they are formed and grow (note the 'escape route' on the left). Spanky wasn't reassured by seeing it.



Once out of the arroyos, he and Thunder waited for Belle (and me) to climb up.



"I was so worried . . ." Now rain is falling in the distance.



A cool drink before heading home (where it was still raining).



MM

Sometimes monsoon rains can be gentle and brief. Other times . . .

The rain can come down so hard it must be what the inside of a dishwasher feels like.



It's not unusual to receive more than an inch of water in an hour when a monsoon cloud forms and stalls overhead.



Times like these, the horses are happy to be in the barn.



The rain can end as quickly as it began - suddenly the sun comes out again. "So, what do you think?" "Looks good to me!" "You go out first".



"Hey! It's great! Nice and soft . . . ah!". "Oh Thunder, really. You are going to get filthy."



"I don't care, it feels wonderful!" "Have it your way. I just did my hair."



"Let's go play in the sunshine!" "Yuck! You're all muddy now!"



We head to Capitan Gap. Only 14 miles away, everything is dry there (Spanky keeps an eye on those clouds, just in case).



Sure makes for beautiful scenery . . .



. . . and extravagant cumulonimbus clouds.



Most folks around here prefer autumn, with its mild weather and fall colors. But we appreciate the drama and intensity of summer in New Mexico.



MM

2020-07-25 - Monsoon Memories

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During this season, life adapts to the ebb and flow of monsoon rains. Chores get done early, and evening skies become phantasmagorical with dramatic and colorful clouds.

Don't let the clear mornings fool you.



It's best to hurry back from the feed store and get things unloaded as the clouds build.



It's a fun time for Chile the barn cat, who supervises (and plays with baling twine).



Then comes the rain. We have had more than 5" in the past two days. During the deluge Cherry Creek reclaims its ancient route across the driveway.



Most of the rain is concentrated near the mountains, feeding rivers as far away as Texas and even Mexico. So we check the sky and head to where it is dry (for the time being).



Thunder leads us to a creek which he knows will be flowing with rainwater.



"Hurry up! It's over here!"



"Do we have to run?", complains Belle. "Sheesh!"



"See?"



"Nice idea, Thunder."



"Yeah, this is wonderful, honey!" says a grateful Belle. Chomp, chomp. "I just love salads."



They graze as we move along the limestone canyon wall.



Until we spotted an interesting cave. "You go ahead", says Belle. "It's too steep and rocky. Besides, I'm not keen on bats!"



They enjoy their snacks while I climb up for a look. Good horses.



An interesting find. In this sheltered spot high above the creek, with good visibility for protection, someone left signs of their presence. 'Bullseye' designs are common among many ancient tribes. These likely were created by the Jornada Mogollon people prior to the 15th century.



Their message is lost in the mists of time . . . but they are remembered.



The clouds have followed us here. Time to go home, with our memories . . .



That evening sky . . .



Thanks for joining us.
MM

The horses enjoy late-morning grazing, as clouds begin to form.



After chores, we look around to see the most likely dry place to ride (it's always a guessing game this time of year). Although cloudy, the area near Capitan Gap looked like a pretty good bet. You can see rain now falling at the ranch (just to the left of jutting Nogal Peak).



It's starting to turn green here.



Spanky enjoys tasty fresh grass near an old stone quarry.



All the ponds and dirt 'tanks' are filling with water.



Belle looks toward distinctive Capitan Gap.



Uh-oh. That rain is getting close.



"Run for the trailer!" advises Thunder at a gallop, as drops begin to fall on us.



Heading back home, we stop by the equestrian campground at Fort Stanton to check out progress on the new group shelter construction. "Golly! They're working on that metal frame . . . and there might be lightning!" observes a cautious Belle.



Since we were at the Fort (and the rain had stopped), Spanky asked if we could make a little detour to the stream for a quick snack - "Please?"



Of course he loves to play in the water (filled with silt from all the rain) . . .



"Thanks for the suggestion Spanky!", Belle says (with her mouth full).



At home, the elk moms and their baby calves were hanging out near the gate.



That little one in the center of the photo manages to scratch an itch in the middle of his back!



We enjoyed the ride (without getting soaked!) Hope you did too.
MM

The horses can see part of Ranchman's Camp from home. Though only a couple of miles away, it is greener there now.

Monsoon rains can be very specific, falling in a very defined area (like that downpour in the center of this photo)



Although it's close by, and we've gotten lots of rain, too, Ranchman's Camp has greened up faster.



The horses were eager to visit that fresh grass.



Cattle are happy with it, too (a little guy has some lunch with mom).



Thunder hangs back with his friends (and that tasty grass!)



Here comes Spanky.



Racing to catch up.



Then a quick snack.



We move on. They are surprisingly good about that.



Still, all that grass makes for some delays . . .



Belle spots a little water hole that's recently appeared. "Hmmm? Was that here before?"



It's getting cloudier.



Thunder picks up our pace.





He comes closer to urge us along. "Hurry up!" . . .





. . . but as we near the trailer, he pauses for a snack with his friends. "La dee dah . . ."



He ignores me as I begin to load the horses into the trailer. Come on, Thunder, we need to go. He pretends not to hear me (kids!). So . . . we start to drive off without him. "HEY, WAIT FOR ME!"



Lesson learned.

MM

Mid-summer in the high country is truly a green paradise - which we share with wildlife and a few friendly cattle.

Mommie Cat thought she might like to come along, but, well, (yawn), "It's so nice here on the porch swing. Have a nice time (yawn)".



We chose a good day for it (the only one this week with no rain at all predicted).



Cheerful daisies and a pretty little brook along the trail.



Lots of snacking on this ride.



Then we move on.



Acres of mountain ferns.



Wild elderberries ripening in the summer sun.



We meet a friend along the way - a very curious Black Angus calf.



He follows us to a little spring. "Hello! What kind of cows are you? I'm going to be eating grass soon, too! Right now I just love fresh milk! Hmmm . . . I guess you don't speak Angus."



Moving higher . . .



. . . and higher . . .



. . . to the top.



We've never seen this before - swarms of just-hatched(?) ladybugs.



Wow. Just wow.



Paradise, indeed.



Playtime.



Spanky makes his own run.



Belle is happy to watch them have fun as she ambles along.



"Hey! Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare? (We got here first!)"



Time with friends.



(The cow in the middle is nursing her calf).



Going home.



A VERY special day. Thanks for joining us.
MM

Last night we had a real monsoon storm - thunder, lightning, rain, and even some hail.
It began with towering cumulonimbus clouds in the afternoon.



Heavy skies at sunset.



They grew darker and more ominous.



Then some hail, and the always-welcome rain.



Morning dawned bright and clear. The cats couldn't wait to go outside and help me feed horses - then it was time to play in the apple tree.



Onyx.



Wilcox does some grooming.



Busy morning. Time for a rest.



The apples enjoy rain, too (odd thing this year. The north side of this tree has NO apples, while the south side is loaded . . .)



A single raindrop lingers in the sun.



MM

Monsoon rains have begun their verdant magic.



Transforming the meadows with a bit 'o Ireland, as we ride along.



Lined up for the fresh grass.



A step, a bite. A step, a bite . . .



It's remarkable to me that they are willing to keep moving, when the green at their feet entices them.



Since they are so cooperative, we allow plenty of brief snack pauses along the way.



Belle gets her turn, too . . .



. . . but we keep moseying - there's lots to explore.



All the little ponds and brooks are full of silty rainwater.



Another quick bite . . .



Then off we go again!



Time for a grass angel. It was so slick, Spanky began slipping downhill. "Wheee! Slip and slide!"



Catching up.



Belle takes a moment to admire an Indian Paintbrush flower. "Hmmm... should I? Naw, it's too pretty to eat."



Back on the run.



The boys are good about waiting for Belle and me to catch up. "Are you waiting for Belle?" "Heck no! This patch of grass is delicious!"



Off they go again!



Back together.



One last nosh before heading home.



Thunder makes certain he's the first one to the trailer this time!



MM

Busy morning.

The deer and turkeys showed up at the same time.



"Who invited them?", they all said.



"Sorry, that apple is reserved."



"Geez! Like I would eat a stupid apple when there is all this good corn. He must be nuts."



Soon everyone had settled in.



They even socialized a little. "So, what are your plans for Thanksgiving", said the buck. "Not sure yet. That's right in the middle of deer season, isn't it?"



The latest batch of swallow fledglings stayed mum.



Their parents built a sort of high rise condo on top of a light fixture.



*A groggy Wilcox (he's not a 'morning' cat) heard the commotion on the way to his apple tree meditation.
"Good morning. I'll talk with you all later . . ."*



His sister Onxy was already hanging out on her favorite branch.



Then his brother Smarty Pants joined the party.



"Good morning, turkey", he said.



"Uh, good morning . . ." responded the turkey with some hesitance.



"You're like, a friendly cat, right?"



"Sure. We just had breakfast - giblets and gravy." "That's NOT funny."



"Hey - that was a good one!", said the buck.



"Well, I have a dry sense of humor. Most cats do."



MM

We had planned to ride in the mountains . . . until dark clouds suddenly appeared.

Curtains of monsoon rain heading our way.



So, we headed east, where the skies were not so threatening.



Some clouds, but no rain. This wide-open country is always a favorite with the horses.



Especially when it's green, and seasonal creeks are flowing.



Thunder jumped over this one.



We check out rain still coming down on the mountain - and at home.



We also spot a lone pronghorn, keeping his eye on us.



Looks like things are beginning to brighten up at home (I don't know how I missed any good shots of Spanky on this ride!)





There's a special rainbow right over the ranch . . .



... and then ... it goes double!



Even Spanky interrupts his supper to admire it.



"Hey! That's cool!"



Yup.



Wilcox thinks it's the perfect backdrop for some kitty yoga. "Some call this the 'Upward Facing Dog' position . . . but I call it 'Upward Facing CAT!'"





"Okay, that's enough of that. When's supper?"



MM

The elk are here with their babies - they are everywhere!

Just a quick afternoon ride behind the house.



Thunder and Spanky linger behind for some especially tasty grass . . .



. . . but they soon catch up, coming over the hill.





Then we came upon some elk (sorry about the blurry photo, we were all running).



Lots of elk!



. . . and lots of babies . . . we've never seen so many little ones here.







The moms are getting to know us. Such interesting faces.



That was a fun little 'backyard' ride!



MM

We are especially grateful when time and place come together to create something truly magical. Such was the case on this ride.

Along the way, a valley view from the plateau.



As we arrived, the horses knew this was going to be special. "Look at that grass!", gushed Belle.



It looked like heaven's front lawn.



"Oh boy!"



Spanky was eager to get started.



Of course, with all that grass there were some understandable delays. I let them enjoy.



They don't show in the photos, but these little yellow flowers are in bloom throughout the meadows.



Soon we were on the trail again. This time toward a rain-filled pond.





"Isn't this cool, Spanky?" "Yeah Belle - especially 'cause I can share it with you." "Awwwww."



As a drifting cloud provided shade, the dramatic skies were reflected in its mirror-like surface.



We continued to mosey along . . .



... and snack ...



... and appreciate the views.





We could see that it was raining at home, only a few miles away . . . and moving towards us.



Thunder wisely directed us back to the trailer at a gallop . . .



. . . and turned nobly back to make certain we were following.



Homeward bound.



We arrived home just before the rain began.
Thank you for joining us on this most special ride.
Be well.
MM

Elk continue to wander around here.



Especially in the early evening.





Lots of cute babies, like this one.



Staying close to mom.



It can get kinda crowded. "Party time!"



This young bull stands out.



As we were heading out our driveway we came upon this group of moms and babies out for a stroll, with a young bull escort. Beep-beep!



MM

Skull Trail is in the White Mountain Wilderness, south of Nogal Peak. It is challenging to get to, and one of the steepest in the area. It's also unlike any other trail in the mountains. Instead of pines and fir trees, it is dominated by umbrellas of oaks - and broad stands of ferns and flowers. Riding it is more like being on a Caribbean Islands.

The driveway beckons. We've been waiting for a day when rain was unlikely on the mountain - this looked like a good chance.



Belle made certain we were on the right trail. "Yup, this is it!"



Along the way, a rusting relic of the area's gold-mining past.



Thunder enjoys the pleasant shade of oaks over the trail (and a quick bite of grass!).



The trail cuts through fields of mountain ferns (it seems no animal will eat the beautiful plants).



Snack stop.



Climbing higher - and keeping an eye on those rain clouds to the east. "I sure hope the rain doesn't come here. Belle hates that!"



A little rest near the top.



The Tularosa Basin, far below.





The horses graze on the shoulder of majestic Nogal Peak (note the rain falling on the ranch just to the east).



Remarkable horses, free in the wilderness.





Happy Spanky. "It didn't rain!"



Fortunately, the clouds gave us pardon.



Spanky determines a route to bushwhack down. "Oh, yeah, a little to the left and then over there . . ."



Then leads the way.



He makes certain we are coming along.



Going home.



MM

Clouds began building early in the morning, as the horses grazed after breakfast.



A couple of bucks came by for brunch.



Antlers growing rapidly, covered in 'velvet'.



By the time we left for our ride, the sky was gray. Terrible for photos (dull skies drain all the color) . . .



. . . but pleasant for a stroll along a meandering stream.



"Cool and lots of grass. I'm good!"





We discovered an old hand-build stone wall and concrete spillway, long forgotten.



It's a substantial wall - sure took a lot of work. Wonder what its purpose was?



"Darned if I know, but it makes a dandy nose-scratcher!" says Spanky. "Ah, that feels so good!"



'Duckweed' along the water.



Come on, boys!



Going home, before the rain.



An inspiring end of the day.



MM

Summer dusk is special. As the sun goes down, the air grows still and cool. Birds give out with their last songs, and shy wildlife begins to stir.

It is a quiet time, as the world seems to slow before drifting into nightfall.



We trot along at a measured pace.



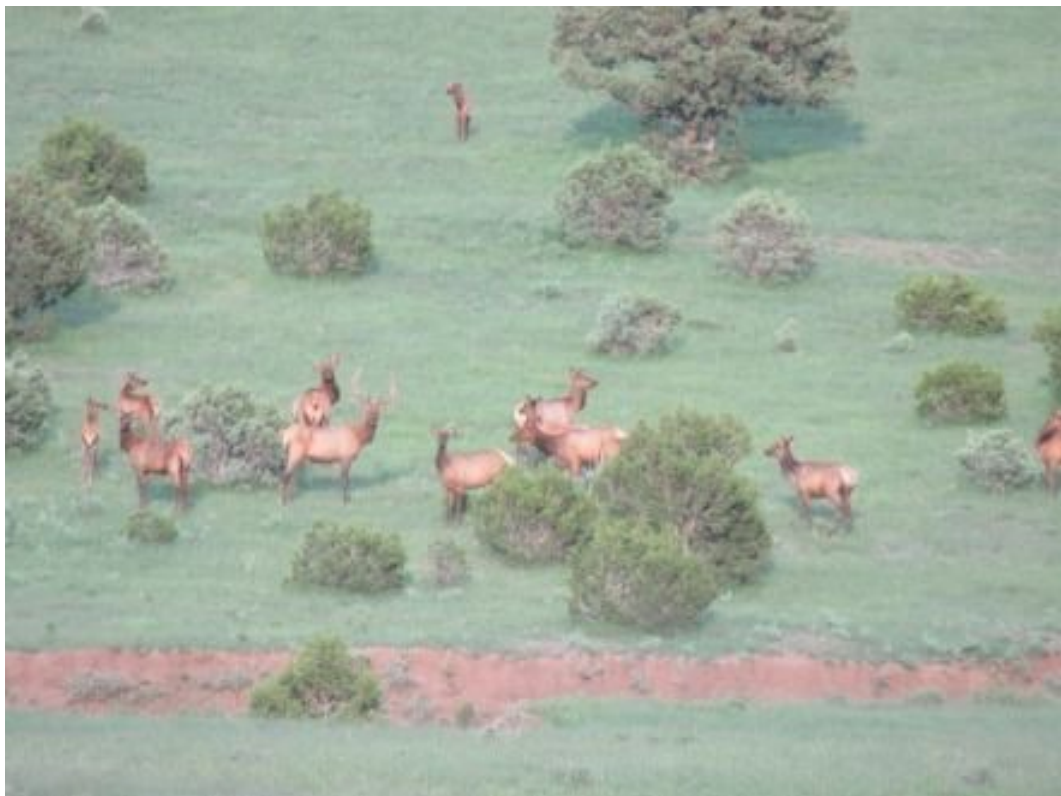
Thunder spots some elk ahead.



"Let's mosey that way", he suggests.



They are enjoying this nocturne between day and night, too.





Two young bulls ambling out and about.



A deep silence descends on the meadows.



Where the grass is lush and green.



Clouds glow with the final moments of sunlight.



Peace.



Bright Indian Paintbrush stands out in the dusk, as though lit from within.



Time to go. Thunder and Spanky are reluctant to leave . . .



. . . *but Thunder is suddenly ready for supper at home.*



So off we go - he is a joy to watch in his freedom (Spanky and Belle are in a mellower mood).



MM

They arrived here at dusk, like migrating Bedouins crossing the desert. Old and young - an entire 'village' of elk (it was getting dark, and my camera struggled with the lack of light).



The horses were only mildly curious (they are familiar with the elk), but the cats came out to see what all the commotion was about.



This one spotted Mommie Cat in the apple tree.



The elk calves are NOISY. Their cries are very much like those of sea gulls - high pitched and insistent (see the 'fawn spots' on the little ones?).





They came through the gate and settled in.



I couldn't capture them all in one shot - there were about 70 in total.





It looks like this bull is eating some of the pine tree - but in fact he is scraping the itchy 'velvet' from his antlers on the branches. It made a terrible racket.



This was cute - a young one became intrigued by the metal deer sculptures on the driveway. "Hello! Who (what) are you?"



"Hmmm . . . okay I will just leave you alone . . . (but I'm still going to keep an eye on you.)"





More curiosity about the metal deer (that's a calf - see the white spots on its side?).



They continued to meander toward the house, finally ending up on the lawn . . .



. . . but by then it was too dark for photos.



Typical evening's entertainment - "Elk T.V."
MM

The sound of elk was unmistakable - somewhere behind the house. We went to investigate.



Not here . . .



Still looking (and snacking) . . .



A-ha!







It felt like a mini safari . . . right out our back gate. Hope you enjoyed it, too!
MM

The horses patiently watched me do my chores, but by late afternoon they let me know it was time for something different. Belle suggested the Mills Trail - "All that green along the stream is easy on the eyes", she said. But I knew she was thinking of tasty grass . . .

"Huh?" Looks like Spanky is trying to figure out what I am saying (that happens a lot).



Thunder gets a head start.



Belle knows where the best grass is.



. . . and we go toward the stream.



The boys pass all that grass, to come along with us.



Pretty meadow under the pines.



Perfect for a grass angel.



"This is it!" Belle reached her destination. "This grass is best!"



Spanky agrees.





Belle's right again - it is easy on the eyes.



Come on, Spanky, it's getting dark, we have to go.



While I wait at the trailer, they try a group-stall tactic. "Don't look at him. Pretend you don't hear him."



Who can blame them?



Oh, and it's chile roasting season! The wonderful fragrance scents every town and village.



MM

It was another after-chores ride . . . but this time the horses didn't seem to want to wander too far from the trailer.

Thunder led us on a trail through a 'secret garden' door.



To a shady spot.



The grass was nice and green . . .



. . . but the horses seemed alert to something.



That didn't keep them from chowing down, of course. It was then that I noticed it had gotten awfully dark

. . .



. . . and very still. Hmmm . . .



The sky had turned a dull gray.



Even so, one of the last wild roses of the summer looked cheerful.



Without prompting, the horses turned toward the trailer.



Grabbing a quick bite along the way.



It began just as we hit the road for home.



Smart horses.



MM

Each summer the elk come down from the high country to raise their young. Some of them return here from year to year (and they recognize us). But there are always new ones who have to figure out what the horses are about.

Thunder spots a group behind the house - see how he pauses and turns his head slightly, to alert me.



Seems that some of them recognize us.



We just do our thing . . .



. . . and they do theirs.



As we drift closer together.



Did you spot the big bull, with his family? Lots of babies, too.



It's always a thrill to see these magnificent animals up close.



We just mosey on . . .



. . . and find this young bull by the old cattle scale at home.



He's comfortable here.



He's likely 1-2 years old, so has been here before.



His spike rack of antlers looks like an ancient lyre harp (see Chile the cat checking him out?)



Sunset at the ranch. We always appreciate these encounters with nature.



Glad to share them with you.

MM

We are hoping for more monsoon rain (fall typically is a dry time here) - but for now, the horses appreciate the green grass.



Belle is overwhelmed. "Wow!"



After a quick nibble, we take to the trail.



The boys follow dutifully along. "Hey Thunder, do you see that stuff over there?", enthused Spanky. "Yeah, I'm sure he'll stop again soon."



Just in case, Thunder runs ahead to snack.



While Belle, Spanky and I take our time, enjoying the arroyo view.



Belle admires a meadow of tiny yellow flowers . . .



. . . and these happy little blooms are all along the trails.



As we continue, she and Thunder sense something in the distance.



The clouds move, and sun lights up a herd of elk.



A mature bull and his family.



We figure he is the father of the little guy next to him.



After saying "hi", they watch as we mosey along.



We hurry home before sunset . . .



. . . but of course, stopping for . . .



Spanky catches up. "Gee, there are so many things to try!"



It's getting dark.



Sunset on the way home.



MM

It's been awhile since we sent a two-part journal (hope you agree this ride deserves a few more photos than usual).

We've been having off-and-on showers most days, which makes riding the high country tricky.



Wilcox enjoys watching the rain from his little pillow. "It is my throne . . . and you may address me as 'Your Majesty' ".



As the skies clear some, we discuss going up Nogal Trail. Everyone agreed it was worth a try.



Good fortune - there is sun on the mountains when we arrive . . .



. . . and plenty of green.



Belle pauses for a sip from a cool spring.



Then we climb on. We want to see the view from the top.



Oops. The horses discover lots of acorns under the oaks. It's remarkable how they can pick up those tiny things, with their big horse lips.



Spanky enjoys some grass on what appears to be an alpine putting green.



Belle admires the flowers along the way. "Ooooh!"





Thunder keeps us moving as we near the crest . . .



. . . and bushwhack along a narrow ridge at the top of the world (at this point I have dismounted, and we all walk along together). This is a place only the birds and elk know - we've never seen a deer this high.



"Gee I'm glad we did this today! What a view!"



Belle is distracted by some sparse high-mountain grass. For some reason they seem to prefer it to the lush grass below.



She wanders to a lonesome high knoll.



The boys trail along behind. It takes real trust to let everyone make their own way up here. They've earned their freedom.



If you look very carefully, you will see Thunder at the top of the peak.



To be continued . . .

We continue our high-country trek.

Belle snacks as she waits for the boys to catch up . . .



. . . and I admire the view of lofty Nogal Peak. We are nearly as high.



Family picnic.



At what feels like the top of the world.



"This is so cool!", they think in unison.



It sure is . . .



. . . but . . . it's time to go. Spanky lags behind. "Aw, shucks . . . "



Catching up.



Come on, boys. "Oh, alright . . ."



We come across a curious bull elk.



"What the heck are you guys doing up here?", he asks.



"We're just on a hike", replies Spanky. "A WHAT?"



"Oh, I'm sorry - you wouldn't understand . . ."



We are grateful for this special day.

"Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world" -

John Milton

MM

End Journal Part 2 of 3

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