

# THE NOGAL JOURNALS

*Volume One*

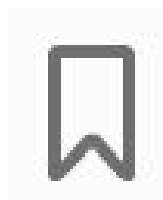
FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH



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

## Volume 1 - Part 1 of 3

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# For MAVERICK



With sincere gratitude  
To Randy Clarke and Clem Ianiero,  
whose technical expertise and tireless efforts  
made this publication possible.  
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*Cover Design: Laura Reynolds*

## The Horse

Where in this wide world can man find nobility without pride, friendship without envy, or beauty without vanity? Here, where grace is laced with muscle and strength by gentleness confined. He serves without servility, he has fought without enmity. There is nothing so powerful, nothing less violent; there is nothing so quick, nothing more patient. Our past has been borne on his back. All our history is his industry. We are his heirs, he our inheritance.  
Ladies and Gentlemen – The Horse.

*Ron Duncan*



# THE NOGAL JOURNALS 2010-2012

It still isn't clear what inspired us to move from the Golden State of California, to the Land of Enchantment – New Mexico. But whatever the reason, it was compelling and definite.

Maybe it was the lure of still wide-open spaces (the state of New Mexico has fewer citizens than San Diego County). Perhaps it was the idea of cowboy – cattle and dusty roads, and songs sung under impossibly blue skies. Whatever it was, I just knew. And I never looked back.

With horses in tow (literally), we began to explore the state, region by region. This part was too dry; this part was too cold; this part was too flat; etc. Finally we narrowed it down to the pale green areas on the map – lightly forested, with lots of variety in riding. And then we looked at other criteria – feed stores and veterinarians, soft soil and solitude.

Nogal seemed to want us. In the confusingly described “southeastern central” part of the state, it is nearly equidistant from Las Cruces in the south, and Albuquerque to the north. Nogal forms a triangle with the tourist town of Ruidoso, and the simple village of Capitan (birthplace of Smokey Bear). There is no “place” in Nogal, just a Post Office, a church, and a cluster of houses.

We found a property that had potential – and a kind of magic, as well as a private gate directly into Lincoln National Forest. About five miles from the Post Office at Nogal, its end-of-the-road location made it feel like it was in the middle of nowhere.

And so, after endless complications with the purchase, and the torture of moving lock, stock and barrel across three states, we were at last home in New Mexico!

Would the dream live up to the life imagine . . .

M

Leaving Sedona was tough; leaving our friends (human and horse) even harder.

*At the stable in Sedona, Kendall and Kelsey say farewell to their four friends for now - "See you in New Mexico!"*



It's a long haul from Sedona to Nogal; I planned the route to include some good places to let the horses out of the trailer along the way.

## 2010-09-21 – *Following A Dream*

Page 2 of 12

*Our first stop was in Holbrook, Arizona . . . a roadside park, where they enjoyed the grass, of course!  
But they liked Lyman Lake, near Springer Ville, even better:*



We continued on to Nogal, New Mexico, arriving at dark. They would have to wait until morning for their first real look at their new home.

*We were greeted by a rainbow over the ranch - a good omen, I hope!*





WHOOPEE! Our new home!

*The next morning:*



*They all run out of the barn to check out the south pasture. "Look! There is grass! Is it really ours?"*





*Maverick runs to catch up.*



*They have their first drink of well water from the stock tank in the pasture . . . "Hey, Maverick, I think this is for us."*

*"I dunno . . . maybe we should ask first."*





*"I don't care; it is cool and delicious!"*



*Thunder and Belle check out the view . . . somehow they just KNOW this is home.*





*One of the eight barn cats and kittens we "acquired" with the place.*





*A look out the barn loft window.*



*Mommy Cat watches Maverick have his first dinner at the new place.*



*Then Maverick checks out the porch . . .*



*. . . and has a look inside. "Hmmm . . . nice, but our barn has higher ceilings . . ."*





*"He's right; it does."*



*But for some reason, they ALL had to be in the garage.*





## 2010-09-21 – *Following A Dream*

Page 10 of 12

*The front lawn under the apple tree is everyone's favorite spot, especially mine. This is what we came here for. We are together - at home.*



*Scooter the cat checks out the horses from the living room window.*





Welcome to Followed Dream Ranch, New Mexico!



MM

## 2010-09-26 – *Update From Nogal New Mexico*

Page 1 of 4

As I have been working on projects all around the ranch, the "kids" have been exploring their new home.

*Spanky runs across the East pasture . . .*



*Belle, Maverick and Thunder stop to graze.*





*Peek-a-boo!*



*The old stock tank (my "swimming pool") from the Morongo Valley ranch has a new home, too (this was not an easy thing to move, but worth the effort).*





## 2010-09-26 – *Update From Nogal New Mexico*

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*This part of the ranch borders on the Lincoln National Forest (1.3 million acres) . . .*



*We have a private gate directly into the Forest. Unlimited riding (and lots of elk . . . in fact, we have elk on the ranch most nights - the kids have gotten used to them).*





*The barn kittens are growing up. Here are two of them . . .*



*Awww . . . I guess they all can stay.*



## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 1 of 10

It was time to take a day off from non-stop projects around the ranch, and to explore some of the nearby riding, so today Thunder and I decided to investigate the trails around Bonito Lake.

Bonito Lake is less than 10 miles from the ranch, but higher in elevation, with big Ponderosa pines and aspens. There is an excellent horse campground, from which several well-marked trails meander off into the Lincoln National Forest.

*On the way to the lake, a couple of deer cross the road ahead of us.*





*Bonito Lake, New Mexico*



*Thunder is eager to hit the trail.*





## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

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*The "Little Bonito" trail follows one fork of the Bonito river through lush forest and meadows.*





## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 4 of 10

*The aspens haven't started to turn their signature bright gold yet - daytime temperatures are still in the 70's.*



*We cross the river many times, as we amble along.*





## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 5 of 10

*Gold was discovered here in the 1870's. We pass several old mines along the way.*



*To Thunder, this must look like one giant salad bar.*





*The forest gets more dense. In the distance, we hear elk making their distinctive bugling noise.*



*I found myself thinking, "Wow. We live here!" I bet Thunder feels the same.*





## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 7 of 10

*When we got back to the ranch, the other horses raced to greet us.*



*I jumped bareback on Belle, and the whole herd took a group ride around the ranch in the late afternoon sun.*



## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 8 of 10

*Maverick has learned that there is a big bowl of dry cat food in the barn; if given the chance, he sneaks in and eats it, "cat" food or not. You can just see him standing in the barn door, trying to look innocent. "Who me?"*





## 2010-09-27 – *Little Bonito Trail*

Page 9 of 10

*But Thunder is on to him, and goes to fetch the glutton. Here he and Maverick run to rejoin the rest of us. Those are the Capitan Mountains in the background, east of the ranch.*



*It was a great day.*



Thanks for joining us!  
MM

## 2010-10-01 – *Some Improvements*

Page 1 of 10

The last couple of days have been busy.

Here is the new gate. Working with Max the welder was great. He is a genuine local character. Over the years, he built much of the pipe fencing on the ranch.

... *Home!*





## 2010-10-01 – *Some Improvements*

Page 2 of 10

*And the big gate by the house has changed from "California Tan" to white - helps it to blend in with all the pipe fencing. (Still looks like it belongs at a condo complex) Sure were a lot of angles to paint!*



*Since the new gate went in at the end of the driveway, I keep this one open most of the time.*







*The restored Dutch door in "Belle's nursery" (should she choose to have a baby . . .), up by the house. There were weeds as high as the roof in the pen.*





## 2010-10-01 – ***Some Improvements***

Page 4 of 10

*And the new guest bath mirror (without all those scratches) - The guest bath looks like it might have in 1962 . . . Funny, I don't miss the old orange/pink/yellow/copper color scheme*





I got the last of the oak flooring out of the barn today - WHEW!; and found someone in Texas (reliable, I hope) to manufacture the new metal horse stalls before winter sets in. The barn sure looks different without the divider wall and floor.

*. . . Here is how it looked before . . .*





## 2010-10-01 – *Some Improvements*

Page 6 of 10

*What a job that turned out to be. I saved all the old flooring (it was recycled in the 1920's when they tore down the big old railroad water tank in Carrizozo. The entire barn is oak from that tank.)*



*Part of my "lumber yard" now stored in the loft. All this came from the old floor.*



## 2010-10-01 – *Some Improvements*

Page 7 of 10

*I got the barn drop-down windows to open, too. They let lots of light and air in. I wonder how long it has been since they were last opened. Plenty of layers of paint gluing them shut . . .*



*The old truck has really had a work out. It has moved stuff all over the ranch. Our first load of hay gets loaded at the Lincoln Mercantile feed store in Capitan. The flatbed makes it easy to move the bales from the grower's trailers.*





## 2010-10-01 – *Some Improvements*

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*At the ranch, I can back right up to the feed room door to unload. (There is also a feed door into the loft for winter storage.) It's hard to believe there were weeds more than 6 feet high covering the barnyard a couple of weeks ago. Couldn't even get to the barn. Poor power mower . . . it worked very hard. That's the old cattle scale on the right.*

*That's a typical New Mexico sky . . .*



## 2010-10-01 – ***Some Improvements***

Page 9 of 10

*I refinished the heavy picnic table this afternoon - it turned out better than the photos look. I don't know whose hands built it - but it deserves to be preserved.*





## 2010-10-01 – ***Some Improvements***

Page 10 of 10

*Meanwhile, the barn cats think I am very amusing entertainment! I plumb wore them out, so Mom and two of the kittens took a nap in the saddle room.*



That's it for now. Lots more projects to go . . .  
MM

## 2010-10-07 – *Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch*

Page 1 of 2

We are really settling in. The horses certainly enjoy their new home, and so do I. Here are a few pictures from this week.

*In the barn, the floor and dividing wall have been removed, and the space opened up for new stalls being made in Texas. Although the weather continues to be truly wonderful . . . winter is on the way!*





## 2010-10-07 – *Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch*

Page 2 of 2

*The old flatbed truck carried all the unused big metal ranch gates and heavy wooden doors - which had been kept in the barn for who-knows-how-long - to the "bull barn" for storage. Too much history to just toss them out! Need a really big wood door, or old metal gate, hand forged on the property?*



*The deer and elk are getting used to the horses. I have lots of them hanging around at dawn and dusk. Here is a deer right behind the house, looking at me through my office window. It is magical to see them like this.*



MM

Belle, Thunder and I were invited on a group ride through remote San Lorenzo Canyon with our farrier and noted horse guide, Dacodah Herkenhoff. This little-known part of central New Mexico is located in the high desert above the Rio Grande Valley. It offers truly amazing scenery - from sandy river bottoms, to towering sandstone cliffs and inspiring vistas of distant mountains, capturing the essence of the desert American Southwest. No one knows the area better than Dacodah. We are in for a real treat.

*Used to traveling with their own "family", Belle and Thunder size up the other horses before we begin. "Well, they look friendly enough."*





## 2010-10-07 – **San Lorenzo Canyon**

Page 2 of 10

*We start up the canyon - another-worldly place of jumbled rock towering hundreds of feet above us.*





## 2010-10-07 – **San Lorenzo Canyon**

Page 3 of 10

*Dacodah is a very gifted trainer and guide. Mike, his partner guide on the trail rides, is a natural teacher. Together, they provide an interesting and unforgettable experience on every excursion.*



*We descend into "Hoodoo Valley".*





## 2010-10-07 – **San Lorenzo Canyon**

Page 4 of 10

*Belle, who has been walking along with us on her own while I ride Thunder, passes between some weird rock formations. "There are some very nice horses here, but I miss having Maverick and Spanky to talk with. And these rocks are pretty and all, but I really have to pay attention. Should I start with my right or left foot? Oh, well . . ."*



*"Don't worry, I'm coming. Why do we always have to be in such a hurry?"*





*"Hey, Belle, wait until you see this . . ."*



*"Are you nuts? Just how are we supposed to get way down there? I am not a goat, you know."*





*"Look, Thunder, why don't we just go back the way we came?"*



*"No, Belle. Too many interesting things ahead; just look at that arroyo."*





*"Oh, alright. I'll go along. But this better be good." "It will be."*



*"Wow. Twisted hoodoos! I've never seen anything like that before."*





*"And look at that sandstone wall!"*



*"Petrified sand dunes! You're right, Thunder. This is a very cool ride."*





*"Told you. Dacodah and Mike know what they are doing."*



MM

## 2010-10-08 – *Capitan Gap*

Page 1 of 6

Since Belle and Thunder got to go to amazing San Lorenzo Canyon, it was only fair that Spanky and Maverick have an outing, too.

We stayed close to home - we head about 20 minutes away, toward Capitan Gap. This is Billy the Kid country. Nearly every crook and cranny has some historic story associated with it.

But we just wanted a nice place to ride. And we found it! Right in our own back yard.

*That's Capitan Gap - a break in the Capitan Mountains we can see from the ranch - in the distance.*





*Spanky and Maverick check it out from their trailer windows.*



*"Come' on, .let's go!"*





*"Oh, oh, what is that thing? It moves and makes a funny noise."*





*"What do you think Maverick? Should we have a closer look?"*

*"Well . . . okay. You first!"*



*How's THAT for a classic shot? The West is alive here.*





*After determining that a windmill is NOT a predator, they contentedly snack along the well's run-off.*



*Yup. Loving being in New Mexico!*





*Going home. New Mexico rush hour . . .*



MM

## 2010-10-12 – **Cattle Scale**

Page 1 of 4

Our new home was a working cattle ranch for many years; the oak barns date from that period. When I first saw the place, I was baffled by an odd wood and metal structure. It turns out that it is a cattle scale, installed in the 1940's to weigh cattle before shipping to market. Although badly weather worn, I cleaned up the controls, and may try to get it working again.

*In the meantime, it is a favorite play spot for the cats.*





## 2010-10-12 – **Cattle Scale**

Page 2 of 4

*The control panel is located in a compartment on the side. It can weigh animals up to 20,000 lbs. (that much cow I don't want to run into!)*



*Scooter checks out the controls.*





*While the kittens use it as a jungle gym.*



*The inside needs a little work!*





*Meanwhile, around the corner, the horses enjoy a meal together. Belle has put me on notice, "Forget it buster. I am not getting into that thing. My weight is my private business."*



MM

## 2010-10-12 – *Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse Ride*

Page 1 of 4

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse has been around since the days of Sheriff Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. Initially a mounted law enforcement reserve unit, it has evolved into an all-volunteer community service organization. In conjunction with the annual Cowboy Symposium held in Ruidoso, the Posse held a trail ride in the Lincoln National Forest just north of town. I was invited to join them. Although we don't do too many group rides, Thunder and I had a wonderful time.

*It was a beautiful day, and our fellow riders were very welcoming.*







*The Forest Service has installed these odd-looking contraptions to capture rain water and distribute it into small basins for wildlife. The cisterns work well, and help stabilize animal populations throughout the Forest.*





## 2010-10-12 – *Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse Ride*

Page 3 of 4

*The Posse has lunch catered via ATV's - a nice luxury in the remote area!*



*Thunder distinguished himself on the ride as we helped capture a runaway horse, and was welcomed into the lunch site. He made himself right at home; he is a good (though skeptical of tall tales!) listener!*





## 2010-10-12 – *Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse Ride*

Page 4 of 4

*Back at the ranch after the ride, a double rainbow . . .*



MM

## 2010-10-13 – *Biscuits And Gravy*

Page 1 of 8

The annual Cowboy Symposium is held during October in Ruidoso as a celebration of all things "cowboy". There is great headline entertainment, and horsemanship demonstrations, cowboy storytelling and poetry, etc. But the most popular part is the chuck wagon race and cooking competition. Thousands of people come to see the authentic chuck wagons, and to eat food prepared by traditional cowboy methods. I was fortunate. Max the welder, who has worked on my fences and new gate, was in charge of the chuck wagon portion of the Symposium this year, and asked if I would like to help judge the "Biscuits & Gravy" competition. Would I? You bet! Twenty-five chuck wagons competed, of which 12 made the finals we judged. I think I enjoyed the best biscuits and gravy ever - all cooked over mesquite coals. Big, fluffy biscuits, and hot gravy nestling morsels of homemade sausage . . .

*The cooks get up before dawn in order to prepare the fires and vittles. Dutch ovens are used for the biscuits.*





*Sausage gravy is cooked over campfires.*



*The wagons are all genuine, and use authentic cookware, etc.*











*Some wagons haul actual wood-burning ovens. These are called "Ranch Wagons" and are generally used only when the herds are stationary for a while - such as during branding.*





## 2010-10-13 – *Biscuits And Gravy*

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*The Dutch ovens are covered with mesquite coals, so they are heated from above and below. It's quite a trick to get it just right.*



*These biscuits aren't quite done. Don't rush 'em!*





*Perfect!*



*And there is plenty of coffee.*





*It is a uniquely American "cuisine" - and I will tell you, delicious on a bright New Mexico morning.*



MM

## 2010-10-13 – ***Maverick's Day***

Page 1 of 6

Maverick suffers from an old injury to his right foot (hoof) that requires him to wear special "orthopedic" shoes. Recently, his farrier suggested a new type of shoe, made in New Mexico. I trust Dacodah's expertise completely, and readily agreed to try them on Maverick. It just so happened that Dacodah had planned a ride near his home down along the Rio Grande a few days later with a great group of friends, and invited us along. So Thunder, Maverick and I enjoyed a very special day - maybe the best of Maverick's life!

*It's a beautiful New Mexico day, and the river is running wide.*





## 2010-10-13 – *Maverick's Day*

Page 2 of 6

*Dacodah shows us the way across the Rio Grande.*



*"Hey, Thunder, how cool is this?"*



"Whoopee!"





## 2010-10-13 – *Maverick's Day*

Page 4 of 6

*"Wow! That was so much fun! Let's go again, can we, can we?"*



*Maverick stays right with us, and thoroughly enjoys himself. He visited with the other horses, and had a really wonderful time.*



*"Boy, Thunder, look at that view!"*





*"This is the best day ever!"*



The new shoes are a success, and so was the day.  
Thanks, Dacodah!

MM

At just short of 12,000 ft. elevation, Sierra Blanca Mountain looms high above New Mexico. It is America's southernmost high point; and one of the southernmost points at which a true alpine ecosystem occurs in the U.S. The access road starts just 8 miles from the ranch - but then its 12 miles up - the mountain trail head is adjacent to Ski Apache resort (designed in 1961 by Victor Lundy who was named "America's Outstanding Architect" in 1958, and helped usher in the "mid-Century" style . . . It features 11 lifts and 55 runs.) My neighboring ranchers from Texas won't even drive up there in a car, let alone towing a horse trailer. (Well, West Texas is awfully flat!) But we found the trip easy and very scenic. All my horses are tourists. Our autumn weather has been spectacular, and I wanted to visit the mountain before winter snows hit (the mountain gets an average of 15 feet annually . . . hey, they ski here!). As is so often the case, Thunder, Belle and I don't see another horse on the trail - or even a sign of one. In fact, we don't see anyone else but deer and elk the whole afternoon.

*Along the way up, some of the trees still have their fall leaves.*







*We take our time (there was only one other vehicle on the road), and the kids enjoy the views . . .*





*. . . which seem to go on forever.*



*This trail is called the "Scenic" (which could be applied to all those we have ridden so far!) We are already at 9,600 ft. elevation – headed into the White Mountain Wilderness area of Lincoln National Park.*





## 2010-10-13 – **Sierra Blanca Mountain**

Page 4 of 10

*Thunder has a drink from a mountain brook. He spotted an elk across the way - I was too slow with my camera to catch it. It is amazing how he sees other animal life, even at a distance.*



*Ah, the views! I NEVER take this for granted.*





*Belle races along a golden meadow . . .*



*. . . and pauses for a snack.*







*"Hey guys, follow me!"*





*Thunder and I do, galloping into a deep forest.*



*Belle leaps over a downed tree. Show off! I think she has seen too many deer do this. Thunder and I go around.*





## 2010-10-13 – ***Sierra Blanca Mountain***

Page 8 of 10

*Yes, that is snow! Well, sort of. Little patches hide on the shady slopes, between still-green grass and flowers. It is in the mid-60 degrees, and I am riding comfortably in shirt sleeves. This place makes its own rules about climate.*



*The horses do very well with the altitude, but I give them plenty of time to relax along the way.*







We had such a great time here this afternoon; we're coming back tomorrow morning to explore some more. Want to come along?

*To be continued...*

MM

## 2010-10-15 – *Kit Carson Trail*

Page 1 of 4

Yesterday all the horses received their fall inoculations for things such as flu and rabies. They were very good about the shots, as always. Since they were already in the trailer, and it was a beautiful day, we went looking for somewhere to explore together. Fort Stanton [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort\\_Stanton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Stanton) is an extensive former military installation, established in 1855, about 20 minutes from the ranch. It has a very interesting history: During the Civil War, it was occupied by both Confederate and Union troops. Later, it served as a major cavalry fort; the first Federal tubercular hospital; and as an internment camp for German sailors during WWII (there is a large Maritime cemetery here). The fort features many original buildings, an impressive cavalry-era horse stable that is currently under restoration, and more than 100 miles of improved and well-marked horse trails. We chose the Kit Carson trail, named after the famous frontiersman, who served at Fort Stanton, and later lived privately in New Mexico.

*I rode Thunder from the trailer to the Kit Carson Trail head. The other three tag happily along behind us. There still are some summer flowers along the road.*





## 2010-10-15 – ***Kit Carson Trail***

Page 2 of 4

*We climb a hill where Kit Carson reportedly spent much time "in contemplation". It offers a magnificent view of the Capitan Mountains.*







*On the way home, we stop by the Rio Bonito, near Fort Stanton. This reliable year round water source was important to the establishment of the Fort here.*





*Fall color is just beginning to tint the leaves . . .*



MM

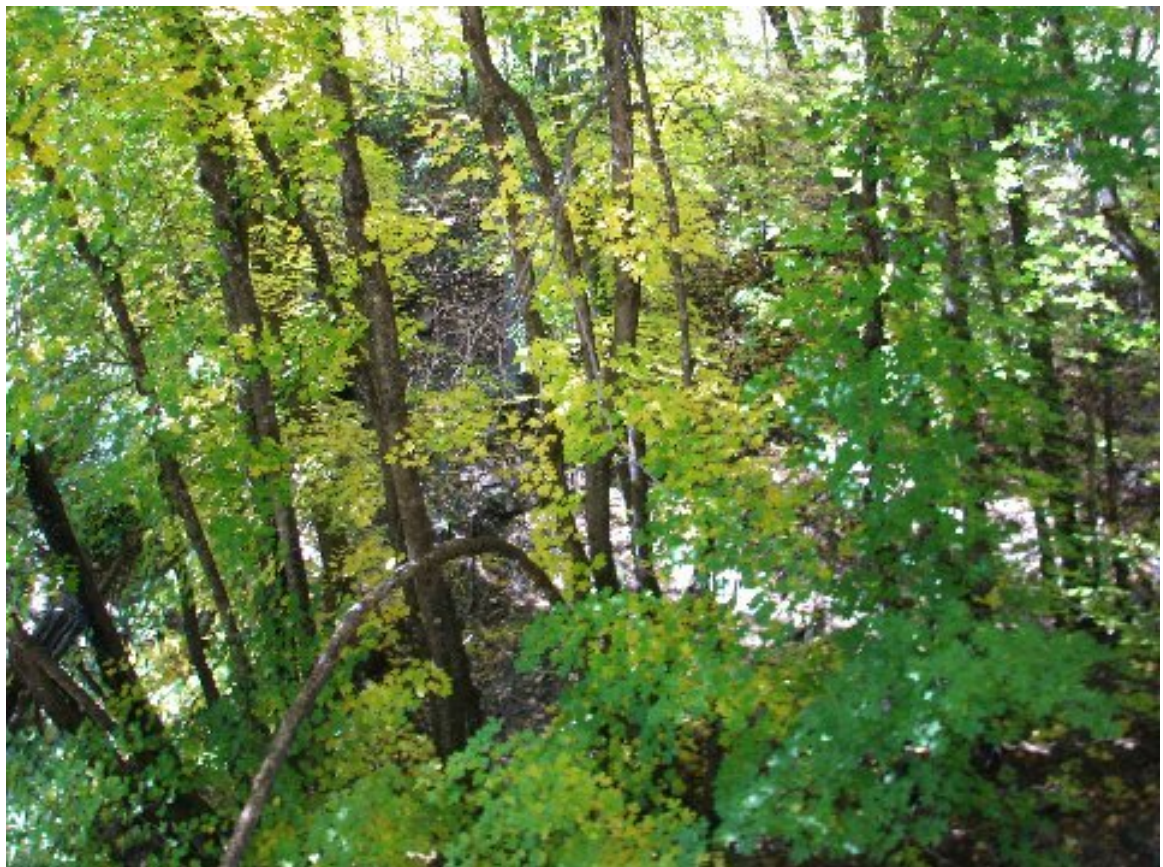
Nogal Peak is the highest and most notable peak in the Southern White Mountain Wilderness, part of Lincoln National Forest. At 9,900 ft. elevation, its distinctive pyramid shape can be seen from the ranch, and I have been eager to explore it. So when some riders from neighboring ranches invited me to join them on their weekly ride there, I eagerly accepted. It was a short trailer drive to the trail head and off Belle and I went.

These are not "la-dee-da" riders. They ride hard and fast, and for once, I felt like Belle always does: "Why do we have to rush through such beautiful country?" But there was ample time for scene gazing . . . and what scenes!

*They say it has been too warm so far for the fall colors to really show. But . . .*







*Tunnels through old apple trees on the way to Nogal Peak . . .*





*Picking apples right off the tree . . . without dismounting. Is this Eden?*





*Nogal Peak at last, above the tree line. In a short distance, we have climbed nearly 5,000 ft. above the ranch.*



*Top of the world! The Rio Grande Valley in one direction . . .*



*Endless mountains in the other . . .*



*"Boy, this place is huge! Wait until my boys hear about this!"*





*On the way down, we pass evidence of the area's mining heritage. This is a protected Wilderness now. No vehicles allowed.*









*A welcoming sunset at home. Belle is back with her boys - she has stories to tell them about her day. Thanks for letting me share this one with you!*



MM

Fall is coming slowly to Nogal this year; the days are still warm, but the nights have a chill.

*This morning the horses grazed on the North pasture, which borders the National Forest, under a "New Mexico Fall" blue sky.*



*The Aspens near Bonito Lake are just now turning.*







*And the maples and oaks, too.*







*It's time to pick the apples off the tree on the front lawn . . . I had no idea there would be so many! I am using old feed buckets - and they are BIG - to hold them in the root cellar. There must be three more buckets of apples still on the tree! They sure smell good. Apple pie, anyone?*





*The horses know the apples are ripening - and so do the deer. This evening at dusk they were all near the tree. Wish I had gotten my camera in time to catch them eating apples together. The deer are fine with my horses - but they aren't so sure about me lurking on the porch (it is still hunting season here!). That's Maverick, just below the rock retaining wall along the lawn, with some of the deer just a few feet away.*



*Spanky and Maverick watch the deer.*



*"Boy, Maverick, those guys are pushy."*

*"Yeah, don't they know that these apples are ours?"*

*(Belle is across the pasture, on the other side of the deer)*



It is wonderful to see them getting accustomed to each other.

MM





FOLLOWED  
DREAM  
RANCH

The majesty and solitude of Sierra Blanca Mountain drew us back again today. Autumn is a great time to visit, but we look forward to riding here next summer, too. Belle and Thunder are wonderful companions. Once again, we didn't see anyone else on the trails.

*Thunder (in my rear view mirror) checks out the mountain ahead. I am certain he and Belle knew where we were going. They jumped in the trailer this morning, eager to go.*



*The trails are well marked.*





*Here comes Belle . . . "Geez, I just stop for a minute to powder my nose, and you two keep on going!"*



*We are entering the White Mountain Wilderness; that's the Capitan Gap in the distance. It must be higher than 10,000 ft. here, seems like we can see forever.*









*Belle is having a wonderful time!*













*Time for lunch. Belle prefers my bologna sandwich to grass. I only allow her to have the bread.*



*Thunder is a vegetarian, so is content to graze.*





*After lunch, we continue through an Aspen grove. Belle has become quite a jumper. She cleared this fallen tree trunk by a couple of feet.*





*"Urp. Gee, that mustard sure repeats when I'm jumping over these darned logs."*



*"I thought that was a bad idea. But you wouldn't listen . . ."*





*"Maybe I'll just walk it off."*





*"Whew. That sandwich made me thirsty."*



*I'm usually too slow with my camera to catch the game we see, but I did manage to get a photo of this deer.*





*After our ride, Thunder has a drink, too.*



*While Belle finds some real clover near the ski lodge. "Gee, I haven't had this since Arizona!"*





*On our way home, we wait for a fawn to cross the road. Another rush hour in New Mexico.*



Thanks for sharing a peaceful day!  
MM

## 2010-11-07 – *Red Neck Tractor (Mine); and Barn Stalls*

Page 1 of 8

Well . . . it works! But it shore do make my truck durty!

*Just some chain, a heavy metal gate, and a couple of old iron wheels . . . Good for grading and weed removal.*





## 2010-11-07 – *Red Neck Tractor (Mine); and Barn Stalls*

Page 2 of 8

*Time for a wash!*



*I haven't been able to get good shots of the barn interior and the new stalls - the lighting won't work with my camera - but here are a couple to give you an idea . . .*





*Feed room on the left; tack room (and kitten condo!) on the right, hay loft upstairs.*





## 2010-11-07 – ***Red Neck Tractor (Mine); and Barn Stalls***

Page 4 of 8

*The new metal stalls arrived from Texas before the sun came up! The horses were very curious.*



*... and then the cement for a new entrance ramp.*



## 2010-11-07 – *Red Neck Tractor (Mine); and Barn Stalls*

Page 5 of 8

*While bringing special sand in for the floor, the little tractor got stuck.*



*But finally, it all came together . . . the old cow barn is now horse-friendly. We will probably only use it when it snows. The "kids" like being outdoors.*





*Spanky checks out his new quarters.*



*Maverick the "ghost horse"!*



*It has a great view!*





*And the kittens like it.*



MM

## 2010-11-08 – ***Blue Front Trail***

Page 1 of 12

There are countless trails to enjoy very near the ranch. We are exploring some of the higher ones while the temperature is still near 70 degrees; winter is coming! The Blue Front Trail links many of the old gold mine sites, through the Lincoln National Forest and White Mountain Wilderness. It meanders through meadows, up narrow canyons, and across numerous streams and brooks.

*Thunder spots some beautiful fall color along the way.*





*We cross a stream to reach the trail head. The horses figure this looks promising.*



*Thunder enjoys some grass before we saddle up . . .*





*... and more along another stream as we get under way.*



*After rolling in the sand, Belle finds some of her own.*





## 2010-11-08 – *Blue Front Trail*

Page 4 of 12

*Thousands of miners flocked to the area in the 1880's. They would pay as much as \$1 for an apple, so lots of orchards were planted, and then abandoned when the mines petered out. Some remain, still producing delicious treats along the trail. The Forest service provides a picnic table at this one in the middle of nowhere.*



*Thunder and Belle enjoyed this beautiful wild "snack bar". More about this orchard later . . .*





*We find an abandoned cabin next to a pond.*





*Uh, oh. Thunder and I go around. Belle jumps over.*



*... and across another stream.*





## 2010-11-08 – ***Blue Front Trail***

Page 7 of 12

*They're glad I don't ask them to go up there; the blue cast to this stone cliff gives the trail its name.*





## 2010-11-08 – *Blue Front Trail*

Page 8 of 12

*Thunder is curious about this structure, and so am I. Is it an Indian wiki-up, or a hunter's blind?*



*Here comes Belle!*





*Fall color, deep in the forest.*





... and the remains of an old miner's cabin.



*A perfect Christmas tree. No, I won't go back for it. But I thought about it!*









*The trail ahead . . . always enticing. Thanks for coming along!*



About the apple orchard: on the way back at dusk, there was a large herd of deer reaching for the apples. Belle ran ahead to greet them. They stood until she joined them, and then took off as Thunder and I approached. Belle ran with them for a minute, and then swung back to Thunder and me. Watching Belle run with the deer was a once-in-a-lifetime thrill. She had a look that clearly said, "Isn't this something!" It certainly was.

MM

When I took possession of the new ranch a couple of months ago, I discovered that the sellers had abandoned their mother cat and her seven kittens. Left to fend for themselves, they were all nearly (literally) starving to death and Mommy cat was pregnant again.

They were all in too ill health to spay/neuter until this week. Although most are feral (wild), I managed to capture them and have them spayed and neutered. It was traumatic for them and a nightmare for me. But it is done. Whew! They all seem back to normal now . . . playing in the barn, and hanging out with the horses.

Mommy cat, who is not feral, will have her next litter in the house where I can hand tame the kittens, before they are adopted out to good homes, and she is spayed as well. No more babies. There were five female kittens . . . just do the math on how many more kittens that could produce. Wonderful as they are, the world does NOT need more cats! Since none of these are adoptable, they will all have a permanent home here at the ranch. At least I don't have to worry about mice!

*"Graystoke" and "Phantom" cuddle up during recovery. The next day they were running round like crazy.*





*"Elke" is still anesthetized.*



*Mommy cat is staying in the house until she delivers her next - and final - litter any day now, so that the kittens will be tame and adoptable. In the meantime, it isn't easy to find a comfortable position with **THAT** belly!*





## 2010-11-20 – *The Barn Cats*

Page 3 of 4

*"My" herd of elk know that hunting season is over for them. They visit every evening now.*



*They are not bothered by the horses or me.*





*Sunset from the barn door . . .*



*. . . and outside . . .*



## 2010-11-24 – **Big Ride**

Page 1 of 7

Dacodah is my farrier (horse shoer), and a group trail ride leader along the Rio Grande. He is also a special friend. So although I usually ride alone with my horses, when he asked me to help out with a big group ride, I readily agreed. He also asked that I bring Maverick along to run free, as everyone seems to enjoy seeing him have such a good time. I wore chaps and told corny cowboy jokes.

*It takes a lot of horses to carry 40 riders! Dacodah has about 25 in his string, and borrowed more from other ranchers.*







It would have been challenging enough . . . but Dacodah failed to mention that these "riders" were in the area for the annual big Crane Festival in Socorro (the cranes come down from Canada for the winter - their arrival is a spectacular show). They were *bird* enthusiasts . . . average age, say . . . OLD. Their travel agent thought a horseback ride would be a classic New Mexico experience for them. Most had never ridden. Just getting them aboard a horse was worthy of a funny video!



*"Uh, Maverick, did you see that woman get on the horse . . . and off the other side?"*



*"I am REALLY glad I am not wearing a saddle today!"*





*Actually, Dacodah is a remarkable leader, and eventually we got going.*



*From a distance, it was pretty impressive. Really looked like the Old West.*





*Dacodah chats up a younger rider.*





*Thank God it was a beautiful day. Rain and lightning would have been interesting . . .*



*On the way home, the riders slowed down . . . a LOT. Maverick wanders along, and thinks about taking a short cut home; but he stayed with the group . . .*



I think sales of Advil, bath salts and liniment skyrocketed in the area. But I ran into three of our riders in a local restaurant that evening. And they said they had the time of their lives!

MM





FOLLOWED  
DREAM  
RANCH

Just wanted to share this evening's sunset at the ranch with you . . . and, of course,  
*Happy Thanksgiving wishes from the kids and myself!*





It just kept getting better!



## 2010-11-27 – **News Flash! - Kittens!**

Page 1 of 4

Well, they are here! Earlier today, Mommy Barn Cat delivered five healthy and adorable kittens. Her previous litter (abandoned along with her, by the sellers of the ranch) has been spayed/neutered, and this will be her final family. They are all in the house, where they will be socialized for adoption. Belle is already thinking she would like to start a family . . .

*The first two were born only minutes apart.*





## 2010-11-27 – *News Flash! - Kittens!*

Page 2 of 4

*She hugs the third...*



*...and welcomes the fourth into the world. She is a great mom.*



*Here are all five, enjoying their first meal together.*







MM

## 2010-11-27 – *Thanksgiving Deer*

Page 1 of 6

For our first Thanksgiving at the ranch, we got a special treat - a little snow flurry (today it is back to blue skies in the 60's), and deer on the front lawn. And after dinner, there were elk hanging out with the horses!

*Deer and a little snow . . . can Christmas be far behind?*





## 2010-11-27 – *Thanksgiving Deer*

Page 2 of 6



*Yes, I see you, too!*





## 2010-11-27 – *Thanksgiving Deer*

Page 3 of 6

*A buck under the apple tree*



*From my kitchen window*





*A baby.*



## 2010-11-27 – *Thanksgiving Deer*

Page 5 of 6

*They gather near the barn . . .*





## 2010-11-27 – *Thanksgiving Deer*

Page 6 of 6

*. . . and the baby has a drink. Makes hauling that water tank all the way from California worth it!*



MM

## 2010-11-30 – ***First Snow***

Page 1 of 6

Yesterday morning started out like most . . . bright blue skies. By noon, dense gray clouds moved onto the mountaintops to the West. The sky seemed to lower and it grew very quiet. And then . . .

*For a girl who hates rain to mess up her mane (she really does get an annoyed look on her face), Belle was oddly nonchalant about the snow.*





## 2010-11-30 – *First Snow*

Page 2 of 6

*In fact, they all seemed unfazed by it, but when I went to check on them, they followed me back to the barn.*



*This is why I worked so hard during the warm weather. Here we are in the barn, cozy and quiet, with snow falling outside. And not just the horses - the barn cats cavorted in the loft, and several birds flew in to roost out of reach on the warmer rafters (the cats thought that was unfair).*



## 2010-11-30 – *First Snow*

Page 3 of 6

*Looking down from the loft, "Big Guy" barn cat enjoys a drink from one water bucket, while Belle has hers from another. Maverick, Spanky and Thunder graze on some alfalfa I put out. Peaceful.*



*Meanwhile, outside the snow continues to fall. For a native Southern Californian, this is pretty cool.*





## 2010-11-30 – *First Snow*

Page 4 of 6

*I went into the house to fix lunch (more turkey leftovers!), and when I looked out the kitchen window . . .*



*. . . he was looking back (I'm glad I wasn't having venison).*



## 2010-11-30 – ***First Snow***

Page 5 of 6

*After a while the buck strolled off toward the barn. Maybe he wanted to get out of the snow, too!*





## 2010-11-30 – *First Snow*

Page 6 of 6

*This morning, most of the snow was gone (!), under blue skies. And the deer herd was on the back pasture; you can just make some of them out near the trees.*



I won't say I am used to all this yet. I'm not sure I ever will be!

MM

## 2010-11-30 – *Mills Canyon Trail*

Page 1 of 5

One of the closest riding areas to the ranch is Mills Canyon. The trail follows a year-round stream through meadows and narrow canyons. There are some stretches where we can run full out through the forest.

*The trails are very well marked; the Mills Canyon trail connects to a network of other trails.*





## 2010-11-30 – *Mills Canyon Trail*

Page 2 of 5

*Thunder contemplates a bridge along the way. This kind of stuff doesn't bother him; in Sedona there was a wood bridge he used to like to race across - I think he liked the sound of his hooves on the boards.*



*Belle treats it like a fashion runway! She prefers not to hurry.*





## 2010-11-30 – *Mills Canyon Trail*

Page 3 of 5

*One of the fast stretches.*







*It is always nice to ride along water . . .  
There is a surprising amount of green grass for this late in the year.*





*On the way home . . .*



MM





FOLLOWED  
DREAM  
RANCH

## 2010-11-30 – *Technical Ride*

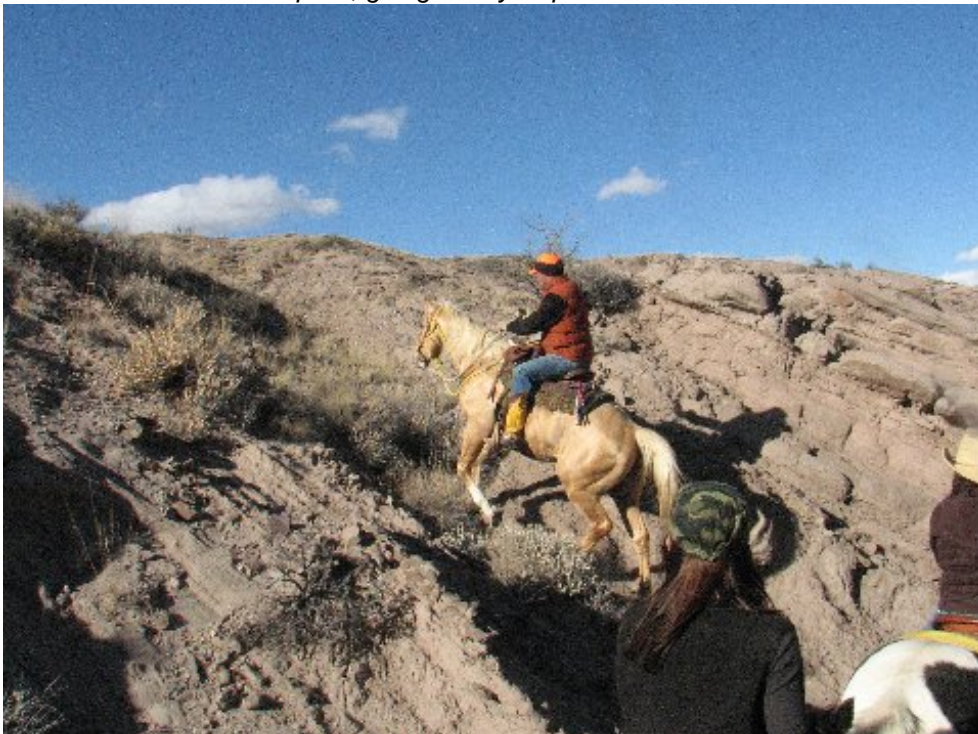
Page 1 of 6

Sometimes Dacodah likes to lead rides on more challenging trails, where speed is not as important as agility and trust. He calls these "technical" rides because of the skills the horses show.

*The landscape here is truly dramatic, and very different from the ranch (one of the things I appreciate is the variety of riding nearby). Dacodah points the way.*



*It is much easier for horses to run up hill; going slowly requires more skill and control.*





*What a different world . . .*





*I was trying to photograph the remarkable landscape sculpted by wind and water - but got that old silhouette instead . . .*



*Those are "my" mountains in the distance.*





*Ridge riding is not for the faint of heart!*



*"Good thing I'm not afraid of heights!"*

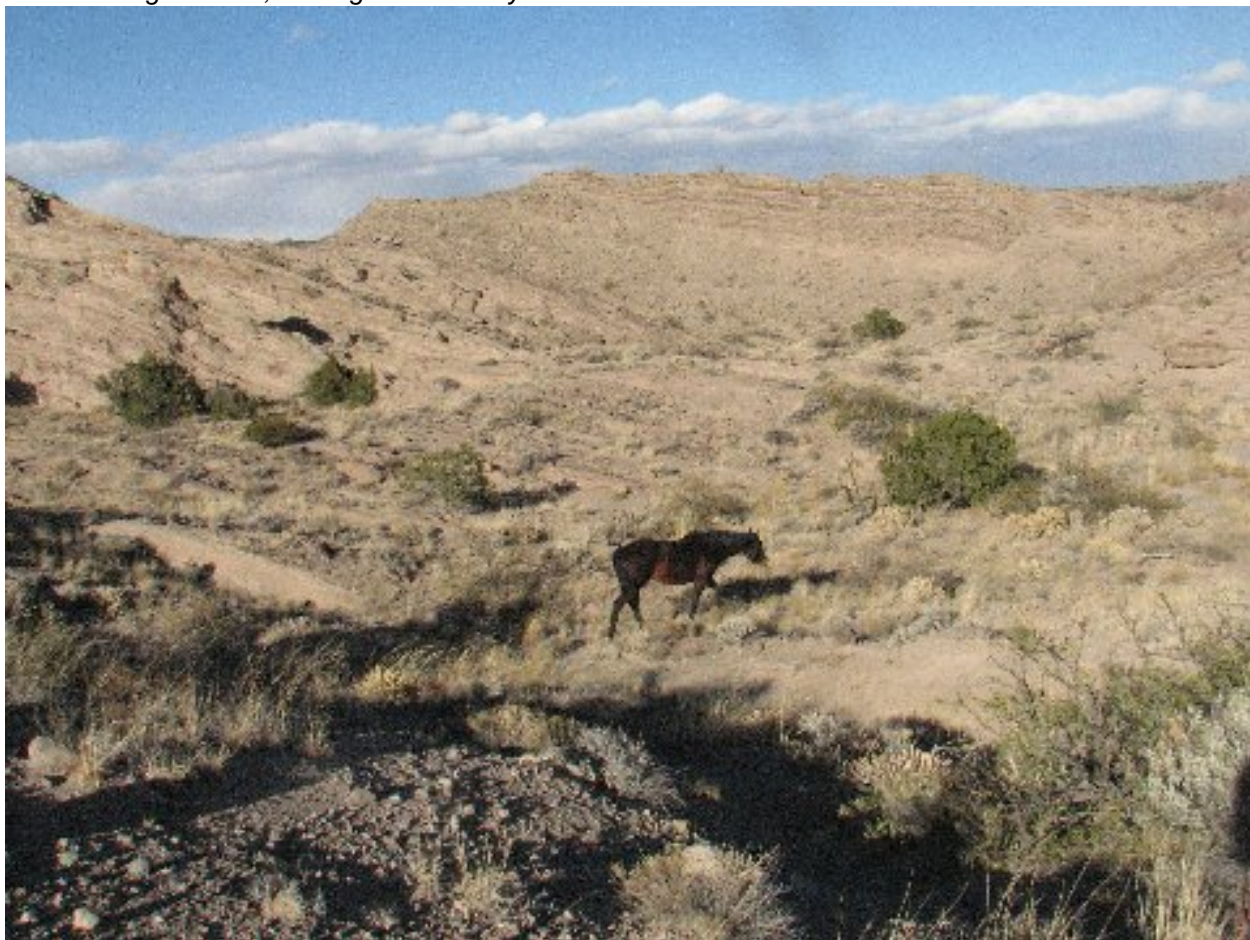


*The great American desert Southwest.*





*Belle had a great time, making her own way.*



Vaya con Dios, amigo!

MM

## 2010-12-03 – *Kitten Update*

Page 1 of 4

The kittens were born last Saturday, and have already nearly doubled in size. Mommy Cat is a great mom. Today there was ONE eye open among them. I am sure this weekend will see more eyes opening . . .

*Here is the lineup. The one that looks black is actually charcoal, with a little orange blaze on his/her forehead.*



*They are pretty much constantly in motion!*





## 2010-12-03 – *Kitten Update*

Page 2 of 4

*Mom is a hugger! I hope the blonde is a girl, so I can name her Tippi after my friend . . .*









She is smart to get her hugs in now; just wait until they are all running around!

MM

Ever since our snow earlier in the week, it has been in the mid-60 degrees! All the snow is long gone at the ranch. I thought I would check out the conditions at Ski Apache, about 20 miles away (and 4,000 ft. higher). I planned to take Thunder and Belle, but she was busy grazing with Spanky, and Maverick let me know that he really wanted to go, so . . .

*On our way out the driveway, we spotted this cow elk. There have been lots more elk at the ranch each evening, but it is unusual to see them in the middle of the day. They sure know hunting season is over!*





*We climb quickly up to the resort . . .*



*. . . through Aspen groves now bare of leaves.*



## 2010-12-04 – *Man Made Snow*

Page 3 of 8

*Thunder and Maverick check out the slopes. Only man-made snow so far. It only gets cold enough for the machines to work during the night.*



*"Hmmm . . . that's funny. Snow over there and none right here . . ."*





*Not much snow on the trails.*



*We can see several of the 55 ski runs at Ski Apache Resort.*











*Some snow on the trail here. The only tracks are from deer.*





*Maverick leads us into the forest. It is so quiet . . . and peaceful.*



*He is well camouflaged against the winter meadow.*





*Spanky and Belle got to go today. I experimented with a new configuration; I rode Belle and let Spanky run free. Although he has been free with a group, this was the first time it's been just the three of us like this. I hold my breath.*



*It worked out just fine. Twice he got confused and started down a wrong trail. But when he realized we were going a different direction, he waited for Belle and me to come and fetch him. I don't know why he didn't just change course to rejoin us on his own, but he had such a different background as a highly-competitive barrel race horse, I suppose this new lifestyle takes some adjustment!*



## 2010-12-05 – ***Nogal Peak Trail***

Page 1 of 8

Nogal Peak is New Mexico's "Bali Hai". Like the mystical island in "South Pacific", it stands alone and apart. Its' unique pyramid shape beckons from high above the Rio Grande valley. Ancient Indians believed it was sacred; many modern Apaches still do. I see it every day from the ranch, and this afternoon decided to explore it closer than I have before.

*The route up Nogal Canyon is a classic forest road (by the way, "Nogal" is Spanish for "walnut".)*





## 2010-12-05 – **Nogal Peak Trail**

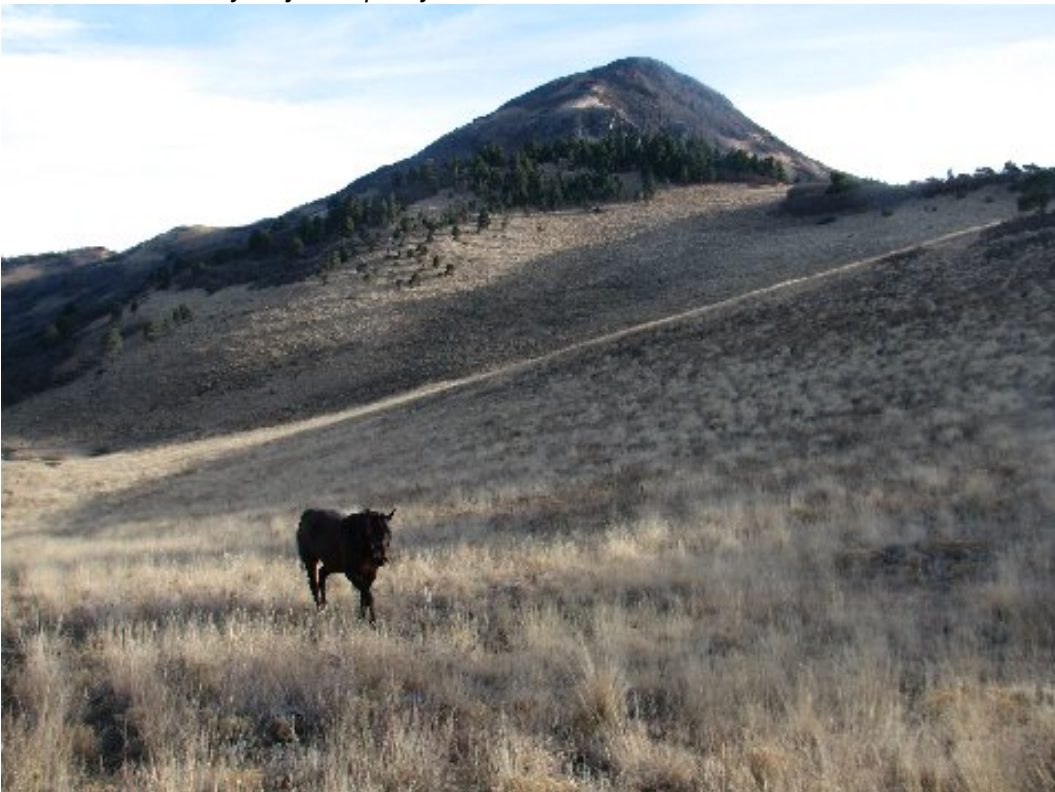
Page 2 of 8

*Since it is still deer season, and we were going to be riding late into the afternoon, I tied a red ribbon around Belle's neck as a warning to hunters; as usual, we never saw or heard any. Belle thought it looked nice.*

*"Whatcha' think? Pretty, huh? It doesn't make my neck look fat?"*



*The trail head is only about 10 miles from the ranch, but the mood is different; at 10,000 ft. elevation, the alpine terrain has a truly majestic quality.*





*This was another of our rides where we didn't hear or see evidence of anyone else. The quiet here is profound. There was not a breath of wind. No sound of traffic . . . not even a plane. Thunder looks north towards Santa Fe.*





*. . . If only I could paint . . .*



*In the other direction, the big pine forests and ski runs of Sierra Blanca.*



*Belle, below the rocky summit of Nogal peak.*



*Thunder takes a breather. It is much steeper than it appears. And BIGGER - the gray slopes are actually covered with broad stands of Aspens.*





*Belle joins him for a snack.*



*Up we go. Near the top is an enormous rock ledge.*



## 2010-12-05 – *Nogal Peak Trail*

Page 7 of 8

*The summit isn't far, and they wanted to keep going, but I think this route is too rocky for them. We'll try a different way another time. This ride has provided plenty of magic.*



*Once again I am very proud of these horses. They do what I ask without complaint, and they obviously enjoy our adventures as much as I do. Rides like this increase our special bond.*





*All the way back, I think of how fortunate I am . . .*



MM

## 2010-12-10 – ***Big Guy Barn Cat***

Page 1 of 8

All seven of the barn cats are doing well. Most are still aloof; but Big Guy has decided he wants to be domesticated, and has become a ranch favorite.

*Big Guy Barn Cat*



*He has a special relationship with Spanky.*





## 2010-12-10 – ***Big Guy Barn Cat***

Page 2 of 8

*And here comes Big Cat's brother, Smarty Pants, to check it out.*



*This happens every morning. "You mean he eats that stuff?" "Yeah." "Weird."*





## 2010-12-10 – **Big Guy Barn Cat**

Page 3 of 8

*Although it is still in the 60's during the day, with those clear New Mexico skies it is cold at night. So I blanket the kids every evening and remove them in the morning. The blankets buckle under their bellies, and Big Guy has learned how to crawl over me when I kneel down to buckle or unbuckle them, and . . .*





*Both are dozing . . .*



*Big Guy has also befriended the deer. Last night I saw him and one of the fawns sniffing each other's nose's (too dark for photos), and here he is this morning with the herd:*







*This is the fawn; Big Guy is below him, out of camera range.*





*Breakfast with the deer family!*



*A younger buck.*







*Off they go.*





*Meanwhile, the horses watch and wait for their breakfast!*



That's how it is around here. Takes the fun out of sleeping in!  
MM

2010-12-10 – ***Elk***

Page 1 of 2

Its dusk and I just walked outside to feed the deer, and spotted the elk herd across the pasture. They were laying kind of low during the hunting season (wonder why?). Nice to have them back.







Happy weekend again!  
MM

## 2010-12-10 – *The New Kittens At Two Weeks*

Page 1 of 4

The kittens will be two weeks old tomorrow. Sorry the photos aren't better - but YOU try getting them to cooperate . . . They still don't walk very well, but they hobble really fast!













Have a great weekend!

MM

## 2010-12-10 – *The Old Bull Barn*

Page 1 of 8

There are seven buildings on the ranch; all in good shape except the old bull barn. Used in the old days to hold the prize breeding bull (It is surrounded by a "Jurassic Park"-type fence), it hasn't been used or maintained in years. Since the weather has been so surprisingly mild, I figured I would paint the poor old barn before winter sets in.

*The bull barn sits on a rise, overlooking the ranch.*





*I'm sure an artist would prefer it like this, full of "character".*



*There hasn't been water in this trough for a very long time.*





## 2010-12-10 – *The Old Bull Barn*

Page 3 of 8

*Big Guy was fascinated by my weed removal. He was hoping for a rodent (there were none.)*



*And once the weeds were gone, I couldn't keep the horses out of the barn. It's like they were waiting for me to break out the beer!*





*"Hey Maverick, we could use a nice cold pitcher in here!"*



*"Got Michelob?" "Yeah, and some cashews would be nice."*





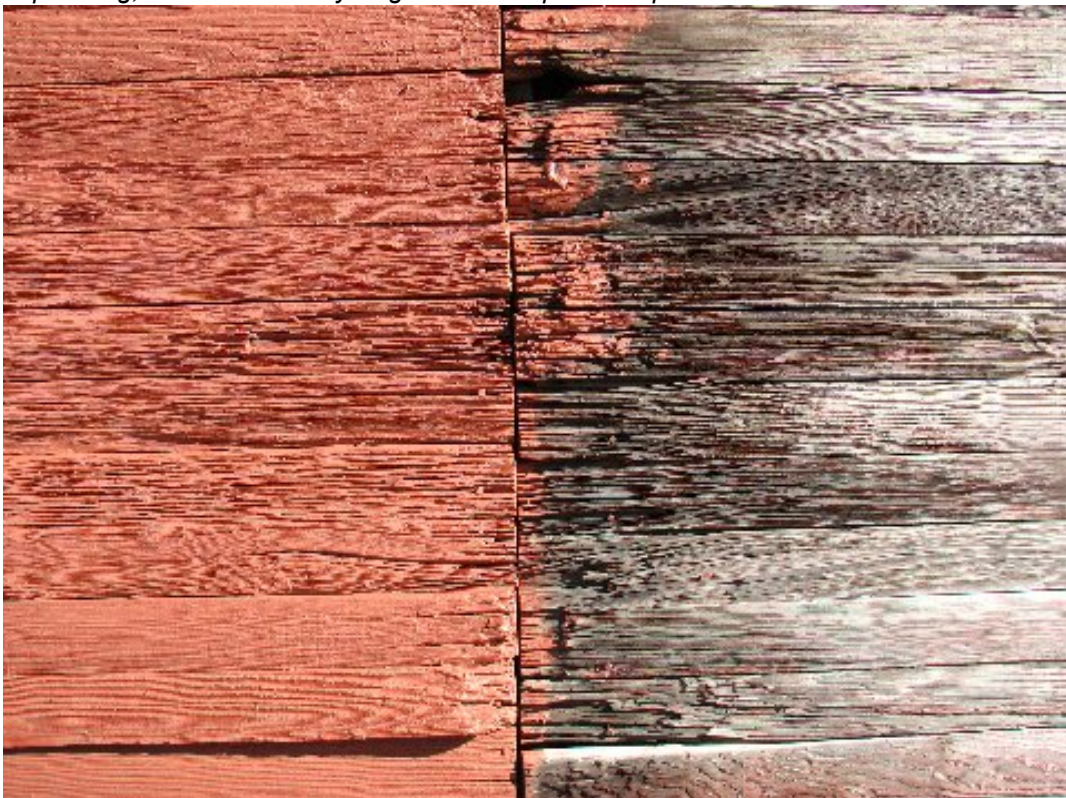
## 2010-12-10 – *The Old Bull Barn*

Page 5 of 8

*The barn has three "rooms". The inside is filled with at least two feet of bull manure (not as much as you'd find in Washington D.C., but still, it's a lot.) I am trying to find a landscaper/farmer to come and get it. It's organic! Lots of work to do . . .*



*I appreciate the way an old barn looks; and I like character . . . but when a building gets this neglected, it is dying. Both realtors said to me, "You'll just want to tear this down, of course". Like Hell! It is built of solid oak planking, and full of history. A good coat of paint will protect it.*





*It does make a difference!*



*Thunder helped! (See his nose?)*



*Not a bad place to work!*





*Painting's done!*



MM

Dacodah plans to offer true-West-style chuck wagon meals on his guided trail rides. He asked if I would like to join some friends and be a guinea pig for the first test. Sure I would!

*We set out through the spectacular canyon country Dacodah knows so well.*



*Maverick checks out some sandstone formations . . . or is he just posing for me?*





*Working up an appetite.*



*My two guys; I'm riding Thunder, with Maverick at my right knee.*





*Lunch is ready, down below.*



*The food was delicious! Brisket, coleslaw (with local pecans), cowboy beans, fresh baked biscuits . . .*





*. . . and fresh peach cobbler cooked in a Dutch oven over a campfire . . . This really ain't roughing it!*



*Thunder and Maverick wait patiently . . .*





*Well . . . Maverick was curious about that cobbler!*



*On the way back, I switched mounts and rode Maverick home; Thunder went along free. He is such a leader; I wasn't sure how he would do with this freedom. But he handled himself with his usual class.*





*"Hello, I'm Thunder and this is my buddy, Maverick. How do you do?"*



I'm always proud of my kids!  
MM



## 2010-12-24 – *Christmas Tree*

Page 1 of 3

This year I could cut my own Christmas tree in the forest right behind the house. Of course, I had lots of help in picking one out . . .

*We found a pinion pine (New Mexico's state tree) that was growing too close to another . . . so we didn't feel so bad about cutting it . . .*



*Everyone had to check it out.*







*Now it glistens with memories of many Christmases past.*





MM





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End Volume 1 - Part 1 of 3

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