

Volume 4 - Part 2 of 3

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Patriotism runs deep in this community, and the Fourth of July is a big celebration.



It starts with a morning parade in Capitan. Belle and I joined re-enactor Emily Pope, representing the Fort.



When we turned a corner and Belle saw the size of the crowd, she wasn't so sure but, she did just fine.



Greeting her fans along the way.





...but the really *BIG* event is the Smokey Bear Stampede Rodeo and fireworks.





In my opinion, the "pick up" riders are the best of all - they stand by and rescue the competitors - at break neck speed; and do a number of other difficult chores in the arena.





All four feet off the ground!



This goes on for four days and nights!



My favorite part is the Ranch Rodeo, held each afternoon. Local ranchers form teams to compete at versions of regular, everyday ranch work like putting an angry steer in a stock trailer . . .



. . . and milking a wild cow!



2013-07-07 – *Fourth Of July*

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This is a true American tradition - and though I am sure no cow likes to be roped and thrown to the ground, their annoyance is brief, and I didn't see evidence of any injuries.

I wish you could have been there for the singing of the National Anthem. The entire audience joined in, and you could feel the pride in this great country.



MM

Although we still haven't greened up much at the ranch, just a few miles away Nogal Peak has gotten more rain and is - well - greener!

We decided at the last minute to take an early evening ride near Nogal Peak. It had rained hard just before we arrived. Made for some tricky driving (I suspect Thunder is a back seat driver . . ."Stay out of the mud! Over to the left!")



The temperature at the ranch was 78 degrees. At the trail head, it was 62! "I hope you ride better than you drive."





Some ferns along the trail.



As usual, wild flowers just don't photograph (especially in the gray light of dusk).

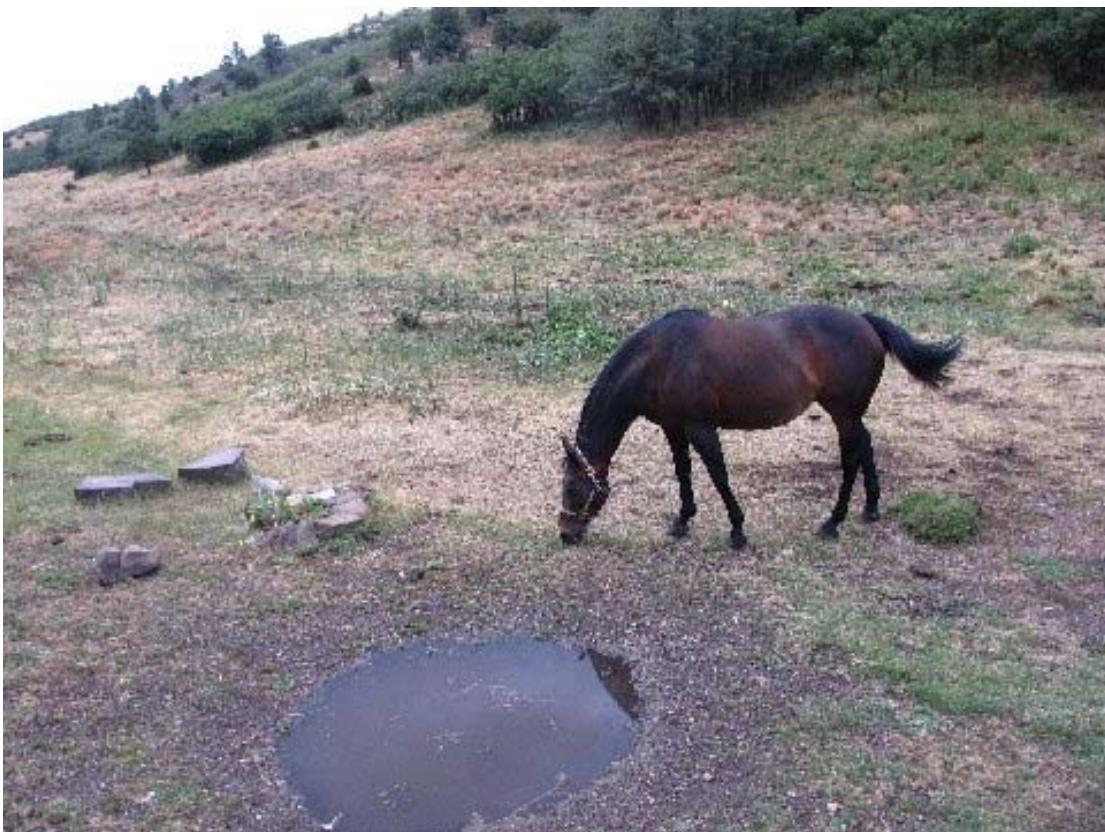




Nogal Peak. Ever changing. Yet eternal.



These aren't rain puddles; they're seasonal springs. We could actually see the water rising in them.





Sunset (and rain) over the desert below.



Whoopee! Headed home . . .



"Glad you had a nice ride. It's late. Can we have our supper NOW?"





FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-07-19 – *Fort Stanton LIVE!*

Our reenactment weekend at the Fort managed to dodge the rain bullet (not that we would give up precious rain for any reason in this dry country . . .)

On Friday, enough rain came that Cherry Creek ran muddy through the ranch. And Sunday night after the event, the rain came back for our days straight - it was 55 degrees!



. . . but Saturday morning dawned bright, warm and beautiful.





Of course, there was lots of cannon fire.



... and muskets, too.



Belle wasn't so sure about the Mescalero dancers in their Ghost Dance regalia.



*She was wonderful during our saber drills - we nailed the potatoes at charge-speed, three runs in a row!
I am very proud of her.*

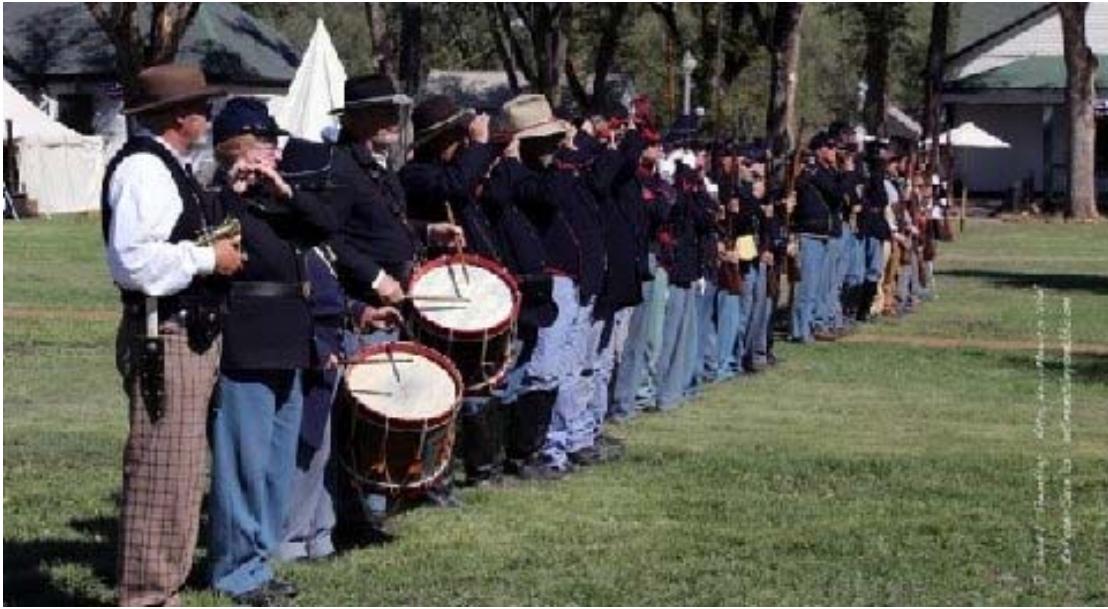


... and she was a calm and gentle ambassador to our visitors young and old.



She was especially pleased by the commemorative t-shirts with her image on them (people joked that she has her own clothing line - "Belle Wear")





On Sunday morning, a small group of us hiked to the old Fort cemetery, for a memorial rifle volley in tribute to those who came before.



A wounded veteran and his wife asked to join us. It was a rough hike over difficult terrain for someone in a wheel chair. But we all helped. He deserved to be there. It was a proud moment.



It is surprising how quickly things green up when the rains come - as though each plant has its chlorophyll already - just add water!
... and wildflowers, too.



Thunder takes a nap at the Fort - quiet again after all the action of Fort Stanton LIVE!



2013-07-21 – *How Green Is My Valley*

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Today I hitched up the trailer so that we could take an early ride. The sky was clear. But I had an inkling . . . so I decided to mow the lawn before we left. Within minutes, it clouded up and began raining just as I finished with the mowing. I rained off and on all day. The horses knew the trailer was ready - and so were they. When it looked like the rain might break in the afternoon, we took off. It was still raining as we arrived at Cedar Creek . . . but we lucked out, and it stopped just as we were parking.



"Hey this is great! The rain stopped, Belle, and look at all this green grass!"



"It's a good thing. You know how I hate it when my mane gets wet!"



These are not "our" deer, but they sure are curious.



Clearing skies.







"Yum!" A last-minute snack before we head home.



It sure is nice to see all the green again!
MM

2013-07-26 – **Ah, Summer!**

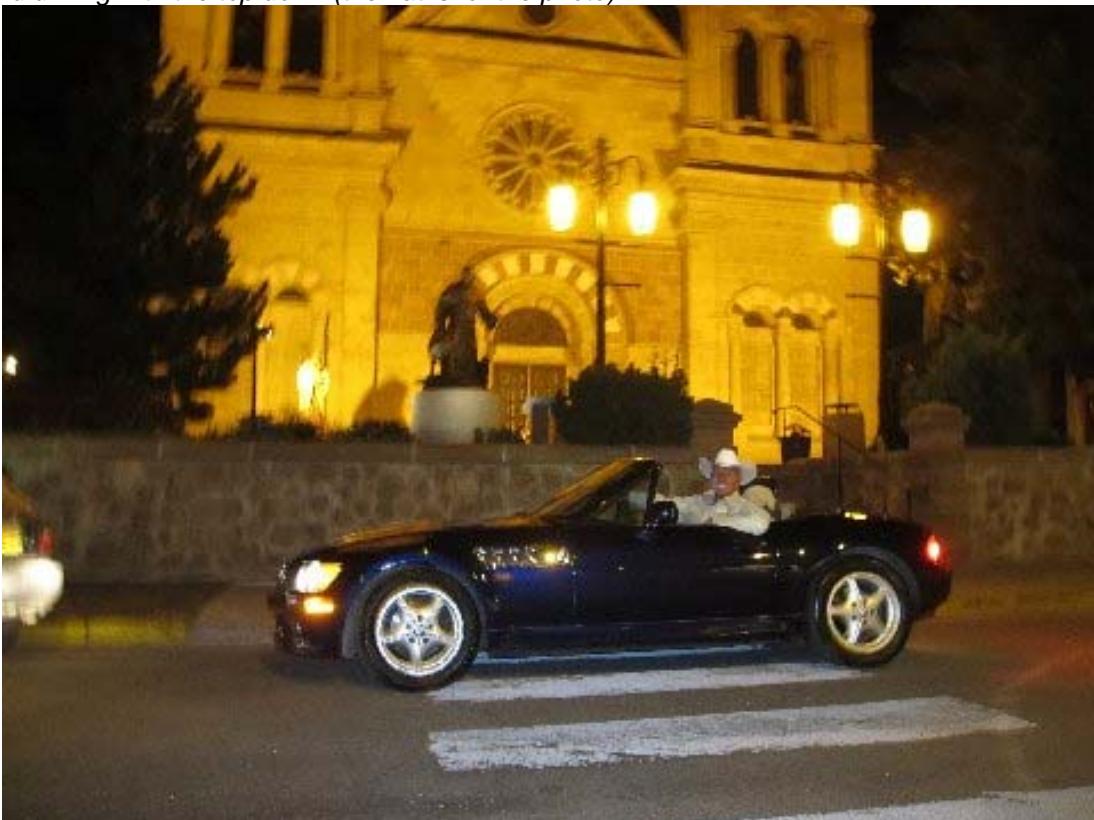
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Most people talk about Fall in New Mexico, but I like Summer - sort of like Spring ought to be, but more interesting.

Summer means balmy nights and full moons (this one behind the cathedral in Santa Fe) . . .



. . . and driving with the top down (the hat is for the photo)



Green meadows (at last!) and monsoon clouds.





Open roads, full of promise . . .



. . . and country roads, full of quiet.



Have a wonderful weekend. I guess Belle and I will be fighting in the WWII Battle of Anzio, Italy, in 1944(!) So much for "quiet". More about that later . . .

MM

2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

During WWII, the United States did not confront the German Wermacht (war machine), until early 1943. Winston Churchill was convinced that the way to overwhelm Germany was through her "soft underbelly" - Italy (what General Mark Clark later called "one tough gut"). President Roosevelt and his advisors thought differently, and began planning the strategy that would win the war - "Operation Overlord"; attacking across the English Channel at Normandy, but to appease Churchill, plans were made to open a second front by the Allies - fighting from North Africa to Sicily, and on to Rome. The "March to Rome" became a turning point in the war - for the first time, the Germans were on the run.

A large group of re-enactors, from as far away as California, Colorado, and Georgia, paid tribute to this great Allied effort with a series of battle recreations in and around Fort Stanton. This part of New Mexico closely resembles the Italian terrain near Anzio, and some of the Fort's buildings were used for housing, mess, etc. Belle and I were recruited by the organizers at the last minute to provide scouting and communications among the troops. It was a very powerful experience.

The "March on Rome" re-enactors are very concerned with authenticity. Allied and Axis armies are represented, with authentic uniforms, weapons, and vehicles. These are re-enactors (in B & W).



2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

36th Division "Texas T-patchers".



There were more than 100 re-enactors, representing most of the actual participants in the "March on Rome" during 1943, including British (and her Dominions), Americans, Germans, Italian partisan resistance fighters, and civilians.





New Zealanders.



2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

American GI's on the move.



German soldier in the field.



2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

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During battles, Belle became keenly alert - and tolerated machine gun fire, high-caliber weapons, mortars, and smoke grenades at close range. This was nothing like our cavalry-era exercises. I was very proud of her.



"Italian refugee children".



2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

German messenger.



GI's, with a young Italian resistance fighter.



2013-08-01 – *March on Rome . . . At Fort Stanton*

After a lengthy battle along the Rio Bonito, Belle congratulates some GI's on the parade ground.



A treat for their mascot.



The battles are designed to be as authentic as possible, and for the most part took place in very remote areas adjacent to the Fort. In order for the public to view a re-creation close-hand, the final "scenario" was of the Germans rounding up "Italian partisan resistance fighters (including a priest)" at the Fort, and forcing them against a stone church wall to be executed. I was greatly affected by it. I actually tiered up. Horrific. It was a vivid reminder of all that inhumanity. For historic accuracy, Belle and I were asked to reenact as Germans, and to "patrol" around the scene, and then, when we "spotted" the Allies approaching (who would save the resistance members from death), to ride at full speed and alert the Germans. This we did - Belle was wonderful, barreling away from the Allies, even when both sides opened fire (more than 100 participants) with guns, machine guns, smoke grenades, etc. - with us in the middle! The concussion of it was terrific. Belle was heroic. We dodged between buildings, where we could not be seen by the crowd of spectators (who were totally absorbed by the chaos). Belle kept looking at me for reassurance. I thought we should do something to finish our "role" in this - all the Germans were killed or captured. At the last minute, as the gunfire began dying down and with smoke thick in the air, I slumped over Belle, with my arms hanging lifelessly on either side and my head resting on her neck, and we walked through the carnage at a slow pace (I was whispering "just walk, Belle, just walk"). The crowd was very moved by the sight of a horse carefully carrying its dead rider. Even the re-enactors congratulated us. Everyone seemed to agree that it was the most powerful portion of this reenactment. I am very proud of Belle.

Experiences like this leave long term impressions. My participation had a profound effect on me. Hard to explain, but I got a real sense of the sacrifices made for our freedom. Rather than trivializing war, this elaborate reenactment paid powerful tribute to the Allies who fought, and died, to protect mankind from tyranny.

MM

2013-08-05 – *Old Lincoln Days*

Because of her "look", Belle is ideally suited to be a military mount. More importantly, she has a good temperament for it as well. She is heroic, without being aggressive. It is very unusual for a horse to be "amp-ed up" during a battle or saber drill – and then to switch gears immediately, gently greeting children. And she genuinely enjoys the action and attention. I never would have guessed it - I'm sure it came as a surprise to her, too!

She has been very busy lately.

Belle was invited to carry the American flag once again in the Village of Lincoln's big "Old Lincoln Days" parade (she was asked at the last minute a year ago - her first parade ever). The centerpiece of the weekend's events is the "Last Escape of Billy the Kid" pageant - one of the few outdoor pageants still being performed. The first one was done in 1940, and it has been an annual institution ever since. The cast is made up entirely of local amateurs, featuring live horses and gunfire. The main performances are at night (with lighting effects), but there is one matinee. Here is how it looks in the daylight.



Before we set out for the parade, Belle had a make-over at home . . .



. . . I think she looks pleased.



We stopped at the historic Ellis Store B&B in Lincoln before the parade. This was the first place Belle ever stayed in New Mexico - back when we were living in California and searching for a new home. Belle enjoyed strolling the lawn where Billy the Kid once tread menacingly.



He really did stay here (as a "guest" of the U.S. Marshall).



Belle was very curious about these miniature horses, being teamed for a wagon. They spooked some of the other horses . . . (I think the one on the right looks like a stuffed toy).



Belle was flawless, leading the parade.



2013-08-05 – *Old Lincoln Days*

There is only one street through Lincoln - State Hwy. 380. (Because of all the gunfights, then-President Rutherford B. Hayes once called it "The most dangerous street in America"); the highway is closed down for the duration of the parade (which most folks agree is illegal). Some drivers naturally object to the delay. At the end of the parade, Belle and I continued on through the back-up, to apologize for the inconvenience (most people understand).



Then we were asked to pose for photos in front of the old Torreon (a defensive tower from the 1850's; when Apaches raided the town, villagers ran inside for protection. That's one of the reasons Fort Stanton was established nearby).



2013-08-05 – *Old Lincoln Days*

Belle stood like that for a couple of hours - without complaint - as countless visitors came up to have their picture taken with her.



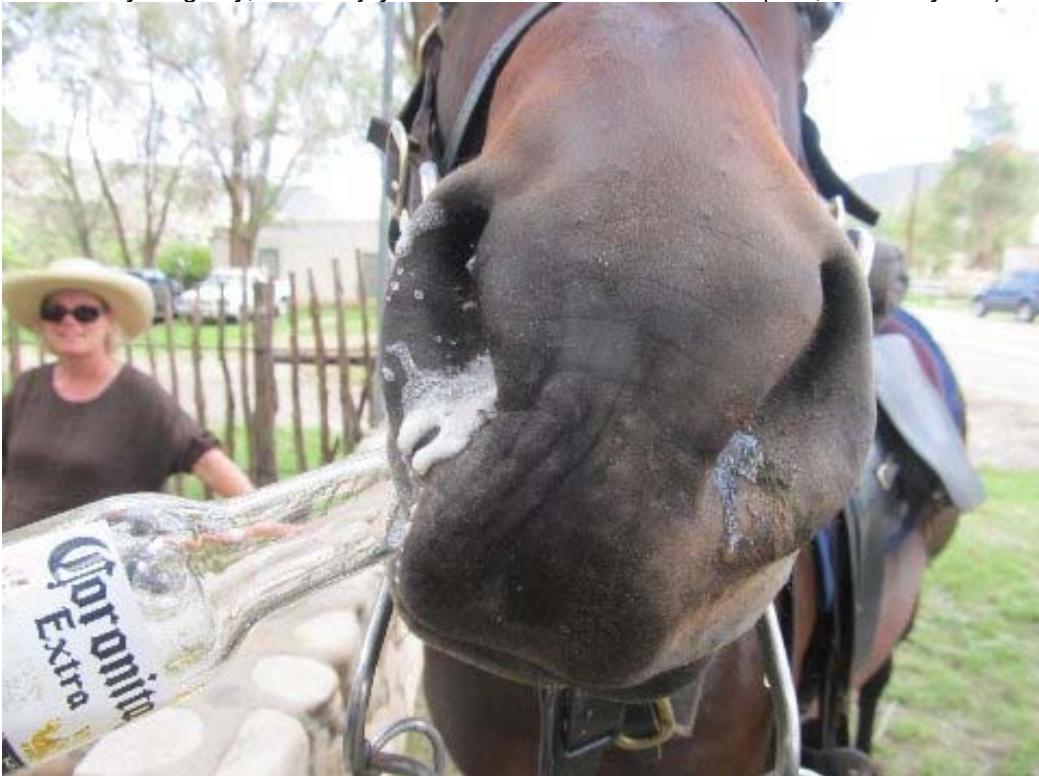
Afterwards, a news photographer asked us to do a "run" for a publication - Belle was happy to comply!



All we needed was a cavalry behind us! The flapping flag didn't bother Belle at all.



At the end of a very long day, Belle enjoyed a much-deserved cold beer (Yes, she really did!)



As you can see, it was a beautiful day for a parade in Lincoln. But while we were there, it was raining at the ranch, just 20 miles away. It rained 4 INCHES in just over an hour. Thunder and Spanky told us all about it when we got home. Ah, New Mexico!
MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

This time of year, it's nice to ride near home, and enjoy the green of Summer.

Thunder has a frolic at Fort Stanton.



We took an easy ride just a couple of miles from the ranch. We are trying a new treatment for Spanky's ring bone. It seems to be helping. Time will tell.



Spanky stops for a snack.

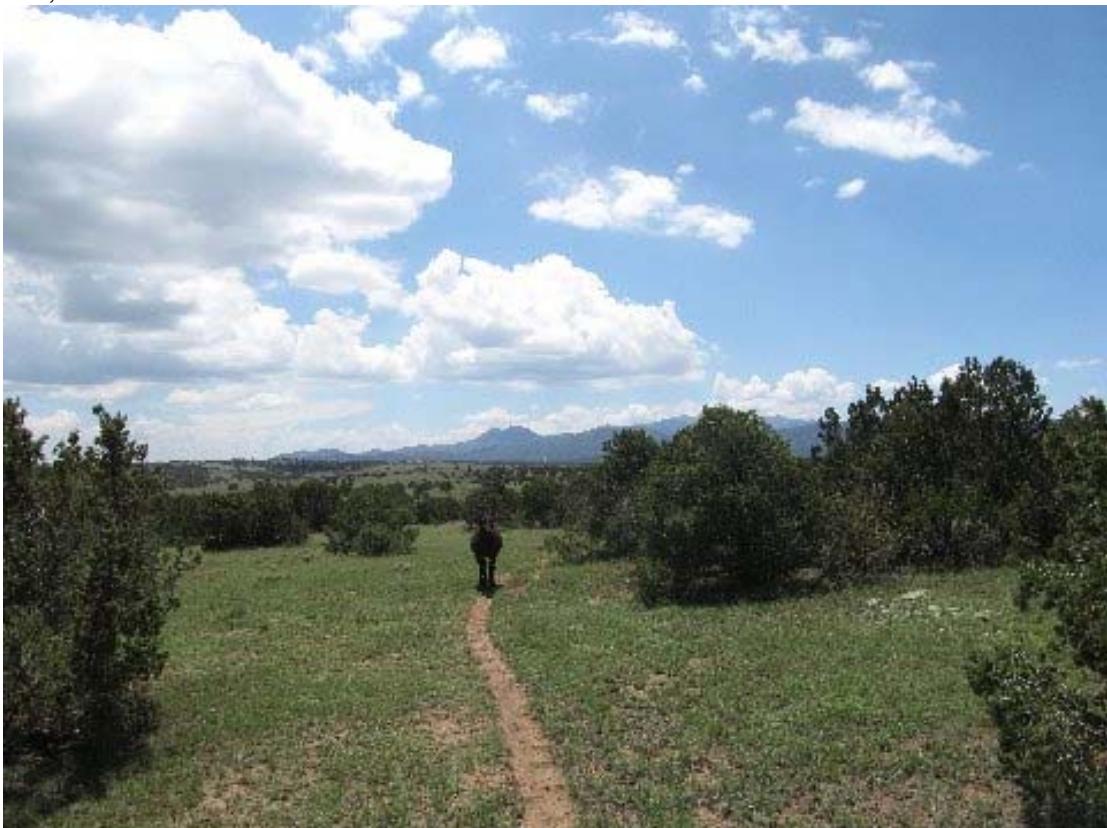


"Isn't this great, Thunder? Like an endless salad bar!"





Come on, Belle!



Running full out.



After a good run, a quiet walk together.



The cattle tanks are full again.



The streams, too.





Even with the green grass, the deer still visit for their treats.





Of course, Onyx has to say "Hello".



This cat decided to attack the mountain lion, "Grrrrr, I've got your ear!" Cats are so strange.



"Ouch! This makes my teeth hurt! Give up yet?"



Grazing in the open country after a ride. Peaceful Summer . . .



MM

2013-08-12 – *Land Of Contrasts*

One of the advantages to living in New Mexico is the wide variety of climate and terrain nearby. Makes for interesting riding (and unpredictable weather!).

We begin the morning along the Bonito River, about five miles from home.





Lots of green grass . . . finally.





In the afternoon, we are on our way to Dacodah's for new shoes. The high desert is very different from the mountains of Bonito.



When we arrived at Dacodah's, he was saddling up for a ride with 30 Chinese exchange students. None of whom had ridden before. That was interesting!



On the trail, as usual, Spanky and Thunder led the way.



This, too, is New Mexico.





Clouds come and go quickly here along the Rio Grande. No riding in the river this time - recent rains swelled the Rio Grande to five feet deep with swift water.



I honestly wonder if they do this as photo ops for Dacodah's riders!



High above San Lorenzo Canyon, Belle looks straight down.





Belle and I watch the approaching afternoon monsoon.



... a distant mesa.



No excuse for being bored here!

MM

2013-08-13 – *Springtime In August*

We have been itching to ride the high country, but afternoon thunderstorms in the mountains gave us pause - even good gravel roads can turn to mush in the rain.

Today looked promising. Cherry Creek is running, and the cattle have grass to eat (I'm spending a lot of time mowing). The mountains were clear.



We decided to give it a try. I could tell that the horses were ready; as I loaded Thunder into the trailer, Belle and Spanky were right behind. They loaded themselves!



2013-08-13 – *Springtime In August*

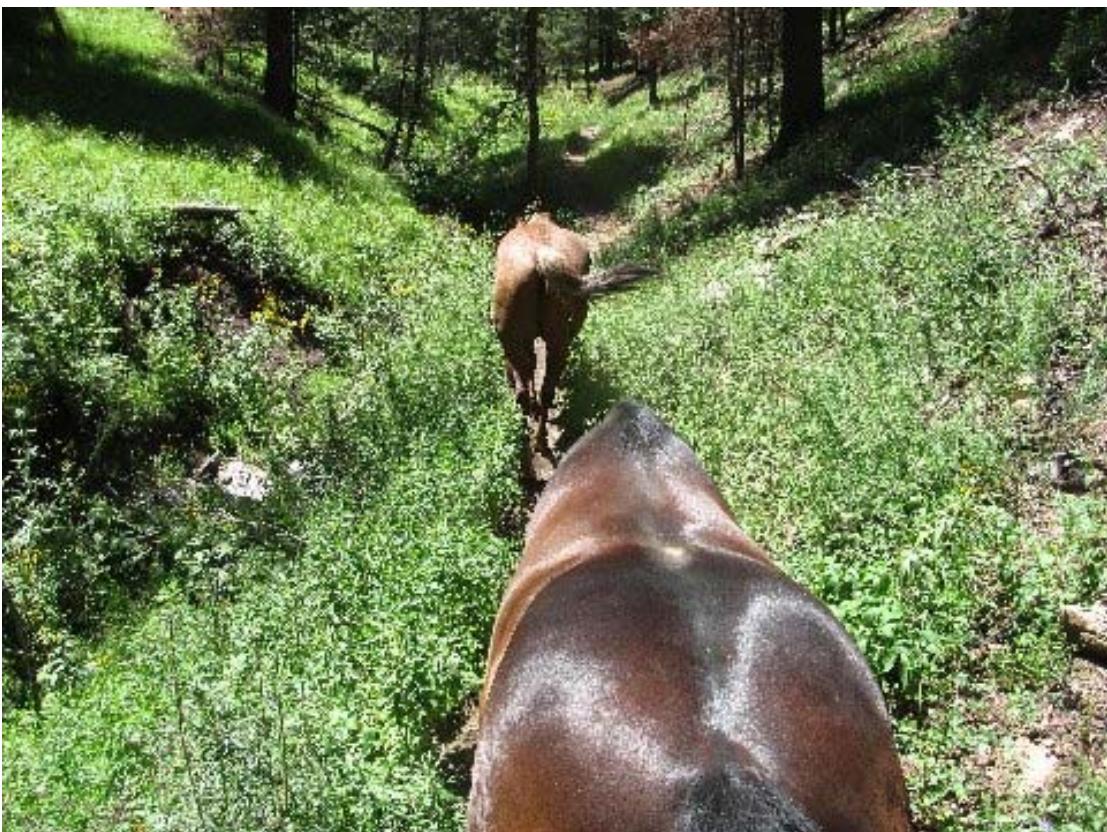
At the Argentina horse camp, Thunder is saddled (carrying a rain slicker, just in case) and ready to go.



"Yum; Can we stop for a quick snack first?"



We head into the forest.



The streams are running. There is a wonderful fragrance in the air.



Spanky is doing much better (fingers crossed). Here, he negotiates some gnarly tree roots. Belle usually lets him find the best route. He has developed into a great trail boss. He is a very happy horse.



"This water sure tastes good. Hope we are near the top!"



We emerge at the crest - green meadows in every direction!



"I saw the Rockettes do this on television . . . do you think I'm too tall . . .?"





Belle and Spanky run full out, enjoying their freedom. I enjoy them.



From here, that hillside looks like a golf course (it isn't).



We came upon this father and his little boys - they were lost (a scary thought). They were so glad to see us, Belle got an apple as a reward. We directed them to their destination (Spring Cabin), and reminded dad about safety tips . . . like carrying a map and compass . . .







When we got back to the trail head, an outfitter had just arrived with a group of riders and horses to be loaded into his big stock trailer. I held my breath. It was obvious that my horses thought it was Dacodah and crew. When they discovered that these horses were different, Belle and Spanky approached and said their quiet "hellos" to the other horses - from a polite distance. No fuss then returned to stand with Thunder and me until the others were loaded. I was very proud of them.

Hope you enjoyed this ride! We had such a wonderful time, we plan to return and try some different trails tomorrow (weather permitting - it rained cats and dogs this evening).

Won't you join us?

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-08-17 – *Belle's Reunion*

We had lots of rain, thunder, and lightening overnight. I kept thinking about the dad up on the mountain with his two young sons . . . So the next morning we set out to check on them. We had lots of area to cover, with little likelihood of running into them again. Still . . .

After the storm, it was a fine day for a ride. The horses enjoy some grazing near the trail head.





I let them enjoy the green grass along the way. These are truly "salad days".



2013-08-17 – *Belle's Reunion*

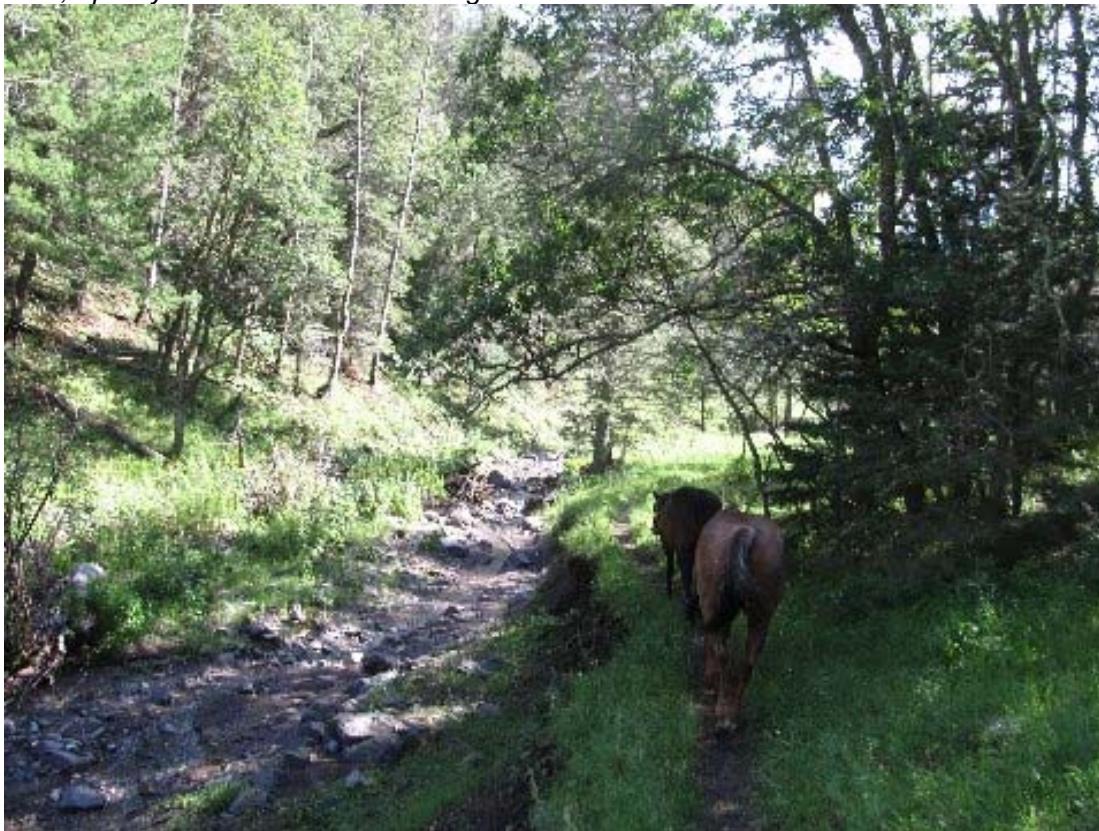
After a little while, Belle took the lead; she seems to be on a mission. She kept speeding up our pace.



"Why the hurry, Belle; this grass is delicious?"



"Come on, Spanky. We have to do something."



Sure enough! She found them. She sniffed the boys to make sure . . .



2013-08-17 – *Belle's Reunion*

I think she was as glad to see them, as they were to see her. Even the little one remembered her name from the day before (although it came out "Bew").



I suggested to the dad that he might consider using this nearby mine opening as a campsite for the night (it would be out of the weather, and safe for the boys - it only goes back a few feet). But he decided they would return home to Texas.



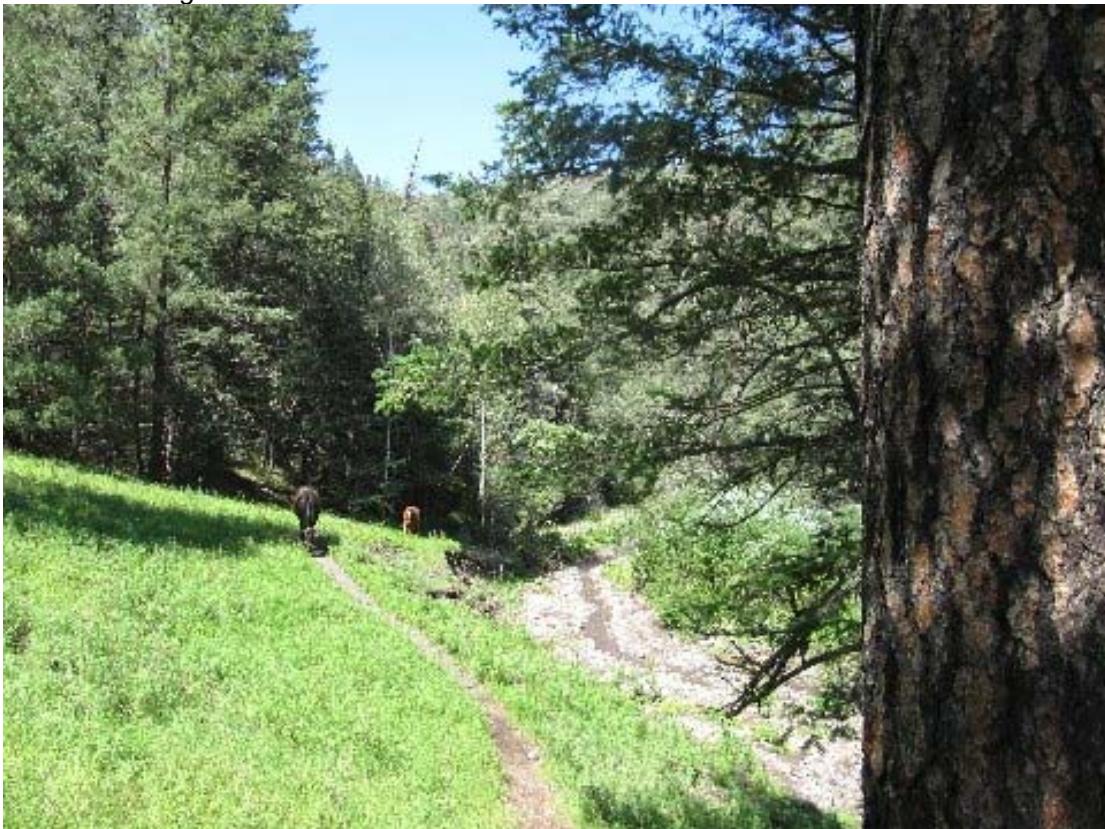
2013-08-17 – *Belle's Reunion*

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Convinced that all was well, Belle is happy to mosey on. "Whew. I'll be glad when they are back in their car, going home . . ."



We continue climbing . . .



... up into the aspen groves.



This is a long ride. I keep an eye on Spanky. He seems to be doing okay, but we slow our pace, just in case.



Spanky uses a tree for a scratching post. "Ooh, I gotta itch!"



It sure is beautiful country.



Thanks for coming along!

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-08-20 – *Rainy Ride*

We haven't let the frequent afternoon rains dampen our rides. Well . . . I guess maybe we have literally . . .

Looks like a great day for a ride! (Of course, there are those clouds forming . . .)



We meander along the Rio Bonito.



2013-08-20 – *Rainy Ride*

... and visit the old apple orchard (didn't see ONE little apple - I suppose due to the unusually dry Spring).



The clouds are gaining on us.



We ride into an Aspen grove.



Pretty Summer's day.



How's that for peaceful?



"Ahem. Guys, it is getting very dark . . ."



"Naw; look at that blue sky".



2013-08-20 – *Rainy Ride*

"Yeah, right . . ." Sure enough, within minutes, the deluge! "Told ya so . . ." "She's right again."



It was pouring! I was grateful to be riding bare back (no tack to get soggy), and glad I brought my slicker along "just in case".



2013-08-20 – *Rainy Ride*

We slogged all the way back - but the horses seemed to enjoy it (Belle's concerns about her hair not withstanding). It really was fun.



2013-08-20 – *Rainy Ride*

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Here is the interesting part: We had ridden for several miles in sunshine along the open area of the river bottom. When the storm came, I was worried about lightening - a soaking wet, 1400 lb. animal wearing iron shoes is a real concern. So I decided that on the way home, it would be best if we stayed close along the tree line, at the base of the ridge. We would be MUCH less likely to encounter lightning strikes there. Thunder seemed to immediately understand my change of course, and he led us all the way back - away from the open meadows. Smart horse!



Protected by my slicker, it turned out to be a great, cozy ride. Thanks for coming along!

MM

2013-08-21 – **Green Gap**

Even the normally dry cattle country around Capitan Gap has greened up.

Classic afternoon monsoon, but we chance it anyway. We want to check out an area we haven't ridden before.



Wide open spaces. That's our trailer in the distance.



Let's go!



Ominous skies . . . but we only got some showers during our ride.



The cattle tanks are full.



... and some ponds, too.



Green for as far as the eyes can see - what a treat!



Pronghorns stand out against the green.



Spanky and Thunder frame a view of the Gap.



... headed back as the rain approaches.



MM

2013-08-22 – **Brand New Trail**

Every trail is exciting the first time you ride it. But a brand-newly-created trail is something really special! Our local Eco-servants (students working as part of the national AmeriCorps program) recently completed a new trail above Ruidoso. Although it is not "officially" open, and there is no signage yet, we were invited to try it out.

Eco-servants use a special machine to cut and grade the trail. This one is especially well engineered.



Since there are as yet no signs on the trail, these cairns were put up to direct us.



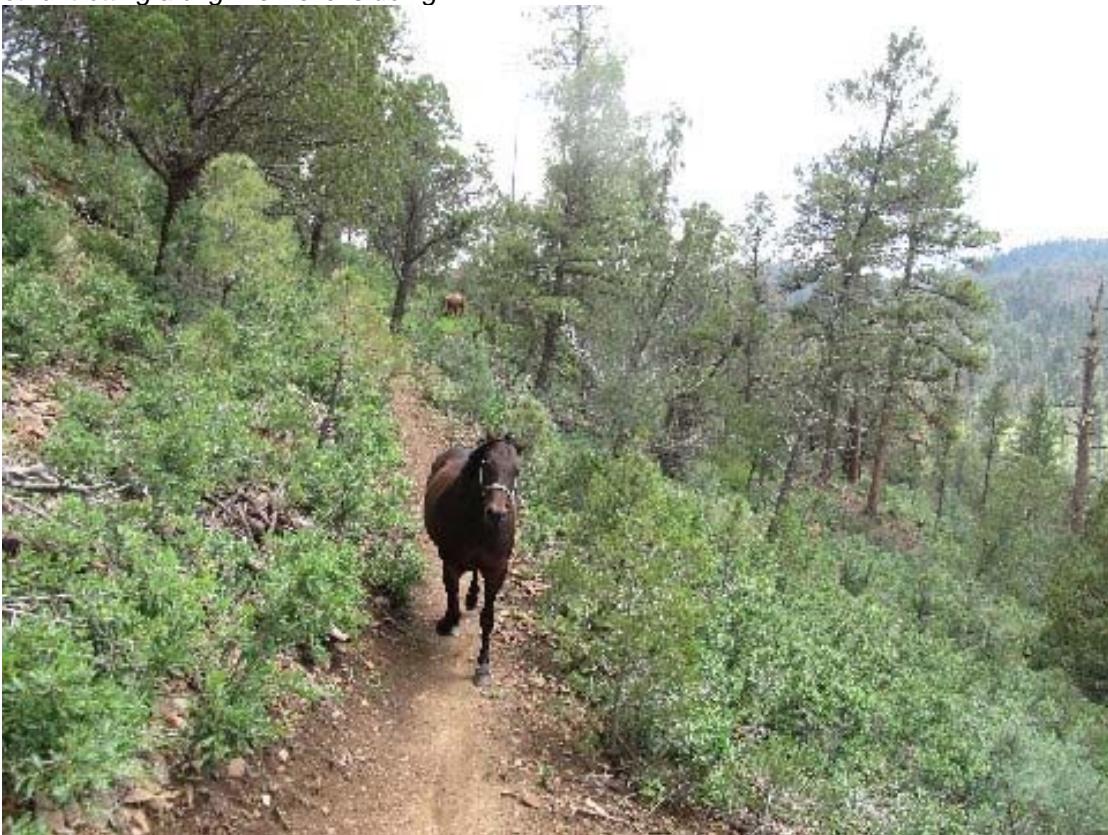
The Eco-servants put lots of nice features into this one, like stone-lined water crossings . . .



. . . and natural rock seats along the way.



They chose a really beautiful route, through several types of mountain terrain. The trail is soft, and perfect for trotting along like Belle is doing.



I have no idea what this plant is, but it sure is pretty.



2013-08-22 – *Brand New Trail*

The trail climbs very gradually, until the views become terrific. In the middle distance, you can see a bit of Grindstone reservoir, where we began.



That's the Inn of the Mountain Gods resort, down below to the south.



At times it was like walking through an enchanted forest . . .



. . . with big round boulders . . .



... and evidence of the area's mining past.



These are the biggest wild rose blooms I have ever seen.



I had not inquired as to the length of the loop trail. It went on, and on. But we enjoyed every minute of it. We got some sprinkles, but no real rain.



Thunder admires some more flowers along the way.





Spanky leads us home.



What a great new trail - one of the best ever. When we got back we were told that it is 15 miles long! We enjoyed every mile of it. Thank you Eco-servants!

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-08-27 – *Elks Convention*

The last few days, we have had an elks' convention around here!

It's impressive to see (and hear) this many at once.



That's a lot of elk - but it's only part of the herd. Here's another group.



... and another.



There are so many, they almost look like cattle. This is a view from the house.





A very young bull elk. There are lots of newborn calves, still sporting their "fawn" spots. The baby calves make a distinctive sound when they call for their mom - reminds me of the screech of seagulls!



. . .another young bull. You can see the spots on the new fawn in front of him.



These cow elk look pregnant to me.



2013-08-27 – *Elks Convention*

Lots of moms and babies - this is a new batch. It seems to be a very young herd. I can hear the mature bull elk at night - they have started their "bugling" rituals.



2013-08-27 – *Elks Convention*

The horses don't mind sharing their grazing (the elk like to lie down in the soft grass).



In all, I counted about 100 at any one time. It's a thrill to see so many this close - and unconcerned as I go about my chores.

MM

2013-08-29 – *Elk At Dawn*

It was just getting light this morning, when I heard a weird and LOUD sound from the pasture . . .

This big guy was calling to his herd.



"Okay, everybody up. Dad says we gotta go now."



2013-08-29 – *Elk At Dawn*

Then the calves started a chorus of "Hey! Mom! When's breakfast?" (They really do sound like noisy birds!)



. . . so much for peace and quiet in the country.





"Can't a girl sleep in once in a while? I was having the best dream about Trigger . . ."



2013-08-29 – *Elk At Dawn*

"Sheesh! I mean I like elk as neighbors and all, but CAN'T THEY KEEP THEIR KIDS QUIET?"



Thunder and Spanky don't seem to mind.



"Yeah, well . . . let's not invite them to breakfast, okay?"



That bull is magnificent.



Off he goes, into the dawn.



So, how was YOUR morning?

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-08-30 – ***Happy Labor Day Weekend!***

Page 1 of 3

Wishing you and yours a very Happy Labor Day weekend!



"Hope you can relax."



" . . . and have a great day."



"... and maybe a cold beer". (That's our Belle).





FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

The ranch sits on the shoulder of the Sacramento Mountains, which are like an island above New Mexico's high deserts. Nogal Peak (9,957 ft.), which we can see from the ranch, often beckons for a ride.

"You going up there again? Bring us back some mice."



Thunder checks out a look-alike horse at an outfitter's camp along the way; it was the last day of hunting season for bear and cougar.



Good news! Even on a holiday weekend, no one is at the trail head.



Bad news! Someone has left a campfire smoldering. If you look closely, you can spot some open flames. The horses are appalled. We douse it and make sure it is safe to leave.



Up the trail.



Everyone takes turns leading.



Elderberry bushes everywhere. Folks around here use them to make jam and wine.



Belle runs to catch up.



... and stops again, for a snack (*I don't blame her!*)



... beautiful clouds and a couple of cattle in the valley.



... lots of wildflowers. They never photograph worth a darn.



Thunder checks to see that the other two are coming along.



. . . looking out over the desert to the west.



Nogal Peak is cone shaped. There is a marked, steep trail up one side. We thought we would try to bushwhack it from another direction.



This is MUCH steeper than it looks.



It was slow going, but the horses were game, and we enjoyed some great views of the Capitan Mountains in the distance.



As so often happens here in the summer, the clouds suddenly turned dark and ominous. We pressed on, until a tremendous crack of lightening hit a ridge top about a mile to our south.



Keeping low in a canyon, we skedaddled down.



By the time we got back to the trailer, the storm had passed. It was a wonderful outing, thanks for joining us!

MM

The elk were very busy early this morning. Bulls bugling, calves calling - they were everywhere!





Thunder, watches his friends as he waits for breakfast.



Young bull elk.



... The big guy.





He has such wisdom, somehow . . . as he watches over his herd.







Mom knows I am there.



... and another bull. He seems to be a "lieutenant" to the big one.



... learning to cross fences.



"Watch this!"



Hunting season begins soon . . .



MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2013-09-07 – *Argentina Trail Loop*

To us, every ride is special, but some . . . well, see for yourself!

The Argentina Trail begins in the lower forest, and climbs to the high country - perfect this time of year.



There is water along most of the way.



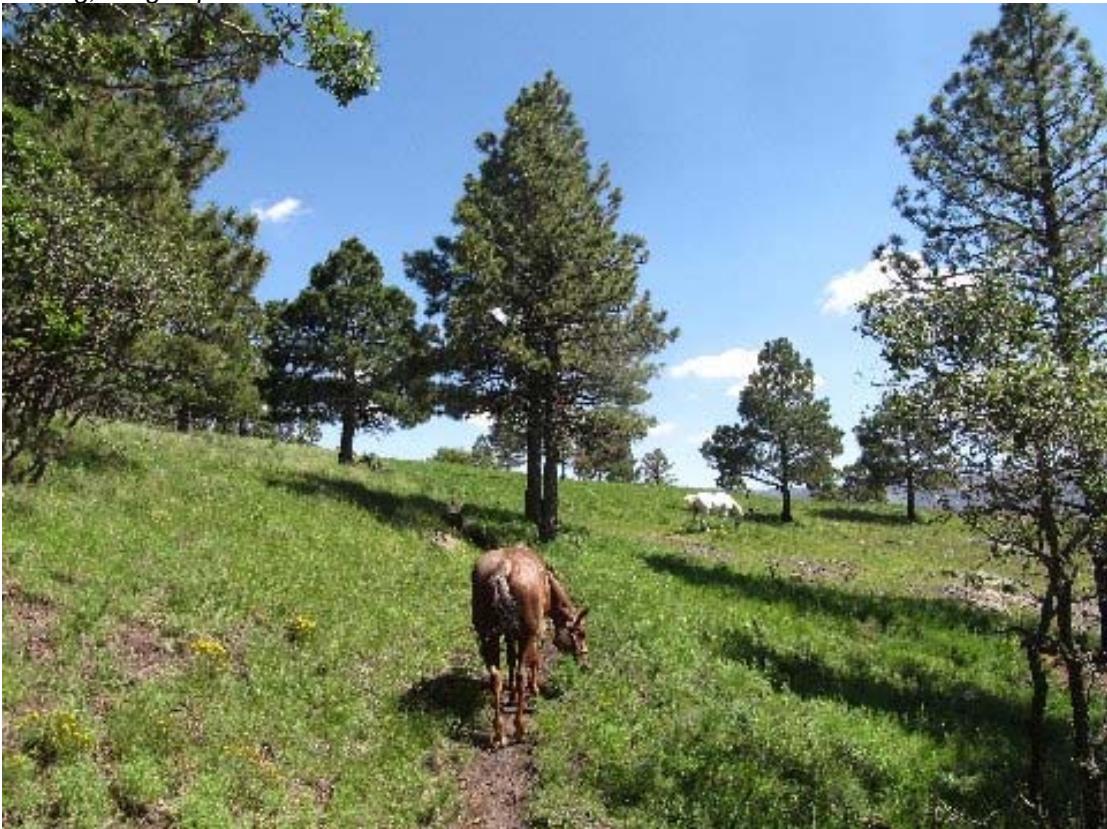
My companions; I figure we covered about 12 miles on this ride.



Spanky has a roll in the grass.



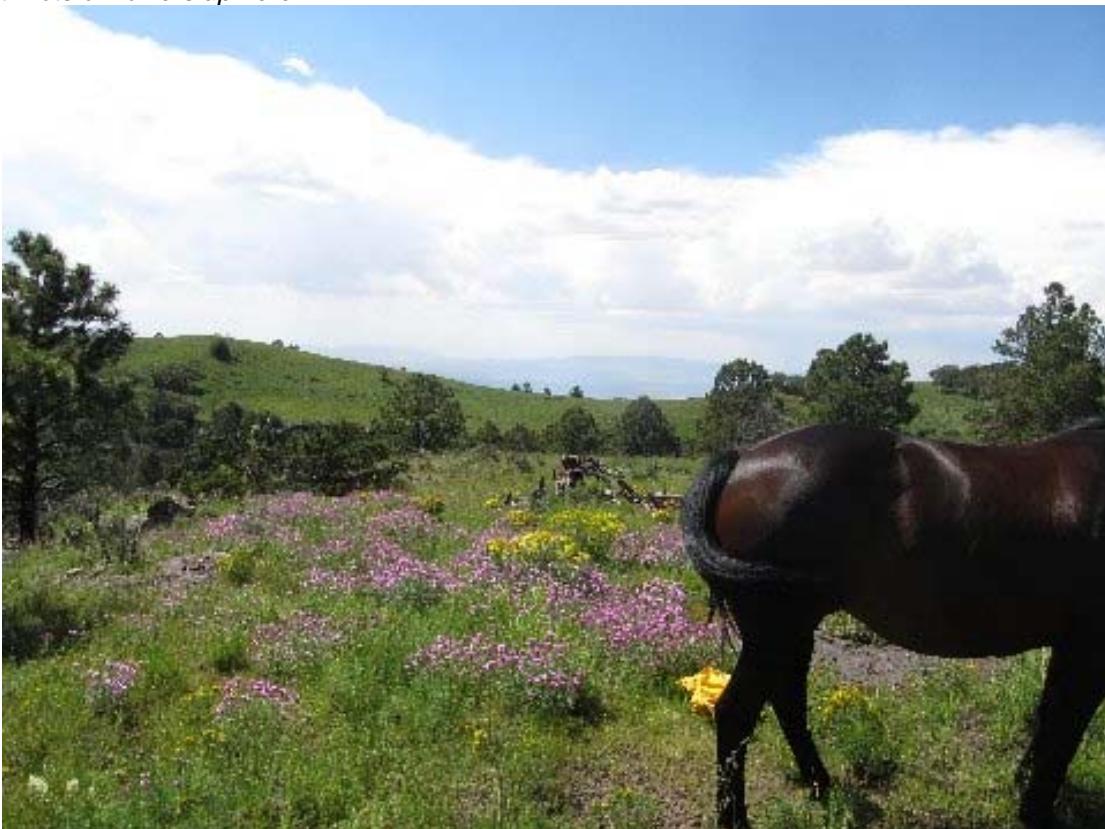
Still climbing; we go up several thousand feet in elevation.



... a high meadow.



... still lots of flowers up here.



... and good grazing.



Thunder and Spanky race to the top.





Belle takes in the view.



That's Nogal Peak in the distance.



2013-09-07 – Argentina Trail Loop

My horses spot a group of riders coming up the trail . . .



They let them pass, and wait for me to tell them where we are heading next.





Back to the trailer; end of a great ride.



Thank you for coming along!

MM

2013-09-08 – *Aspens And Owls*

Old timers say we will have an early autumn this year ("large grasshoppers, black caterpillars") - but so far it still feels like summertime.

We hadn't been up the Aspen Trail for a while, and though the afternoon clouds were forming, we thought we would give it a go.



The trail follows a little meandering stream.



Farther up the trail, we entered an enchanted world - quiet and green as a Caribbean island.



This owl sat right over us, like an animated character at Disneyland. He never moved, except to blink his enormous eyes. What a face!



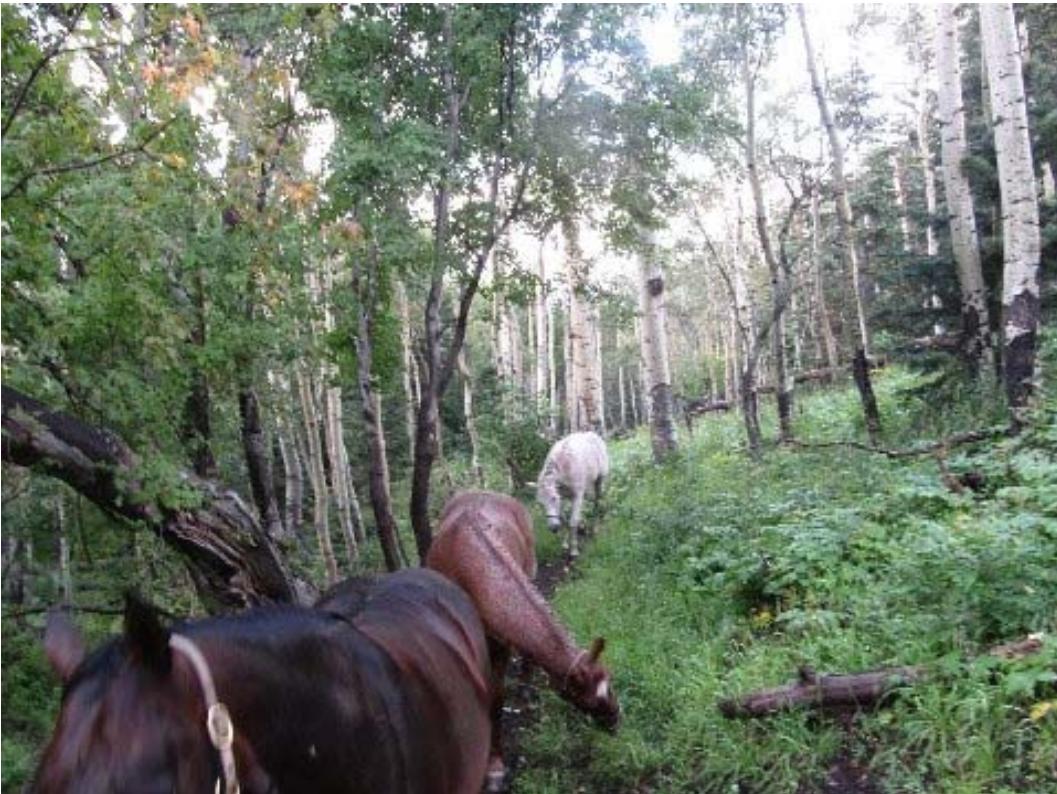
2013-09-08 – *Aspens And Owls*

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It began to rain - a real cloudburst. Belle, Spanky and I took cover under some oaks (it helped a little). Thunder saw it coming - like a curtain of rain ahead. He turned and looked at me, as if to say "Oh-oh, get ready." He even started back down the trail, before realizing that we were staying. Then he joined us and went back to his grazing.



A few minutes later, up through the namesake aspen trees. The rain left the forest with a beautiful fragrance.



2013-09-08 – *Aspens And Owls*

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We are climbing steadily. I jumped off Belle, to help her negotiate the steep parts. The horses were clearly as enthused about this ride as I was.



We climb still higher - into an alpine bowl. I'm on foot, too. We are fellow hikers, headed to the ridge above.





You can see the angle of the slope.



Here comes Spanky, through the deep meadow.



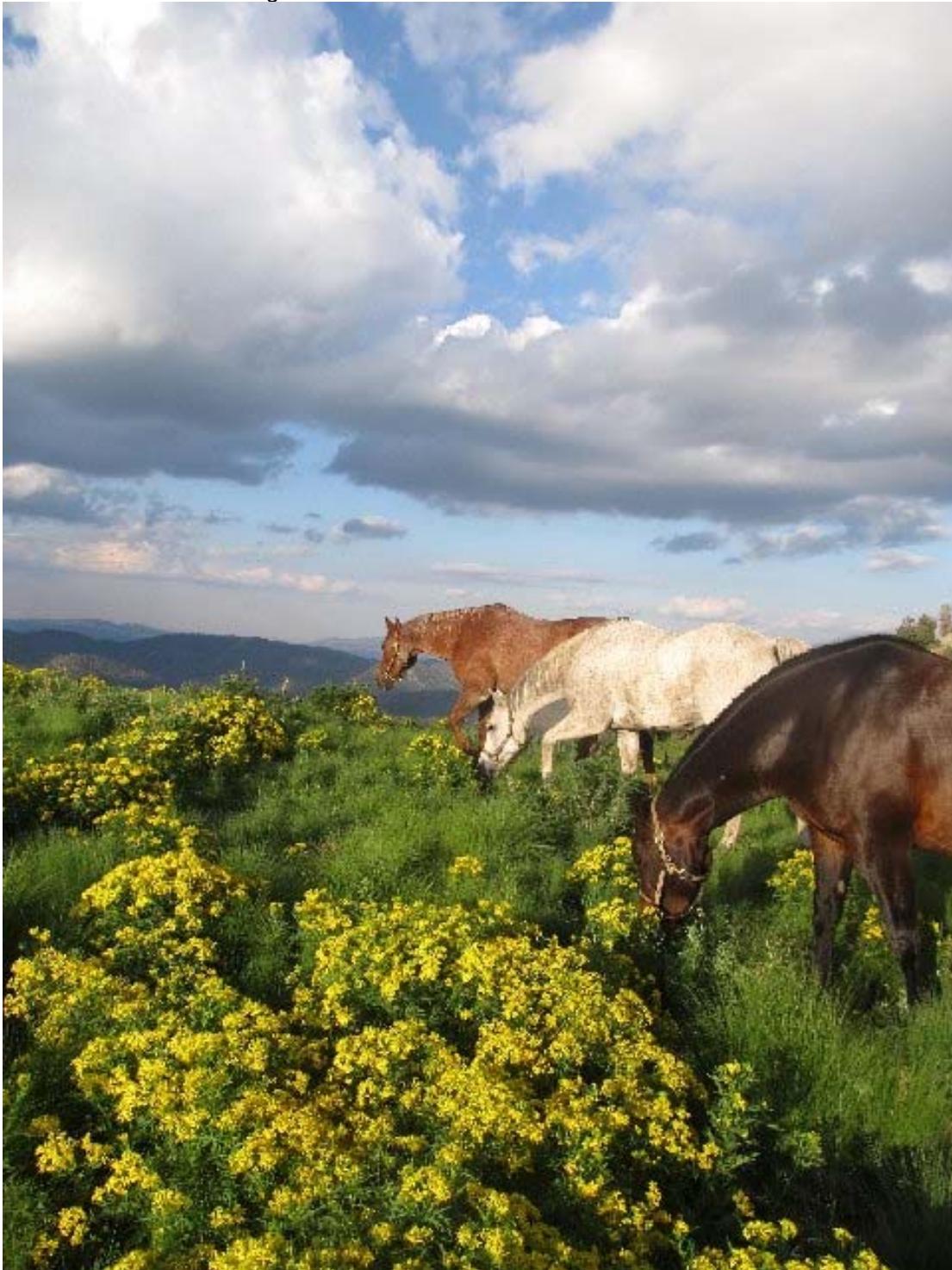
He spots an elk - probably wondering what WE are doing up here.



WOW! Although the sun is out, there is a single drop of rain on my lens.



We don't take ANY of THIS for granted!



We bushwhacked down the steep slope to the trail below. It was an extraordinary ride. Thanks for letting us share it with you!

MM