

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Twenty-five

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



“Thanks for bringing me along on your terrific adventures
and the delightful antics of your wonderful creatures! ”

Whitney Mandel



Come along and ride with us!

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XXV

Part 3 of 3

With sincere gratitude
to Randy Clarke-Ianiero and Clem Ianiero-Clarke
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made this publication possible.

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There is a special area between Fort Stanton and the Capitan Mountains - wide open Bureau of Land Management space featuring three high little knolls (we have named them the "Three Sisters"), which offer spectacular views in all directions. We thought we would head there for an outing before more snow arrived.

There was an extra guest at breakfast . . .



The normally reclusive elk observe the deer having their corn, and sometimes one will come join them.



They usually figure out how to come around the fence (and they can jump it if they want to), but often hang out on the other side . . . curiously observing their cousins busily socializing. "Where's MY corn?"



The pitiful look worked - there soon was a special 'elk section' for dining that morning. "Thank you!"



"Gee, that was nice . . . I wonder when they serve lunch . . . ?"



Finally, off to the 'three sisters'. The traffic-free open road (actually just a gravel two-track) always is a pleasure and a quiet balm.



"This is great! I hope we go up those steep hills for the views!", says Spanky. "Well, I'm not a goat you know! But yeah, the climb is worth it", grumbles Thunder.



Still some snow on the shady stretches of the trail.



We stop to enjoy the view along the way.



When we reach the top of one of the knolls, the vistas are grand. "Wow! We can see all the way to Sierra Blanca!"



Being 'prey' animals by nature, horses like to have clear sightlines - preventing a sneak attack by predators.



That ancient instinct is still with them . . .



. . . and maybe they just like admiring beautiful panoramas while they graze.





There are no established trails up here - we climb up and down all three of the 'sisters', taking the easiest routes. "This is a lot steeper than it looks in photos!", explains Spanky.



The promise of a nice cool drink from a clear stream keeps them moseying along.



Did I say 'clear'? Spanky's playful splashing takes care of that!



Time to head home before dark.



MM

With so many local riding destinations to choose from, some really great ones can be overlooked. Such was the case with Salado Canyon. A geologically interesting area, it lies between Fort Stanton and historic Lincoln town.

It was time to explore it again. The last time we visited it was green with early summer's flush. Now the palette is more subdued, and with a different kind of beauty.



Thunder and Spanky wait patiently to begin our journey down into the canyon.



Dramatic limestone formations here are associated with the nearby world class Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave (with more than 44 miles of passages explored so far, it contains the second-longest known cave passage in the world).



A spectacular overhang.



We pass one of the many smaller exposed caves along the way (and note the thicket of brush Thunder is confronted by. "That's okay, I'll find a way through!", he gallantly asserts).



Thunder blazes a trail up the canyon for us . . . and waits.



He is very good about making certain we are coming along. "Oh, there you are . . ."



The wet summer created an abundance of brush, which has dried into a very difficult landscape to traverse. "Which way now?", Spanky wonders.



To avoid as much of the tangle as possible, we hugged along a high stone cliff face.



Then a major obstacle. We came to a place where the only way forward was to squeeze through a very constricted gap between the rock and a large tree trunk.



As usual, the horses were game - and I held my breath as they wriggled past.



The effort proved worth it - as the narrow canyon expanded into a wide meadow of grass and running water.



"Ahhh . . ."



Such good boys (despite mild temps, some snow lingers in the shade).



This interesting stone formation looks almost like the wall of an ancient temple.



More 'caves' along the way (did Billy the Kid hide out here? He actually might have . . .).



High up on the canyon wall, this one resembles a cliff dwelling.



As shadows lengthen, Thunder leads us back home.



Out of the canyon, I let them go ahead so that I could capture their independent cooperation (in wide open spaces) - as they go directly back to the trailer which is barely visible on the horizon.



"Well of course! We're the three amigos!"



MM

We have a new baby. Born very late in the year, it seems to be thriving and happy.

First - it seems that word about the corn got out around the elk crowd. A few have shown up for a snack. This 'spike' bull elk came to visit when there still was snow on the ground (now all gone) after the last storm.



He looks like a nice guy. "Thanks for the corn!"



Then - the new little one. This deer cutie arrived with his mother on a bright sunny morning.



Awww...



The big buck was here, too - could he be the daddy?



Hmmm . . . there is a resemblance.





Baby stayed close to mom while she ate some apples.



Then, little as he is, he tried one. "You need bigger teeth for that!", she told him.



"Aw, Gee!"



"Shucks!"



"I can't wait until I grow up and can eat cool stuff. Milk is for babies!"



"What's that over there . . . ?"



". . . and over there! So much to see around here!" . . . "He's a handful", says mom.



Fuzzy wuzzy.



"Oooh! Gotta itch!!!"



MM

Gracie and the little fawn spend lots of time together.

The youngsters really enjoy each other's company.



"And then . . . and then I thought I heard a BEAR! . . . But it was just my mom snoring"

"Oh, my!"



"Gracie's my friend!" . . . ("I'm a good listener!")



*Even mom, still skinny from nursing, likes Gracie. "Did he tell you about my snoring?" . . .
"No! Not a word!"*



"Well, sometimes I have allergies." . . .

"I understand. Not allergic to cats, are you?"



Gracie is very patient. . . . "Sheesh!"



"Oh! Mom's calling!"



"You told her about my snoring, didn't you?" . . . "Well, kinda . . ."



"It's okay. Eat your corn, baby . . ."



"I like the way it goes 'crunch'!"



"Honestly, I don't know how you get so dirty!"



"Aw, gee!"



Lunchtime.



"Hey, Gracie - don't you want some corn? It's nice and fresh!"



"Uh - no thank you. You go right ahead!"



She also gets along with the big buck. "Hi! You have a very nice family, mister buck!"

"Thanks! You gonna eat that apple . . . ?" . . . "Uh, no. Go right ahead! (Why don't they understand - I'm NOT a vegetarian?)"



What a magical menagerie.



MM

Few things are as pleasant as riding along flowing water - any time of the year.

Soothing sounds along a peaceful stream . . .



" . . . AND there's green grass to snack on!"



Thunder prefers the tiny new shoots. He picks them out ever so carefully, one by one - his eyes closed in concentration.



Later, he and Spanky keep an eye on the weather to the west . . .



"Hmmm . . . maybe rain coming . . ."



In the meantime, we continue on along our stream-side journey.



A cool drink is always handy. "Don't swallow a fish, Spanky", Thunder jokes.



Come on you guys - remember those clouds!



"Okay, I'm coming!"



It's difficult not to linger here.



One more snack - by the famous petroglyph rock - before heading back.



We've watched the ancient carvings in stone fade over the years. Someday they will be lost to history.



Oh-oh. Now we can see rain in the distance, coming our way. Better take a shortcut to the trailer.



Good timing. We made it just before the rain started.
MM

2022-12-13 - *Ride Before the Storm*

Page 1 of 12

The first big 'winter-like' storm of the season was barreling our way from the West Coast. But it was a beautiful day here, and we thought it might be a perfect time to visit the high country again before snow comes - and likely stays awhile.

The road was clear and dry. Under a bright blue sky, we were all alone at the trail head horse campground.



2022-12-13 - Ride Before the Storm

Page 2 of 12

I hitched a bareback ride on Thunder for the journey up - promising him his accustomed freedom when we got to the top.



Knowing about Spanky's arthritis disability, he was obliging. "Oh, okay . . ." Note how Spanky has taken the lead . . .



2022-12-13 - Ride Before the Storm

Page 3 of 12

It's interesting how Spanky, normally 'number two' horse, realizes that he can be in charge when I am aboard Thunder.



It's as though he is saying, "Ha! Ha! I'm running free and you are stuck with him on your back!"



2022-12-13 - Ride Before the Storm

Page 4 of 12

No, I don't weigh 300 lbs. I'm wearing a big jacket, with all our treats and stuff stowed away in it.



As we approached the top, I made good my promise to Thunder. Says Spanky to me, "Oh-oh . . . what are you doing there? Guess I'm back to second fiddle again!"



2022-12-13 - Ride Before the Storm

Page 5 of 12

He's clearly happy to have his buddy to pal around with. "Yeah, we sure do have a good time together!"



It's a great pleasure for me to see them enjoying their freedom - something few horses ever know (especially on top of a mountain in the wilderness). Our connection makes rides like this very special.



2022-12-13 - Ride Before the Storm

Page 6 of 12

Of course, sometimes one or the other will lag behind - but they always catch up. Here comes Thunder at a dead run. "I'm on my way!"



I am so very grateful for their loyal companionship.



We're always stunned by the beauty up here in the high county. Not a cloud (or storm) in sight . . . yet.



They mosey around, looking for a snack.



We take turns leading the way.



Appreciating the alpine splendor - and the peace.



Thunder negotiates a rocky segment on the way down. "This is not the most fun part!"



Soon we are once again on easy trails . . .



Along a soothing stream.



The bliss before the storm.



The next day: "See! The weatherman was right!", says a delighted Gracie about the overnight snow.



It was good timing.

MM

That big winter-like storm passed by quickly. Unlike the recent fall snows, this one did not coat the trees with beautiful thick 'Christmas card' fluff. It was a drier snow and is mostly gone now (although temperatures remain below normal).

Just before the snow arrived, we had a visit by our little deer family - big buck, mom, and the fawn.



"Better eat up, snow is coming!"



2022-12-15 - Winter-Like Storm

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The storm was brief, and after it moved on, some other deer came for their snacks (they tend to hunker down during storms).



Even though it is a drier, 'powdery' snow (which the skiers love), it's still pretty.





Gracie sure thinks so. "Oh, boy!"



2022-12-15 - Winter-Like Storm

Page 4 of 6

Of course, the horses are delighted. "Yup! It's snow!"



"Snow angels! Perfect!" says Thunder . . . "I know a better spot up here", replies Spanky.



2022-12-15 - Winter-Like Storm

Page 6 of 6

And few things are as peaceful as a dusk walk along softly snow-covered trails.



[Note: I am currently having computer issues and am unable to download new photos. It may be a while before I am able to create journals. Ah, technology!]

MM

Wishing You and Yours a Very Merry Christmas . . .



And a Silly Spanky kinda New Year!

All of Us at Followed Dream Ranch



FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

During the holidays, extended families often get together to spend time with each other. It happened here when the deer invited their cousins, the elk, for a visit.

Gracie was excited to see them. "They're here!"



It's fun to see everyone together.



The big elk dwarf their smaller cousins.



A young bull elk joins the fun . . .



. . . and has a bit of holiday cheer.



"Yum!"



"Gee, it's a good crowd! I haven't seen some of my cousins in a long time."



"Oh, hi! Thanks for hosting!"



"Let's see . . ."



"Oh, there's cousin Rudolph - he'll go down in history!"



"So, how you guys been do'in?", asks a cow elk of her deer relatives.



"Fine, fine. The holidays are always so crazy . . ."



"Yeah, but I love all the goodies!", says this very young elk.



Everyone seems to agree.



The twins have lost their fawn spots. "We're getting all grewed up!"



"Hmmm . . . just a little more . . . gotta watch my diet!"



"I hope we don't run out of goodies!"



"I better make sure we have enough corn . . .", says Gracie the good hostess.



*My computer still is on the blink, but sometimes allows me to download photos (we lucked out this time).
The new system won't be here until sometime after the 30th.*

MM

We are grateful for a peaceful Christmas Day on the trail. Familiar places and trusted companions - a wonderful combo for a Christmas Day ride.

Interesting horse behavior: Spanky knows that Thunder is the alpha, and in charge of things on most outings. BUT, when I hitch a ride on Thunder, Spanky is smart enough to realize that he is under my control . . . so he behaves like an old geezer in a freeway fast lane, enforcing the speed limit for everyone behind him. He gets in front of Thunder and putts along at his leisurely pace. "Dah-dee-dah . "



"Grrrr... move over!", I can hear Thunder thinking. "Beep! Beep!"



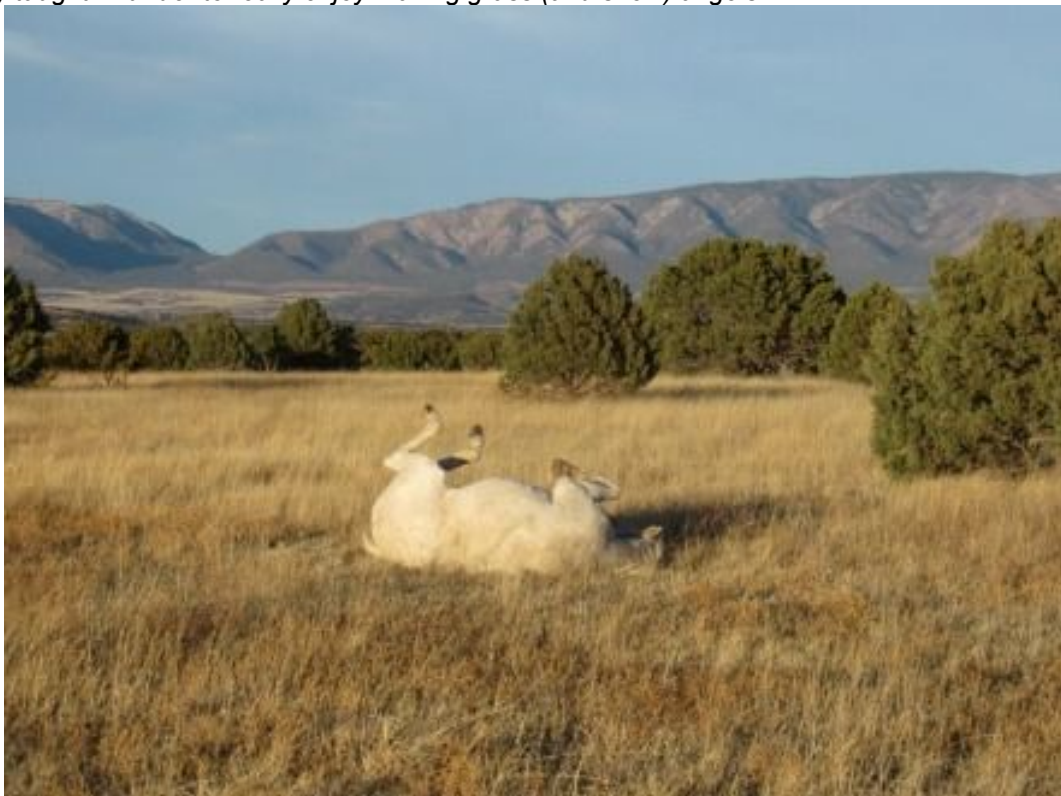
Eventually, Thunder manages to pass Spanky, and all is well . . . and of course, when they are free together, everyone is happy.



They are remarkable companions.



Spanky taught Thunder to really enjoy making grass (and snow) angels.



Mostly, they just appreciate each other's company as we mosey along together . . .



. . . and they both keep an eye on me. Here, Spanky waits - making sure I know how to get down a steep embankment. "Well after all, you've only got two legs . . ."



This stream is a favorite any time of the year - but especially now, when a delicate snow lace decorates the water's edge . . .



. . . and delicious green grass still flourishes in the sunny spots.



"Yum!"



"This makes it a very Merry Christmas!"



. . . and peaceful, too.



"How's it down there, Thunder?"



"Wonderful!"



"This is a happy holiday!"



Until later, when . . . "Here we go again!"



Wishing you peace on earth.



MM

Happy New Year



. *Thunder races 2022 to the finish line under a 'fire opal' sky - Nogal, NM*

Wishing You a Spectacular 2023!
All of Us at Followed Dream Ranch



FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

The weather had been unusually nice - snow didn't come until after the holiday weekend.

"Oh! Look!", shouted little Gracie this morning. "Snow!"



Before long, the storm retreated - backing away over the mountain like a defeated army.



When the snowfall ended, Gracie was eager to go outside.

"I never understand where it comes from - I mean, suddenly it's just HERE!"



"It's neat! But I think I'll go in now . . ."



. . . and enjoy admiring it from a nice warm house!"



It sure does make everything look fresh and clean.



The horses were eager to leave their barn and check it out. "Wow!"



"Yum! I love snow cones!"



"Let's go play!", suggested Thunder (everyone seemed to be talking in exclamations this morning).



*After chores were done, we set off into the forest for a snowy outing.
"Do you see the elk going into the trees over there?", they asked. (I didn't.)*



"Elk never bite, right?"



"I don't think elk bite anyone, Spanky - besides, they're our neighbors . . ."



The snowy views were especially beautiful as dusk began to fall. "Are you sure about the elk . . .?"



"Just one more angel before supper!"



A good way to start the new year.
MM

We hadn't visited Cow 54 and her friends for a while.
So, we hit the open road down to the high desert near Carrizozo.



"Where are they?", wondered the boys.



As soon as the cows saw their horse friends, they moseyed our way. Everyone was glad to see one another again. "Happy New Year! . . ."



. . . and there was sweet Cow 54! "Got any treats?", she asked politely.



Of course! "Ooh! Thank you!"



Then, we met a new friend. Her name is Cow 74. She took an instant liking to Thunder (most of them do).



It seemed mutual, as he gave her ear an affectionate nuzzle.



Awww . . .



Over drinks, the boys planned the rest of our day. "Gee, it's good to see everyone and catch up - but let's go check out the arroyos." . . . "Sounds good to me!"



Happy on the trail.



It was a beautiful time for it, with snow glistening on the mountains.



As we approached the deep ravines, we could see the old (1906) railroad bridge - which looks like a tunnel in the distance - once used by trains carrying coal from nearby mines.



Then, down into the vast arroyos - where the sand is soft under foot.



Thunder looks like he is having a semi-siesta in the sun's warmth.



We admire beautiful views, framed by the massive arroyo walls.



*As usual, Thunder stops and waits patiently for Spanky and me to catch up.
"What takes them so long? . . ."*



As much as I like riding him, I also love to see him enjoying his freedom . . . and observing how his bright mind works. On the way back, he recognized the way we had come down into the arroyos and followed our tracks back up. But we wanted to continue on a different route. All I had to do was say, "Not that way - down here!", and he came running.



"I know that is the way home, but I'm glad we are going to explore some more!", he says.



Later, he waited to lead us along the abandoned railroad bridge across the arroyo.



It's dramatic country - the real West.



MM

Recently, one of the young bucks has taken to ambushing me as I bring the corn out for happy hour.

I've always tried to keep my distance (I don't want the deer to get too trusting of humans), but this guy is persistent!



He nuzzles right into the bucket, and 'munch, crunch, munch'. It is wonderful to be so close . . .



After his special treat, he joins the rest (they've worn all the grass off their happy hour area).



Of course, Gracie continues to play hostess. Another buck joined her and Orca (who seems more interested in the sprinkler) for a morning apple snack.



She watches a blue jay swoop by - "Oh, my! Isn't that pretty! I wish I could fly!"



Another special moment. She and Orca have a great friendship.



So far, this has been a very mild January. Only a touch of snow still clinging to the shady edge of the pond.



Thunder has grown . . . or I have shrunk . . . or something!



As usual, he waits patiently ahead . . .



. . . and off we go. A beautiful sunny winter's day.



MM

2023-01-11 - *Gray Day Beauty*

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Even in winter, gray days are rare here. More so when it's warm (in the 50's) for this time of year.

The day began with a beautiful sunrise over the pastures.



By mid-day, the sky turned a dull gray. But although the photos may look dreary compared to blue skies, there was a very special quality to the light around the lake and mountain - all is still, quiet, and peaceful.



Warm temps make the remaining snow slushy, with no danger of ice.



Like a pig seeking wild truffles, Thunder knows where to find green grass under the snow . . . "Ah-ha!"



Before moving on along the lake's tranquil shore.



He and Spanky must wonder what happened to the green meadow which flourished here just a few weeks ago.



"Yeah! What's up with that?"



"I mean, I remember it was right over there!"



So, they make do with what they find along the way.



"Hmmm . . . these dried scrub leaves are tasty!" . . . "Yes, zesty, with just a hint of cinnamon . . ."



"Wow! Look at this!", exclaimed Spanky along the water's edge.



The mirrored surface reflects nature's restrained winter artistry.



"Yeah! And it's refreshing, too!"



Then . . . "Oh, boy! Splish splash!", squeals Spanky.



"DO YOU MIND?", scolds *Thunder*.



"Oh - sorry."



Along the trail home, they discover more green grass emerging from the rapidly melting snow.



Before silently passing through the tall pines.



The day ended as it had begun, with a gaudy tribute to nature's brilliance.



MM

Our 'Big Buck' is a favorite around here. He has a certain nobility about him, and he has come to trust being here with his family (hunting season has just ended).



He is a powerful presence . . .





... and wise.



He has an extensive family (I don't think all of these belong to him!)



He keeps an eye on things when he is here . . .



... and then there is this guy ...



Yep - it's 'Bucket Buck'.



He is a very gentle animal.



He seems to have made a special friendship with Orca (Gracie gave her buddy some pointers on deer etiquette).



"Oh, that's the dry boring stuff Gracie says they like to eat . . .", he thinks to himself (Gracie said to never make fun of their diet.)



Oops. "Hey, Gracie, I don't get it either!"



"I know.", she says. ("It's just weird!")



Back to Big Buck - he likes his apples . . .



... and resting safely on the lawn.



MM

Magnificent autumn leaves are the result of a complex combination of soil conditions, temperature variants, changing sunlight - and Nature's magic. Whatever the explanation, we look forward to the colorful spectacle each year.

Generally, the color change begins at higher elevations, and works its way down. As we start up the trail, we're surrounded by the still-lush thick green forest.



Then a bit of subtle color along the way - like a watercolor painting in the sun.



What's this? A lone maple leaf has floated down from above. It seems to have a split personality - as chlorophyll production slows, the green pigment starts to degrade . . . revealing the bright hues which have been in the leaf all along!



Looking up, the highest branches are luminous against the blue sky.



A natural bouquet of red maple leaves glow in the shade . . .



. . . and then we emerge into an enticing wonderland of soft yellow and gold.



Here are some more of those two-toned leaves; it's early in the season - soon they will be completely red.



"I think this is my favorite time of the year! Oh, wait . . . I do love the fresh green grass of summer! Oh . . . and of course snow angels! So, lots of favorites!"



It's wonderful to wander under the stained-glass ceiling of leaves.



In other places, the colors are more subtle - but just as magical.



Then, BAM!, a splash of crimson.



Some trees are slower to surrender their green wardrobe for more colorful raiment.



The boys pause in a high meadow for some shady late lunch.



"Hey! Look over there!", Thunder urges.



Another autumnal dreamscape trail beckons.





"Yup - this is pretty cool!"



Indeed, it is.





Thanks for sharing it with us.
MM

The severe weather along the West Coast has largely passed us by -- we're still waiting for 'normal' winter moisture.

In the meantime, we're enjoying the mild days. An alert Spanky spots something in the distance. Was it a pronghorn, or elk? Nope. That tiny little white dot at the far left is the world-class-in-the-middle-of-nowhere Spencer Theater of Performing Arts. Workmen were doing something to the roof. I couldn't see them from this distance . . .



. . . but Spanky certainly did . . . and he recognized that 'it' was something different. Horses are sensitive in so many ways . . .



"Yeah, well, let's go now," shrugs Thunder.



So, off we mosey.



I lag behind, enjoying a chance to observe horses free to be . . . compadres on the trail.





Doing what horses were meant to do . . .





. . . and choosing to stay close to their human companion.



Willing to carry me without complaint.



Along endless trails . . .



Appreciative of the liberty they enjoy.





"Where in this wide world can man find nobility without pride, friendship without envy, or beauty without vanity? Here, where grace is laced with muscle and strength by gentleness confined. He serves without servility; he has fought without enmity. There is nothing so powerful, nothing less violent; there is nothing so quick, nothing more patient. Our past has been borne on his back. All our history is his industry. We are his heirs, he our inheritance. Ladies and gentlemen, The Horse." . . . 'Ode to the Horse' by Ron Duncan, 1954





MM

Even in winter, the high country holds special moments.

Tall mountains will be covered in snow until the spring melt . . .



*. . . but the sun hits just right in certain areas,
where only patches of snow come and go with the storms . . .*



. . . and there are secret oases - magic places where green grass emerges as the snow recedes.



Nourished by the temperate snow-fed spring.



Gently rolling over smooth rock . . .



. . . and cascading over ancient stones.



Here, all is peaceful (until the next snowstorm), as the horses delight in a special treat.



They purposefully move along the green border at the water's edge.





Seeking out the tasty tufts.



Each blade of grass is savored.



There are other alpine delights, too . . . "Hmmm - this looks like a good spot!"



"Yes!"



The ethereal splendor of high country in winter . . .



. . . and the welcome comfort of being home again.



MM

About 20 miles (and a world apart) from the alpine high country, is a very different land. It's the romantic West of dime novels and Saturday matinee 'oaters'.

The movies didn't invent this - they only embellished it. Splendid mountains form a snowy backdrop to this vast rolling country where real Indians once roamed, and genuine wagon trains helped create the future.



Where horses still search the horizon for pronghorns.



"Is that one?"



"I'm not sure . . ."



Before meandering like outlaws evading an imaginary posse, into the mysterious arroyos and soaring limestone cliffs.



"Yup. This is the real deal!"



Spanky really gets into it. "Are those Injuns?"



There once were, for centuries, indigenous peoples who found shelter within ancient alcoves like this, before moving on through history.



Today it is home to lone survivors - such as a very independent pine tree, clinging to a dramatic promontory . . .



. . . and it's intriguing territory to an unrestrained Thunder, too . . .



. . . who explores ahead, then waits patiently. "Are you coming?"



A responsible trail scout in the old tradition.



"Onward!"



A scene from any time -- grazing in the great outdoors.



Grass angels are timeless, too.



Magnificent country, always full of promise.



"Well, I'm glad you made it back from your little Old West adventure in time for happy hour! Where's my corn?"



MM

With snow predicted, we thought it best to take advantage of the clear weather before it arrived.

So off to the feed store to stock up just in case.



*Chile the barn cat is in charge of inventory. "Yup we should be all set."
"Wait! Wait!" . . . (He strikes a noble pose.) "Now take my picture!"*



The boys voted for another outing where they could find some more green grass. On the way, a view of lofty Sierra Blanca peak.



They hit the trail at a fast pace. "Let's get some grass before the snow comes!" . . . "Yeah, hurry!"



They knew right where to go.



A thin film of ice along the water's edge makes for an arty effect.



The cold water doesn't stop Spanky from having some splashing fun. "Eeek . . . this was better in August . . ."



They continue to enjoy the salad bar.



Just munching along



Another peek-a-boo view. Clouds are starting to form over the high country . . .



... and then we head home.



Where Gracie is waiting to begin happy hour. "Do you think it's too early?"



The twins have traded their spotted fawn coats for thicker winter fur.



They sure are growing up (looks like mom may be expecting again) . . .



. . . and later, the snow arrived. Good timing.



MM

The snow's been melting fast, which is great for watering the land - but the mud isn't much fun.

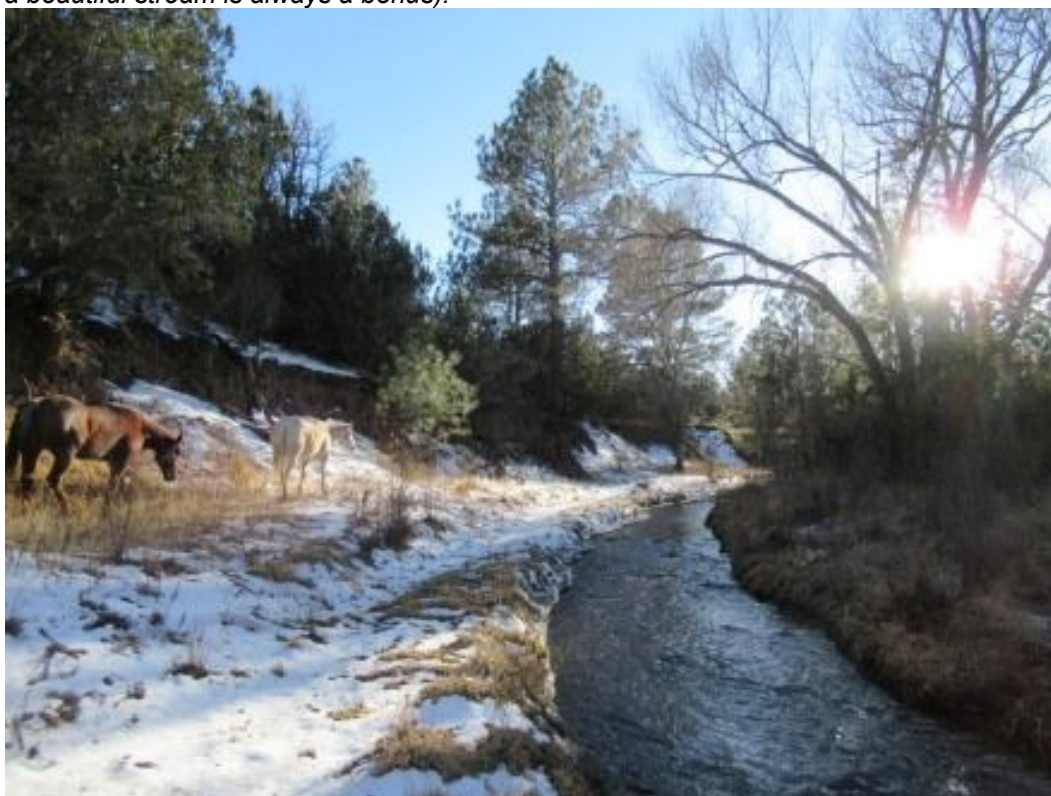
*We hoped this local trail would be dry by now. Wrong assumption!
"Uh, didn't you say this would be a nice snow-less ride?"*



It's wonderful when ours are the first tracks in the snow (other than the forest wildlife). The areas between patches of snow are mud. "Goop ahead!" . . .



. . . But the boys are always game, and made the best of it (of course finding something to snack on beside a beautiful stream is always a bonus).



The ride ended with this remarkable 'bat cloud' hovering above Sierra Blanca peak.



Okay, so that ride didn't go as planned. We decided to return to the arroyos near Carrizozo for some guaranteed dry riding. "Come on, Spanky. This is nice and dry!" . . . "You sure?"



"Perfect! Great for running!"



From here we could see the remaining snow on our mountain.



Ahhh . . . blue sky and dry sand!



They enjoyed climbing in and out of the warm desert arroyos.



It's good to have four-hoof drive . . .



. . . AND we got to spend some time with an old friend.



Such a sweetie.



Awww...



MM

An alert and knowledgeable reader informed me that the geese in the lake are not white snow geese:



But are in fact Chinese white geese - see the bump on their beaks? (George Washington is thought to have kept some at Mount Vernon):



Thanks. Learn something new each day!
MM

Bucket buck ("Bucky" for short), sure is friendly.



My, what sharp antlers you have . . .



He doesn't say much.



Right behind him, Big Buck ("BB") is paying attention. I am not encouraging him to eat from a bucket.



Thunder says, "That's nothing. I have all my meals served to me . . ."



He and Spanky deserve it.



For a little snow break, we left the ranch . . .



. . . and went down to the desert at nearby Carrizozo.



Beautiful views of our mountain from down here.



Nice dry trails, too. Thunder has a look at one of the park's gazebos. "Hmmm . . . that's strange. What's it for?"



All was peaceful until a nerve-chilling sound came from the lake.



"What the heck is THAT?", wonders a startled Spanky.



Some very handsome, but very loud white snow geese. "Honk, HONK!"



They form a romantic heart shape with their curved necks (you can see the one in the middle eating a treat I had tossed to them).



I reassure the boys that geese are not predators. "Whew!"



MM

The weather is mild again, so our wild (mostly) friends are socializing more frequently.

Even the reclusive elk are visiting the ranch.



They're always curious.



This is a very fuzzy-coated young calf.



Of course, Gracie is still entertaining her deer friends . . .



That's Big Buck, stopping by for an apple.



Bucket Buck ('Bucky') is a frequent guest.



He has tons of personality (does he look to you like he's smiling?).



He likes his nose rubbed.



He's not much interested in apples. "Uh . . ."



"Not right now . . . maybe later."



However, he was in the mood for a back rub (it's kind awkward to give a deer massage, while holding a camera in the other hand). "Aw-yeah. Right there! Oooh!"



Then he and a buddy enjoyed some friendly sparring with their antlers.



They put on quite a show (the clattering could be heard in the house).



"Hey, that was fun!" "Yeah, let's go have some corn now." (That's Bucky on the left.)



Speaking of mealtimes, Chile often keeps Spanky company as he eats his breakfast.



Chile keeps a sharp eye out for varmints.



On a recent ride, Thunder and a big Hereford bull seemed to get along just fine.



Even exchanging confidences (or maybe just a joke - "Did ya hear the one about . . .").



. . . and that's how it's been around here.



MM

With the snow pretty much gone from everywhere but the high country, we explored some of the more remote spots again.

Sometimes we find cattle grazing in the middle of nowhere.



These cows seem surprised to see us. "What are they doing here?", wonders the mom. "What ARE THEY?", ask the calves.



A brave one checks out Spanky (who is used to this sort of thing).



He tags along as the horse's snack.



"Hmmm . . . this one smells different . . ."



"I don't know what they are, but these things are really cool! (I'm not so sure about the weirdo with two legs...)"



Leaving our new friends behind, we mosey ahead.



Thunder catches wind of something he's not familiar with, so he lifts his upper lip to get a better scent. Called a 'flehmen response', it is common among horses, cats, and even rhinos! It can mean several things including distress, but usually it is a technique to get a better 'smell' of something. By raising their upper lip, they trap scent in their very sensitive olfactory (nose) area so that they can better analyze it. Sure looks funny.



Snow melt is keeping all the little streams full.



Some familiar crossings now are too deep. "Naw . . ."



. . . but it's great for cool drinks along the way.



All the dry areas have been nice . . . but then a swift-moving storm passed through (that's not the moon - it's the sun behind snow clouds).



"Oh, gee - it's back!", say the horses (who really don't mind the snow).



An odd phenomenon - days of warmer temps had been absorbed into the roadways, which keeps snow from accumulating on them.



Clear skies this morning. Big Buck enjoys the soft bed while waiting for his breakfast.



"Thanks for the apple!"



Bucky prefers to be served. "Good morning!"



"Yum!"



MM

Each year at this time, the elk leave the high country and visit the ranch.

Of course, that's in addition to our 'regular' deer guests, like these.



The elk arrive in various groups and always are curious about things.



Sometimes they intimidate the deer - but Big Buck stands his ground.



"I'm not going to miss my apples! . . ."



"... and anyway, who invited them?"



In this case we're visited by a young (two-year-old) bull elk, with his wives. Of course, Gracie was there to greet them all. "I really don't know what to say to elk!"





These brave little deer joined them. "Don't look at them . . ."



. . . and our friend Bucky (foreground) wandered by. "Gosh, they're BIG!"



The bull is surprisingly at home here.



Is he sticking his tongue out at the photographer?



He even checked out the barn area and pens.



Chile watches all the activity (if you look carefully, you will see the elk wives on the other side of the fence behind Thunder, checking him out).



The bull has quite a bit of personality (young ones often have misshapen antlers, from a variety of causes).



Later, this little calf decided to explore the old sheep barn. "What's in here . . . ?"



"Hmmm . . . that's weird!"



"What's over there?"



It's most wonderful to encounter them out in the open.



They never shy away from Thunder.



They may even consider him to be some sort of white deity (I think the elk wives thought he was a bit of alright).



MM

End Journal Part 3 of 3

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