



# THE NOGAL JOURNALS

*Volume Twenty-six*

THUNDER, SPANKY  
AND  
MATTHEW MIDGETT

“ These meditations are so heartwarming.  
Thanks so much for your incredible visual diaries!”

*Jean Malkerson*  
Artist



Come along and ride with us!

# THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XXVI

Part 3 of 3

With sincere gratitude  
to Randy Clarke-Ianiero and Clem Ianiero-Clarke  
whose technical expertise and tireless efforts  
made this publication possible.

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First performed in 1940, "The Last Escape of Billy the Kid" is an annual folk pageant presented in a specially built outdoor amphitheater right next to the historic Lincoln County Courthouse, where Billy's infamous final escape took place in 1881. Over the years the event has grown to include a three-day festival known as "Old Lincoln Days" - celebrating the time when Lincoln's main street (now a designated highway, it's still the only street in town) was called the "most dangerous street in America" by then-president Rutherford B. Hayes. Once again, the boys were invited to participate.

*"Hey Thunder, it looks like a great weekend for the festival!" . . . "Yeah - Belle would want us to do her memory proud. She loved these events."*



*And so, we honored Belle by doing the 'meet and greet', which she was so good at.*



*Since most of our time is spent alone on isolated trails, it's to their credit that they adapt to being 'public figures'.*





*They showed great patience for all the petting and photos.*



*Of course, no one minds being greeted by a pretty cowgirl . . .*



. . . and Spanky did his share of mooching along the way. "Ahem . . . are those French fries fresh?"

"Why yes, would you like to try one?"



"Oh, thanks!"





*Thunder caught on quickly. "Oooh! Cinnamon do-nuts!", he hinted.*



*"Maybe just one . . ." (No, they are not spoiled.)*



*He also took in some displays set up at an archaeology fair . . . "Hmmm . . ."*



*. . . and got to meet 'Wyatt Earp' . . . "Howdy, Mr. Earp!"*





*They give a lot of happiness to fans of all ages.*



*They did Belle proud.*





*What do you think, Spanky? . . . "I didn't get a do-nut . . ."*



*But maybe their favorite part was making angels before heading home. "Ahhh . . ."*



MM

Old Lincoln Days are all about tradition . . . and part of that is a parade which features more horses than anything else. For over a decade, Belle proudly led the parade with the American flag. She carried it beautifully last year, two months before her passing.

2022





*This year the organizers insisted that I carry the flag again - as a tribute to Belle. Thunder is not a 'parade' horse. He has been in several - even carrying the flag in Lincoln during the year Belle was recovering from a hoof injury. But he is not really suited to it. And of course, if he was to be in the parade, Spanky should come along too. So - two horses and a big flag. Finally, we all agreed to give it a try. The day of the parade dawned inspiringly.*



*It seemed like a good omen.*





*Bucky came by to wish us luck (and have some breakfast . . .), before we left for the parade.*



*"You're gonna be great!", he assured.*





*His friend, Big Buck, agreed. "Go and have fun!", he encouraged.*



*So, off we went. The boys did their best - though at the beginning Spanky was very leery of the horse carrying the New Mexico flag so close behind us.*





*"He's gaining on us, Thunder!" . . . "I know - just be cool."*



*Never-the-less, we managed it. It was a meaningful experience. As usual, it was a real small-town 'horsey' parade.*





*Certainly, this very miniature horse was the tinies participant!*



*A family entry.*



*Always, some neat old tractors . . .*





*... and members of the Pageant cast.*



*Afterward, the boys did some more 'friend-making'.*





Awww.



*We took the sidewalk back to the trailer. "Whew! No one is following us!"*



*Very proud of them.*



MM



**Elysium. *noun*; a place or state of bliss.** We have an abundance of great spots to ride and explore nearby . . . and as long as we are together, the surroundings don't really matter. However, there are some places which really are extraordinary.

*One of our favorites is only a few miles from home - in the high country adjacent to Nogal Peak.*



*The road is peaceful, winding through the forest.*





*The boys are happy to be on green trails.*



*"It's a salad bar for us!"*





*Elderberries ripening in the sun.*



*Ooops - traffic jam. We encountered some polite cattle on the trail. "After you!" "No, after you!"*



*A straggler. "Here we go again", thinks Spanky.*



*"Hey! This is my home!", says the calf.*





*It looks to us like he lives in paradise.*



*In the shadow of a passing cloud, Thunder races along a high ridge.*



Yes - 'Elysium'.







*Spanky pauses to take in the view . . .*



... and spots some elk on a distant hillside.



Snack time on top of the world.







*Two wildflower plants growing together, form a natural alpine bouquet.*



Ahhhh . . .



*On the way down, the boys mosey along their own route in the wilderness, keeping an eye on me. Trust.*



MM



This has been a drier than usual summer so far. The clouds come, and some rain falls - but it is over before much water accumulates. It makes it challenging to anticipate rides.

*Yes, or no . . . oh, let's take a chance.*



*Good decision this time.*





*The sun prevailed . . .*





*. . . and the horses enjoyed. "I'm sure glad we did this!"*



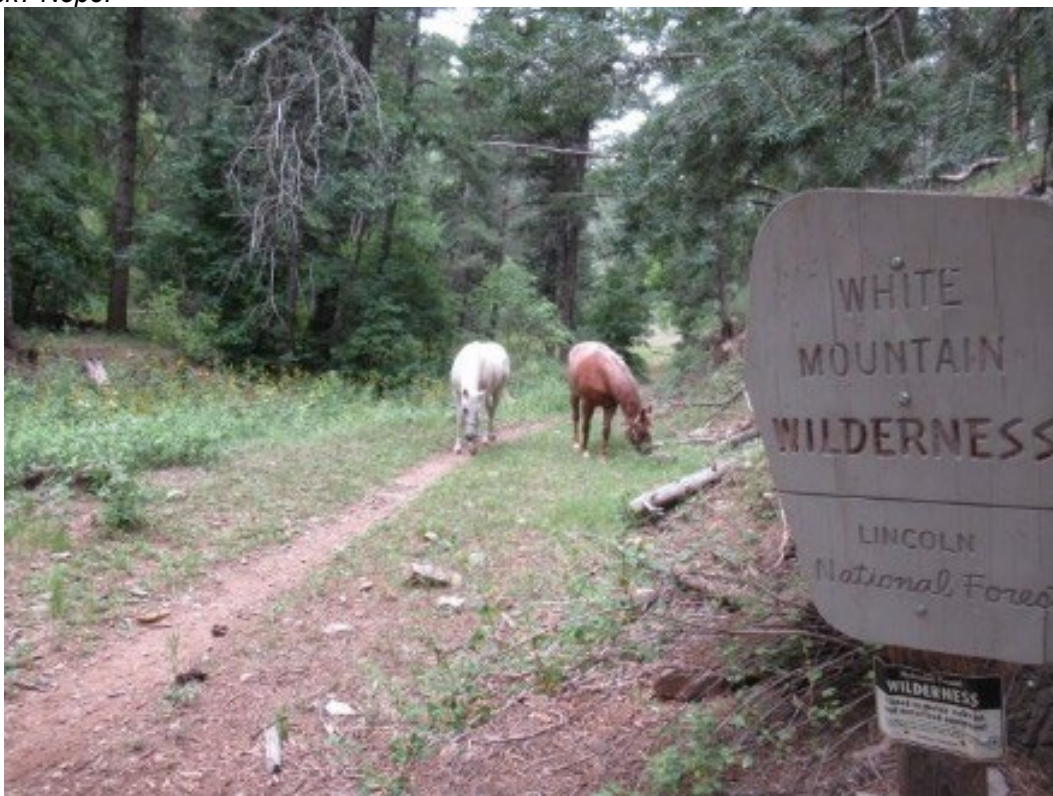
*Even a sunflower seems pleased.*



*On another day, we headed out just as the clouds began moving in.*



*Go back? Nope.*





*Increasingly cloudy skies are reflected in a little spring along the trail.*



*"Uh, did I just feel a raindrop, Spanky?"*





*A few sprinkles didn't amount to much - just adding an 'Appaloosa' pattern to Thunder's back.*



*We discovered an abandoned gold mine.*





*"Hey, Thunder! That would be a swell place to get out of the rain!"*



*Looking at the sky, Thunder had other ideas. "I think we should head home now!"*



*He was right. We made it just in time. At last, a little more rain.*



*Out on the trail - or here at home - it's always welcome.*



MM



The story of White Oaks, New Mexico is a classic tale boom and bust; of hope and greed. Once inhabited only by Apache's, gold and coal were discovered in the nearby mountains during 1879. Within a year a boom town had developed and boasted a population of around 4,000 - and even an opera house. It attracted a wide range of colorful notables - including Billy the Kid; and Susan McSween Barber, the 'Cattle Queen of New Mexico'. But success could be fleeting in those days. The gold ran out, coal became less valuable, and greedy bungling by the town's bosses ruined chances for a railroad (which went to Carrizozo, making it the new boom town). Shortly after the turn of the century, White Oaks had become a virtual ghost town. Despite having only about 85 residents in the area currently, they manage to put on a terrific annual celebration - 'White Oaks Miners' Day'.

*Our drowsy bucks were curious. "Where you go'in so early in the morning?", one of them asked Thunder. "To another parade!", he answered. "Oh! That sounds like fun! (What's a 'parade'?").*



## 2023-08-20 - White Oaks Miners' Day

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*In addition to a parade, the all-day event boasts buckboard rides, gold panning, blacksmith demos, kids' games, trading post, an old-timey play in the brick schoolhouse, and even a brass quintet concert! They picked a beautiful day for it (last year we suffered through cold rain).*



*Youthful 4-H entries getting ready for the parade.*





*A cow and her calf mosey cooperatively along the only street in town.*



*As luck would have it, this noisy mule team was directly behind us in the parade.*



*The boys were awfully worried that those mules were predators of some kind.*



*They much preferred meeting all the nice people . . .*









*. . . and posing smartly for tourist photos (they're still watching for those mules).*



*They also admired an exhibit of handmade quilts. "Hmmm . . . those would be cozy in the barn this winter . . ."*





*An adobe remnant of days long past.*



*One of the town's remaining Victorian-era homes.*



*This fancy brick schoolhouse was built in 1895.*



*Reminder of the rambunctious old days - patrons waiting eagerly for the 'No Scum Allowed Saloon' to open.*





*The old blacksmith . . . "Is it time for new shoes already?", Thunder wonders . . .*



*. . . and the brass quintet, playing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home".*



*This is a patriotic community . . .*





. . . and honors those who have defended freedom.





MM



## 2023-08-25 - Surprise Party

Page 1 of 10

We celebrated Gracie's second birthday (!) with a surprise party.

*Her elk friends came by to wish her a happy birthday.*



*They gathered around the punch bowl for a toast. "Here's to Gracie!"*



*"Ummm . . . good punch!"*



*"Yeah! Happy Birthday Gracie! (Glub glub)"*





*Even the fawn-spotted calves came.*



*"So when is it MY birthday, mom?" "Not for almost another year . . ." . . . "Aw, shucks!" . . .*



. . . . and the wild turkeys joined in.



*"Delicious birthday corn. Happy Birthday!"*





## 2023-08-25 - Surprise Party

Page 5 of 10

*The elk enjoyed their snacks, too. "Yum! Love these fresh mulberry leaves!"*



*"Yes - they're such generous hosts to provide all this!"*





*Then it was on to the apple leaves. "I'll just serve myself . . ."*



*"So tasty!"*





*"I know we're supposed to be reclusive and all, but, I really do love parties!"*



*The babies tried some grass for the first time. "This is not an acquired taste . . . I love it right off!"*





*"What a fun party!", exclaimed Thunder ("But who invited all these neighbors?").*



*"Yes - we're sharing your corn . . ."*





*"Is it really your birthday, Gracie?", Bucky asked . . . "I guess so!"*



*"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Gracie! Happy birthday to you!"*





*"This is my best birthday EVER!"*



*"Oh, my! And a salmon cake! My favorite!!! Gotta make a wish and blow out the candles! (I wish for more birthdays like this!"*



MM



## 2023-08-29 - *Rain on the Range*

Page 1 of 10

We're finally getting some overdue monsoon rains.

*A typical monsoon downpour moves our way . . .*



*. . . and then reaches us, with lots of precious water.*



## 2023-08-29 - Rain on the Range

Page 2 of 10

*By late afternoon the skies were clearing (at least we thought so) . . .*



*So, we headed to our friends' nearby ranch for an cattle-country outing (by then the muddy ranch roads had dried enough to drive on).*





*Ponds and stock tanks are filling quickly.*



*Even random depressions have become troughs of water.*



Thunder takes in a view of newly greening hills. "Hey - do you see that dark cloud over us?"



He was right - although it was 'sunny', that one big cloud decided to douse us good.





*Everyone ran for cover under a protective pinon tree. "We knew this would happen . . ."*



*It doesn't show in the photo, but we had a wonderful experience. As the sun shone under the cloud, big raindrops appeared like diamonds falling from the sky - beautiful.*



*"That tree isn't waterproof!", complained a shiny-wet Spanky.*



*Thunder took a little spin, to dry off.*





*"This wet range is so much fun to run on!"*



*Rain over, we head to a distant dirt 'tank'.*



*"Look at the reflection of clouds on the water!", exclaims an observant Spanky.*



*Of course . . . a wet-grass angel . . .*





*. . . and a snack.*



*Heading home . . .*



. . . and savoring a very special afternoon (you can see by his dirty coat that Thunder made some angels, too).



*Church Mountain on the dramatic horizon.*



Then a big storm dropped nearly two inches of rain overnight - now it's time to grade the driveway (not complaining!)

MM



Within the vast Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area are several groups of high knolls, providing terrific views of the surrounding country.

*Lots of wide-open spaces out here . . .*



*. . . and excellent trails for exploring . . .*



*. . . but mostly, it's about the quiet and the views. "Wow", says Spanky, simply.*



*The best panoramas are from the tops of the knolls. Of course, it takes a little effort to climb them - so we wind slowly up the steep hillsides. "Does he think we are goats?"*





*360-degree views make it worth the effort.*



*Snacking on the way down (those are a couple of knoll-tops in the background).*



*It was such a beautiful afternoon, the boys suggested we visit the nearby Salado Pasture area, which offers iconic panoramas of 'The West'. A breathtaking vista of the valley from a high palisades.*





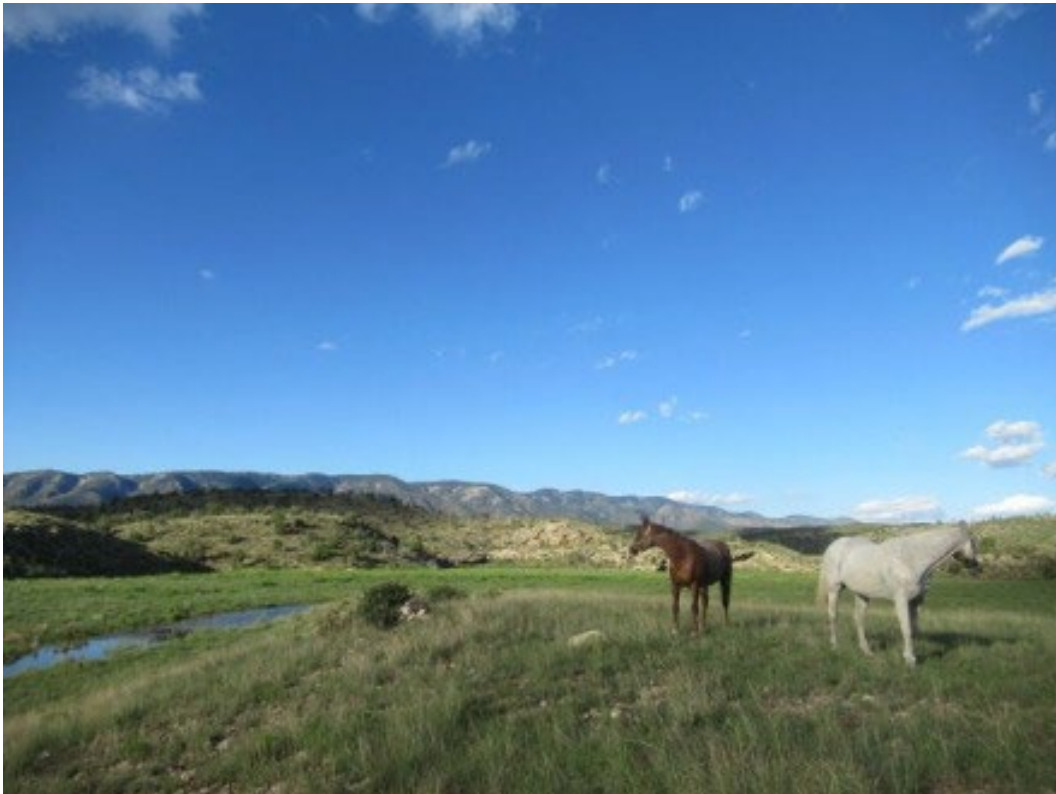
*Monsoon water moves leisurely along Salado Creek.*



*"Sure is pretty country, eh, Thunder?" "Yup. Can't believe we are passing up all this green grass!"*



*"Wait! What was that sound?"*





*"Just some kind of weird bird, I guess." "Okay. Let's stop here for a snack . . ." (Thunder's still wondering about that bird.)*



*A cool drink at dusk.*



*Yup, this is The West!*



*Oh, and that 'blue supermoon' was sure impressive as it moved through our clear skies last night.*



MM



There's a little taste of 'spring' around here, just as we are about to enter autumn.

*Thanks to some late summer rains, parts of the forest sport bright 'spring green' grass . . .*





*... and on the range, Thunder admires some 'cow pen' daisies. "Pretty - but they don't taste like noth'in!"*



*At home, the pastures are greening up again.*







*There's a big gathering of bucks at happy hour.*







*Bucky's antlers continue to grow.*



*"It's because of that tasty corn!"*





*They're all still in 'velvet' covering (as the antlers develop).*



*The cats and deer enjoy some neighborly time together. 'Orca' takes in the view . . .*





*. . . and catches the interest of a curious buck. "Wait. You aren't Gracie, are you?" . . . "Nope. She's the same colors but has really long hair." . . . "Oh, yeah. My mistake!"*



*"I can see the difference now!"*





*Little Gracie has a chat with her deer friend. "Hi! Hope you enjoyed the corn! (Yuck . . . that stuff is flavorless)."*



*A mom brings her spotted baby for a drink . . .*





*. . . and though still nursing, this one enjoys a little corn snack with its mom.*



*Awww . . .*





MM



On a bright late-summer day, the shaded trails of a green mountain forest beckon.  
*Hey boys, want to go to the mountain? "You bet we do!"*



*"Oh, boy!"*



*For years, Thunder has just stepped over this tiny brook near the trail head. However, Spanky insists on walking across a very small hiker's 'bridge'. "I like the sound my hooves make on the wood. Ka-thump, ka-thump!"*



*It's a splendid day.*





*In the shade of the tall pines.*



*Thunder seems to be in his bliss along the grass-bordered trail. "Ahhhhh . . ."*





*Happy horses. "Did you get some clover?" . . . "No! Where is it?"*



*Such good boys . . . but it's time to move along.*





*Ahhh . . . cool water from a spring beside the trail.*



*Our first view of majestic White Mountain ('Sierra Blanca') in the distance.*





*"Well, this is nice!"*



*"I think we're pretty lucky", nods Thunder.*





*Traversing a high ridge . . .*



*Which brings us to a 'lonesome pine'.*



*The high country's beauty.*



*Farther along the trail (and higher up), Spanky pauses to enjoy the vista. "Wow!"*





*Bushwhacking through the verdant forest.*



*Another drink . . .*





*... and a last snack before heading home.*



*Back at the ranch, moody clouds - and rain in the distance.*



It was a wonderful day. Thanks for coming along!  
MM



The boys sure enjoy running around in the soft sand of the fairgrounds arena in Capitan.

*They don't need any prompting to take off.*



*All the things we do to keep Spanky sound (due to his arthritis) are paying off. It's fun to see his joy.*



*"Yee haw!"*



*Around and around they go.*





*Then some sand angels. A few little clouds suddenly appeared.*



*During their playtime, clouds began to form in earnest.*



*By the time we went for an outing just outside of old Lincoln town (only a few miles away), it was raining back at the arena. "Looks like we got out of there just in time!", observes Thunder.*



*This area includes an old homestead apple orchard, dating from the late 1800's.*





*It's now public land administered by the BLM.*



*"Please don't eat the daisies", admonishes Spanky. . . . "Don't worry, they taste terrible", says Thunder.*



*It's getting darker. "Hmmm . . . those clouds seem to be following us", observes Spanky.*



*Enjoying a grassy little glade. ("Did I just feel a raindrop?", Spanky wonders.)*





*Cool sip from a sweetwater stream.*



*High on the cliffs above, mysterious rock alcoves inspire lots of imagination - did Apache's once call them home? Did Billy the Kid once hide out here?*



*A still pool is disturbed by a single raindrop . . .*



*We heed the warning.*





*"Looks like it's time to go!", says Thunder.*



*Once again, we made it back to the trailer just in time.*



*Back home the rain had passed, and Big Buck and his friends greeted us.*



*"Is it time for happy hour?"*



MM



Our late-season rains are still hanging around - which is great. But it does make being outdoors a bit 'risky'.

*It was sunny when we left home for the high forest. But by the time we got to the Sawmill Trail, the sky had clouded up. "It's looking awfully gray . . .", Spanky fretted.*



*He was right - it was getting darker by the minute.*





*But it was wonderful being in the big trees - and there was lots for them to eat. They spotted something coming our way.*



*A couple of curious deer (these are not 'our' deer, so it was interesting that they weren't afraid of us).*





*Spanky watched them mosey on through the trees. "They were nice. I guess they have things to do . . ."*



*Thunder wandered around enjoying the green grass. "Dee duh dee . . ."*



*But then . . . it doesn't show up well, but that is heavy rain coming our way.*



*Thunder always knows. "Come on! Hurry!" (That's a rain drop in the center of the camera lens).*





*He leads us on a shortcut back to the trailer. This was the sort of rain squall that brings sudden downpours, and strong winds that blow it sideways - but the horses were good sports.*



*It's still raining pretty hard - you can see his wet coat.*



*Even in the gloom, these mounds of happy wildflowers bring some cheer.*



*Before long, a break in the clouds.*





*The sun peaks out and we dry off as they graze in a pretty meadow.*



*"Wouldn't you think he would be smart enough to know rain was coming?" . . . "Not everyone is as sensitive to weather as we are!"*



*Spanky strikes another of his 'alert' poses.*



*He's watching Thunder take a few last bites, in the distance. "Hey, Thunder, it's time to go! (Geez . . .)"*





*A beautiful double rainbow welcomed us home.*



*A bit of magic (now where is that pot 'o gold!)*



MM



New Mexico's beautiful skies are well known. But sometimes they become truly inspiring.

*"My horse's intuition tells me this may be one of those times . . . What do you think, Thunder?"*



*"Yeah . . . maybe . . ."*



*"Actually, the sky is pretty cool right now! (Oh, look, some clover!)"*



*Open range makes for a big sky and perfect viewing.*

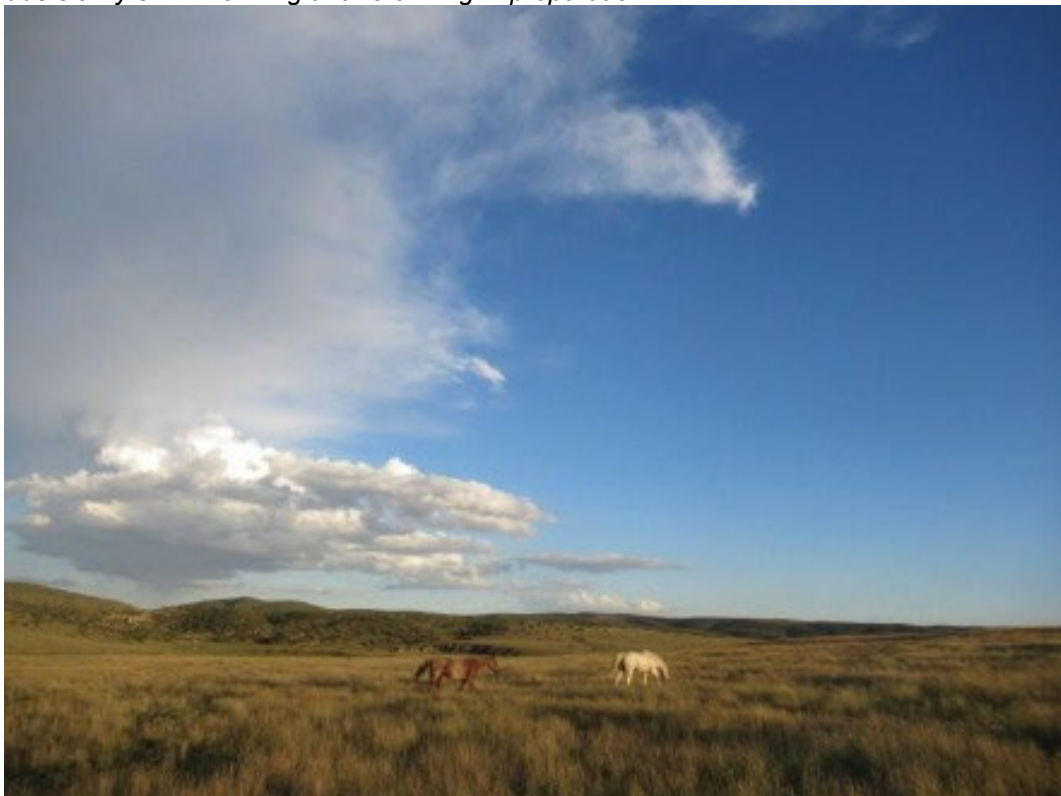




*"I think this is going to be good. Hope we can stay until sunset!"*



*The clouds slowly swirl - forming and reforming in preparation.*



*"I'm keeping my eyes on it . . ."*



*The light begins to change.*





*"Oh, my! Look over there!"*



*Wow.*

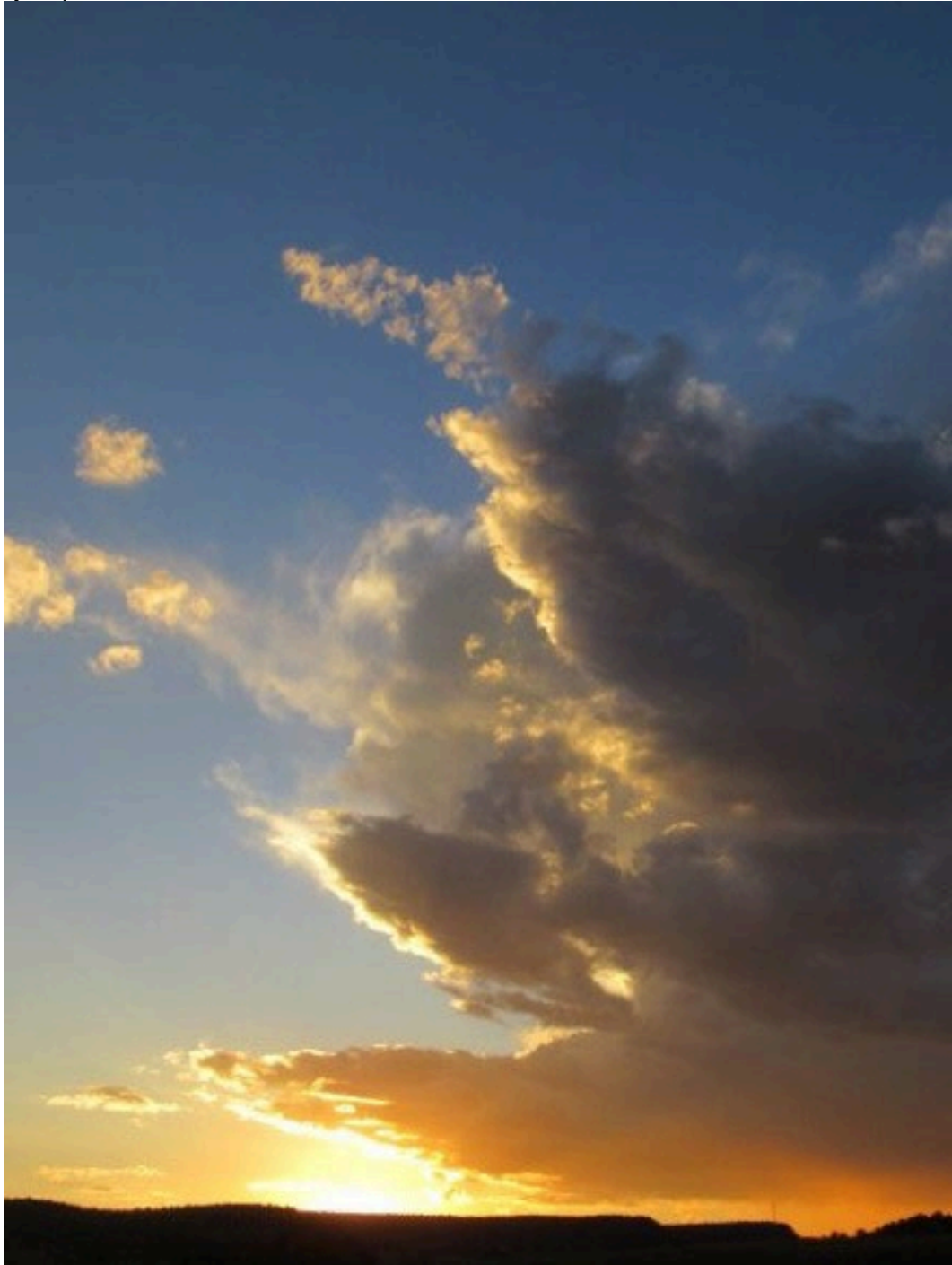


*Grandeur in every direction.*





*Heavenly inspiration.*



MM



# FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH



The beginning of autumn is a wonderful time of year just about everywhere. Here, it's one of the best times to be out on the trails.

*With no particular itinerary, we began the day by following blue skies to peaceful Blue Pond (that's Spanky and Thunder on the opposite shore).*



*At this time of year, the spring-fed pool often has a flush of bright green algae on part of its surface - but the water remains clear, with that distinctive jade-blue refraction.*





*The boys are more interested in the bright green grass along a musical little brook.*



*We next wandered over to quiet Bonito Lake.*





*Another salad bar, along the shore. "It's lunchtime!", says Spanky.*



*Then Spanky has a little playtime in the water. "Oh, look at that tiny fish!"*



*And Thunder enjoys an energetic romp on his own.*





*Observant Spanky spots some deer in the forest. "Hmmm . . . I guess I don't know them . . ."*



*It was too perfect a day to head home just yet - chores could wait. So, we continued on to the nearby Argentina trail.*





*"This was a great idea! (Of course, I don't have chores . . .)."*



*They snack on what appears to be Nature's putting green.*





*Hanging above, a bounty of wild mountain elderberries.*



*Climbing to the top, Thunder always races along the final ridge . . .*



*... and of course Spanky makes his grass angels. "It's closer to heaven up here!"*



*Yes, it is.*





*We all appreciate this special place. "Gosh . . ."*



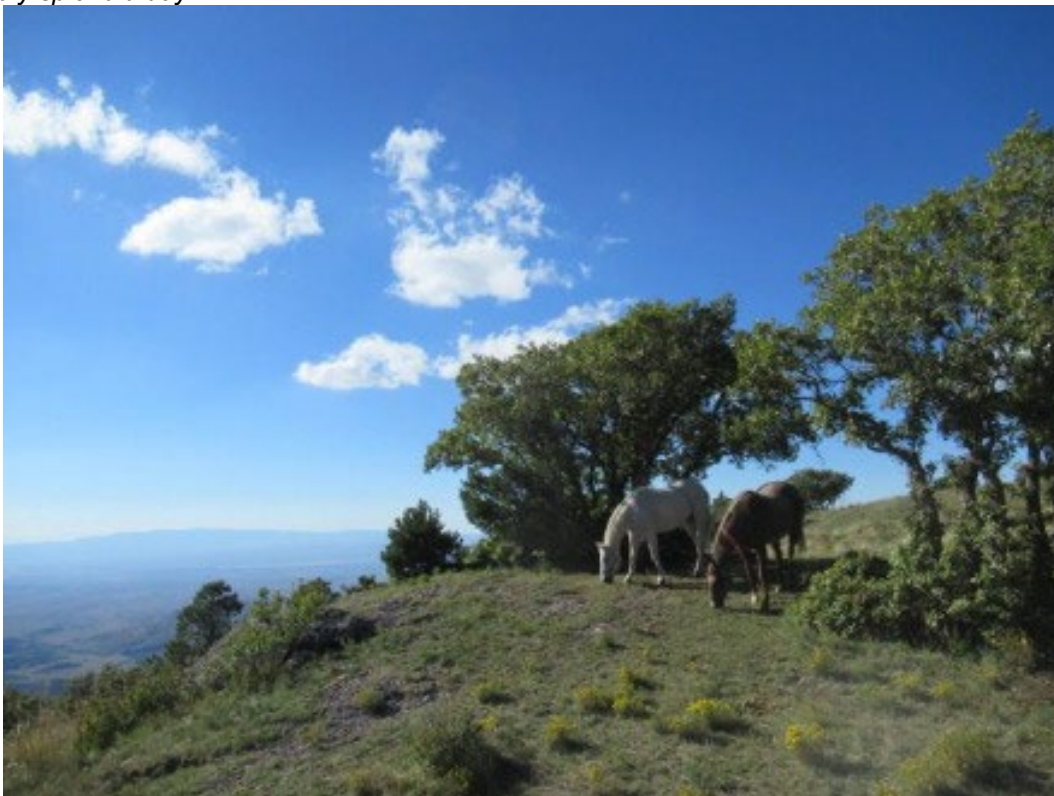
*Spanky takes some alone time, exploring a high country meadow (he's just a little brown dot in the center of the photo) . . .*



*Before returning on his own to us - "Hi! Now where?" Such loyal horses.*



*It's a truly splendid day.*



Thanks for sharing it with us!  
MM



Arroyos are common in the desert southwest. They're created by flood waters coming from heavy seasonal rains in the mountains, which rush down and gouge out dramatic canyons across the desert floor. There are so many arroyos just south of Carrizozo, NM, they form an intriguing 'badlands'. Though sometimes difficult to access (due to steep walls), the soft-sandy bottoms make for excellent riding and extraordinary views.

*Because they are dug into the flat desert floor, they can be difficult to see from a distance (which made it tough for pioneers trying to cross this country in covered wagons). "But WE know where they are!", says Spanky.*



*The water that creates them comes from the high mountains in the distance (we stay out of here if it is raining up there!).*



*They're nearly invisible until we come upon them.*





*"Good thing we know the secret ways!", says Thunder.*



*There actually are very few places here for horses to access the arroyo bottoms. This is one of them.*



*Here come the boys.*



*"This is going to be fun! Oh! Wait - which way do I go now?"*





*"Whew! Gee, this sand is soft!"*



*You can see what we mean by 'steep' walls.*



*The boys manage to find some tasty nibbles along the way.*



*They see something up ahead. "Hmmm?"*





*Deep in thought . . . "Wonder what we're going to have for supper . . ."*



*Spanky negotiates a rock ledge. These low barriers create beautiful cascades when the arroyo is filled with water (we've only seen them that way from above!)*



*Adapting. As the wall erodes over time, plants like this mesquite adjust by 'moving' new growth away from the cliff. Eventually the old trunk will wither and fall into the arroyo.*



*Sometimes the walls expose interesting sandstone alcoves like this one.*





*"Yup! We like it here!"*



*Beautiful 'badlands'.*



MM



We seem to be surrounded by angels around here.

*First, we had a nice visit with 'Angel' and her feral family.*



*This is her kinda-sister (same dad), 'Sweetpea'. They're growing up so fast.*



*The moms came to give us a really close-up goodbye. "Got more treats?", they asked in unison.*



*At home, we have these little angel fawns.*





*They are best friends.*



*And THEN. Coming back from a ride in Bonito Canyon at twilight, it was nearly dark along the isolated forest road - when I spotted a quick flash. Something white was under a bush on the side of the dirt track. I figured it was a baby cottontail and stopped for a look. In the dim light I couldn't be sure. Is that a kitten? In the middle of nowhere? How could that be? I got out for a closer look. Yup, a tiny kitten in the forest. Without hesitating, I reached down and grabbed it before it could run away. Oh, my gosh. Two years and two days since I found Gracie cowering under a dumpster . . . and now this. How did she get here? How did she survive even a few hours, with predators, etc.? How did I manage to find her? So, she came home with us (of course), and had her first meal in how long? (Lots of questions).*





*Unlike Gracie who was sick when I found her, this kitten appeared healthy (but very hungry) - so she got to meet the family sooner. Onyx and Orca pretty much ignored her. Gracie wasn't thrilled to have a new sister.*

*"Where'd THAT come from?" . . . "She doesn't look very welcoming!", thought the baby.*



*But Mommie Cat was in bliss. She is naturally nurturing, so having a new kitten was a happy miracle to her. "Yes!"*



*Yup. Love at first sight. "MINE! (I don't know how this happened)."*



*"Let me give you a big hug and a kiss!"*





*The baby likes her first toy - a little plush goat, just her size.*



*But mostly, she loves having a home. "I was so scared!" (She has little black spot in the middle of her nose).*



*And we all love her (well, Gracie will come around . . .)*



*Exploring . . . a little.*





*I like being in the house better!*





Welcome home little Angel.

MM



A portion of the nearby Apache Trail follows a narrow and ancient canyon - from a wide-open mesa top, down to meadows along a cascading stream. It's a wonderful place any time of the year, but maybe especially in the languid days of early autumn - when the green leaves hold on a bit longer before donning their fall colors.

*At home, we're still enjoying the remains of summer . . .*



*. . . and the bright blues skies of New Mexico . . .*



*. . . and of course, those clouds . . .*



*. . . then, wandering along the Apache Trail.*





*Ahhhh . . . a taste of summer's bounty.*



*Thunder lingers, and then catches up - taking in the beautiful day.*





*A very pleasant destination at the end of the trail. Spanky is in a mellow mood. "Huh?"*



*Shade-dappled meadows . . .*





*. . . and lush glades.*



*The autumn sun reflected in unhurried waters.*





*While occasional swift cascades add music to the day.*





*A ghostly reminder that summer has passed.*



*But still, evidence of Arcadian days remains.*





*To be enjoyed as precious moments . . .*



*. . . and shared with treasured friends.*



MM



## 2023-10-04 - Kitten Update

Page 1 of 6

It was just last Wednesday evening that little Angel was lost, alone, in the forest. It was a miracle that she was found. Now she is part of a caring family - Mommie Cat is very maternal and is delighted to have a little one to spoil.

*Much of the time they are cuddled together.*



## 2023-10-04 - Kitten Update

Page 2 of 6

*It's a great win-win - Mommie can do what she loves; and at the same time help teach, and encourage things like trust in the little one.*



*"Remember, only tomcats chew with their mouth open . . ."*





## 2023-10-04 - Kitten Update

Page 3 of 6

*We have no way of knowing what Angel experienced before now.*



*Oops . . . woke the baby.*



*"Look up at the camera, honey . . ." (Mommie is accustomed to being photographed).*



*"Now smile!"*





*They both like the little goat toy. "But what is it?"*



*Angel is well-fed . . . now!*



*"I feel really lucky!"*



MM



Beautiful Grindstone Lake is a wonderful destination in itself - but it's also the gateway to many miles of surrounding mountain trails. On an early autumn day, it's hard to beat (there even is dedicated horse trailer parking).

*Thunder leads us to the trails, from the horse trailer parking area.*



*We're always eager to see the lake from this vantage point. Spanky takes a moment to enjoy the view.*



*The trails around the lake are very special.*



*A drink before continuing on.*





*We take a shortcut across a meadow.*



*A snack . . .*





*... and some grass angels.*



*Now we hit the trails in earnest . . .*





*. . . climbing high above the lake.*



*Note how the tree over Spanky has bent and twisted itself in order to survive on the steep hillside.*





*It's a 'Nature's bouquet' all along the trail.*



*Here's an old timer. Lots of history in that gnarled trunk.*





*Higher still.*



*All we can see is forest, for miles and miles. "We love views!"*





*It's an especially beautiful place this time of year.*



*Lunchtime.*





*Thunder sees elk across the way.*



*They were up on that hilltop a moment ago - the 'phantoms of the forest', gone now.*



*More mountain grazing . . .*



*. . . and a final drink before heading home.*



MM



Although fall colors are beginning to dot the high country, nearer to home it still looks a lot like summer. The green won't last much longer, so we enjoy it while we can.

*Even the skies have some summer-like clouds, as the boys wander across a meadow . . .*



*. . . but it's the still-green grass the horses most appreciate.*





"Oh! Boy!"



*The wild rose flowers of summer have left behind brightly colored rosehips, which some people gather to make a healthful tea rich in vitamins A, C, and E as well as strong anti-oxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds (they're good for horses, too).*





*Cattails are mature now. Their abundant pollen makes an excellent, high protein substitute for flour. It has long been used by the local Apache's and other indigenous peoples.*



*Thunder takes it all in - "This is very interesting!"*





*He and Spanky mosey along on the warm, still day.*





*Spanky spots a young, wild stallion at the end of this meadow.*



*Stallions are seldom social with unfamiliar horses. He keeps his distance as we continue our outing.*







*We know that cooler autumn nights will soon fade this deep green Eden.*





*So we enjoy it while we can.*



*"Hey, Thunder, why does summer have to end?" . . . "To everything there is a season; and a time for every purpose under heaven."*



*"Gee, that's profound!" . . . "I read it somewhere."*





*Along the trail, Virginia creeper provides the first sign of change to come.*



*There's already change at home. Angel has begun to share some big-cat food with Mommie Cat (and she now plays with all the other cats - including Gracie).*





*I honestly don't think either of them realizes that they aren't biologically mother and daughter. It makes no difference to them . . . "Love is love."*



*A bonus shot: The big old truck was featured in Carrizozo's 'First Responders Appreciation Day' parade (that's the reason for my colorful uniform shirt).*



MM



The Fort Stanton Cave Study Project (FSCSP) is an all-volunteer organization which conducts exploration, public education, scientific research, and environmentally sound management of the caves and karst within and surrounding the Fort Stanton - Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area. The world-class cave now surpasses Carlsbad Caverns in size and contains what is thought to be the most remote (from an entrance) underground area in the world. FSCSP organizes three study expeditions annually, each with a set of strict scientific goals (the cave is not open to the public). It was a privilege to join them during their fall expedition, and to participate in establishing precision survey points within the cave.

*Strict decontamination protocols are followed both before and after entering the cave (to prevent the introduction of outside bacteria and fungi). A special 'decon' building is located near the cave entrance.*



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*There is only one known entrance to the cave - a natural collapse of the ground surface thought to have occurred around 900 years ago (the cave itself is estimated to be about one million years old). It is protected by a series of security measures.*



*The enormous scale of the interior can't be fully expressed with photos . . .*





. . . and yet many passages barely allow for adequate crawl space.



*Special instruments are used to determine level differential measurements underground. It was an exciting venture!*





Meanwhile at home, Gracie and little Angel have begun to share playtime together. "Whatcha doing?", asks Angel.



"Can I play, too?" A scrap of paper and some toy balls keeps them busy for hours.



*"I see you!"*



*A ball-on-a-string is another favorite.*





*Gracie attempts to hide under the paper (we don't call her 'little' anymore).*



*It's challenging to photograph two cats in perpetual motion.*





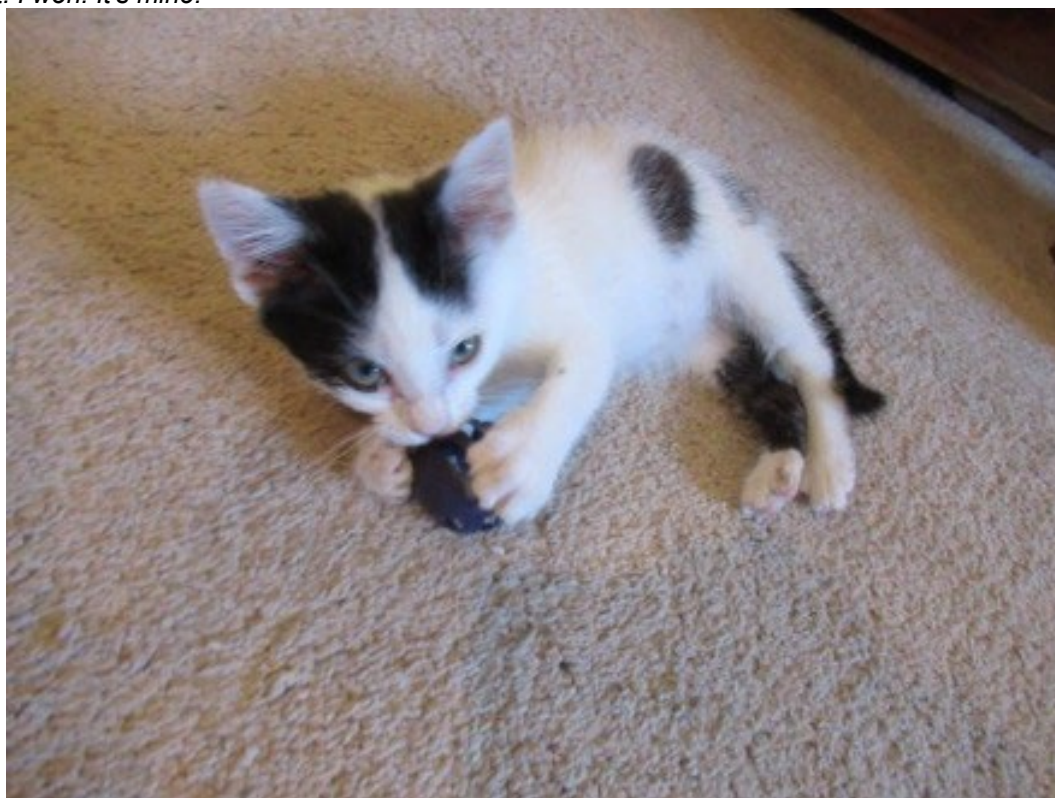
*A simple box becomes a magic castle. "Just my size!"*







*"I got it! I won! It's mine!"*



*Gracie still gets lots of attention, and of course socializes with her deer friends. "I have a new sister!"*



MM



## End Journal Part 3 of 3

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