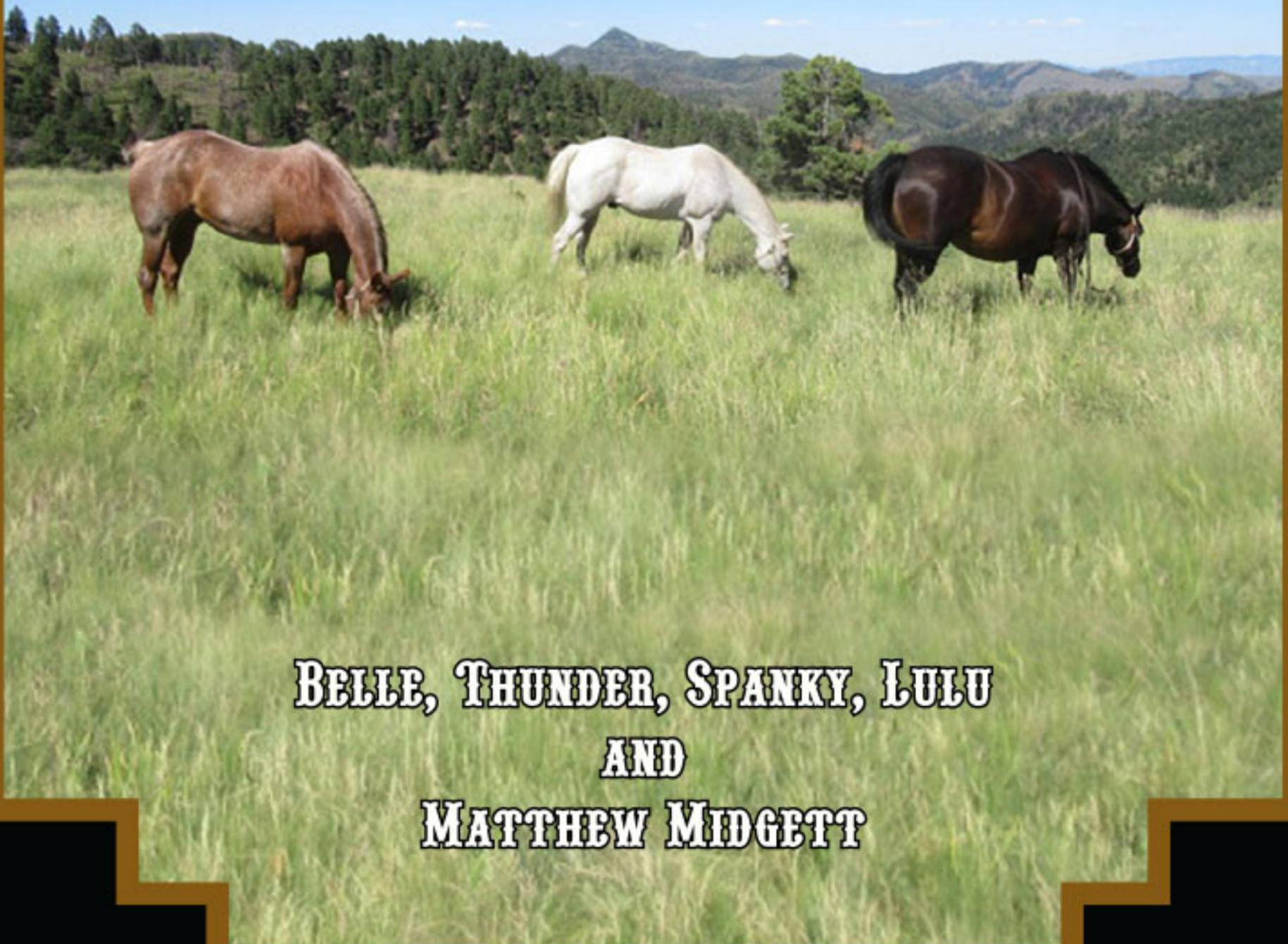


THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Eighteen



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

“Thank you for sharing your delightful family and wonderful adventures. I feel as though I know everyone personally, through your vivid descriptions and exquisite photos. Your prose always hits the mark -- so beautifully written -- whimsical, spiritual, and inclusive.”

—Whitney Mandel



Come along and ride with us!

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XVIII

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

Cover Design: Laura Reynolds

Printing: PrintStar San Diego

First Edition Printing October 2020

All photographs © Matthew Midgett. All rights reserved.

Please use the BOOKMARKS TOOL:



for your active TABLE OF CONTENTS
(located on the far upper right corner of the
window).

Only a couple of miles away, Ranchman's Camp is located on a large plateau, with views in all directions. Though mostly soft, rolling country, it also offers deep dramatic arroyos - and a couple of steep, high peaks.

Wilcox bid us farewell from his apple tree lounge.



"Bye (I don't know why you don't just come up here and hang out . . .)"



2019-08-25 - Ranchman Peak

Well, the horses aren't keen about hanging out in trees . . . so off we went. We're headed for that peak straight ahead.



A joyful Thunder in his element.





Getting closer.



Climbing up, we look out toward towering Sierra Blanca in the distance.



Spanky takes in a perspective of Nogal Peak, too.



The view from the very top.



Thunder leads us back, on his own special route.



Spanky tailgates . . .



A snack as clouds build.



Thunder moves out on his own again. ("I hate it when he tailgates . . .")



Before returning to his lead position.



Rain coming? Maybe.



"Naw - I don't think so", says Spanky.



He was right. It rained over there, but not on us.



MM

On warm, late-summer afternoons, we welcome the cool shade and water of Mills Canyon Trail.



Of course, the green grass is a big plus, too!



Spanky takes his time on this clear summer's day.



We all do.



While Thunder wanders ahead . . .



Belle and Spanky share a secret confidence.



He's back!



Surprising that they are willing to move on past all this grass.



A summer's idyll.



Ah . . . the gentle sound of water.



Lots of delicate flowers along its edge.





Another quick snack.





It's getting dark in the canyon.



All is still and quiet - save for the murmuring water.



Always nice to be welcomed home.



MM

2019-08-28 - Summer Fantasy - Part One

Page 1 of 10

Sporadic monsoon rains (and possible lightning) can make rides into the high country tricky this time of year. But we just had a feeling about the day, as we started up the mountain - there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Please join us on this very special ride . . .

The horses love the high country and were happy to be on shady trails.



We followed several brooks and streams along the way.



These twin pools sure looked inviting!



I hopped off Belle, to walk along with them awhile as fellow hikers on the trail.



Deep summer foliage surrounded us.



Which opened up to reveal another stream.



Thunder provides a peaceful image.



The trail continues to climb through the quiet forest.



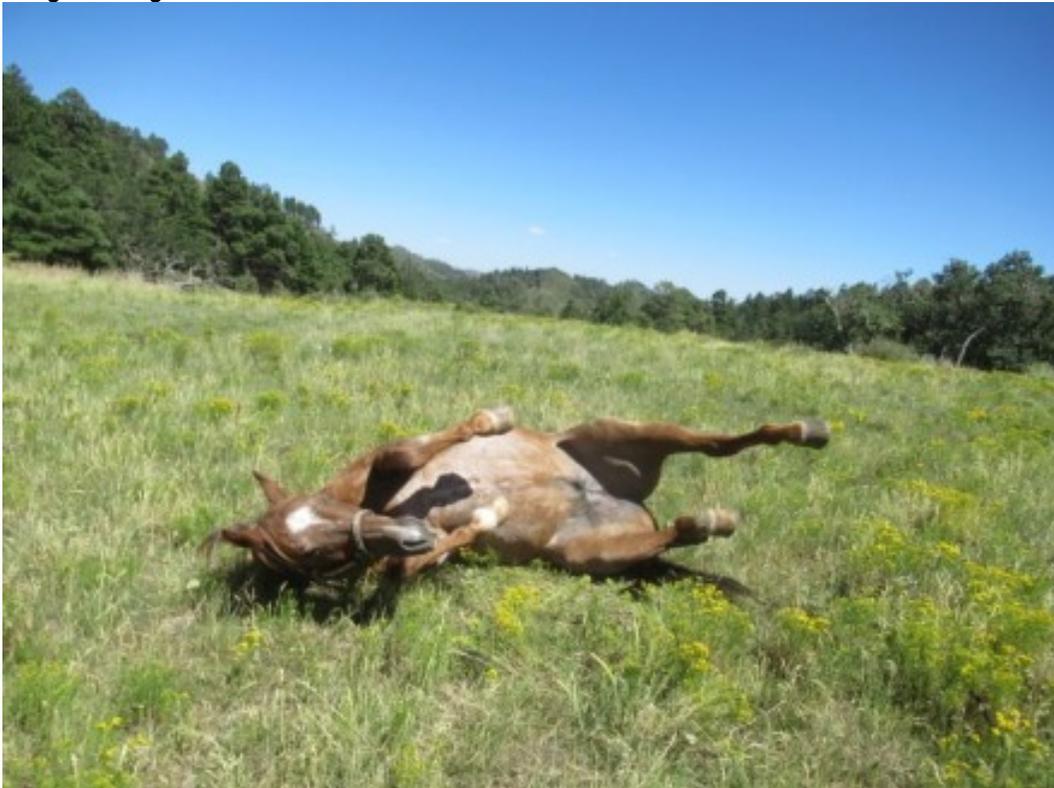
Thunder leads the way . . . he knows where we are headed.



We come upon high alpine meadows - cool and green, and dotted with summer flowers.



Perfect for grass angels!



In the distance, Nogal Peak watches over us as Thunder grazes.



We're nearing the top - spectacular views, as the Tularosa Basin far below begins to emerge.



We happily climb on through the White Mountain Wilderness.



It's park-like up here. These meadows look like Nature's golf course.



Very happy horses!



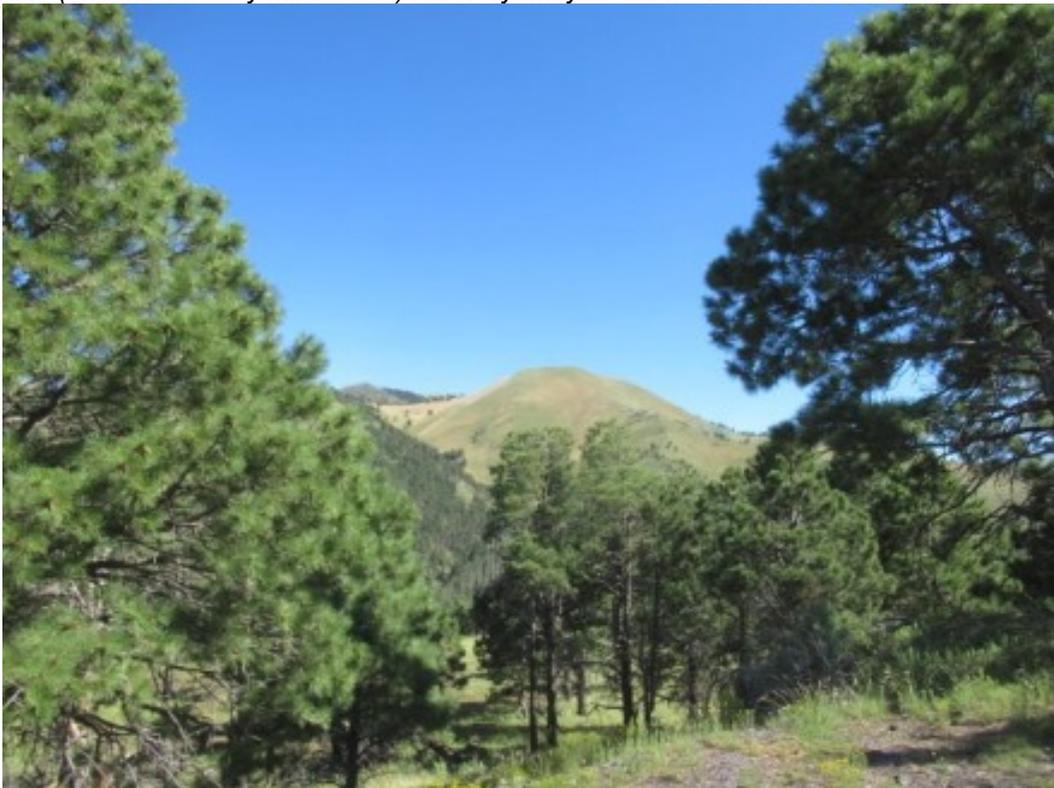
Moseying on - as though riding across the top of the world.



A contented family.



Now a decision has to be made - we could return the way we came. Or continue along what is the longest loop trail up here. It is the perfect day for it, but we have not attempted this long or strenuous a ride since Belle's serious hoof injury in 2017. With the support of her well-wishers she has made a remarkable (and the vets say miraculous) recovery. Maybe this is the time . . .



MM

2019-08-28 - Summer Fantasy - Part Two

It's easy to be an overly protective dad . . . so the horses and I had a little family talk. They all felt that Belle was doing fine and decided we should continue on our long trek.

We're headed to the base of bald Goat Mountain, where we can bushwhack down and join the trail home.



The trail beckoned ahead, winding along a high ridge.



We encounter plants unique to this elevation.



Like this grove of ominous "devil's cornstalks".



2019-08-28 - Summer Fantasy - Part Two

Thunder looks into infinity. You can just make out White Sands National Monument (upper left) . . . and then Arizona somewhere out there . . .



The trail clings to the mountainside - thousands of feet above the desert below.





To reach the trail home, we bushwhack down a long, steep slope. The horses seem to enjoy this. Romping along through the high tufted grass, each finds their own route.



Still, it's nice to have a (relatively) level trail again!



Belle was doing fine, and thoroughly enjoying herself. She found this tiny mountain spring, for a cool drink (if you look closely at the bottom of the photo, you will see the underside of her head reflected in the water).



2019-08-28 - Summer Fantasy - Part Two

Page 6 of 10

Thunder and Spanky meander ahead - always keeping an eye on Belle and me and stopping before getting to far in front of us.



As we descend, we enter the white-barked aspen groves (and pass a natural Christmas tree).



It's getting late, and we Thunder picks up our pace.



They find a way around a downed tree across the trail.



Back down along another stream.



I dismount again, and we finish the ride with each finding their own pace (Belle always prefer to lag - she is a real tourist and likes to see everything along the way).



No saddles or lead ropes.



We made it!



We lucked out with a perfect day . . . and everyone had a great time.



Thank you for joining us on this very special ride.

MM

2019-08-29 - *Thunder's Clouds*

With rain passing throughout the region all day, we finally saw a clear opening in the skies just before sunset.

A quick drive brought us to Ranchman's Camp.



Spanky confirms - "No rain here. It's not even wet!"



2019-08-29 - Thunder's Clouds

Thunder, especially, seemed to like the cool coming of evening.



He was full of energy and led us on a very fast-paced ride. Hanging on to a galloping Belle, I was unable to zoom the camera in for a better look at his jetting across the hills.



He seemed supercharged!



In the distance, "walking rain", so-called because of the way the shower seems to pace along the horizon.



A great thunderhead over Sierra Blanca.



Just at sunset, with the golden light streaming close to the earth, we raced towards home.



A fast ride, but a beautiful one.



MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-08-31 - Buck Club

"Our" bucks sure have a nice club this year. Every evening they gather for happy hour - an antler party!





Sometimes there is playful rivalry (which can become serious during the breeding season).



The usual lineup.



Still "in velvet" as they develop.





Wilcox has the best seat for the show.





MM

Monsoon storms can develop quickly - so we stay alert.

Just a few fluffy, white clouds (to me, this one looks like a flying Mickey Mouse - see his nose and eye? - with angels' wings).



More are forming . . .



... but we ride on (Belle is thinking "This may be a bad hair day ...")



Thunder finds a dry spot for some dust angels. Now the clouds begin to darken, forming a front.



We increase our pace.



Taking a breather.



We can see rain coming down ahead, near the ranch.



Now we really speed it up.



The storm front moves ever closer, as we run full-out.



Bushwhacking our own shortcuts, we race in and out of arroyos.





We spook some wild turkeys along the way.



The boys wait patiently for Belle and me to catch up. We made it home just before the rain began to pelt down.



Good timing!
MM

In a remote area of the Bonito River Valley; a nearly forgotten route, which Billy the Kid likely would have known we discovered summer gold.

We're headed down into the Valley (the river's course is marked by the line of big cottonwood trees).



Hint of things to come - a mass of yellow flowers along the river's edge.



As we continue on, our route takes us through a tunnel beneath a road. Belle leads the way (into a very scary space) with no hesitation!



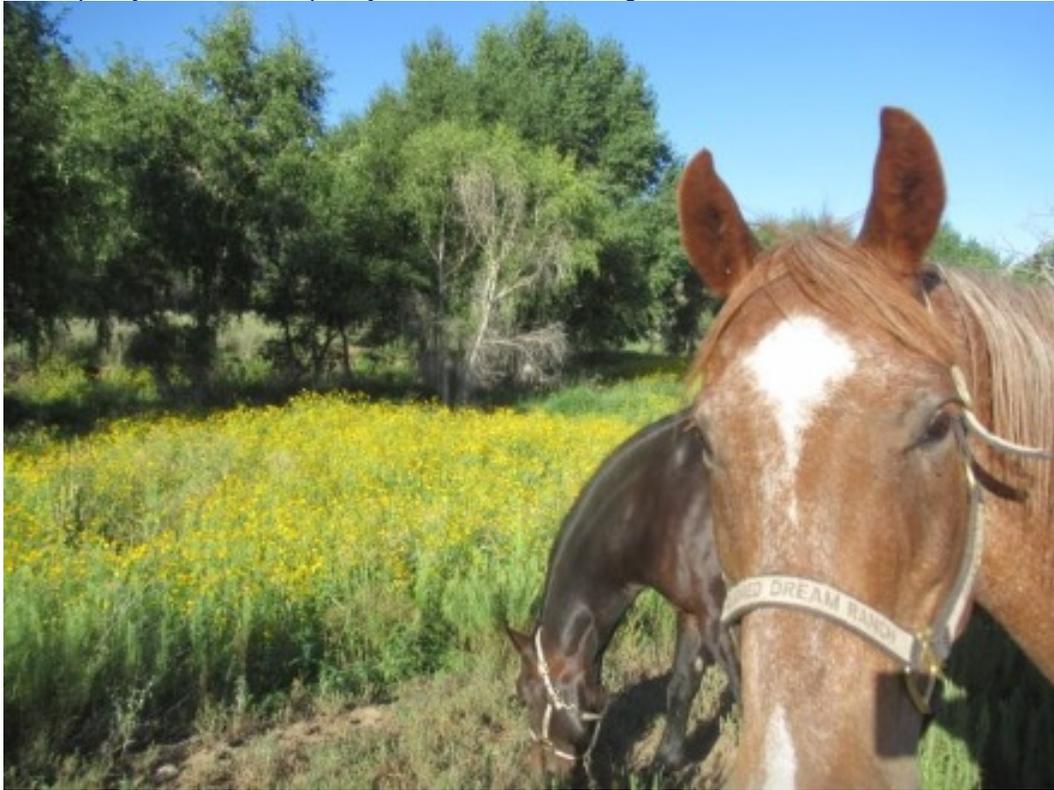
On the other side, we follow the river's course . . .



... and discover a magic place of summer gold.



"Wow! That's pretty!", observes Spanky. Belle has other things on her mind . . .



Thunder thinks so, too.





It's a Van Gogh painting come to life.



Belle seems more interested in the tasty grass beneath the flowers.



"Why do I feel like a cow?"



"Cause we're so contented!", Spanky responded.



Well, he certainly is.



We all are.



Time to move on, guys . . .



I could hear them sigh . . . but they obediently headed back.



This time, the boys bravely led the way through the scary tunnel.



Once again, across the river . . .



... and back to the trailer. "Oh boy, Thunder, it's nearly supper time. Hurry up!"



Still contented, before heading home.



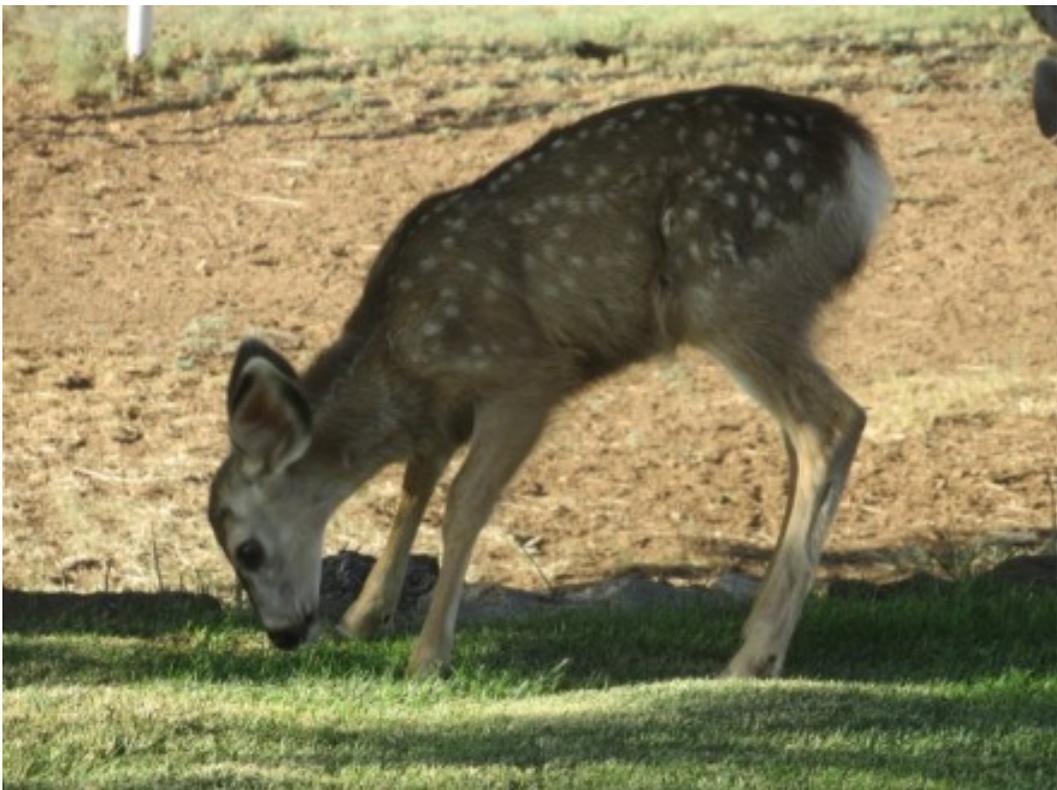
MM

It's always fun to be introduced to friends' kids.

First, mama turkey brought one of her little ones through the side yard . . .



Then . . . meet "Spotty"!

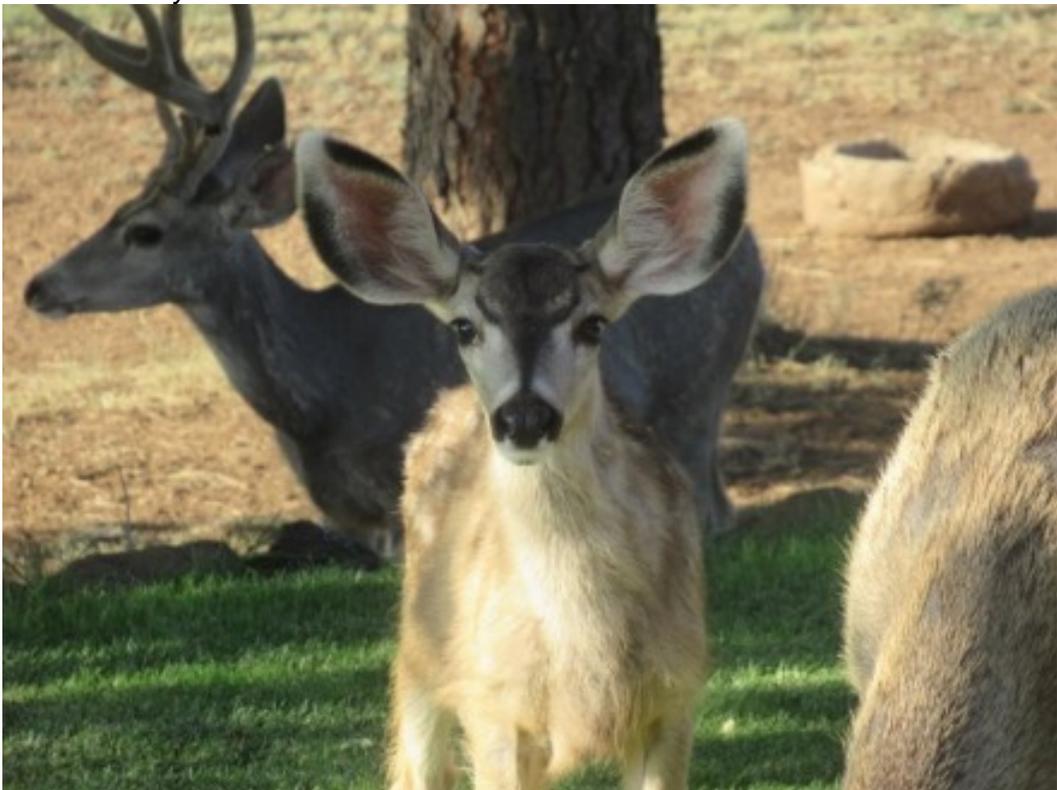


2019-09-05 - Meet the New Kids

"Princess" doe introduced her little fawn to us this morning! Major "awww" factor!



"All the better to hear you with!"



Family portrait?





What a great way to start the day!

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-09-07 - A Late-Summer Day

The days are getting a little bit shorter, but summertime continues.

Wilcox gets up early and takes his seat for the breakfast club gathering.



Monsoon clouds still dot the skies.





Belle spotted a bull elk - "Not one of ours!" - deep in the forest ahead.



2019-09-07 - A Late-Summer Day

The hunting season has begun - elk-colored Spanky wears his bright neckerchief.



He finds a good spot for a dust angel . . .



"How is it?", inquires Thunder. "Great! Nice and soft!"



"My turn!"





"Can I ride in the back of the truck?" "No."



2019-09-07 - A Late-Summer Day

As we get home, we meet a friend along the driveway.



It's the big bull elk (who bugles noisily most of the night . . .)



2019-09-07 - A Late-Summer Day

"I'm sorry. Am I too loud?" (Yes.) Those are some antlers.



We got home just in time for happy hour. "Oh, boy - here they come."



Princess brought her little Spotty along.



Cute as ever.



He checks out the appetizers. "Ummm . . ."



"Hey, mom, those would be really good with some milk . . ."



Nap time for a tired little guy.



MM

Last night it really rained. We got more than three inches!

Wilcox and Lulu know how to spend a stormy evening.



Snoozing as the rain came down.



2019-09-08 - Sunday Drive

It began to clear in the morning.



Things were pretty muddy, so we just took a little walk behind the house - and ran into some neighbors.

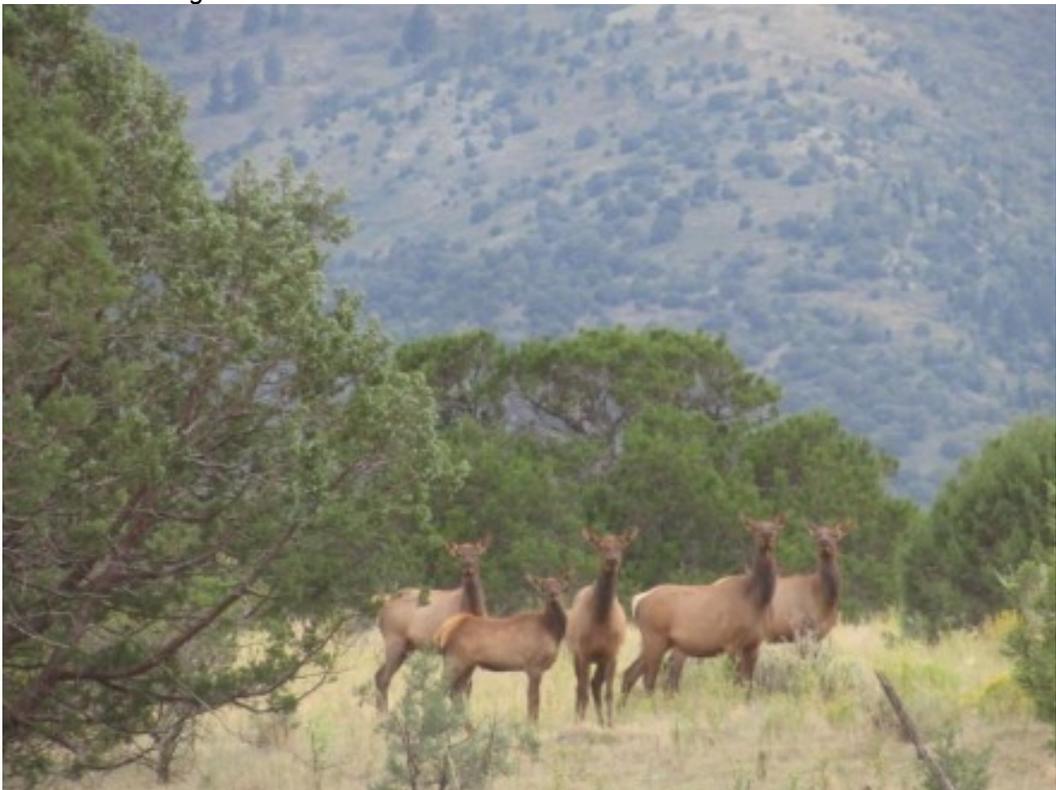


2019-09-08 - Sunday Drive

They were wondering what we were doing . . .



"Those horses sure do get around!"



2019-09-08 - Sunday Drive

Then Lulu had an idea. "Let's go up to the Lodge at Cloudcroft, for brunch". "I knew she was thinking "bacon!"

Fresh after all that rain, it was a beautiful day for the drive.



The high mountains have retained their green grass.



It still feels very summery up here.



Lulu was happy to be back at the old Lodge.



"Uh . . . bacon?"



"Whew! That made me thirsty!"



Then, we headed back home.



It was a good idea, Lulu.

MM

2019-09-11 - *Still Monsoon*

This year's monsoon season has persisted later than most (we have had about 5" of rain since Saturday), but we are not complaining!

Yup - monsoon rain, alright!



2019-09-11 - Still Monsoon

The distinctive thing about monsoons, is the amount of water, and the rapid way in which the rain comes and goes. This one came and went.



Our trails were pretty wet, so we headed over to Fort Stanton.



It was dryer there . . .



. . . but we kept our eyes on those clouds in the distance (you can see rain coming down on the right).





Rain has kept the flowers blooming . . .



... and the grass green (just ask Spanky). "Yum!"



Thunder trots briskly past the WWII German Internment Camp ruins.





The stream is muddy with silt from our rain upstream.



The Fort's old stone church is washed clean.



I guess Spanky was feeling the spirit. "Hallelujah!"



The parade ground has greened up.



We take in the view.



The boys enjoy some grazing.



Headed back through the Fort.



At sunset, clouds were building again over the ranch (we got more rain again last night).



MM

2019-09-12 - Springing into Fall

The official start of autumn is less than two weeks away (!), but our recent rains have brought back a touch of spring-like green.

The kids don't care much, as long as they get to go.



Of course, they do appreciate green grass.



2019-09-12 - Springing into Fall

This range was looking faded just a week ago.



Now every little dip and depression holds silty rainwater.





Nature's artistry.



More water along the trail.



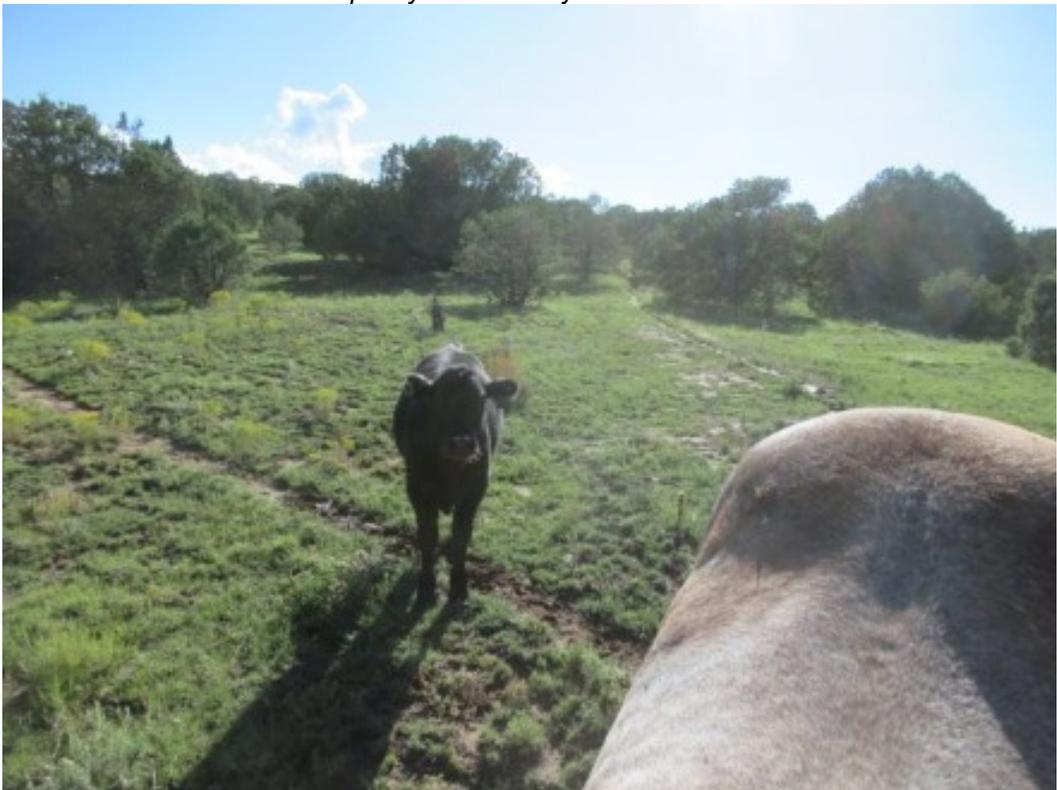
We came upon some very contented cows and calves. They're not used to water here! "What the . . .?"



"That's weird . . ."



This little one is sure curious about Spanky. "What are you?"



Mom and Thunder have a chat at the water hole.



Suddenly, all the ponds and stock tanks are full.



A very young coyote along the way.



The open country we love.



Spanky shows his gratitude in his own way.



MM

2019-09-13 - *Peak Time*

The rain has been a blessing, but it has made riding the high country tricky. Yesterday looked like it might be an ideal time to go, and we gave it a try.

We lucked out. As you can see, blue skies and green everywhere. The horses wait for me at the trail head.



It was very still and quiet, except for the songs of birds who have not yet begun to head south.



Juicy, ripe wild elderberries, ready for wine or pies.



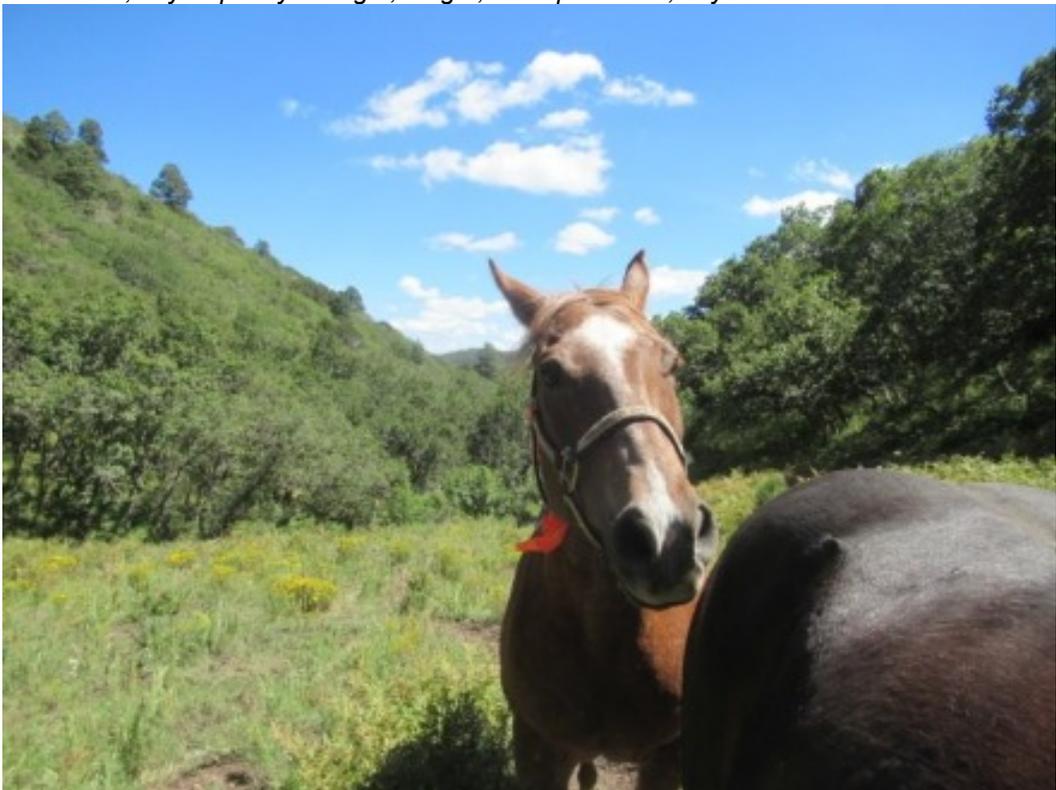
Little springs have emerged - some running in the trail. Thunder looks like he doesn't want to get his hooves wet. "If I can, you can", taunts Belle.



Plowing through belly-high mountain ferns.



"Ooh, that tickles", says Spanky. "Alright, alright, don't push me", says Belle.



2019-09-13 - Peak Time

They don't show well in this photo, but the entire valley was covered in bright lemon-yellow flowers.





Thunder's favorite part - the race to the top (he always wins).



Close to heaven.



Looking west, that "shadow" dark area is actually the Valley of Fires - the Northern Hemisphere's most recent lava flow (5,000 years ago). It's 44 miles long, and 160 ft. thick. A little bit of Hawaii, in New Mexico.



They wait for me to move us on. Never have to worry about the horses wandering off up here - that's lucky, too.



Mountain majesty - Nogal Peak.



More carpet of yellow.



The trip down was just as beautiful.





Sure glad we could share this with you!

MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-09-15 - *Beyond the Rain*

Recent rains have favored our mountain. So, we thought Capitan Gap might be a good choice for a dry ride.

Well . . . dry so far.



Looking kinda ominous - even here . . .



... but, the horses were game ...



... and there is green grass.



Belle can see it's still raining at the ranch. This was a really good idea!"



Thunder has a run . . .



... and then barrels back to join us.



Whoa! That's a lot of rain coming down. Better head home.



Thunder agrees.



After the rain - whatta moonrise!



MM

The rainy weather hasn't kept our neighbors away.

Most mornings the elk are hanging around.



Here's our noisy bugler.





Bugling . . . Here is what he sounds like: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ec0UcmAr4_E . . .



... and the deer have had company.



A big wild turkey family has been joining them at happy hour.







"They better stay away from my apple!"



Princess, with baby Spotty (who has learned how to scratch an itchy nose).





MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-09-17 - Dry Spot

Because of the rain, we did something usually reserved for winter days . . . and headed down to the arroyos south of Carrizozo in search of a dry spot.

The high desert was dry (and green . . . for the desert)



Back up at the ranch, still cloudy with some rain.



2019-09-17 - Dry Spot

The kids thoroughly enjoyed the dry sand underfoot.



"Yes!"



Thunder explored the old (1906) abandoned railway bridge.



Then we headed for the beautiful arroyos.



2019-09-17 - Dry Spot

There was little chance for a flash flood down here, but we chose routes with an escape path . . .



Thunder looks like he is keeping an eye out, just in case.



2019-09-17 - Dry Spot

This sand is great for a soft, easy ride. Though there are no hunters here, Spanky wears his ribbons out of habit. "I think they look dashing!"



The beautiful desert Southwest.





Of course, Thunder remembers this obscure little trail out of the arroyos.



It requires four-wheel-drive.



The skies had cleared a bit at home. Different worlds . . . only minutes apart.



Spotty greeted us . . .



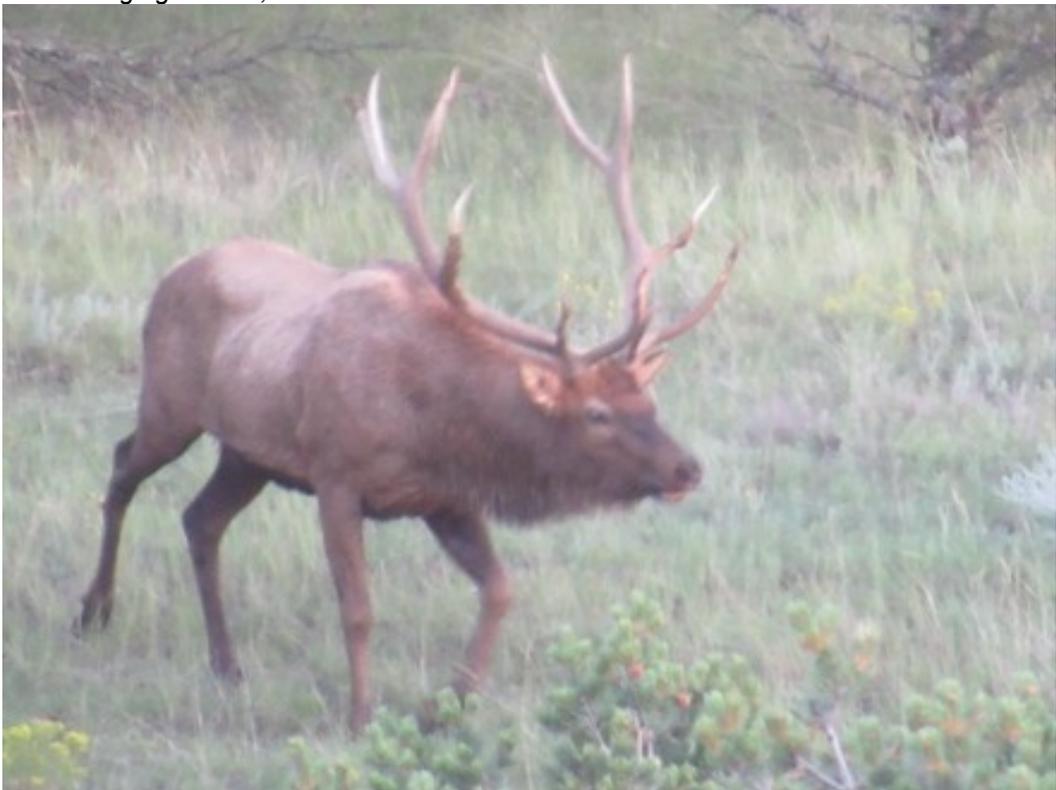
. . . and the bucks were waiting for happy hour.



"It's time, you know."



The elk were hanging around, too.



It's interesting . . . most every evening I have a little talk with the big bull. He listens awhile, then slowly saunters away. Maybe he is thinking about what I said, "Stay on private land!"



It was a beautiful evening.



Shortly after sunset, it began to rain again. Lulu and Orca know what to do about that.



MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

Although the weather forecast predicts still more rain showers ahead, it is beginning to feel a bit like autumn. Summer's brightness is being mellowed by the changing season.

I don't know whether the wild turkeys prefer summer or fall (we don't talk about Thanksgiving . . .)



The little guys sure are busy . . .



. . . and then they seem to suddenly just poop out and sit down (but they still peck at the bits of corn on the ground around them).



Mom keeps tabs on them.



Belle takes in a view of the ranch.



Under those New Mexico skies.



We have another bull elk.



This one has a very odd, saber-like antler on his right side.



The horses know the green of summer will soon be turning to gold.



So, they enjoy it while they can.





Summer flowers are still in bloom . . .



(Spanky admires these) . . .



. . . but new things are appearing, too.



The shadows are longer than they were.



Even if monsoon clouds still form in the evening.



The autumn glow seems to have begun.



MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-09-19 - *The Creature*

As frequently happens, I was finishing my chores - thinking it was too late for a ride - when the horses let me know that they didn't think it was too late at all. So off we went.

The weather to the east looked good - so that's where we headed.



2019-09-19 - *The Creature*

The sun was going down fast (have you noticed how it's getting dark earlier?), so we decided on a loop ride.



Although not as green here as at Ranchman's Camp, there was plenty of quick grazing.



We were quietly walking the trail, when suddenly Thunder stopped in his tracks. He spotted something under a tree.



This is the only shot I got of the creature, as it scurried into the brush. Either a big raccoon (but no ringed tail), or a porcupine (though they are rarely seen in daylight). Once the horses had a chance to watch it, they moved on.



"So, what was that thing, anyway?" wondered Spanky.



"I don't know, but if you see another one, I suggest you stay clear", offered Thunder.



Maybe it came out of a burrow, like this one.



We were still curious, as we rode into the sunset.



MM

It's hunting season, and our elk friends know it - they pretty much stay hidden in the forest during the day.

They're up there. I see them (and hear the bugling), but they are obscured by the trees, so no good photos.



That's not an issue with the wild turkeys - they now come up on the lawn, looking for goodies.



"Did you mention stuffing?"



It's a beautiful day . . .



So, while the horses enjoyed their breakfast, I took a short walk in the forest.



Lo and behold, I came across my friend. I thought he might have mistaken me for a hunter, and figured this quick glimpse was all I would see of him . . .



2019-09-20 - Odd Fellow

. . . but when I called out, "Good luck, my friend!", he slowed - and then stopped in front of me.



This is the one with the very odd antler. I've never seen another like it.



As I talked, he paused (the rest of his herd were in the trees ahead).



That right antler grew into two, large extensions.



I told him it looked cool . . .



. . . and urged him to be very careful, as he went to join his family.



Some of the deer heard my voice, too, and were curious. I assured them that happy hour would be on time.



MM

We've been spending time at Ranchman's Camp.

Here's why.

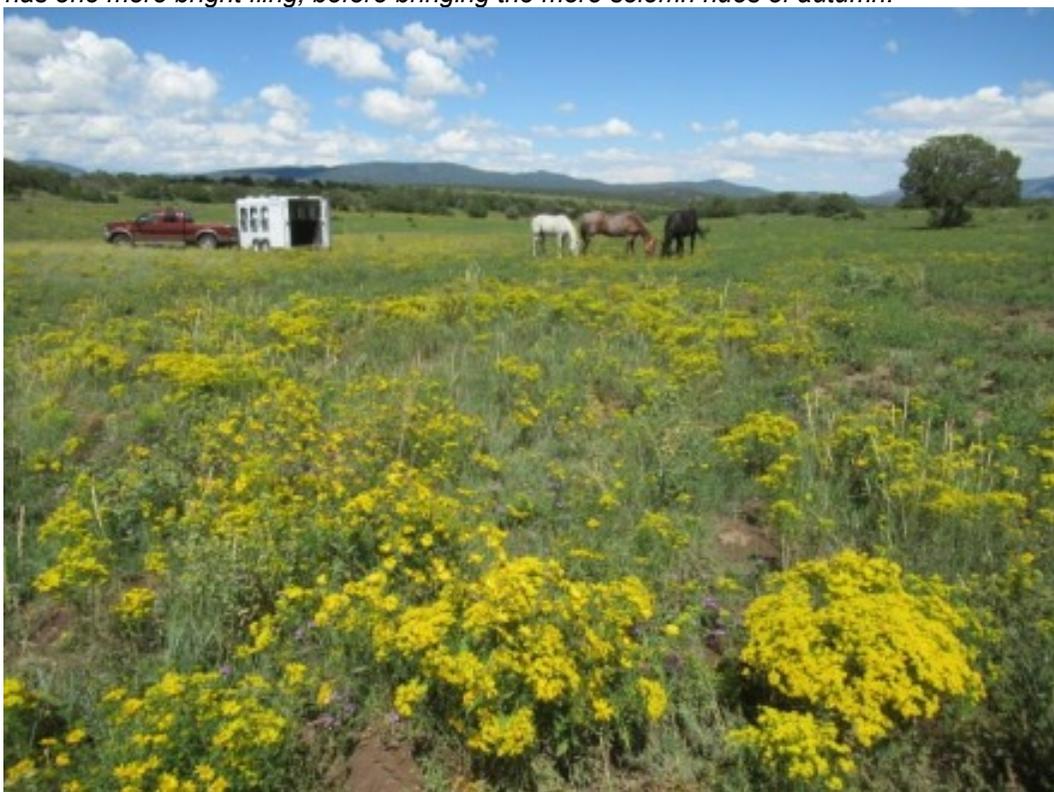


This year, it seems more like springtime than mid-September.





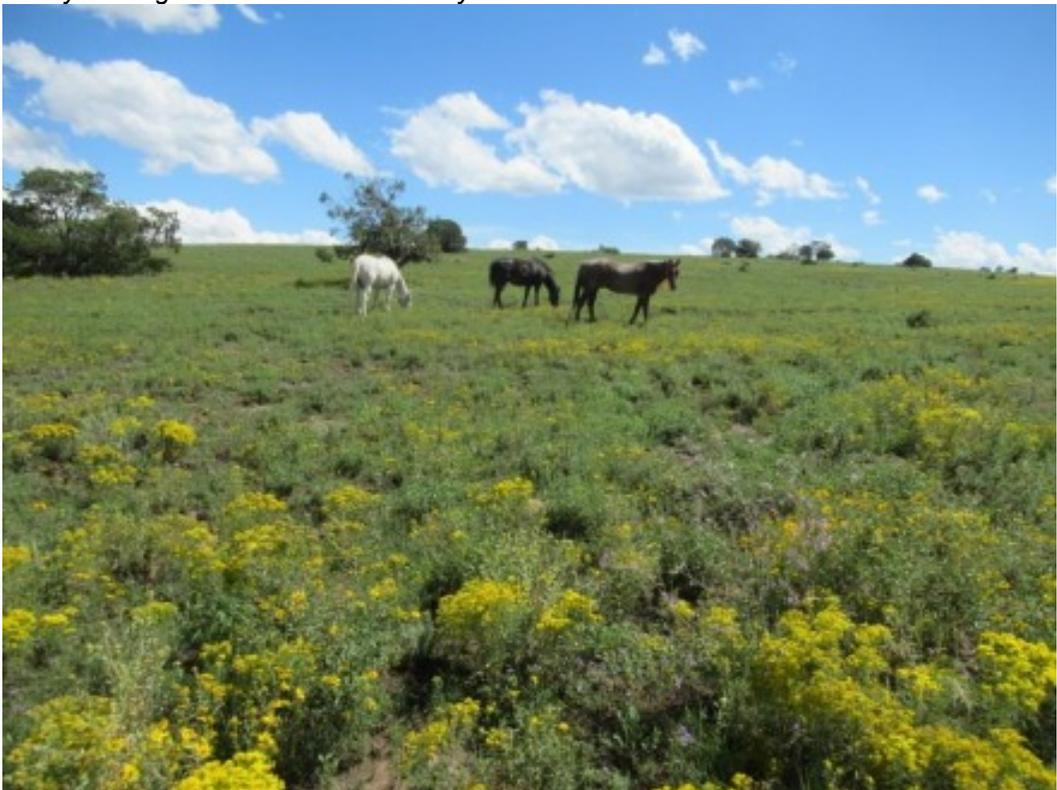
Nature has one more bright fling, before bringing the more solemn hues of autumn.



Spanky's been making daisy angels . . .



. . . and everyone is grateful for nature's bounty.





Thunder shows a light step, as though he has spring fever.



It kinda reminds us of this old painting we've had for years . . . "Slow Poke."



Nature is an artist, too.



Spanky grazes under blue skies, while Thunder enjoys a run-about.



We all join him for a gallop.



Whew! Time for a rest.



Uh-oh. Here we go again.



"Just one more bite . . ."



Great time - to share with you.



MM

2019-09-23 - *Dusk and Dawn*

Each morning and evening, the elk herds move across the ranch, with much bugling by the big bulls, and bawling by the little calves.

At dusk (7 pm), the bull brings his family out of the sheltering trees, for grazing in meadows (these photos are less clear because of the low light in the shade).



Lots of babies this year - the mom in the foreground seems to have twins.



You can see one nursing. Awww.



Dad keeps an eye on everyone.



Then, in the morning, they all move to another part of the forest. This time, his loud bugling seems to be giving directions.



They all must learn to get past fences.



Dad watches to make certain everyone makes it.



Meanwhile, two young bulls practice sparring with their antlers. It makes a clattering racket.



All done, for now.



"I won!" "No, I won!"



Big daddy continues to monitor the herd.



Oh, and at the same time, the wild turkey families are cleaning up last evening's happy hour corn.



"Yum!"



The little ones are getting their 'big bird' tail feathers!



2019-09-23 - Dusk and Dawn

It's 7:30 am. By now, nearly all the elk are into the meadow, for a late breakfast.



These ladies watch me, from the forest tree line.



Dad gives out with a mighty bugle - all is well.



The rhythm of life.

MM

End Journal Volume 18 - Part 1 of 3

Please Follow Us Some More... See

All the Journals.

JUST CLICK HERE!

