

# 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 1 of 3

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

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window).



It was a beautiful spring morning, and the horses enjoyed their breakfast while I went to the feed store for supplies. They were finished eating by the time I got back and unloaded it all, which they supervised ("Oh, boy! He got that sweet grain we like!"). They didn't show much interest as I repainted the cattle guard on the driveway (well, Belle did say it was "cheerful" - it's bright yellow so the snowplows can see it). Spanky was paying attention when I removed the air horn compressor from the old truck (it had stopped working awhile ago and needs to be replaced). "Is that what makes it go 'HONK HONK'?" Yes, Spanky, it does. "Wow, it's loud". That's kind of the point, Spanky. Belle was vocal again when I repaired their winter blankets before storing them for the season. "Do a good job with those patches - I don't want to look like a ragamuffin, you know!" By the end of the day, she was tapping her foot to get my attention while I was touching up paint on the pipe fences. "Ahem. AHM! We have been waiting all day for a nice ride. I know it was the perfect day for all those chore-things you do, but . . ." I got the hint.

*Shadows are long as we hit the trail.*



*It was a great time for a late-day ride. Seventy-six degrees and quiet as a library.*



*Thunder's intent on some cattle in the distance. "Hmmm. Do I know them?"*





*This old tree inspires us. Leaning nearly to the ground, it doesn't give up.*



*While this ancient specimen stands tall in its artistic maturity.*



*Apparently, Thunder was not going fast enough - so Spanky reached out to give him an encouraging nip. "Stop it, Spanky! Go around!"*



*He speeds up.*





*"I just wanted to cruise a little . . ."*



*Typical New Mexico cloud overhead.*



*It's getting late. The birds are singing their evening songs as we trot along.*



*Suddenly, everyone wants to run!*





*Thunder really takes off.*



*It's a race to the trailer.*



## 2020-05-17 - *Little Ride*

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*Belle and I slow down, enjoying this beautiful moment. Thunder comes racing back, joyfully checking on us before heading full out, to the trailer. I wish the photo captured his beauty in motion.*





*The boys are waiting for us. Isn't it great that they cooperate like this!*



*"Time to go! It's getting to be supper time at home, you know!"*



Great little ride. Thanks for joining us.  
MM

There are about 280 species of iris in the world - 28 of which are native to the United States. Each spring the forests and woodlands of New Mexico come alive with wild mountain iris. It seems that wildlife is not attracted to the showy blooms - not even the deer eat them (although they do eat non-wild garden varieties). Belle always looks forward to their appearance in our mountains, "They're so pretty!" she gushes . . . and they don't last all that long. Can we go see them today?"

*Some of the best iris viewing is in the valley below Nogal Peak - practically in our back yard. It's a nice drive on the shaded forest road this time of year.*





*We pass groves of quaking aspen -named for the the way their round leaves move about in the breeze.*



*Soon we begin to see clusters of wild irises. They especially enjoy the wetland areas of little brooks and springs.*





*A snack at the trail head.*



*The flowers brighten our way.*







*The trail crosses lots of little springs.*





*Each seems to have its own colonies of iris.*



*The calming sound of water moving gently along.*





*Although they don't show well in photos, this high-mountain meadow is covered with the colorful blossoms.*



*The horses enjoy snacking in such seasonal splendor.*





*Large groups like this one make showy displays. Wild iris do not like to be transplanted, but can be grown from seeds.*



*Since we are so close, the horses vote for climbing to the top - a favorite spot for all of us . . .*





*. . . and a special place for grass-angel making. Don't roll too far down, Spanky!*







*It's very quiet here.*

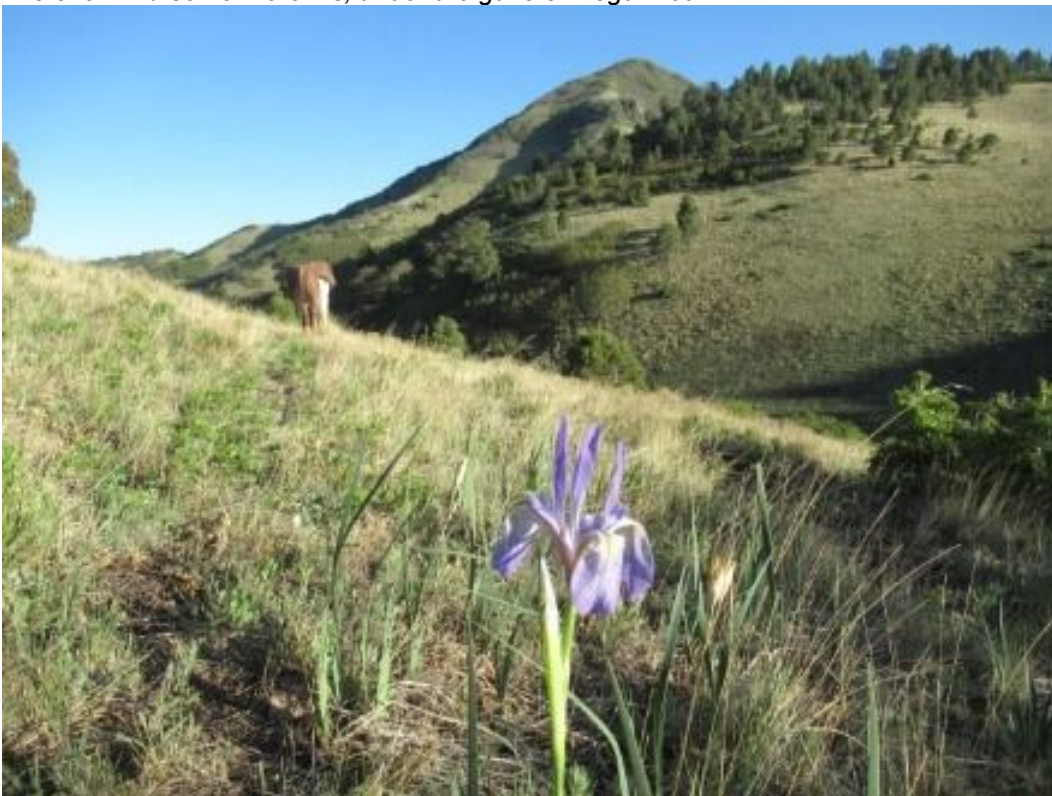




*The views are inspiring . . .*



*. . . and we even find some more iris, under the gaze of Nogal Peak . . .*



. . . and a curious young elk. "Huh?"



*This was an especially peaceful ride in nature. Thank you for sharing it with us.*



MM



Much of New Mexico has a dry climate - so we really appreciate water wherever it flows. Thunder said he knew of a wonderful spot along a stream near old Fort Stanton. Naturally, everyone wanted to check it out.

*He was very confident as he led us to his special place.*



*"Hey Thunder, Belle wants to know if there is any river grass." "Sure. Lots of it."*



*"She'll love that. Let's hurry!"*



*The water was a sliver of silver, far below.*





"See?"



*"Follow me . . ." We cut through a secret passage . . .*





*. . . and climbed down a narrow path next to dramatic stone outcroppings.*



*Spanky couldn't wait to soak his feet in the cool water - he didn't even splash! "Ahhhh . . ."*





*Belle couldn't wait to taste the grass. "Ummm . . . delicious!"*



*We meandered along the water's edge.*





*Stopping to snack along the way . . .*



*. . . and enjoy a long, cool drink.*



*While a pair of mallards quietly drifts along.*





*This strange plant was growing in a bed of fallen oak leaves.*



*It was a peaceful outing - thanks, Thunder!*



MM

One of our friends (thank you Tina!!!) identified the odd plant in our most recent journal:

*Squawroot, also known as Bear Cone, is a strange and fascinating little plant which produces no chlorophyll of its own and lives mostly underground, depending on the roots of oak trees for its nourishment - apparently without harming the oaks (you can see a cluster of oak leaves in the right of the photo).*



*The squawroot plant has an unusual life cycle. Its seeds sink into the ground near a oak tree, and unlike other plants which immediately produce leaves to collect chlorophyll, the squawroot seedling's first order of business is to send out roots - which travel down until they make contact with the oak's roots. It is from these oak roots that the squawroot gathers all its nutrients. For four years, the squawroot remains underground, living off of its host plant. In the spring of the fourth year, it emerges, sending up a thick white stalk covered in brown scales, which can reach a foot in height (as in the photo). As summer progresses, the scales pull back and fall off, revealing tubular white flowers. The squawroot flower is pollinated by flies and bees and produces a round white seed capsule that falls to the ground to begin the process again. The parent squawroot will survive as a perennial for as many as six more years.*

*Squawroot is edible, and it has a long history of medicinal use as an astringent. It gets its name from Native Americans' use of it to treat the symptoms of menopause (including hot flashes, sweating, sleep disturbance, and anxiety). It has been used to treat hemorrhages and headaches, and bleeding of the bowel and uterus. The stalk can also be dried and brewed into a tea.*

*Though in no way related, the strange stalks remind me of our 'red hot poker' which are blooming all over the ranch right now.*





*Red hot poker* are a member of the lily family and are extremely hardy.





*Bees, butterflies and especially hummingbirds love their sweet nectar.*



MM

After breakfast I noticed Belle primping her mane and tail more than usual. What's up? I asked her. "Well, aren't we going to take the flag out? It's Memorial Day!" No, Belle, not this year. "But all those tourists are in town for the holiday weekend - and if we don't remind them, they might forget about the men and women who gave their lives for our freedom!" I couldn't argue with that.

So we pulled out her military tack and my uniform - and the grand old flag - (and added a mask for good measure), and set out for Ruidoso.

*"Where's the parade?" Even without a parade, Belle seemed pleased to be back doing this again.*





*As she greeted all her new friends, she encouraged me to remind people that it isn't just a three-day-weekend.*



*She enjoyed that so much, she suggested that we head over to nearby Grindstone Lake. "I bet there are lots of folks over there today!", she exclaimed. "They really should be reminded!"*



## 2020-05-25 - Happy Memorial Day

Page 3 of 6

*Once again, she was a great ambassador . . . proudly carrying the red-white-and-blue and saying hi to everyone.*





*. . . and also giving city folks a close-up look at a horse.*



. . . and of course, she posed for countless pictures. "Take of your mask off for a second, so they can see your face", she advised.





*She makes me proud.*



Belle and I wish you a Happy Memorial Day!

MM

*P.S. We hope you might enjoy this short video about our flag (thanks Gary, for sharing it.)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akfd9xYMSs4&feature=youtu.be>

There is an out-of-the-way narrow, deep canyon near Nogal Peak. Sunlight rarely reaches the canyon floor, making it a shady and cool place to ride on a warm afternoon.

*Our skies are looking more summer-like (note the rainbow over Thunder . . . must be raining in the Capitans).*





*When I went to collect the halters, I found someone had gotten there first. Wilcox was enjoying a nap on top of them.*



*The trail head is located at the more open mouth of the little canyon.*



*Soon, though, the trail meanders into the shaded, deeper portion of the gorge.*



*This trail is rarely used, and there is plenty of deadfall along the way.*





*Spanky enjoys a rare sunny spot. "Wait, wait! I'm catching some rays!"*





*These maples put on a colorful show in the autumn. Nice when they're green, too.*



*Most of the trail is under a woody canopy.*





*Spanky makes quick work of another obstacle.*



*"It's okay you guys, come on!"*





*Snacking in a sunny little meadow.*



*Moseying on through the silent green woods.*





*Break time.*



*While they grazed, I found these beautiful little flowers.*



*Nature's perfection.*





*Headed home.*



MM

In the open cattle country, this is a dry time of year. The early spring green has faded before the (hopefully) soaking monsoon rains of summer, . . . but we know where to find some green, and Belle was eager to enjoy some fresh river grass . . .

*The dramatic skies changed to sunshine as we rode along.*



*Thunder knows where we are headed. "Follow me!"*





*"See? There it is, Belle!"*



*One of nature's miracles - flowing fresh water and green grass.*



*Horse delicacy along the water's edge.*



*It's remarkable that they are willing to leave such bounty - but they joyfully move on.*





*They know there is more to come. "This way!"*



*Thunder ran down to scout it out. He was back in a flash. "Nope. I know a much better place."*



*"Come on!"*





*Oh, yeah.*



*Horse heaven. Thanks, Thunder!*



*"Yeahhhh. Thwanks, Thawonder!!" Don't talk with your mouth full Belle. "Oh, sorry."*







*Let's go, Thunder.*



*Again, they willingly leave all that green grass.*



*Time to go home.*





*A lone pronghorn bids us an alert farewell.*



MM

It's beginning to feel like summer.

*Monsoon clouds have begun to form each afternoon . . . (we had some welcome rain the last two nights).*



*. . . and the red hot poker are happily in bloom.*





*Little Chile ventures out of his barn more . . .*



*. . . to lie in the lazy afternoon sun.*



*It was a good time for a simple ride close to home.*



*Just over the hill, a neighbor's cattle graze contentedly . . .*





*. . . and hang out around a little spring.*



*The calves always like Thunder. This one is a bit shy . . .*



*"Hmmm . . ."*



*So he brings a friend along for courage. "Go smell it!" "No, you first!"*





*"Hmmm . . . it don't smell like mom."*



*"You're right. Weird."*



*Thunder had enough of that, and off we go.*



*We spot an exotic-looking cactus flower along the way.*





*Let's head for the sunny meadow (our ranch is just over that hill).*



*Rain is coming down in the distance.*



*Carrizo Mountain towers in isolation over the valley below.*





*Familiar Nogal Peak directs us home.*



We've been invited to join friends for a ride at a ranch in northern New Mexico. "Road Trip!", shouted Belle. We'll be back in touch next week.  
MM

## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

Page 1 of 12

Over the years, the horses and I have led rides around here for a group of friends from Abiquiu and Santa Fe. As a 'thank-you', they generously invited us to join them on their riding adventure at Wheaton Creek Ranch in northern New Mexico. Wheaton Creek is a working 36,000-acre cattle ranch created by the current owner's father who was a 'geologist' from Amarillo (that's a polite Texas term for a lucky son'a bitch oil and gas wildcatter). The ranch has added some very nice guest accommodations, a talented chef, and now offers private stays for hunters, fishermen, mountain bikers, and equestrians.

*Our little doe (with the big ears) seemed baffled by all the loading of feed, etc. for our trip. "Where you going? Why can't I come?" We'll be back soon . . .*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

Page 2 of 12

*Road trip!*



*Since the horses prefer to relieve themselves outside the trailer, we stop along the way for potty breaks and legs stretching. This was on the plains south of Santa Fe.*



## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*The horses are natural tourists and enjoy seeing the sights along the way.*



*Getting closer to our destination. They admire another picturesque church . . .*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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... and a relic of the real Old West.



Wheaton Creek Ranch is at the base of that mountain on the right.



*The road to the ranch.*



*We arrive.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*They make themselves at home, in cattle pens used as paddocks for our horses.*



*A happy poppy.*



*Full moon coming over the mountain.*



*Getting ready for a ride.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*Headed to the trail - ranch horses watch the procession.*



*We had been told a ranch hand would guide us on the rides - when none was available, the wrangler who travels with the group was given a hastily-marked map (oh-oh), and we were on our way.*



*Spanky made himself right at home.*



*Lots of water throughout the ranch.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*It wasn't all easy going . . . there were some rocky climbs . . .*



*. . . but aspen groves made the effort worth it.*



## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*We're headed to the ruins of an old logging camp.*



*Spanky seemed to especially enjoy this ride. "Gee, all those horses have passengers . . . (not me, tee hee!)"*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part One

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*Our first glimpse of the camp.*



MM

*(More to come)*

## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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It was a terrific ride - we enjoyed a picnic lunch at the old logging village before moseying on.

*The camp buildings are being consumed by the forest.*



*A glimpse of times past.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*Following the map, we ride on . . .*



*. . . and on . . . and on. The sky darkens and rain falls in the distance.*



## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*Something's not right. We stop and consult our (faulty) map. Thanks, Sue, for the pic!*



*Thunder spots it right away. "They didn't mark the turn way back there . . ." He was right. We would have to backtrack.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*"I need a drin", says Spanky. I think we all did.*



*Well . . . the scenery was just as nice as before.*



## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*We came across one of the ranch hands out on his rounds. "Guess what happened . . ." His pack mule hid a snicker.*



*We kept going.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*We have been gone about five hours - some of our riders felt it was more time in the saddle than their . . . er . . . 'seat' cared for. So, the ranch was contacted and sent ATV vehicles out to collect them. The rest of us continued on, back on course (with a guide!)*



*Sure glad we did. Turned out the back side of the loop was the most beautiful. Although it clouded up, it didn't rain on our parade.*



*We even saw the remains of some very old stone 'dugout' dwellings.*



*The horses were great. By the time we got back to the lodge, we had been gone more than 10 hours! . .  
But no one was complaining.*





## 2020-06-09 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Two

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*It was a memorable ride.*



MM

*(More to come)*

## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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After our 'surprise' 10-hour ride, we were careful about the routes being recommended by the ranch. When another trail was suggested, Brianna and I decided to go with a guide (on a mountain bike!) and check it out first.

*Spanky had some questions for our guide. "Are you sure this isn't a wild goose chase? Is it rocky or really steep? Do you know where you are going?"*





## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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*He had cause to ask. It turned out to be rocky and steep . . .*



*. . . (Though with some beautiful views.)*



## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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*. . . and our guide did get us lost!!!!!! Although Brianna and I (and the horses) enjoyed the ride, it was not one we could suggest to the rest of our group. Good thing we checked it out.*



*Several of us still wanted to ride - even with the threatening clouds - so we chose a nice, easy route.*







*Soon, the sky began to clear . . .*



*. . . and it turned out to be a most pleasant ride.*





*Some bright mountain cactus flowers along the way.*



## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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*(Too) soon, it was time to leave this special place. That's Thunder, Belle and Spanky in the pen on the right.*



*After the others had left, we enjoyed a quiet family ride together.*







## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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. . . and said good-bye to Hall Mountain (which reminded us of our Nogal Peak).



The road home . . . (if you look very carefully, in the far distance you can see some snow on the Sangre de Cristo Mountains above Santa Fe).





## 2020-06-10 - Wheaton Creek Ranch Ride - Part Three

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*We were greeted by a new batch of swallow babies - the first of the season.*



It was a memorable time with great friends (to whom we give BIG thanks) - happy you could join us!

MM

Although dark, monsoon-like clouds threatened a downpour at any minute, the horses wanted to come along when I did some errands in Ruidoso. "Afterwards, we could stop by Grindstone Lake for a little walk", Belle said optimistically.

*It hadn't seemed likely, but by the time we got to the lake, the clouds were breaking up.*



*A few light sprinkles, but trail wasn't muddy.*





*The water's surface looked like polished jade.*



*There's always time for a quick bite along the way.*



*Our meanderings took us high above the lake.*







*When the trail petered out, we bushwhacked through the trees . . .*







*... and discovered a lagoon-like pond in the forest.*



*"Let's go this way", suggested Belle.*



*She had a cool drink from a little spring - and some of her favorite fresh grass.*





*"Follow me!"*



*Thunder was feeling lovey-dovey. "Hey, snuggums . . ." . . . "Don't go mess'in-up my mane!"*



*Giving them some privacy, a tactful Spanky saw a perfect spot . . .*



*"Ahhh!"*





*Back at the lake, a sip from a cool cove.*



*Turned out to be a good day for it. Thanks again, Belle.*



MM

Generally, our monsoon season doesn't start until about the first week of July. But . . . we have been having some monsoon-like rains, which always are welcome.

*As we were headed out for a ride, Belle expressed some concerns. "You know, it looks pretty dicey up here. Maybe we should head down Carrizozo way today." I explained that rain could happen down there, too. "But, it's sandy and not so muddy when it rains. I have new shoes!" Couldn't argue with that.*





*In the distance clouds clung to the mountains around the ranch, but it was mostly sunny below.*



*The mesquite trees are green . . .*





*Many animals depend on mesquite bean pods as a food source (cattle love them; it is estimated they account for 75% of a coyote's diet during the summer). Since antiquity, they have been important to humans living in arid climates. Native Americans use them as a tea, syrup, or ground into flour called pinole. Today it is recognized as an excellent source of calcium, potassium, magnesium, iron and zinc - and has become a trendy ingredient in stylish recipes. The horses are not interested in eating them.*



*Spanky appreciates the view (and probably some pronghorn I didn't see).*





*The Southwest . . .*



*A piece of history. At some point long ago, someone tossed this old thick-glassed bottle. Soldier? Cowboy? Pioneer? Identity lost to time.*



*"You mean there used to be people here?" "Guess so."*



*Ancient arroyos add mystery.*







*. . . and are fun to explore.*



*Thunder and Spanky know this route well and run ahead.*





*They wait patiently for Belle and me to catch up.*



*As we depart, rain is coming down on the foothills.*





*Looks like rain at home (Belle was looking rather smug - "Uh-huh!").*



MM

On warm, dry June days, evening rides are just the ticket.

*Our Scotch Broom plants are in bloom (in the old days, pioneers gathered the stiff stems into home-made brooms). The flowers have a wonderful fragrance, especially as night falls.*



*Early evening is a very special time. Chores done; all is quiet.*





*We are so grateful for this.*



*Family.*



*A time of peace . . .*





. . . and thankful reflection.



MM

*Surrounded by high desert, our mountains are a green place appreciated by birds, animals - and Texans escaping the heat this time of year.*







*Creeks and streams provide Belle's favorite grasses.*





*"Hey! I like it too!", says Spanky with his mouth full. "Oh, pardon me . . ."*



*Chowing down, Thunder is in his bliss.*





*Even dry patches appeal to Spanky . . .*



*. . . and Thunder, too (Belle isn't much interested. "Are you kidding? All that dust in my hair?")*



*We meander along the water's edge.*



*Snacking as they go.*





*A wild rose.*



*"Can we go to that place with the really tall grass? Can we?"*



*Sure, Spanky. That's tall grass!*



*"Oh, boy! I love this place (the grass tickles my tummy!)"*





*"It's tasty, too!"*



*"Excuse me, please . . . (munch, munch)"*





*Enjoying the green.*



MM

Spanky had a little flirtation during our evening ride yesterday.

*She showed up kinda suddenly, then sort of sauntered over our way.*



*A pretty blonde. Oh, you beautiful doll, you GREAT BIG beautiful doll . . .*





*Everyone played it cool at first. "La dee dah . . . Oh, my, this is tasty . . ."*



*Then, she set her gaze on Spanky. I think I heard strains of "Some Enchanted Evening" . . .*



*"You may meet a stranger" . . .*



*Kismet!*





*Even the little calves noticed that something was in the air. "What's up with that?"*



*Blondie joined in the happy hour snacking. Spanky wasn't sure what to do (after all, he is really smitten with Belle, who was right there).*



*Spanky thought it over, as curious twins checked him out. "Do I, or don't I . . ."*



*Their mom gave Spanky some friendly advice. "I'd be careful if I were you." . . . "Hmmm . . ."*





*Then two other suitors showed up and began vying for Blondie's attention with impressive head-butts. Big Angus bulls (they are the size of rhinos!). It was like a head-on collision between two sedans. I suggested that Spanky might want to leave the whole thing alone. "Good advice!" said Spanky. "Let's go!"*



*As we made our escape into the sunset, a little calf trotted along with us for awhile.*



*Safely out of romantic entanglements, it was a beautiful evening . . .*





*. . . and now Spanky has another story to tell.*



MM

The day started sunny, with just a few clouds drifting over the mountain.



*... but there was a 'feeling' in the air. As the clouds continued to build, Belle suggested we head toward Fort Stanton. "They don't get as much rain there", she said optimistically.*





*Along the way, we checked the progress of expansion at the Fort Stanton horse campground. "Wow, that's impressive", said Thunder. Construction is underway for added horse trailer campsites, and a large group event pavilion. With about 100 miles of trails, the camp is a major venue for national equestrian endurance competitions, as well as a riding destination for locals and visitors.*



*We were headed for cool shade, and Belle's favorite stream-side grass.*



*"Ahhh . . ."*



*"Yum! This is delicious!"*





*They all chowed down, before continuing our ride.*



*A welcoming shaded route on a summery day.*





*"What kind of grass you got there, Belle?" Thunder inquired. "I'm not sure - but it's tasty."*





*We worked our way along a giant salad bar.*





*This placid pool was sure tempting for a dip on a warm day . . .*





*. . . but watchful Belle spotted the growing clouds in the water's reflection.*



*"Uh, it sure is getting cloudy. Maybe we should head back (you know how I hate getting my hair wet)."  
She was right.*



*So we skedaddled to the trailer . . .*





*. . . and arrived home just before the sky opened up. Lots of welcome rain!*



MM

Although our monsoon season hasn't officially begun, the tell-tale signs are here.

*Mornings start out clear and cloudless, but by noon large billowy clouds start to form.*



*Often, welcome late afternoon rains bring cool temps . . .*





*The skies clear into the evening, making for some very artistic effects.*



*Each evening, a new view.*



*A 'cotton ball' sky.*







To everything there is a season.

MM

It really doesn't matter where we go, or what we do. The main thing is to have time together. Of course, it's nice to wander along a flowing stream on a pleasant summer's day . . .

*With all the recent afternoon rains, we really weren't sure how the weather would go - but it turned out just fine.*





*Those rains muddied the stream a bit, but the horses didn't mind -- the grass was delicious . . .*



*. . . and years of seasonal floods have left behind lots of soft sand. "Ahhh!"*



*It was very quiet - except for the songs of birds everywhere. For some reason there are more of them this year than in memory.*



*We were just moseying along under the passing clouds. It was that kind of day.*





*Then we spotted an interesting side canyon we hadn't noticed before. So, off we went!*



*Following a deer trail - the horses are always game for a little adventure . . .*



*. . . but soon the trail petered out, and it became too rocky to proceed further.*



*So, back to the soft earth near the stream.*





*All alone, we had a sense of being watched.*



*"Who? Who?" Just us.*



*We came upon the old petroglyph rock.*



*Ancient peoples left their marks here (see the 'snake' design slithering down?).*





*It took a lot of effort - with no metal tools - to carve these signs. What are they saying to us?*



*This land has changed little in the centuries.*



*The stream flowed then, too.*





*Spanky has a sip of history.*



Thanks for sharing this special time - together.  
MM

## 2020-07-01 - *High Country Nocturne*

Page 1 of 10

Early summer evenings in the high country are truly magical. The air is soft and scented with pine and oak. The birds begin their sunset serenades . . . and reclusive wildlife gather for some socializing.

*Nogal Canyon Road becomes shaded with dappled light.*



*While along a lazy little brook, the trail is cocooned in leafy foliage.*





*Just right for a cool sip.*



*By and by, exotic mountain flowers glow.*





*These wild elderberries will ripen and be ready in the fall for jams and pies - and homemade wine.*



*Under a sheltering canopy of gambel oaks, sunlight is filtered low.*





*Lots of mountain fern cloak the hillsides.*



*Another day's end. Serene Nogal Peak keeps an eye on our progress.*



*As we climb to a wildlife-attracting spring in a sheltered meadow.*



*We join some roaming cattle - mostly moms with their calves . . .*





... and ... what's that?



*Partially obscured by the low sun (the light was reflected in the lens), some nonchalant elk graze in the shade. Note the young bull with his new 'high horns'. That's a black Angus cow sharing happy hour in the foreground; everyone gets along.*



*This calf inquired of a preoccupied Belle - "Hmmm . . . got milk?"*



*Hey, Thunder, don't back up . . . "Huh?" Those horns look mighty sharp . . .*





*Ah, freedom.*



*Sure is nice to trust them to stay around in the wilderness.*



*While I take in the views.*



*The sun had nearly set. Time to head home. The horses know the way.*





*As we descended into the shadowy canyon, we were not alone. Enjoying the sun's last rays, curious elk emerge like alert apparitions, to observe our silent progress.*



It's a time of joyful bird-song sounds. Of warm air beginning ever-so-gently to cool into the mountain night. Suffused with reflection and gratitude.

MM

Our monsoon rains typically kick in around the Fourth of July.



*"Uh, what's 'typical' these days?" Belle asked, as they waited to load into the trailer.*





*Spanky takes no chances on being left behind.*



*Although he and Thunder take their time on the trail.*



*They all hang out near the stream.*



*"Isn't this fun? I love a Fourth of July picnic!", says Belle.*





*Then we encountered this old pipe-threading apparatus, long forgotten in the middle of nowhere (founded in 1893, the company still produces pipe-related machines in the USA).*



A refreshing pause.





*Thunder with the thunder clouds.*





*We did get some sprinkles -- but no real rain.*



*Belle is sure that grass is going to be tastier than the stuff on her side of the water. Spanky isn't convinced.*



*A summer afternoon...*





*This spot sure reminds us of Sedona, red dirt and all.*



*Back at home, some 'red, white and blue' (and Chile, too!)*





"And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea."



2019

Happy Fourth of July!  
MM

New Mexico skies are different.

*A vibrant sunset created an unusual effect as it colored some virga (rain evaporating before it hits the ground).*



*You can just make out the curtain of rain as it hangs in the air. It looks nearly like the Phos-Chek retardant dropped on wildfires.*





*It almost made it to the ground! It was a spectacular and eerie effect.*



*Here is the source of that colorful light.*



*Within minutes, the light had changed again. These elk, resting behind the house, had a ringside seat for the spectacle.*





*"What the heck was that all about? (It sure was pretty)"*



Thanks for letting us share this unusual sight with you!  
MM

It was a beautiful, bright summer day. I had an errand to run not too far from Grindstone Lake, so the horses lobbied to come along.



*A few minutes later, ominous clouds began to fill that 'bright' sky.*





*I warned them that it might rain soon - but even Belle wanted to ride at the lake. "Look at the pretty color those clouds make the water", she gushed.*



*She was right - the water did have an odd hue. The clouds got darker by the minute. I could see rain falling in the distance . . .*



*. . . but the air was warm, the trail was dry, and the birds were singing.*



*The sun still shone on us.*





*So we continued on our merry way.*



*It began to get darker.*



*The lake got very still.*





*"Did I just see a drop hit the water?"*



*Then, "Was that a raindrop I just felt?" Yes, Spanky, it was.*



*"Run, everyone!"*





*We made it back to the trailer just in time. It poured all the way home.*



MM

During this time of year, we keep our eyes on the sky. Often clear and beautiful, monsoon clouds can form with surprising speed (and then disappear just as quickly). Remember, Belle hates getting her hair wet.

*When we began our ride at Ranchman's Camp, the sky was nearly clear (Spanky and Thunder are the tiny dots near the center of the photo) . . .*



*. . . and then, shazam!*





*Thunder wisely leads us in the other direction. "How's this, Belle?" "Better. Thanks!"*



*Are those clouds following us?*



*Moving on . . . "Hey! Let's go this way!"*



*Now they seem to be circling overhead.*





*They hang motionless, like enormous blimps.*



*That's rain coming down at the far left of the photo.*



*"Gotta go!" advises Thunder.*





*Actually, it never did rain on us . . . but at the ranch (just about five miles away), we got not only a nice rain, but this showy rainbow, too (sharp eyes will spot a faint double rainbow).*



You just never know.  
MM

With no rain in the forecast, it seemed like a great time to visit the high country.  
*Skies were clear as we approached the trail head.*



*Most of this trail follows a little stream, decorated with yellow daisies.*





*We were surrounded by green.*



*Sometimes we entered shady tunnels of lush leaves.*





*Spanky pauses for a cool drink from a brook beneath a natural 'bridge'.*



*Flowers everywhere now.*





*During a little break, everyone seems preoccupied with something.*



*We keep ambling on.*



*Ahhh . . . approaching the high country.*



*Reaching the top, Spanky enjoys a roll in the sky.*





*Some of our favorite panoramas are found up here.*



*The horses take in the views, along with some tasty mountain grass (Spanky is near the middle of the photo).*



*Glorious, humbling nature.*





*Reluctantly, we head back down.*



*This trail took us between walls of flowers.*





*"There better not be any critters lurking in there!", fretted Belle.*



*If you look closely at the foliage on the right, you might spot some wild raspberries.*





*They are much more flavorful than their domestic cousins, and delicious right off the bush.*



*Homeward bound.*







Thanks for joining us on this special summer ride.

MM

It was a call no horseman wants to receive. Cynthia said that her friends had just moved to the area from Colorado, and overnight their two horses had escaped from their new home. Oh, no. Loose horses in unfamiliar, open country. I threw my horses in the trailer and off we went to meet the owners at their new ranch to see if we could help. It was late in the day and it had rained at our place. I hoped wet ground would make tracking the lost horses easier. But no rain there. A wrangler met me and said that he and some other riders had been looking. They found tracks which petered out. It was then that he mentioned the horses had escaped two nights before; they had been gone for more than 36 hours. That didn't make things easier. In that time they could have gone far - and in ANY direction.

*Thunder and the wrangler on the first day of the search. This is rough country, full of rocky arroyos - which is why we have never ridden here, and had no familiarity with it. Reluctantly we had to give up the search at the end of the day.*





*The next morning, I was glad to hear from Debbie, who lives in the area. Unfortunately, she was in Colorado . . . but we talked it out on the phone and decided I should look to the east of the ranch Rather than haul the trailer over who-knows-what roads, I went alone in the truck. I missed my horses but was glad I hadn't brought them along on this exploration - the road was terrible and the terrain worse, with lots of tree cover which made visibility challenging.*



*I finally had to stop the truck and get out to walk. I trudged a mile or so on foot before I came to a crossroad. Hmmm . . . left or right. Left. That just didn't feel good, so I backtracked and went the other way. The dirt 'road' was cut into a very steep slope. As I hiked along, I suddenly had a feeling . . . went to the downside edge and looked over. The trees were parted in just the perfect way for me to see clear to the bottom of a very deep ravine. I had to rub my eyes - there were two horses down there! Lucky - right place, right time. Even though they were far away, I didn't want to spook them, so I quietly backed up and then ran back to the truck. I called the owners, Gary and Marian, and told them to grab two halters and lead ropes - and some sweet feed - and meet me on the highway. We would use my truck to get back to the same spot. It seemed to take them forever (I was afraid the horses might wander off). When they arrived, we piled into my truck and off we went. Luckily, the horses were still there. If you look very, very closely, you will see a tiny reddish dot in the center of the photo - one of the horses.*





*Now, how to get them out. I was afraid I might spook horses who didn't know me, so Gary and I scaled down the hill together. They certainly recognized his voice (and the sound of sweet feed in the bucket). It was a great reunion.*



*Carefully, Gary haltered them, and we headed up the hill, taking a more sensible route than the one we had come down.*



*Once back at the truck, Gary and Marian climbed into the back and we led the horses to a place where we could have a truck and trailer meet us. Gary is calling a friend to bring the trailer - Guess what!"*





*Whew!*



*My view out the back window making sure all was well as we went slowly along.*



*There's the friend and trailer, waiting to take them home.*





*A very happy ending!*



It was getting late. Time to go home and feed my family their supper (and maybe an extra carrot or two).

MM

End Journal Part 1 of 3

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