

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Twenty

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

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

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

Jaune "Quick-to-See" Smith



Come along and ride with us!

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XX

Part 3 of 3

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

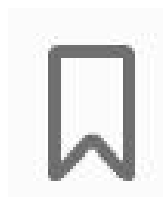
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(located on the far upper right corner of the
window).

We had a fall-like, one day 'cool front' come through. It was refreshing, but threatened rain (actually, no rain is a 'threat' - it is always welcome here).

The clouds at home looked beautiful and harmless in a fresh blue sky.



By the time we got to Fort Stanton, the sky was getting a bit darker.



*The horses were happy to be walking along the stream. "Don't push, Spanky", said an irritated Belle.
"This is supposed to be a relaxing time . . ."*



Belle's idea of 'relaxing' . . .





'Mr. Mouth-full' . . . "Huh?"



*It was cool, quiet and peaceful. "You wanna go over there, Thunder?" "Uh . . . no. I'm fine right here."
"Me, too."*



The sky continued to get darker as Thunder led us back to the trailer.



They grazed near the trailer until the raindrops started to fall (you know Belle and her hair . . .)



Everyone was inside for the drive home as the rain came down. Lucky again.



MM

"Buddy" was the most well-behaved cat imaginable. I can't think of one thing he did wrong. He was shy of guests so rarely seen. He loved to travel and came along on numerous explorations of New Mexico. He died of complications related to old age. Becky and I have been monitoring him, and it was time for his 'liberation' May he rest in peace. He will be missed.

Buddy behind Mommie Cat, to whom he became very attached.



Scooter's ashes have been laid to rest with Buddy. Friends forever.







MM

Argentina Trail remains one of our favorites. It climbs rapidly from the horse camp to the crest of the Sacramento Mountains.

The horses know what we are up to, and enthusiastically anticipate hitting a familiar trail.



It's a wonderful day for it - cool and clear with no likelihood of rain (yes, those are the tips of Belle's ears).



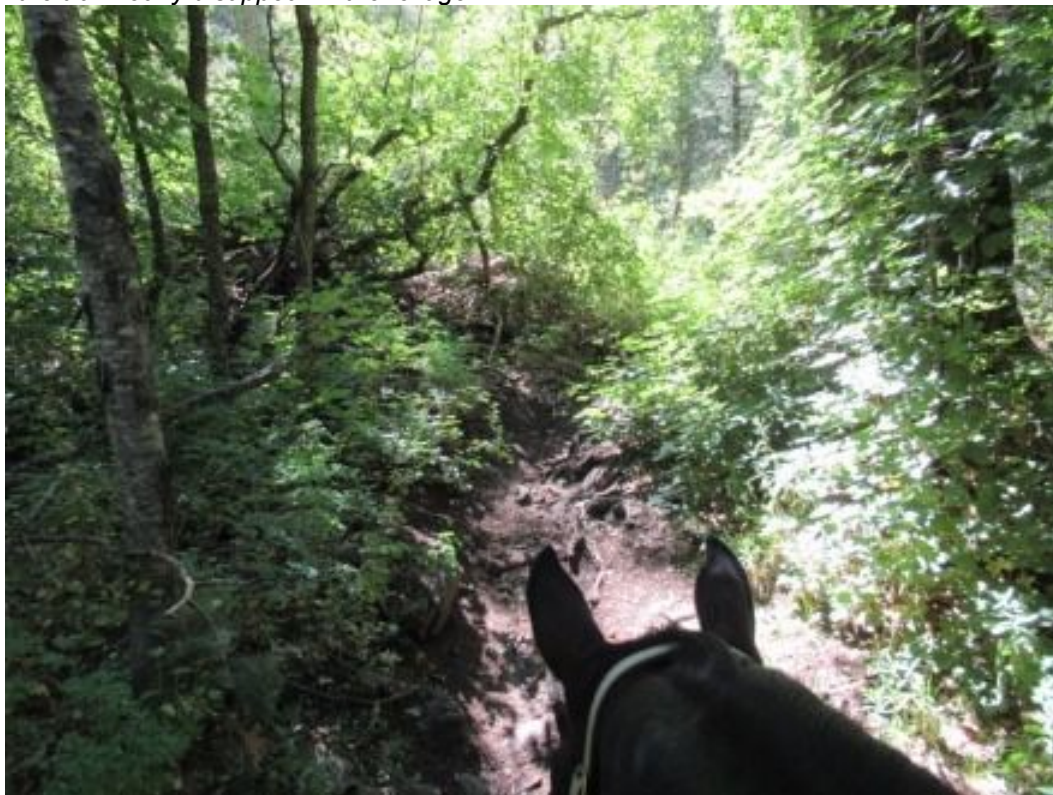
Spanky negotiates a rocky patch (hunting season has begun, so he wears his bright ribbon) . . .



. . . and then . . . "I prefer snow, or at least grass - dry pine needle angels are a bit prickly!"



Parts of the trail nearly disappear in the foliage.



As we near the crest, the last few yards of the trail are the steepest and the most challenging. The horses step carefully.



Thunder always celebrates reaching the top with a little burst of speed.



Spanky is happy to nibble.



We are not alone - an elk sentinel quietly observes us from her shady hideout.



Moving on.





Wonderful mountain vistas.



To the north, Nogal Peak keeps an eye on us.



Spanky speeds down a meadow. "Oh, my! Oh-my! Too fast! Don't trip! Oh! . . ."



We've come around from that ridge beyond.



As we descend down Turkey Canyon, the boys spot some elk.



"Where? I don't see them."



Dusk on the trail. Silent except for birds serenading the day's end.



A drink before heading home.



MM

Summer is waning. We can feel it in the air. We'll sure miss the soft, warm days . . . and all the greenery. Yet each season has its gift, and fall is a good one.

As the season begins to shift, we are even more appreciative of summer's bounty - green grass and bright flowers.



Here's an interesting patch of verdant grass on the plains.



"Look, Belle, sunflowers" . . . "Oh, honey, let's go see!"



Always cheerful . . .





... and tasty!



"Um . . . just one more" . . . Spanky dines with great delicacy.



Next, we discover a truly green meadow.



It looks like an alfalfa field, but it is native grass.



"Hmmm . . . where to start?"



Admiring more flowers - these are 'cow pen' daisies . . .



These strange plants look like puffs of pink ground fog.





The boys are reluctant to leave their meadow . . .



. . . but they race toward us.



Here comes Spanky, full-out.



At home, a bull elk at twilight.



Supper time.



MM

Last night the elk kept up a mighty symphony - bulls loudly bugling; calves crying like sea birds.

"Yeah, what a racket!", agreed Onyx and Mommie Cat."



One of the culprits. This big bull was still at it at dawn. His bugling is powerful!



He was making certain his family retreated back into the safety of trees after breakfasting in our pastures. He's a good dad.



Here's Mom (see how thin she is from nursing) . . .



. . . and her kid.



The youngster was sure curious about our water tank.



"Hmmm . . ."



He steps in. "Hey, Mom! This thing is deep!"



"Get out of there! Your dad's calling us." "Okay, okay!"



Dad was busy herding another little one (still with some fawn spots) along the fence.



"Come on, we have to get into the forest now . . ."



"That's right, son."



He waits for the others.



Yup. Good dad.



MM

2020-09-09 - Crest Trail to the Big Bonito

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This was a very special ride, and the horses knew it. We all took in the spectacular views - and enjoyed the companionship - with great appreciation.

As usual, the horses were wonderfully cooperative.



They seemed unconcerned with the height. "Spanky! Don't push!"



Grateful to be together in this beautiful place.



We would have liked to just stay and stay . . . but it was time to head down. "Aw, gee. Do we have to?", says Spanky.



Yet he was the first to lead the way. "Okay . . ."



"Wow. This is steep (better not try a grass angel here) - but fun!"



"Try going cross-wise, like the elk do.", advises Thunder" . . . "Oh, yeah. Good idea."



They wait below for Belle and me. "I am not rushing and messing up my nice shoes", she said.



We rejoined them in a magical aspen grove. These plants are nature's largest organisms - all the trees share one giant communal root system.



We pass a perfect Christmas tree among the aspens.



A cool drink from a mountain spring was welcome. "Ahhh . . . it's wonderful!"



It sure is. There is a feeling of summer's passing. Where did it go?



As Thunder and Spanky mosey ahead, the trail levels out some.



In deep shade, these green maples will soon be ablaze with autumn colors . . .



. . . and tropical-looking ferns will hibernate with the first frost.



Nearing the end of our ride.



Carrying these memories with us . . .





And happy to share them with you.
MM

With predictions of heavy rains for the next couple of days (it is pouring as I write this, for which we are very grateful), we decided to take a long ride in the high country before they arrived. It turned out to be one of the best rides of the year.

It's in the 70's. Just a few clouds preceding the cold front. We decided to risk it.



At the beginning of the ride, those clouds moved over us, creating an almost mystical atmosphere in the forest.



It was very still and peaceful along a stream.



Here are those clouds, reflected in the cool waters.



We decided to try one of the longest loop rides - roughly 10 miles of mountain terrain.



When leading, Thunder is very conscientious. He keeps his eye on us. "You coming?"



We pass through deep forest . . .



. . . and then a long draw, across an alpine meadow. The skies are clearing - we are in luck!



Snack time.



We reach the Crest Trail, along the spine of our mountain range.



They've worked hard (and enjoyed every minute of it!), so we take a break.



Farther along our long trek, a moment to appreciate a view of the valley below . . .



. . . and one of nature's mountain bouquets.



Spanky wonders, "Are we going there?" We are.



Another break.



We have climbed more than 4,000 ft. up. That light-colored band in the distance is the world-famous White Sands National Monument.



"Wow. It's like being in an airplane (I guess . . .)!" gushes Belle.



It is.



This really is the top of the world to us.



Thanks for coming along. Our very special ride continues . . .
MM

Our highly unusual September cold spell arrived on Tuesday, as predicted. Temperatures dropped 40 to 50 degrees (into the 30's)! More importantly, it brought much-appreciated rain - we have received nearly three inches so far.

The heat lamp was turned on over Chile's bed (he clearly remembered it from his first winter, last year). "Ahhh . . ."



He still prefers his barn domain to the greater comfort of the house. "This is my place", he insists.



The horses have a remarkable ability to grow a heavy coat before the cold of winter. But this thing came out of nowhere, long before they could prepare. So we hauled out their old, much-mended medium weight blankets, and they stayed warm. I'm sure they wondered, "what the heck?" as they hunkered down outside between rain showers.



As a cold fog thickened, we took a walk in the forest behind the house.



"Sure doesn't feel like September!", thinks Spanky.



He wears his bright ribbons in case any elk hunters are lurking about.



A mom and baby elk seeking shelter. "How come we don't have blankets like them?", baby wondered. "Our coats are plenty thick!", said mom.



The cool air inspired some frisky running! "Yah-hoo!"



Spanky, too.



No complaints about the cold - we're sure grateful for the rain. Supposed to be clear and warmer tomorrow.

We'll see . . .

MM

Water is always precious in desert country. And on a silent, overcast day spent with appreciative companions, it can become mystical.

Rain had left the trails near the ranch muddy, so we headed down into the drier Tularosa Basin. This area, with its rocky buttes...



Creosote, mesquite and tall spiny ocotillos -- always reminds us of Arizona.



Nature wisely flows most water underground, but we're able follow a clear surface steam up an ancient arroyo.



Some of the earth's history is told in layers of colorful rock.



The horses enjoy frequent sips from cold, clear little pools -- flowing over natural marble outcrops.



There's plenty of grass along the way.



"What'd you guys find?", wonders Spanky.



He admires his reflection. "Hey, who's that handsome guy in the pool? LOL."



Thunder picks up the pace -- we are nearing a favorite spot.



Water cascades down a gentle fall in a remote and picturesque box canyon. Gathering for another cool drink, "This is great!", they all agree.





Falling water splashes on Thunder's face, which he then wipes on Belle. "Stop that, Thunder! I got wet, too --it'll dry you know!"



Moisture feeds ferns in a protected grotto.



The sparkling sound is wonderful.



Then Spanky finds a perfect spot for sand angels. "Phooey, Spanky! You're throwing sand all over us! Echh!"



"Hmmm... actually, that looks like fun!" So they join in.



"Please! This is not a very flattering pose."



"There -- that's better (does this cliff make my butt look big?)."



Come on guys, time to go. "Oh, geez..."



"Hurry up, Spanky."



Another snack on the way back.



MM

One of our 'secret' destinations just east of old Lincoln town (Billy the Kid knew the area well) is being developed by the Bureau of Land Management to expand its recreational opportunities.

The BLM is restoring a long section of stream course, to create better environments for fish to flourish. A new kiosk provides maps and information about the site.



We have ridden these trails for years (never seeing a soul), and the horses were curious about what changes were happening.



As the trail crosses a dry creek, stones are used for guidance.



This friendly little feller makes his own route. "Dah-dee-dah . . ."



We were admiring the flowers, when . . .



"Huh? What the . . .?"



A group of about six javelina wild boars raced across a meadow (they typically live in groups of six to nine, called 'squadrons'). The medium-sized mammals are surprisingly fast - I barely captured a photo of this one on the run. The horses seemed unconcerned, but I thought it was sort of creepy, the way they silently raced through the tall grass. Javelinas are rare here; these are the first we have seen.



Billy the Kid might well have rested in the shade of this tree (which would have been much smaller than) on his frequent trips between Lincoln and the Hondo Valley.



Efforts by the BLM to engineer improved fish habitats include construction of "in stream and bank structures" made of native stone.



These control measures slow water flow, allowing for still-water pools to form.



The sound is musical.





They also produce serene vistas (it was easy to imagine a banjo strumming on this stretch. . .)



Nearby, the horses enjoy grassy meadows and soft sand of an ancient flood plain.



They linger a bit, and then catch up.



Belle does her own snacking. "Wait just a minute. I found some clover!"



Before we move along at dusk.



Once again, we saw no one during our hours here.

MM

'Cowpen' daisies (*Verbesina encelioides*) are common summer wildflowers in our area. They are coming to the end of their season, and Belle suggested that we visit a place where they are abundant. "I want to see them again before they're all gone!", she pleaded.

The bright flowers are so named because they often bloom in soil which has been disturbed.



"Oh, darn! I don't see any.", Belle fretted.



Thunder reassured her, "I think I know where they are. Come on this way!", he said.



It was not an easy route.



He was right!



Belle was pleased, but easily distracted by some grass . . . "Hmmm . . ."



Here is a bunch near a long-forgotten cement trough (as usual, the camera fails to capture their bright color).



"I think I see more over there, on the other side of that pond!"



We followed a little brook through some lush grass.



(Lots of snacking).



Then more daisies.



Belle was thrilled. "They're so pretty!"



A classic Southwestern tableau.



We moseyed along through a natural garden.



There were other wildflowers, too.



"Those things might be pretty", said Spanky, "but they taste terrible!"



Belle had to agree.



"You're right, Spanky. But this grass is delicious!"



Still, we all enjoyed seeing fields of the flowers as their blooming season wanes.



Soon it was time to head home.





MM

Sometimes the simplest rides can be among the most rewarding. Just an after-chores, early evening ride behind the house can offer much peace and companionship.

Long shadows as the sun goes down.



Open space and silence.



Even some wildflowers for Belle to admire. "Nice!"





The sun sets gently beyond a distant ridge.



Hurrying home to supper.





A quick stop for appetizers at dusk.



Belle is impatient and gives Spanky an encouraging nip. "Come on! Supper is waiting!"



MM

With so many - and such varied - places to explore in our immediate region, it's easy to forget the ones closest to home. We were headed out for a ride near Fort Stanton when, only a mile or so from the ranch, Thunder reminded us of a place just over the hill. We hadn't ridden there in quite a while, but he remembered.

"Hey, it worked. He stopped!"



It's a section of National Forest, nearly surrounded by private property.

"To tell you the truth Thunder, I had sort of forgotten about this spot (oh, look at all that yummy grass . . .)"



"Let's go check it out!"



"See, Belle - some of your flowers!" (Belle couldn't comment because her mouth was full.)



"Yes, they're lovely (hmmm . . . is that some clover over there? . . .)"



Then it was quiet again for a few minutes as they snacked (NOT on the flowers).



"Hey, wait a minute . . . don't we live just over that little hill on the left?" "Yes, Belle, we do."



Belle was happy. "Yum, um, um . . ."



"Yum . . ."



"This place is great, thanks for suggesting it Thunder."



Nice view of Carrizo Mountain, too.



We moseyed to another meadow.



Spanky spots an elk in the tree line (that's why he wears the bright ribbons . . . hunters . . .)



Contented horses.



I promised that we would come back here soon.



"You know", said Spanky, "we can ride here from home - we don't even have to take the trailer!"



"Yeah, but that trailer is like a magic carpet for us."



Always that last bite before going home . . .



*"You'll find your happiness lies,
right under your eyes,
back in your own backyard."*

Lyrics by Billy Rose

Yup.

MM

2020-09-21 - Apache Trail

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Apache Trail follows an ancient route down a long canyon - from a high plateau to the Bonito River far below.

Much of it is gradual, and grass-covered (the horses like that!).



Spanky lags, to do some snacking along the way.



Then it narrows as it descends.



There are some more challenging spots, which the horses maneuver with care . . .



. . . and small meadows which they enjoy.



Spanky always seems to see something! "What was that . . .?"



An easy stretch. We travel as true companions on the trail.



A refreshing reward for their efforts - cool water (and lush grass).



"Ahhh . . ."



Peaceful sounds.



We take a stroll along the water's edge.



"This is so cool!"



"Yum!"



Yet they make no complaint when it's time to leave.



"Can you believe he wants us to go now? Sheesh!"



"Oh, well, it was a great ride . . . and it's nearly supper time at home . . ."



Our timing was good . . . Spanky sees something else.



We got back just in time to watch the bull elk prod his herd into the trees above the barn.



Off they go for the night.



It feels like a privilege to see wildlife in their daily routines.



MM

"Do you realize it's already autumn" asked Belle? (she keeps tabs on such things.) "I think we should go see the pretty fall leaves in Pennsylvania Canyon." The rest of us just stared blankly at each other.

"It doesn't look much like fall", observed Spanky. He's right. There are still summer flowers by the barn.



". . . and we still have summer thunderhead clouds", he continued. "You might be rushing it."



But Belle was insistent. "Maybe that cold snap we had two weeks ago jump-started them!", she pleaded. We knew better than to argue. So off we went.



"Oh.", she said when she saw all the green leaves.



"Come'on Belle, maybe if we go up higher . . .", encouraged Thunder.



"It's awfully green", he thought to himself.



Then Belle saw it. Just one, solitary red leaf on the ground (we have no idea where it came from), but it gave her renewed hope. "Oh, boy!", she exclaimed.



There were also these little summer flowers under the green trees.



This is a favorite meadow, high up on the trail.



"I think it's beautiful (and tasty), but I'm afraid Belle is disappointed", fretted Spanky.



There have been some serious summer monsoon rains up here, and as we climbed the going got rougher due to downed trees and erosion.



They always find a way . . .



. . . but there also were wonderful stretches where the trail became a shady tunnel through the (green) maples.



Then we found it! One branch of autumn leaves. The only fall color we came across on this ride. It wasn't much - but it seemed to satisfy Belle. "See! I told you!", she exclaimed. We hope there will be lots more (it varies from year to year).



A traffic jam on the trail. Thunder gave Belle a helpful 'nudge'. "Okay, okay. I'm going!"



Then he was distracted.



Spanky took a moment to reflect. "You know, this is a special spot no matter what color it is . . ."



We all agreed.



"Yup."



MM

Our summer is lingering into autumn, but we know the change is coming. We will miss the warm embrace of summer days, and the green that comes with them.

There's a wonderful trail which begins almost in the shadow of the world-class Spencer Theater (which is in the middle of nowhere!)



Called the Elk Valley Trail, rarely have we seen elk here.



It's a gentle, soft path - through a long, meandering valley.



It's very quiet here.



The boys linger behind.



Can't blame them. That's Thunder (in the middle of the photo) moseying toward us.



They catch up . . .



. . . and then pause again.



Belle is happy admiring the flowers.



Indian Paintbrush always stands out.



It's a very pretty spot.



Another break, while they talk it over. "I'm sure go'in to miss this summer grass . . ." "Yeah, me too!" "Aw, you mean summer's over?", laments Spanky. "Darn!"



We spot a hill to climb, for the view.



Elk Valley below.



Trekking back down (it's steeper than it looks). "If I mess up my brand-new shoes . . .", frets Belle.



Fun run through the grass.



The days are growing shorter - before long it is time to head back.



Shadows lengthen.



We take off for a final gallop! (Note the dust behind Spanky).



Thunder usually likes to be first to the trailer - so we humor him.



"The summer smiles, the summer knows.
One last caress. It's time to dress -
For fall . . ." *"The Summer Knows" lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman.*

MM

Chores were done for the day. The sun was low in the sky. It was a beautiful, quiet afternoon. Belle had an idea. "Let's go see if those pretty yellow clumps of flowers are blooming yet at Ranchman's Camp!", she enthused. "There's just enough daylight!" It's an odd thing - those lemon-colored flowers always bring the fresh look of spring just as autumn begins.

Of course we went.



Though we could see their pale-yellow beginnings, it was apparent that the flowers had not yet bloomed out to their full glory. "It won't be long, now!", said Belle optimistically.



"Yeah. Since we're here, let's look around a little more", suggested Thunder.



He led us on a quick ride across the grassy plateau. "Let's go this way!"



"Over here!"



"I don't know where he gets all that energy", commented Spanky.



We did find a few of the plants in bloom. This is what they look like when in full flower.



"We'll come back, won't we?" . . . "Oh sure Belle. Let's give it a few more days." The lush grama grass is now golden with seed tassels.



"There he goes again . . ."



They got their exercise.



We returned home just in time for the bucks' happy hour.





MM

End Journal Part 3 of 3

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