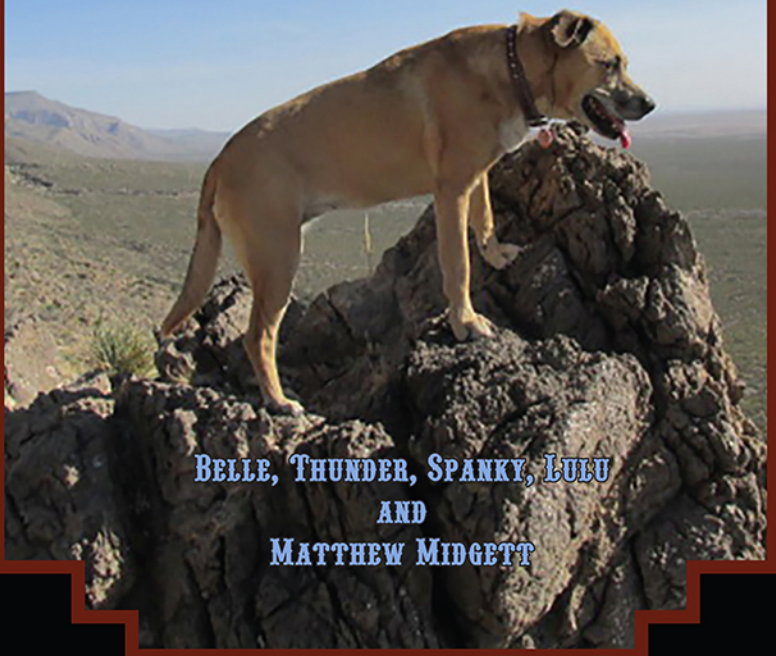
THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Five



Belle, Thunder, Spanky, Lulu
and
Matthew Midgett

Volume 5 - Part 3 of 3

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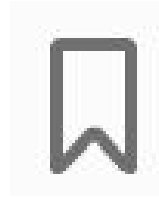
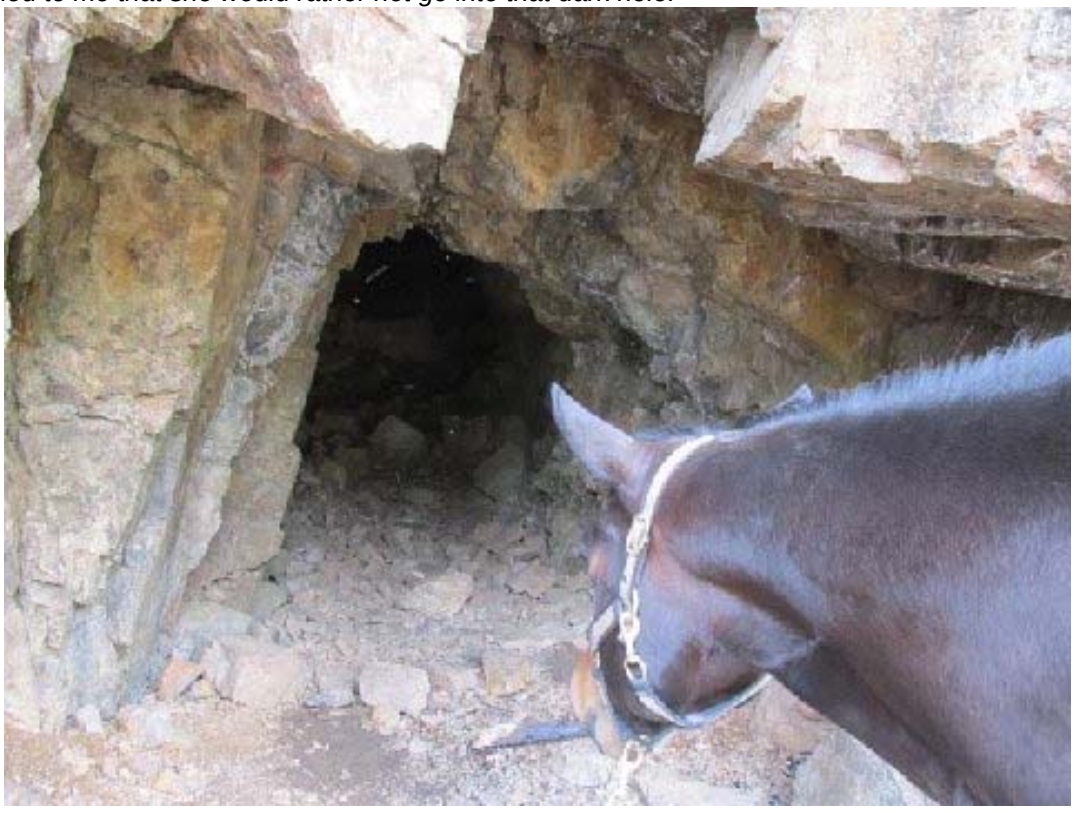


for your active TABLE OF CONTENTS
(located on the far upper right corner of the window).

2014-04-14 – ***Lulu Goes Camping – Part Two***

Metal trailers seem to attract the cold - and I was glad to have Lulu on the bed to keep my feet warm overnight! We woke up to a nice morning, had breakfast and hit the trail early.

I explained to Belle that if we were caught in a storm, we could take cover in this old mine. SHE explained to me that she would rather not go into that dark hole.



Period. (Lulu doesn't mind).

Spanky negotiates a rough spot on the trail. More was to come . . .

Ever loyal Lulu.

Some clouds roll in. The aspen trees know it is too early to leaf out.

We climb to the top of a high ridge, pretty much above the tree line here.

Instead of taking the trail around the mountain, we decide to bushwhack across it. Spanky has an awkward roll in the tuft grass. It is much steeper than it looks.

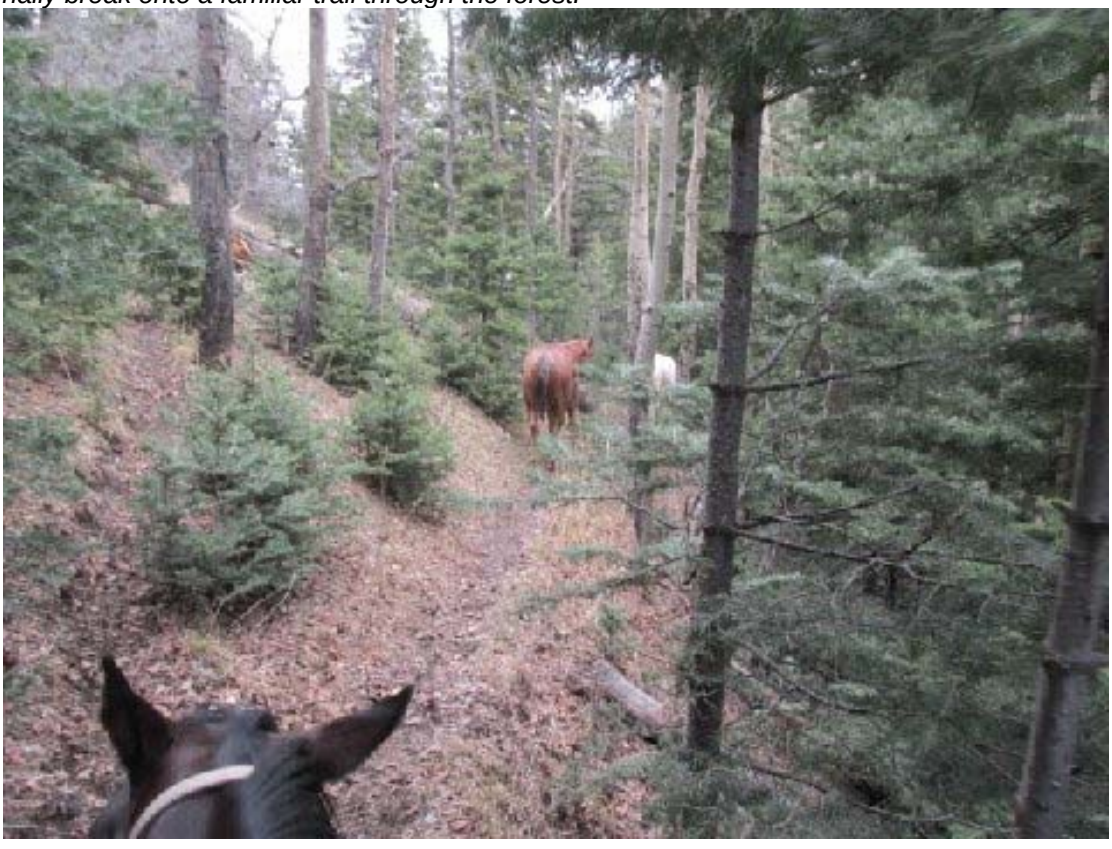
That grass (the tufts grow from bowling ball-sized root clumps), combined with rocks and a very steep slope makes for rough going. I dismounted from Belle to make it easier for her. Even I was stumbling along like an old drunk!

We struggled along for a couple of miles before I discovered that in one of my stumbles, I had lost the camera! Hated to leave it - and the photos you have seen so far - but hated to ask the horses to back track through such miserable terrain. Well . . . they thought I was crazy, but with Thunder leading, we reversed direction. He managed to sniff out our unmarked route! I spotted EVERY black rock, dark spot and anything resembling a camera. No Camera! After about two miles (and two hours) or so, I called a halt to the search. We reverse again (now they really think I am nuts) and go back over the difficult ground. Nearly where we turned the first time, I spotted the camera! One of us had stepped on it, but it functioned. Whew!

We even came across some patches of snow up there.

Lulu looks for the best way to cross a creek without getting soaked. Some of this ride was tough.

We finally break onto a familiar trail through the forest.



On the way back to camp, Lulu stops for a drink.

Home again. Lulu enjoyed a hot shower and was ready for bed early that night!

It was a wonderful trip, and (as usual) Lulu fit right in. Thanks for coming along!
MM

2014-04-15 – ***What The Heck?***

It was a beautiful, mild spring day - so we took a ride nearby.

This plateau overlooks the Capitan Mountains in one direction . . .

. . . and the Sacramento Mountains in the other (you can just spot some snow on the ski runs at Ski Apache Resort.)

A stock tank in cattle country.

"Outrider Lulu" enjoys a drink with her buddies.

. . . and she discovers a natural water hole along the way.

Pretty spot.

Belle contemplates a jump!

Done!

I was riding in just shirtsleeves.

. . . and then, the next morning . . . Snow? What the heck!!!!

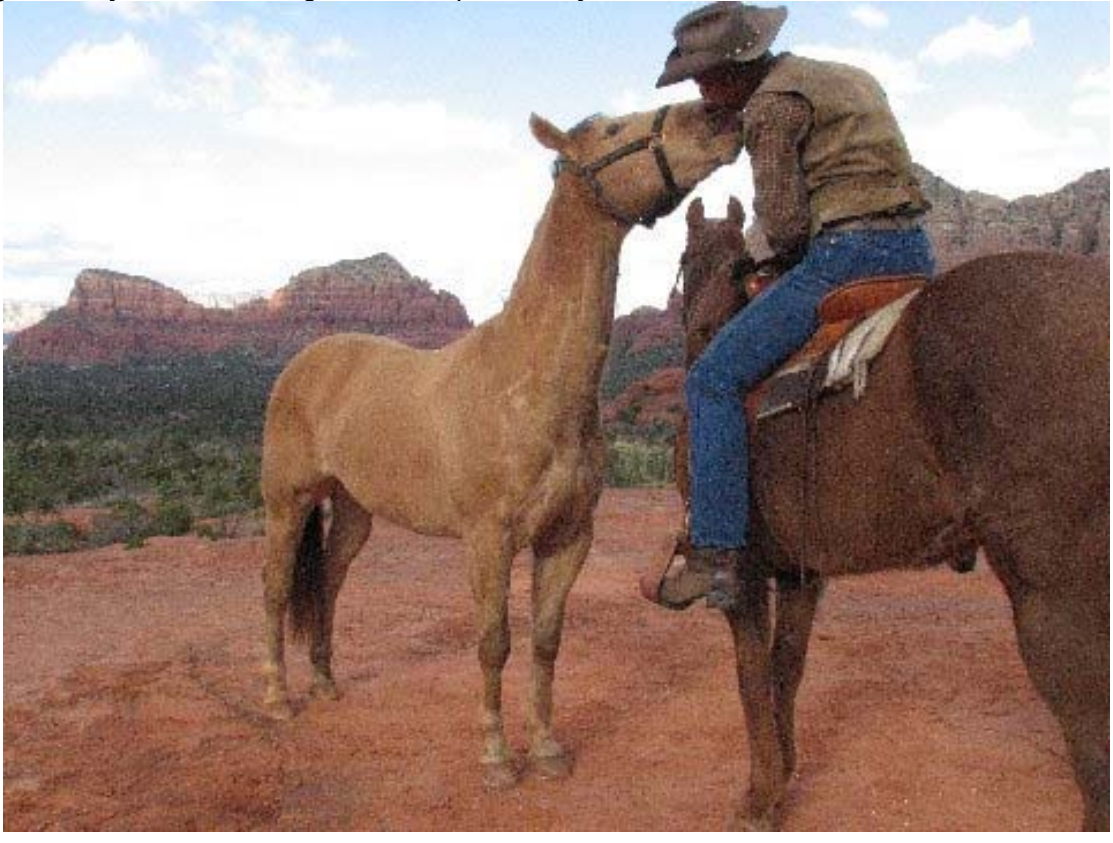
Ah, New Mexico! But later that same day we had a school tour at the Fort . . . back to "normal".

MM

2014-04-20 – ***Remembering Maverick***

Remembering Maverick on the 3rd anniversary of his passing.

Our golden boy continues riding with us in spirit - always.



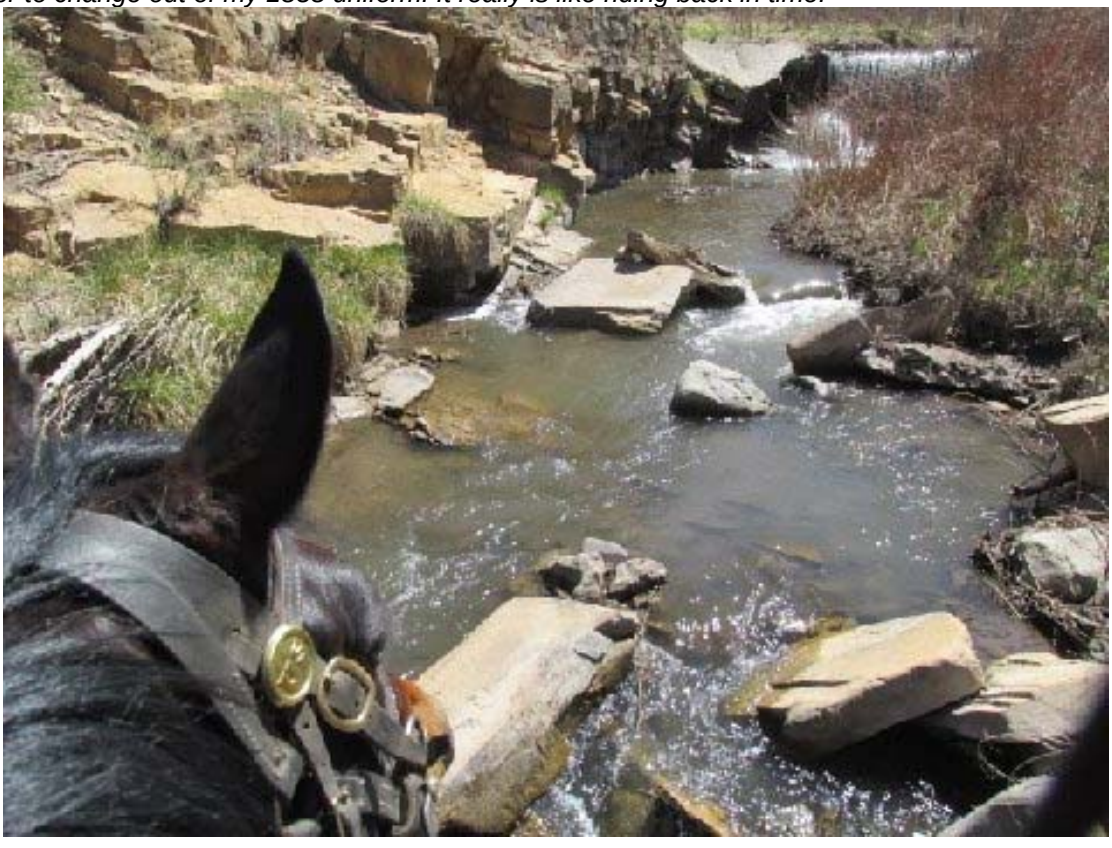
MM

2014-04-20 – ***Somewhere In Time***

This time of year we have lots of school tours at Fort Stanton. The kids love the horses (and Lulu), and vice versa!

Spanky, especially, just joins right in - as though he is a kid, too!

Afterward, since I am already saddled and on Belle, we often take rides out from the Fort. I usually don't bother to change out of my 1858 uniform. It really is like riding back in time!



Thunder takes off.

It is almost eerie - to be riding in full historic uniform and tack, just where the actual cavalrymen rode 150 years ago . . .

Lulu has gotten used to crossing water. She even stops mid-stream to cool off.

It really is a special experience to ride quietly, in the footsteps of the past.
MM

2014-04-24 – ***April Showers . . .***

Around here, we never complain about rain. But . . .
We had a full day scheduled at the Fort. It was our regular Garrison Saturday, plus I had been asked to give a mounted saber demonstration and give a special tour to a large high school group. It clouded up very early . . .

Just some light sprinkles as our activities began. The students were excited to see the horses. Spanky has become a real ambassador.

He genuinely enjoys hanging out with them!

I figured the rain would be over soon. Belle does not like rain.

Official greeter.

Laundry demonstration. The kids found it hard to believe that doing wash took all that work!

Making homemade egg noodles. Thunder knows more rain is on the way. He finds a tree to stand under.

Boning chicken (cooked over the open campfire before it began to rain . . .) for chicken pot pie.

The men helped with the vegetables.

Spanky supervised.

That's our Belle.

When it came time for the saber demonstration, things were getting a little damp.

Then the sky opened up! Belle was not happy. But she did her bit.

We were soaked through! (Once your underwear gets soaked, it's hard to ignore.) Even my socks were sloshy! The students applauded our demonstration (from the protection of the big veranda).

I was very proud of the horses and Lulu (who took cover in the kitchen tent). Belle was very patient. Here is what the school supervisor had to say in a thank you note: "Watching you and Belle in the downpour made us realize just how far above and beyond you were willing to go to share the history with the students. Belle - even though you said she hates the rain - did all that she was asked."
Thank you, Belle! (It took forever for that wool uniform to dry . . .)
MM

2014-04-29 – ***Simple Rides***

Although Fort business and other "stuff" has taken a lot of time recently, we still manage to ride pretty much daily; they are short, local rides like this one yesterday.

Lulu is just SURE she heard something under that bush!

Spanky catches up after rolling. Nice, soft dirt here.

. . . Rolling hills and big sky above.

Funny how these two trees are leaning that way; they are protected from the wind here, so I don't think that caused it . . .

The desert below (and beyond that, prairie all the way to Oklahoma!)

MM

2014-05-01 – ***Grindstone Loop***

One of the trails closest to "town" (Ruidoso) is the Grindstone Loop. The Forest Service has just added several more miles to the system, but we decided to take the original loop of about 7 miles. It is a very peaceful trail.

Before we started out, Belle took a little time for a dust bath in a dry patch of sand. She is a powdery mess. "Hey! A girl doesn't want a shiny nose!"

We often let Spanky take the lead and set the pace. Lulu keeps close.

Starting to see some wildflowers.

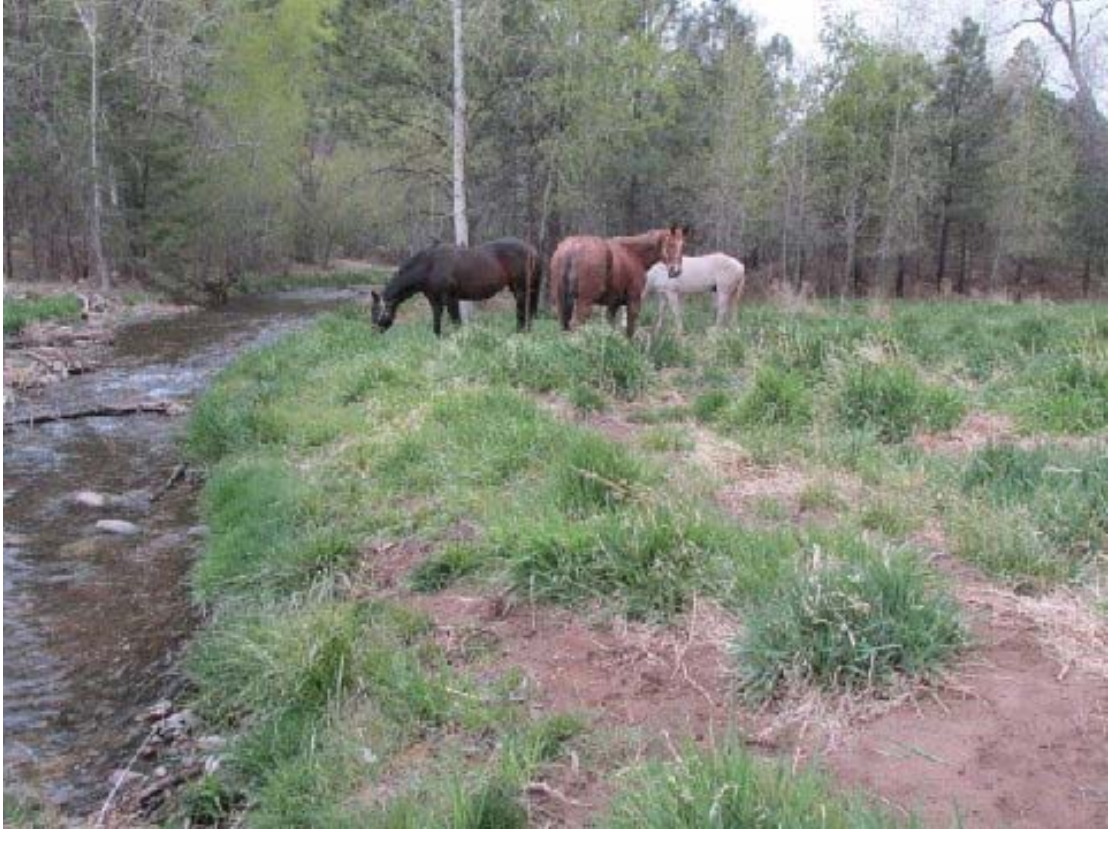
Don't know what these are, but there are masses of them higher up.

Lulu got a little ahead; she returns to check on us. "You slow pokes alright?"

"Beep beep! Passing on the right! Beep beep!"

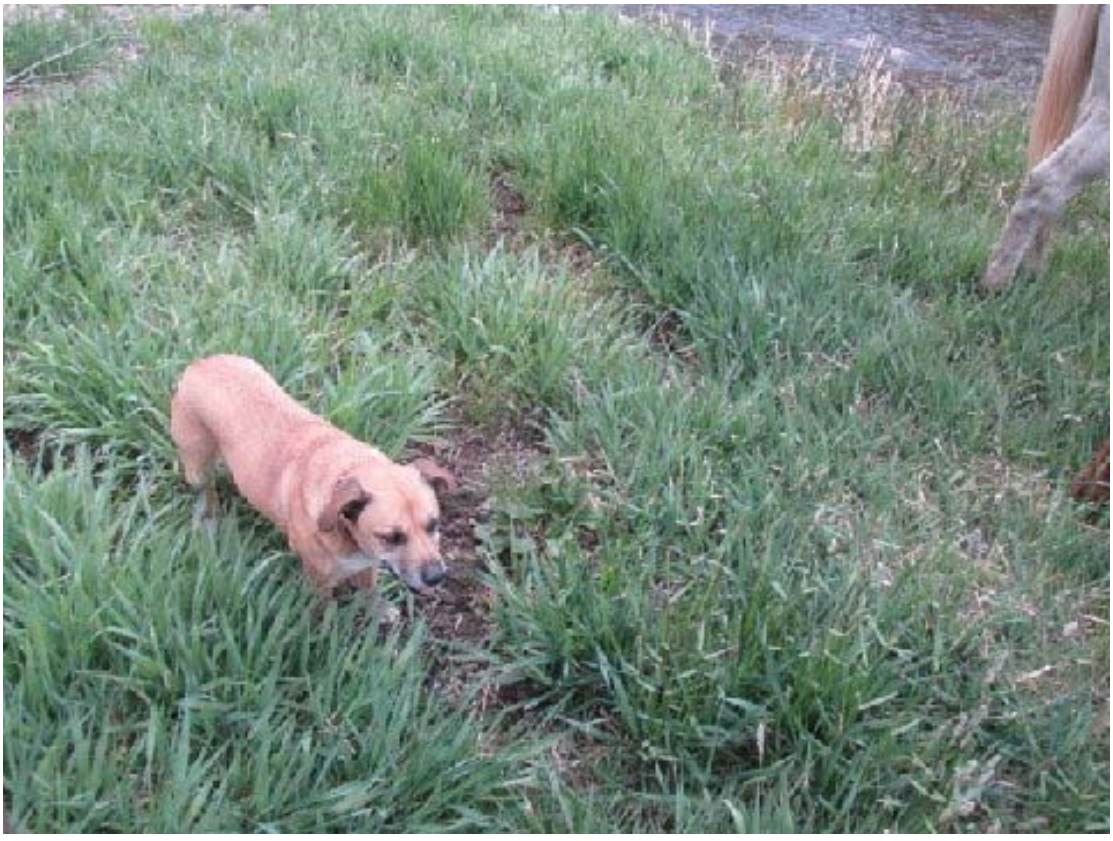
I got all excited when I spotted this "shed elk antler". It wasn't . . . just a branch.

Nearly dark, on the way home we stopped for some green grass along the stream.



Thunder thinks it looks greener on the other side.

Maybe it is!



MM

2014-05-07 – ***Busy Belle***

Because of her association with historic Fort Stanton, Belle's dance card has been very full recently!

First, she was asked to lead the annual Smokey Bear Days parade in Capitan; this year there was a special celebration for Smokey's 70th birthday. Lots of people along the way yelled out "Hello, Belle!" to her. But she is modest. "Aw, shucks . . ."

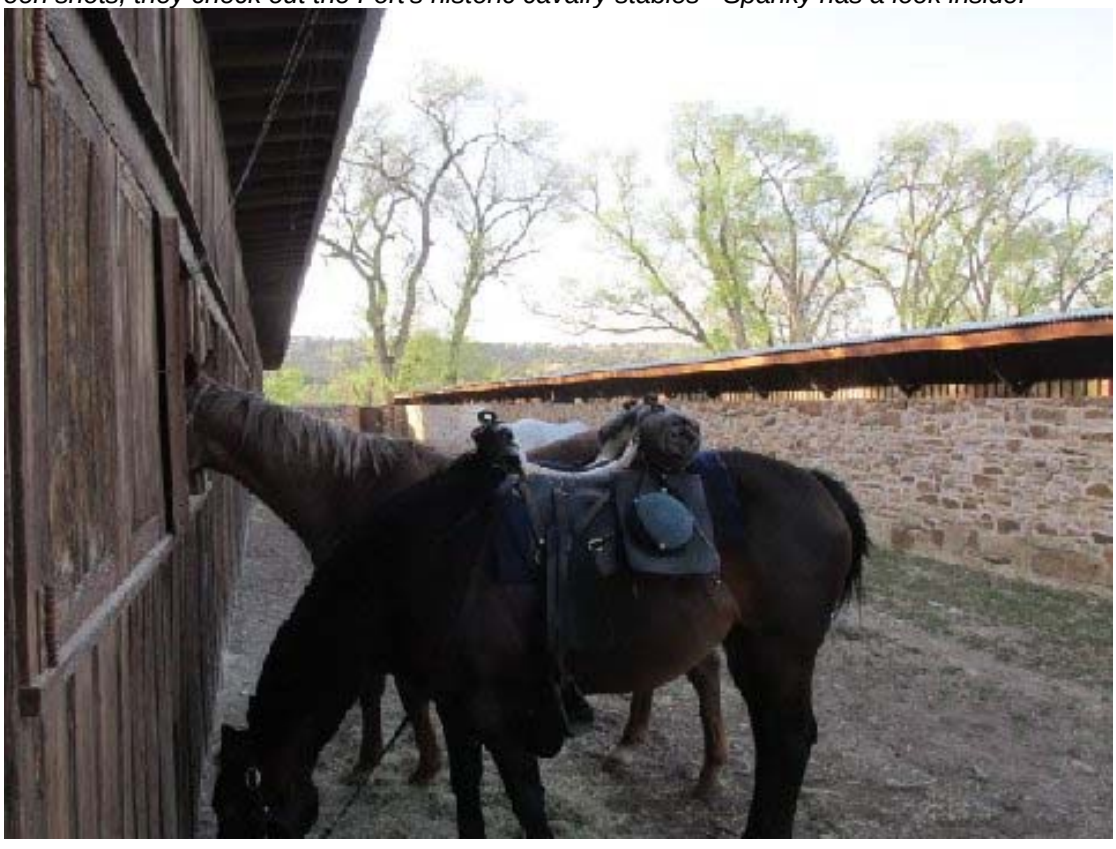
After the parade, she spent time with her fans - old and very young. She has become a Fort ambassador.

Then she, Thunder and Spanky (Lulu, too!) were asked to participate in the filming of a travel television show (when it is edited, it should be available on Youtube. I will let you know). They all were so cooperative on camera; the producer said she wishes she could do a show just about them!

We did this countless times.

Waiting for our direction.

Between shots, they check out the Fort's historic cavalry stables - Spanky has a look inside.



Sunburned, tired, and very proud of my kids!

The next day, Belle was invited to present the flag and lead the Pledge of Allegiance - indoors - during the Governor's Conference on Tourism at the Ruidoso Convention Center. Belle was thrilled to represent the Fort to hundreds of travel professionals. We were told the floor would be carpeted.

She made a dramatic entrance through the big rolling door.

Did you notice the floor? It was glossy polished concrete! We both paused. Belle knew it was very slippery. She hesitated for just a moment - then she did what she came to do. She faced an enormous crowd.

No, I am not singing opera - just reciting the Pledge of Allegiance! LOOK AT THAT FLOOR!

I can't tell you how proud I was. Belle stood grandly and calmly, even when the large audience gave her a standing ovation. Bravo, Belle!

MM

2014-05-14 – ***Winning In Last Place***

On group rides, my free horses generally take the lead - typically Thunder is first, with Spanky right behind (if I am riding Thunder, Spanky eagerly fills the number one spot!)

Occasionally, they choose to fall in behind the others. Such was this case with Dacodah's crew.

Spanky is always on the lookout for treats!

They casually waited for the other riders to lead off.

If a rider gets between Thunder and us, he pulls aside and waits for his herd to catch up.

It was a beautiful, warm spring day. This cattle tank was a refreshing stop along the way.

Lulu cools off!

. . . a risky way to mount a horse. Belle stands very still.

Up and down, they stayed in line.

Racing up a ridge at full charge.

Spanky scores a snack from Jill. Thunder is hoping someone will notice him . . .

Great day for the whole family!

MM

FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

2014-05-15 – ***May Gray***

Folks joke about the changeable weather in New Mexico. It's true - we are never bored with it!

Monday, it was in the 70's. I rode in shirtsleeves. Tuesday was our day for Spanky to get new shoes at Dacodah's. We woke up early to gray skies, temps in the low 30's, and even some snow flurries!

The cold weather made the horses especially frisky. I was too slow on the draw to capture them bucking and doing pirouettes, and such, but you can see what fun they were having.

"Okay, guys, time to go to Dacodah's!"

By the time we got to Dacodah's, the weather had cleared and it was "warming up" into the 50's! Trying out Spanky's new shoes, we took a wonderful ride near the ghost town of Carthage. Spanky is trotting out (thanks, Dacodah for the new shoes).

Simultaneous sunset and moonrise. Spectacular!

Treat time!

We rode well into darkness.

When we got back to the ranch, there were several elk in the driveway. They just hung around while I unloaded and fed the horses. Wish I had some photos of THAT!
MM

2014-05-17 – ***A Touch Of Summer***

"**I**t's finally beginning to feel a little like summer at the ranch. I believe I will just set a spell and cool off here on the veranda . . ."

MM

FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

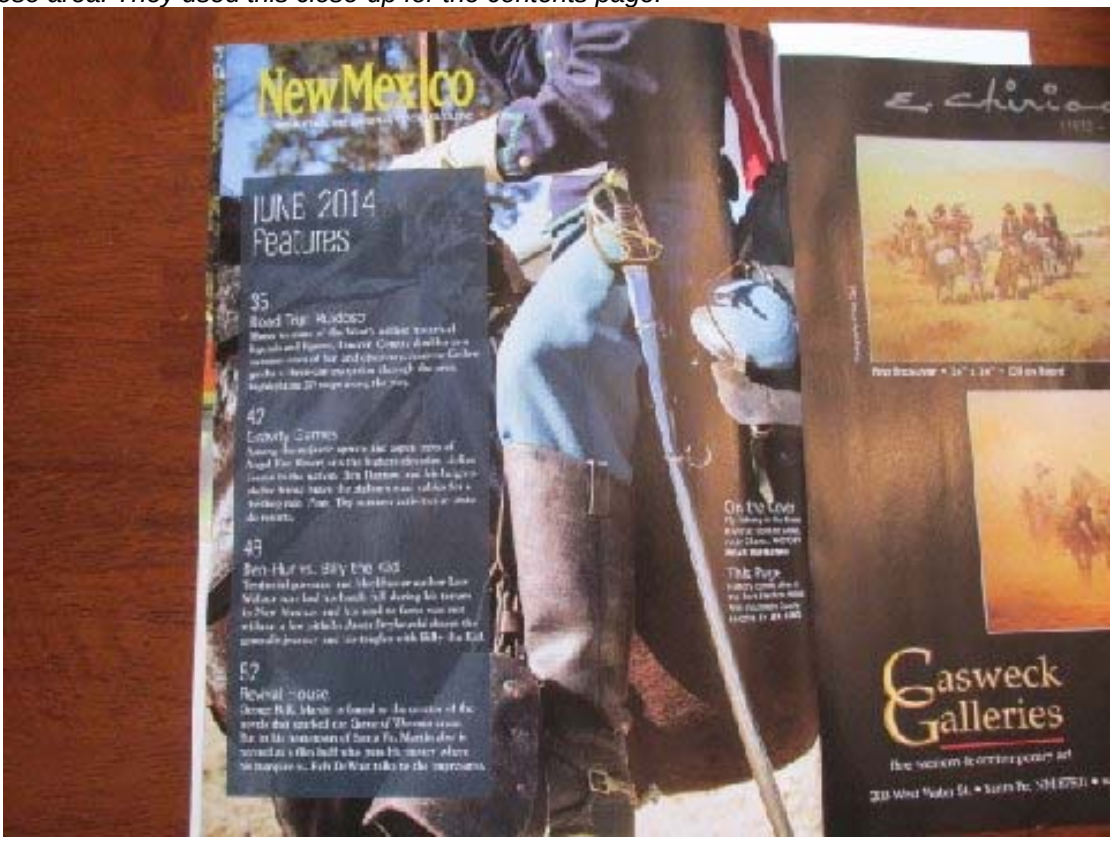
2014-05-20 – ***Belle And The Fort***

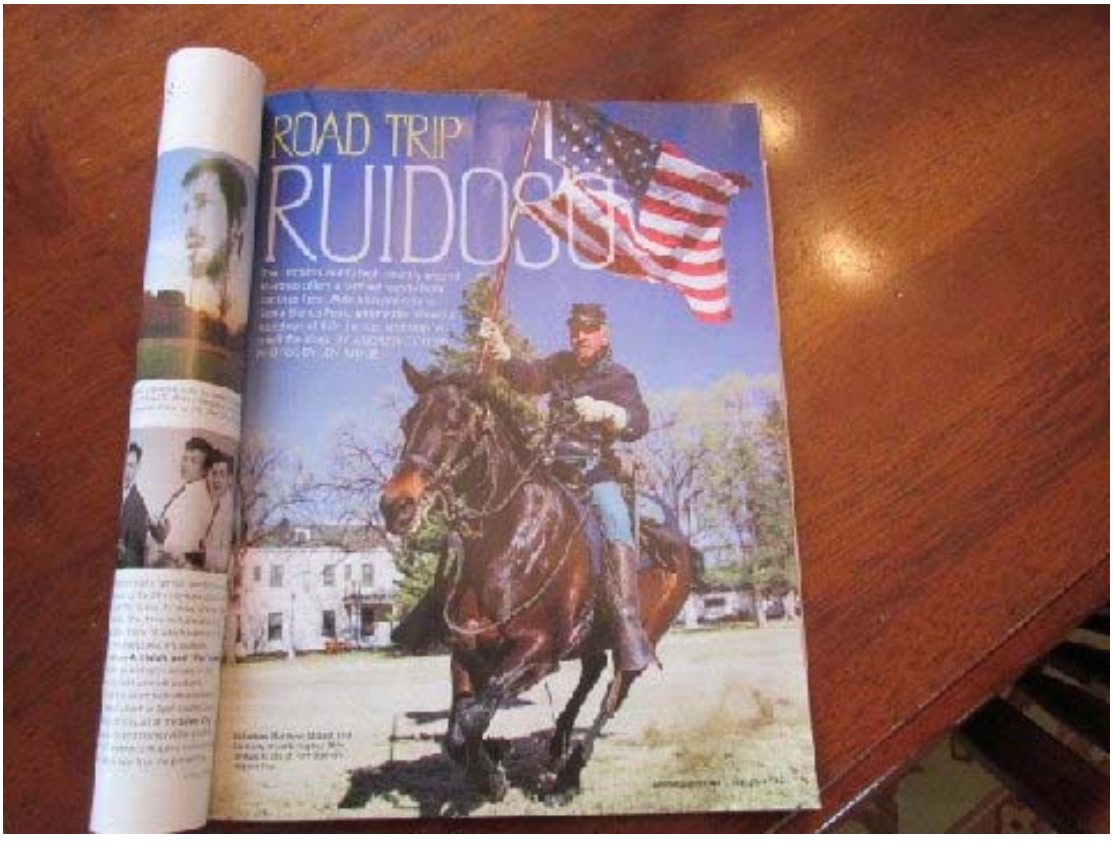
Belle has been very busy promoting Fort Stanton.

She cooperated with yet another film crew on Saturday. At one point we were asked to JUMP the Rio Bonito, and she obliged, with me hanging on for dear life! (Wish I had a photo of that!)

We were wired for sound after a saber charge. They wanted to "hear the horse running", so we did it again - with radio microphones. This sort of filming is very repetitious; Belle seems to enjoy it. But when she saw the cameras being put away at the end of the day, she watched, and without any direction, went right back to the trailer. She knew her work was finished!

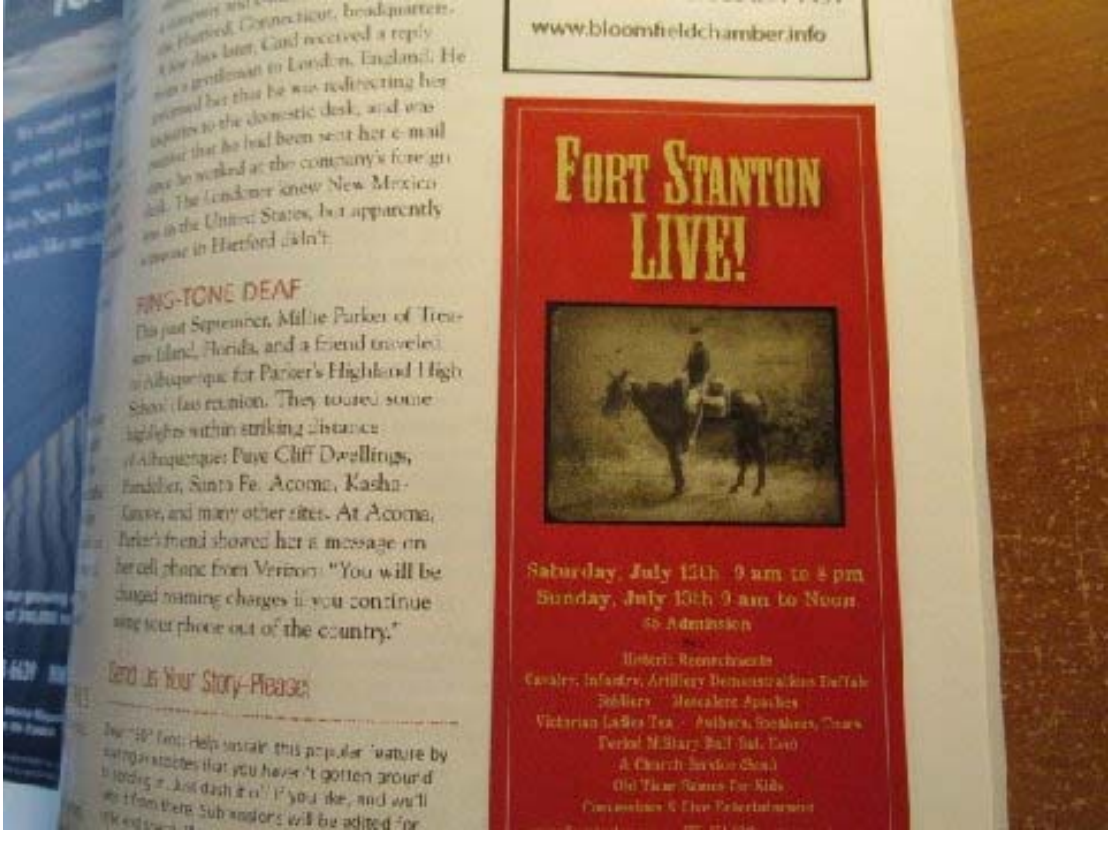
She also has a featured spot in the June Issue of New Mexico Magazine - in an article about the Ruidoso area. They used this close-up for the contents page.



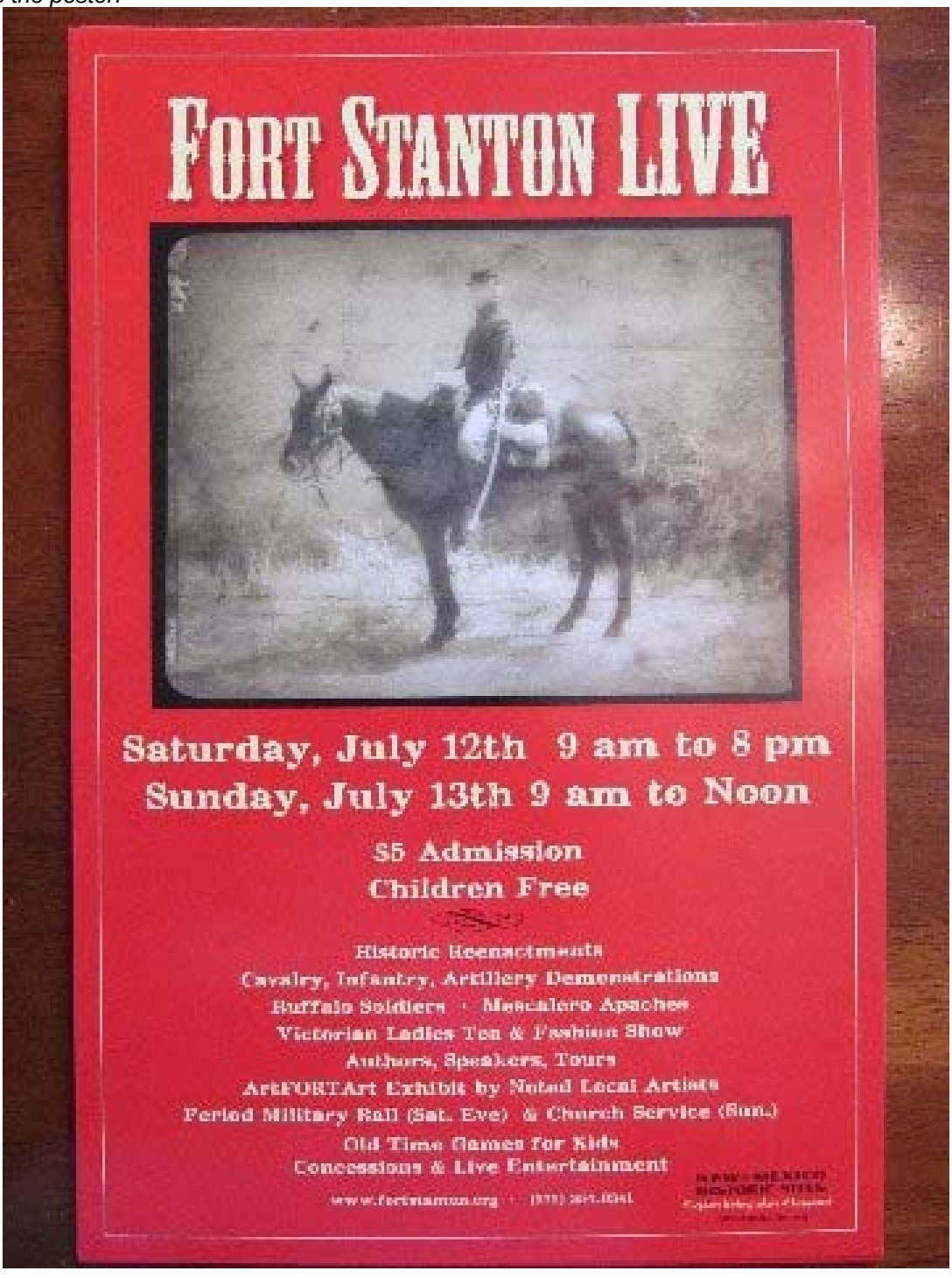


Spanky and Lulu are included in the story, too.

In the same issue, Belle sports her "historic" best – in an ad for the living history event, "Fort Stanton LIVE!" in July. Most people figure the photo is an authentic antique.



Here's the poster.



I think Belle somehow understands that doing this stuff is special - and shows great patience with it.

MM

2014-05-23 – ***Lulu Goes To Town***

We had business in Santa Fe, and Lulu thought it would be a fun get-away.

She seemed to like Santa Fe right off. "Wow! Look at all these friends I haven't met yet! Glad I had a bath this morning."

She especially liked drinks at the Inn of the Anasazi; they bake their own dog biscuits from scratch . . .

. . . and they served her purified water in a special bowl. "Don't say anything, but I think our well water tastes better . . ."

She did some boutique shopping. "Very nice, but no thank you; I am looking for something a little dressier . . ."

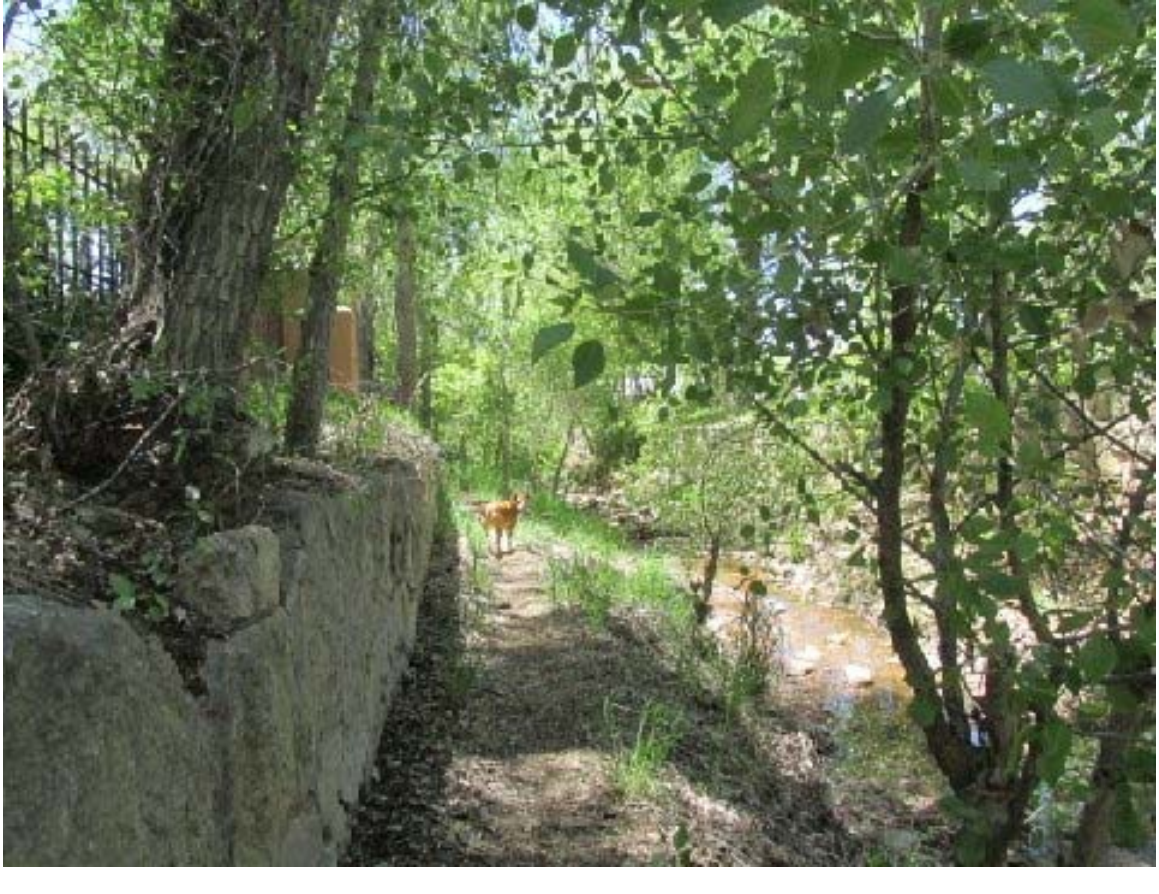
The weather was fine, so we had dinner Al Fresco.

We wait for our table to be set. "You mean all these people are eating good stuff? May I see a menu, please?"

She settled in, and never moved - watching the waiters. "This is so cool. We just sit here, and they bring us good stuff to eat! It's amazing! Oh, look at that dessert over there . . ."

After dinner, she took a stroll to the old cathedral.

Next day, a walk along the quiet little river that runs through town.



"This reminds me of home. I miss my horses."

". . . but I really like this . . ."

"I'm REALLY liking this!"

Tired girl. "Whew! I had a ball . . . but it will be nice to get home and see my friends!"

MM

2014-05-24 – ***Hail and Elk***

It was a beautiful day at the Fort . . .

. . . but dark skies brooded over the ranch, a few miles away (between the ridges of the mountain).

We were on our way home when it hit - lots of rain and HAIL in the village of Capitan!

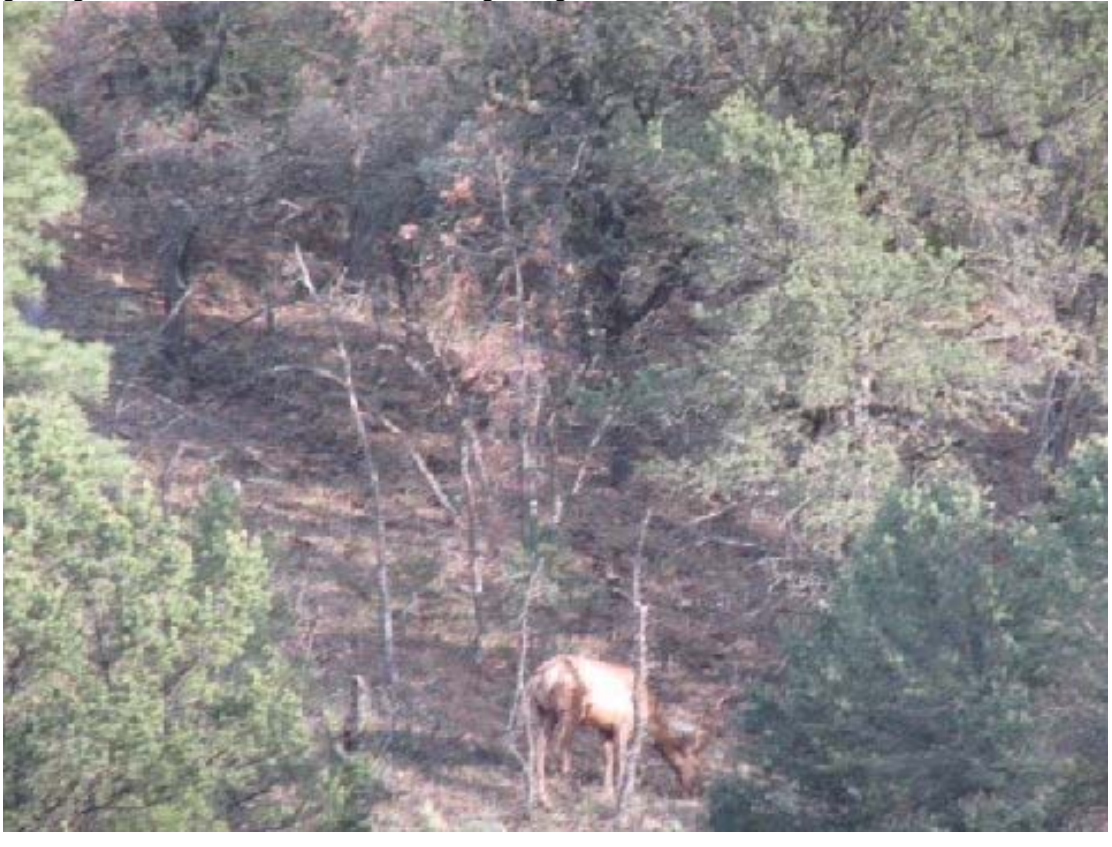
Pretty big stuff! We had a nice rain at the ranch.

When I refer to elk as the "phantoms of the forest", this is what I mean. See it?

Here is a young bull elk. His antlers are just developing; looks like he will have an impressive rack in a couple of months.

We have seen this one before - and he has gotten somewhat used to us. "Oh. It's just you again".

Recognizing us, he relaxes and returns to his grazing.



Back home, the deer were waiting for their corn.

The twins.

Mom still keeps an eye on them (and on me). "How about another apple?"

Just a day in New Mexico!
MM

2014-05-25 – ***Memorial Day***

What is it like to lose a limb - or a life - for one's country? Since most of us will thankfully never know, how can we fully appreciate the sacrifice of those who do? Our world would undoubtedly be a sadder place, and nearly unlivable by our standards, without the grave contributions of so many. Not all of them are human. (If you don't know the story of Sgt. Reckless, you should: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIo3ZfA9da0)

The most recent military battle death I am aware of is Command Sgt. Major Martin R. Barreras, 49, of Tucson, AZ, who died May 13th from wounds suffered in Harat Province, Afghanistan when enemy forces attacked his unit with small arms fire.

No matter how we feel about war, men and women are risking their lives to defend our freedom right now. It seems little enough to take part of a day, once a year, and give thanks to those who have done so much for us. Once again, Belle was asked to represent the fort during the Memorial Service at Fort Stanton Cemetery. This year the Governor was present, to give a speech about her plan to open or expand four new veteran's cemeteries in the state. Fort Stanton's will be one of them.

Maybe because of the Governor's participation, there were more flags this year - lots more.

Snapping in the wind, they created a frightening gauntlet for Belle to negotiate. Some of the flags actually slapped us as we passed. But Belle stayed focused and behaved beautifully.

If you look closely at her ears, you can see that she is listening to my whispered reassurances. You bet I was proud of her.

Governor Susana Martinez. Belle stood like this for nearly 90 minutes, as various people spoke about the sacrifices of others.

After the speeches, we rode a tribute gallop. We were honored to do so.

When the crowds had gone, we had a moment for our own reflection, and gave thanks.

Wishing you a meaningful Memorial Day.
MM

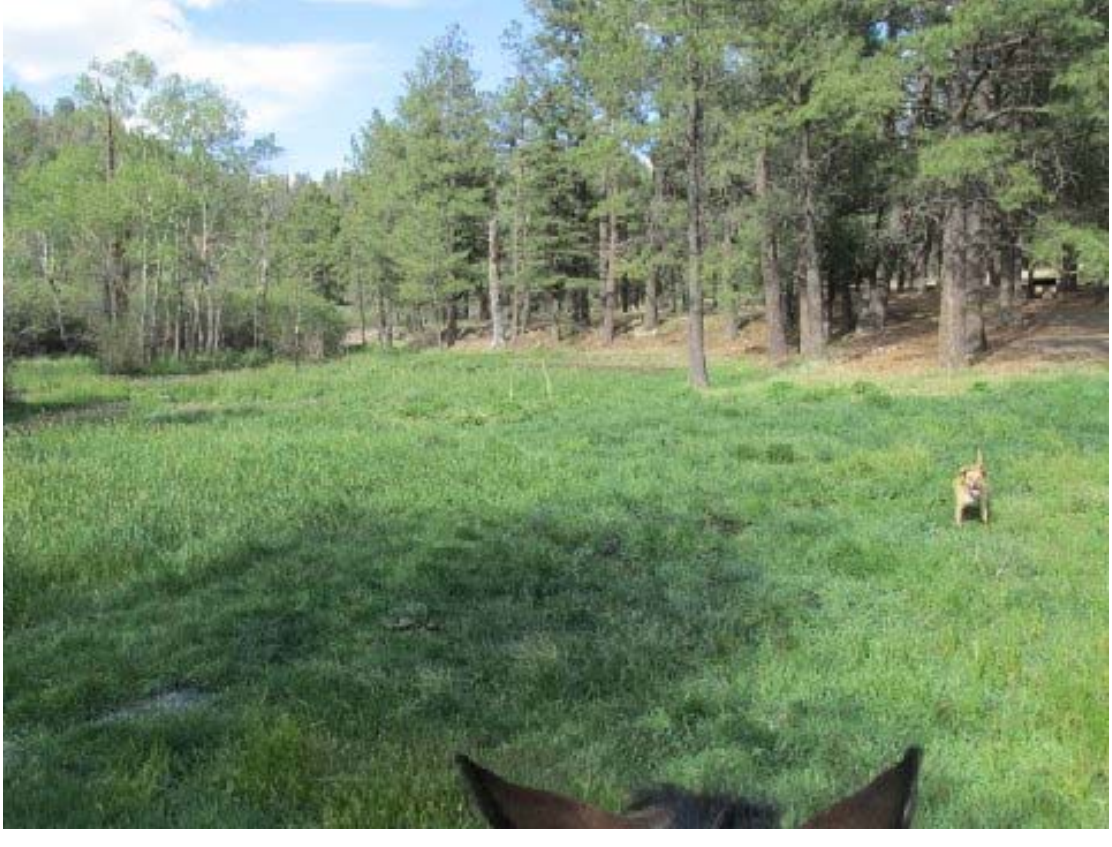
[Thanks to David Tremblay, Gerald Garrett, and Tony Davis for these photos]

2014-05-28 – ***Gett'in Green***

The greening up of this area sometimes waits until our monsoon season (July & August); but this year we have had enough spring rains to begin the process a little early. The horses are happy about that!

It's difficult to spot Lulu in the tall grass!

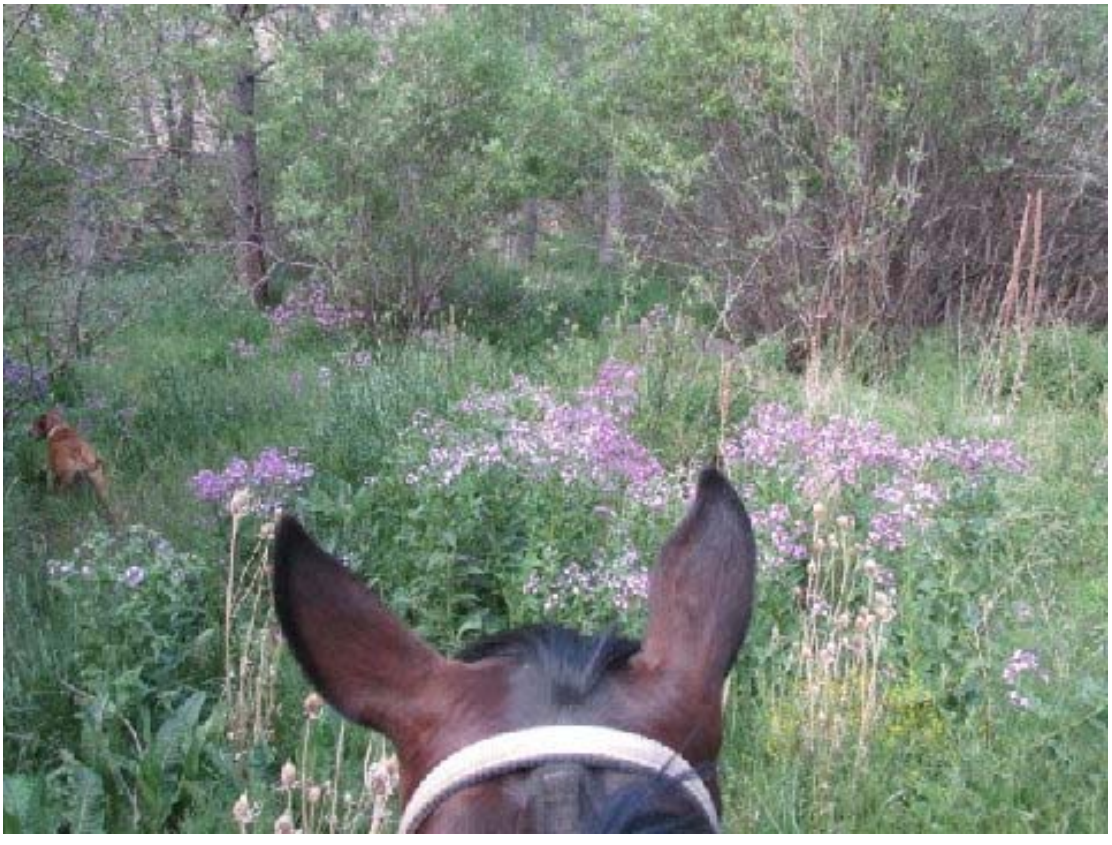
Lulu keeps an eye on us.



It's a giant salad bar for horses!

Little springs and seeps continue to run.

. . . and new wild flowers keep appearing. I never understand why their brilliant color is lost in my photos!



Most wild irises are rather plain - I have never seen any like these before. I'm surprised that the deer and elk have left them alone.

Heading home.

Contented horses, waiting to load into the trailer. "(Burp) I shouldn't have had that last iris . . ."

MM

2014-06-03 – ***New Neighbors***

More elk have moved in recently - they live in the forest behind the house. Like some neighbors, they are curious about what is going on "next door" . . . and seem to enjoy watching me wash my vehicles outside the garage! The horses don't mind them at all.

They usually appear in the west pasture, at dusk. Sometimes there are more of them - but it has been too dark for me to photograph the bigger group.

These two seem especially close (siblings?)

They are close to the house. They know I am there washing my truck, but go on with their business as usual.

Occasionally I catch them drinking from the stock tank by the house. Sorry about the low light photos!

It's cool to see them this close!

MM

2014-06-04 – ***June Is Bust'in Out All Over!***

We are having a heat wave this week (90 degrees really gets people whining around here), but we enjoyed a ride along a cooling stream.

The old apple orchard is looking good this year - but no apples!

I chose Belle for this ride - I thought it would be a short one, but they wanted to keep going, and going . . . can't blame them!

Lulu cools her feet in the stream.

Spanky finds some cool mud and fresh watercress.

This is our "normal" wild iris.

Outrider Lulu!

A near wreck! Thunder was tailgating Spanky during a gallop, who put on the brakes . . . (maybe trying to teach him a lesson?)

Yeah, I really like this shot of Thunder and the aspen trees . . .

Whatever it was, they all wanted to taste it!

This stuff looked better to me . . .

An attempt at being "arty".

Homeward bound.

MM

2014-06-05 – ***Western Romance***

We were on our way back from San Acacia (shoes for Thunder - thanks, Dacodah!). As we passed isolated Bingham, New Mexico (pop. about 5), we decided to take a detour for a late afternoon ride. Something about it reminded me of the lyrics to a song I'd heard a long time ago . . .

. . ."nestled in the western hills" . . .

. . . cactus lovelier than orchids" . . . (But I still hate cholla!)

. . . "evening breezes softly murmur" . . .

. . . "harmony is everywhere" . . .

It was that kind of ride. The red rock arroyo reminded us of Sedona. It was very quiet.

There was a lot of deep grass for grazing. This is cattle country, and I wondered where they were (never did see any).

That's Spanky, disappearing into the grass.

Suddenly, it was "Out of Africa". I sort of expected to see a rhino . . .

. . . but it was only Lulu!

She leads us home.

. . . "when the setting sun, says the long day is done, harmony is everywhere" . . .

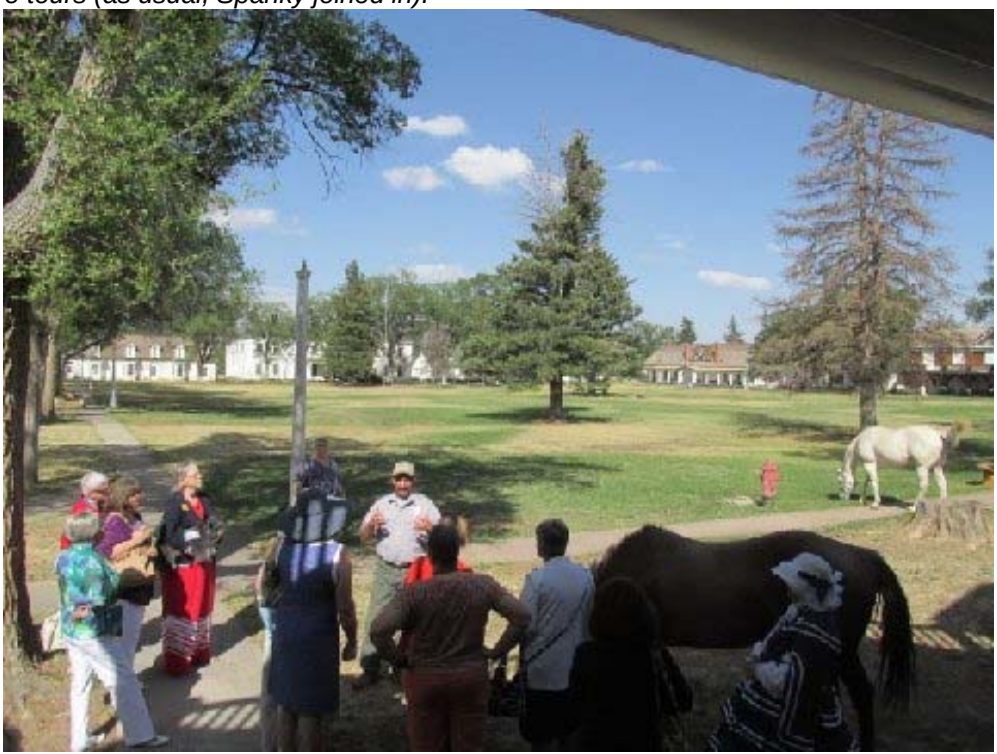
MM

2014-06-09 – ***D.A.R.***

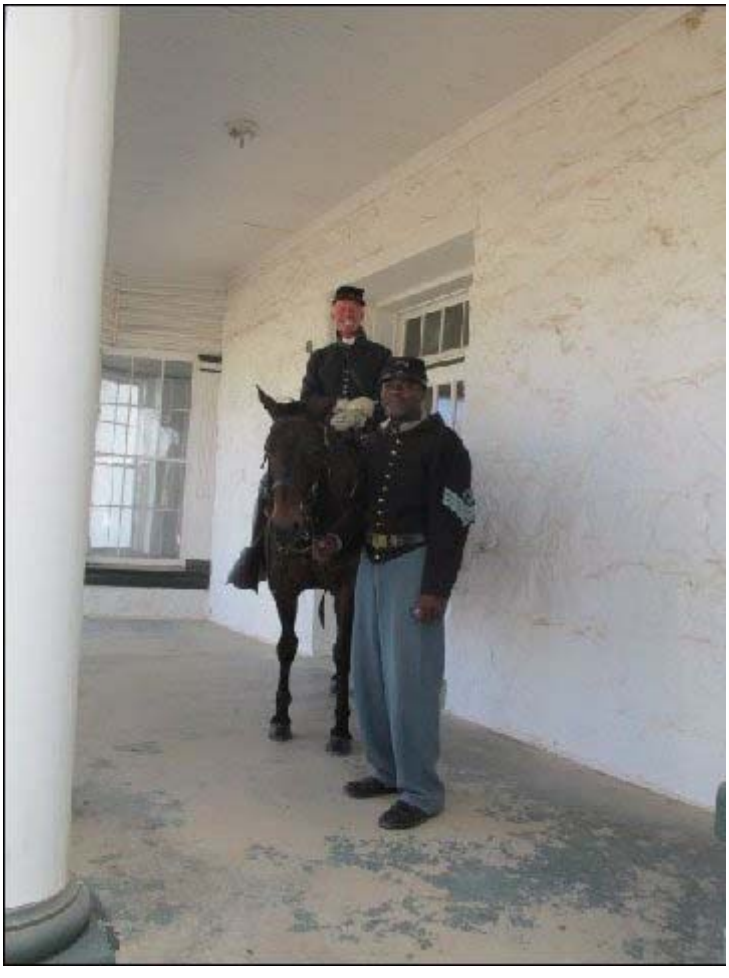
It seems to me that anything to do with the American Revolution happened a long way from New Mexico (. . . although Santa Fe is the nation's oldest capital city, we didn't even become a U.S. Territory until 1850). Nevertheless, the Daughters of the American Revolution organization is very active here. The state chapter donated a piece of artwork to the Fort Museum, and Belle and I were requested to be present.

It was a beautiful day for the event. While Belle and I worked, Thunder and Spanky enjoyed the quickly greening-up parade ground.

There were tours (as usual, Spanky joined in).



This gentleman commissioned the original painting - a depiction of the African-American "Buffalo Soldiers" at Fort Stanton.



As always, Lulu had a wonderful time - greeting guests and generally acting as Fort hostess. But I think the best part for her, was a quiet walk along the river . . .

MM

2014-06-09 – ***New Arrivals***

Lots of elk around lately (Lulu still isn't sure just what those big things are!)

I saw something moving along the driveway . . .

. . . in the shadows.

Then, as the sun set, some more arrived.

If you look closely, you will see two baby elk - so young, they still have their "fawn" spots.

In another pasture, these two graze near some purple verbena.

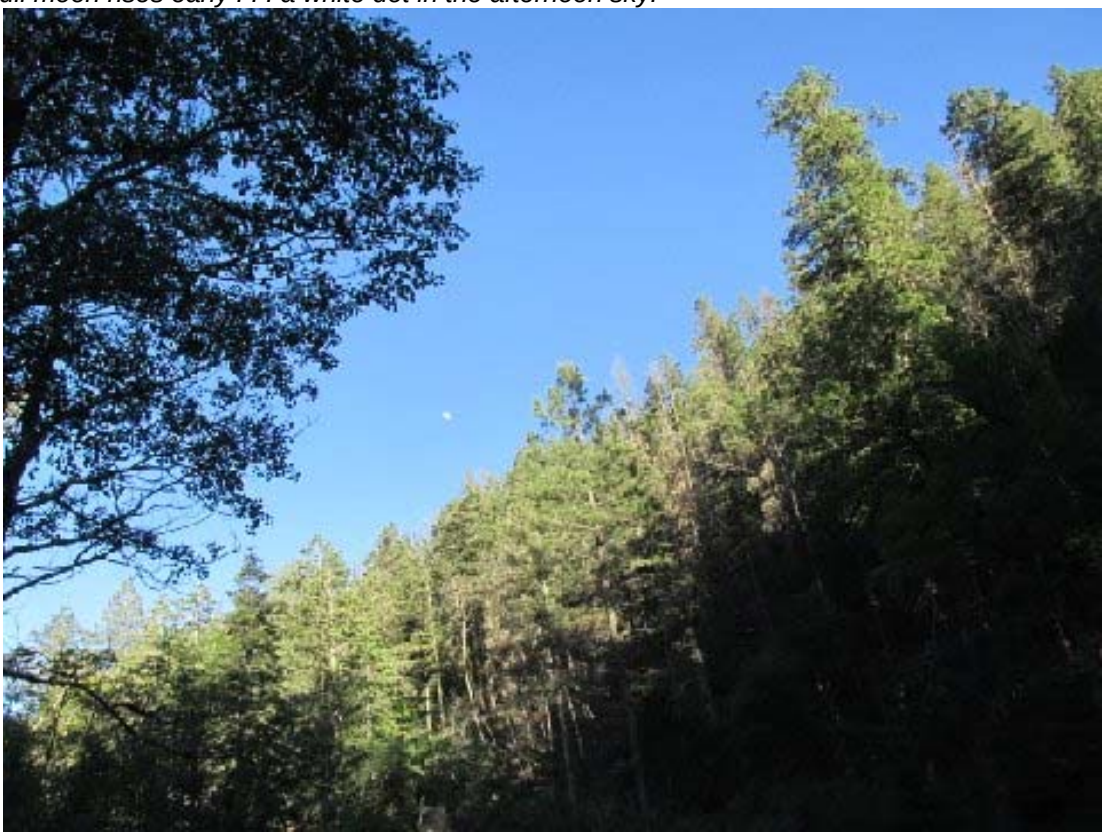
From this angle, they look a lot like horses.

MM

2014-06-12 – ***Longer Days***

The longer days mean I can get more chores done, and still have time for a late afternoon ride.

The full moon rises early . . . a white dot in the afternoon sky.



This is a peaceful time in Bonito Canyon.

A cow and her calf have good grazing at the lake.

Lucky cows!

At dusk on the trail, the horses are in a mellow mood.

A quiet stream murmurs below.

Lulu leads the way . . .

. . . and stops for drink.

. . . as Belle enjoys a clover salad. "Ummm . . . nice and fresh".

This was a challenge.

Forest ferns have started to come up.

Headed home at dusk.

The Forest Service has made some "improvements" at the Argentina horse campground. At least they think so; I'm not so sure. They put in new gravel walkways, cemented the pens, and added rubber mats. Nice . . . but some visitors don't pick up their manure. And horses don't like splattering urine on a surface like this (mine try not to pee in the trailer). My horses lie down (off and on) to sleep at night. Doubt that they will on this. Seems like an odd effort to me . . . we'll see. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it".

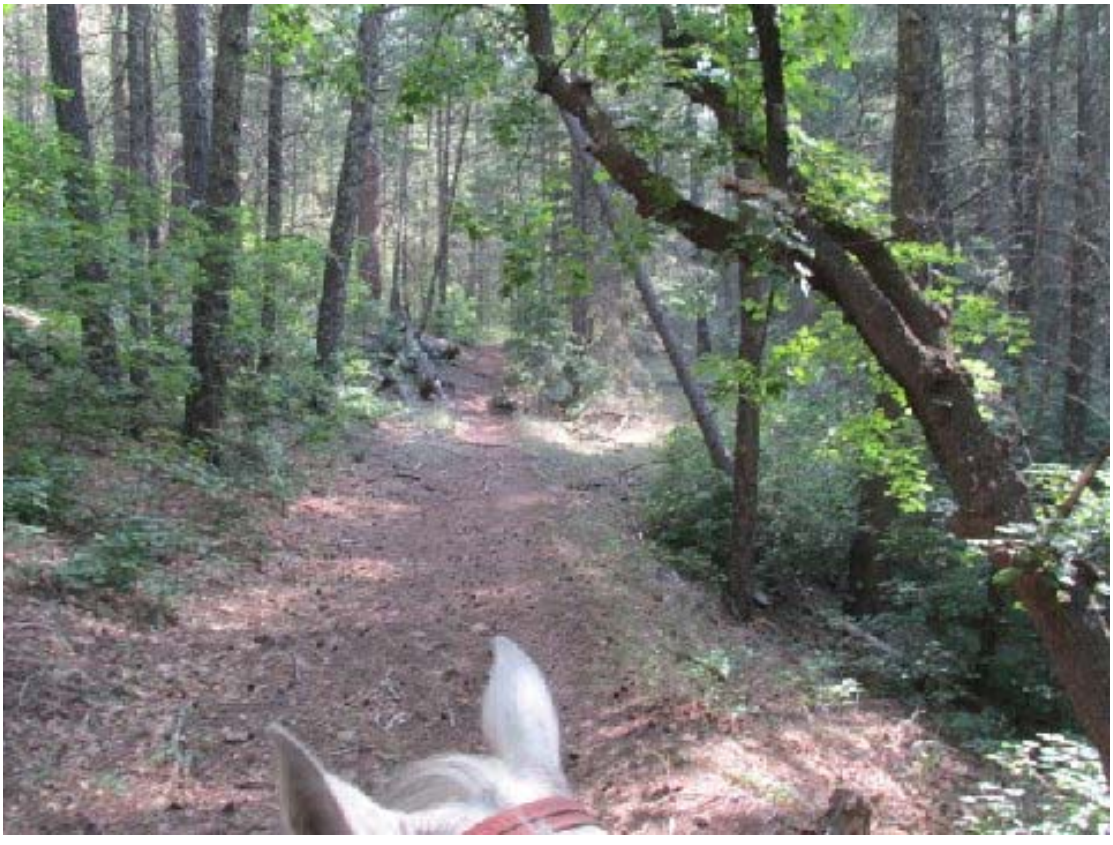
MM

2014-06-14 – ***Elk Watch***

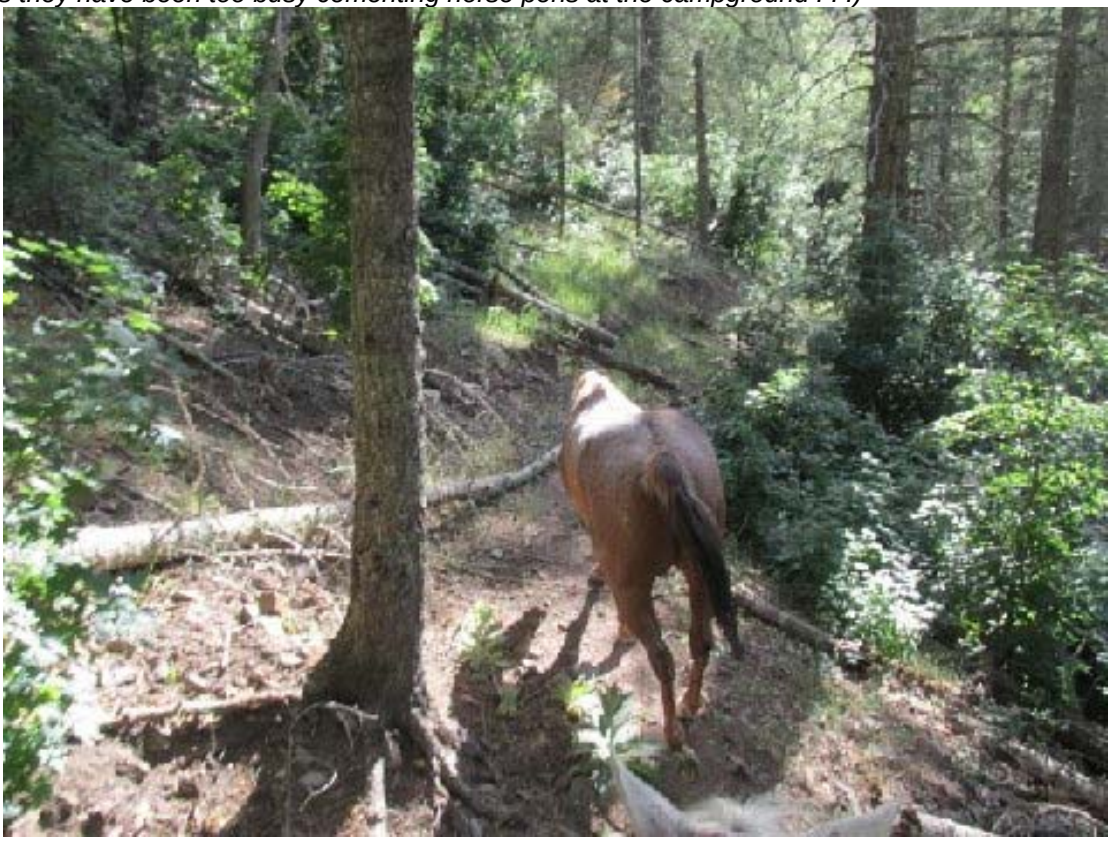
Elk are large game. They need a lot of forage every day, and they know that they make big targets for human hunters (especially with that obvious, light-colored circle on their rumps). On more than one occasion, I thought Spanky had somehow gotten off the ranch . . . then I realized it was an elk on the adjoining land. They do look similar (which is why Spanky wears his colorful ribbons during hunting season). So, elk have learned to keep on the move. They are known as the "phantoms of the forest".

We thought we would try nearby Pennsylvania Canyon Trail for a late afternoon ride. This is the road to the trail head. Nice to see the big trees.

The trail was fine for a while.



Then we discovered that the Forest Service hasn't yet cleared the downed trees from last winter (I guess they have been too busy cementing horse pens at the campground . . .)



It kept getting worse. My horses are willing, but this was a lot of work.

Finally, we gave up and turned around (from a previous ride, I remembered even more dead fall further along). The horses were clearly disappointed. They were pouting. So we tried a little side trail I we had never explore, It turned out to be wonderful.

All of a sudden, I had a funny feeling, like we were being watched. The horses seemed to notice it, too. Sure enough . . . on the hillside above us . . .

Two bull elk, their developing antlers in "velvet" were following along with us.

When we stopped, so did they. When we went on, they came, too.

We got a little closer to them - they didn't seem to mind. Had they seen us at the ranch? Did they recognize the horses?

They were certainly casual about our presence. It was getting dark (sorry about the blurry photos), so finally we all moseyed on our way.

I watched the elk go over a ridge, and disappear into the sunset. But I will never forget that special encounter. Thanks for letting me share it with you.

MM

2014-06-16 – ***Starlight Ride***

This time of year, evening rides at San Lorenzo can be spectacular. Warm, balmy air . . . the sun's painterly glow on the horizon . . . and endless stars emerging in the twilight sky.

Our group saddles up at dusk.

The view from a hill above.

Dacodah leads along a high ridge.

Too bad my camera doesn't capture images by starlight . . . but with a flash we can see Spanky and Belle begging for treats!

Along silent, invisible trails, we all followed Thunder back to the trailer . . . his white silhouette beckoning like an apparition in the vast darkness of a New Mexico night. MM

Although Dacodah's remarkable corrective shoeing expertise (along with special medications) has kept Spanky moving long past the predictions of veterinarian specialists who have concurred that his is the worst case of ring bone disease they have ever seen in a *living* horse, he still has a disability, but everyone agrees that regular exercise is not harmful to him; in fact, it is essential to keeping him as healthy as possible.

Dacodah's Sunday "boarders' rides" are very popular. Even the wranglers want to join in during their off day. These rides are fast, tough, technical, and only for experienced riders and conditioned horses. When we were invited to come along, I explained that we would be happy to join them, but that we would go only as far as Spanky or Lulu seemed comfortable, at which time we would leave the others and return to the trailer on our own.

It was a warm day - hovering around 90 degrees in the San Lorenzo Canyon as we started out.

This is harsh country, with unforgiving obstacles. I was keeping my eye on Spanky.

It was a challenging ride for Lulu, too. Here she has a drink of water out of my cupped hand.

We had already gone much further than I had anticipated - Spanky and Lulu were holding up fine - when we hit an open stretch of arroyo sand, and everyone took off at a full gallop. I figured this might be where we drop off.

. . . but Spanky kicked it into high gear - with all four feet off the ground as he makes a turn!

He even passed Thunder!

I think it was a proud moment for Spanky.

We climbed to the top of another high ridge.

Then Spanky led us down.

Thunder and Spanky seem to be doing a head count. "Yup, they're all here". We all finished the ride together.

When we got back home to the ranch that evening, "our" mascot elk was waiting . . .

. . . and some deer, too.

No one can predict how long Spanky will be able to handle rides like this one; but it is clear that he wants to enjoy them for as long as he can.

MM

2014-06-21 – ***Rain!***

Boy, did we get some rain yesterday - about 3 inches in a couple of hours!

Just a few clouds to start . . .

. . . then a few more.

Then, the deluge!

2014-06-21 – ***Rain!***

No damage, and lots of much-needed water! Today is bright and fresh.

That's New Mexico!
MM

2014-06-24 – ***A Summer Ride***

After wearing a heavy wool military uniform while giving Fort tours in the summer sun, I changed into something cooler for an impromptu ride off the parade ground.

. . . but first, Thunder enjoys a drink from an impromptu drinking fountain (leaking hose . . .)

Smart horse!

We head for the water - where Thunder has another cool drink.

Summer skies in New Mexico.

Good grazing along the way. This is one of those rides that starts out to be "just for a minute", and goes on and on.

Lulu waits for Spanky to take a drink.

Wild roses along the way.

Spanky cools off.

Lulu, too!

A galloping dash home.

It was a nice day for a ride - thanks for coming along!

MM

2014-06-24 – ***Elk Caravan***

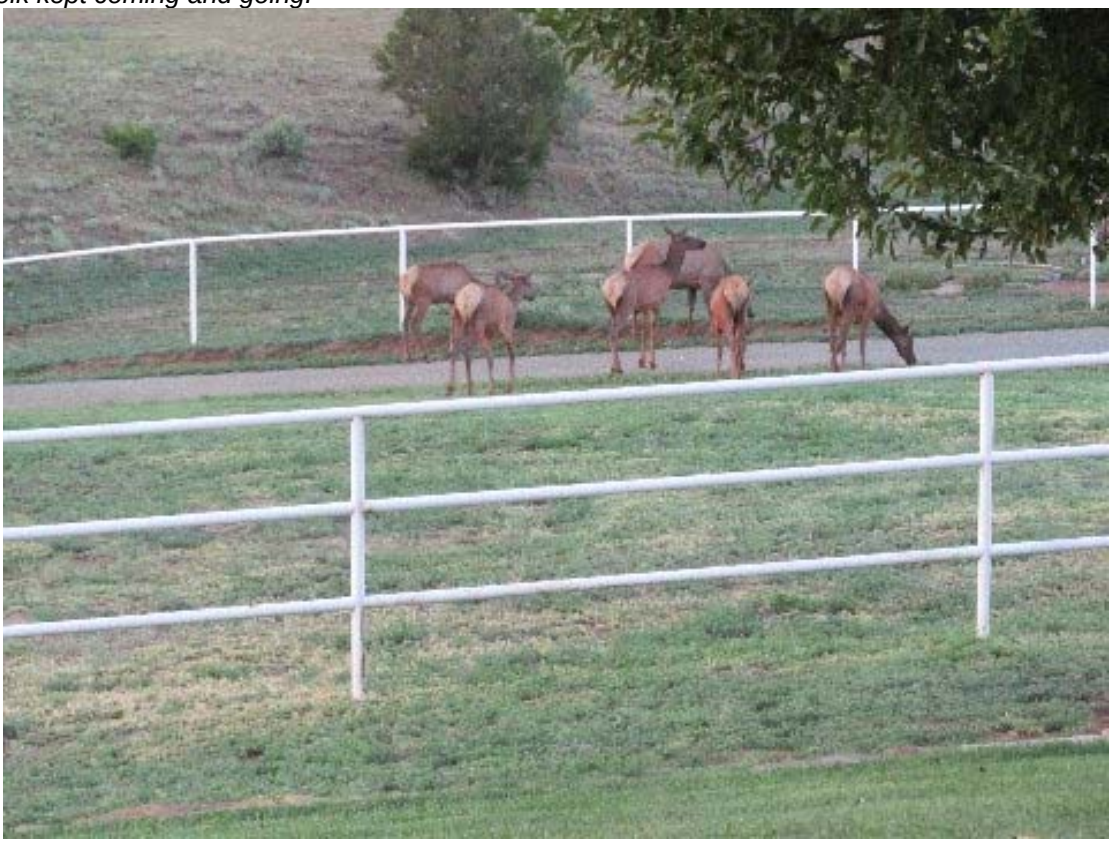
Last evening, quite a few elk watched me wash the truck and trailer in front of the garage. They seem curious about me and whatever I am doing. They are not even concerned about the mower noise when I cut the grass.

This morning (just at dawn), I heard a loud commotion outside. A caravan of about 50 elk was passing through the ranch. It reminded me of those old Cecil B. DeMille biblical epics of a tribe crossing the desert - young ones playing (the calves make a distinctive "whining" sound), their mothers gossiping . . . it was a BIG herd. They were very talkative.

By the time I figured out what was going on, and got my camera, most of them had moved on, but a smaller group stayed right in front of the house. They seemed curious of the deer.

The deer didn't seem too concerned about their distant cousins dropping by.

The elk kept coming and going.



Nacho wasn't too sure about this.

"I know we are kinda family, but still I wish they had called first . . .

"I would have worn something nicer".

All shots were taken from inside the house; the deer are used to me, but I didn't want to spook the elk.

Dawn breaks.

I finally ventured out and caught the last stragglers of the big caravan moving into the forest as the sunlight came over the horizon.

Not a bad way to start the day! MM

2014-06-24 – ***Magic Time***

First the elk at dawn . . . then I just went out to feed the horses their dinner at sunset, and . . .

Thunder tipped me off, "This place is getting pretty crowded at mealtimes." What are those animals behind him? Hmmm?

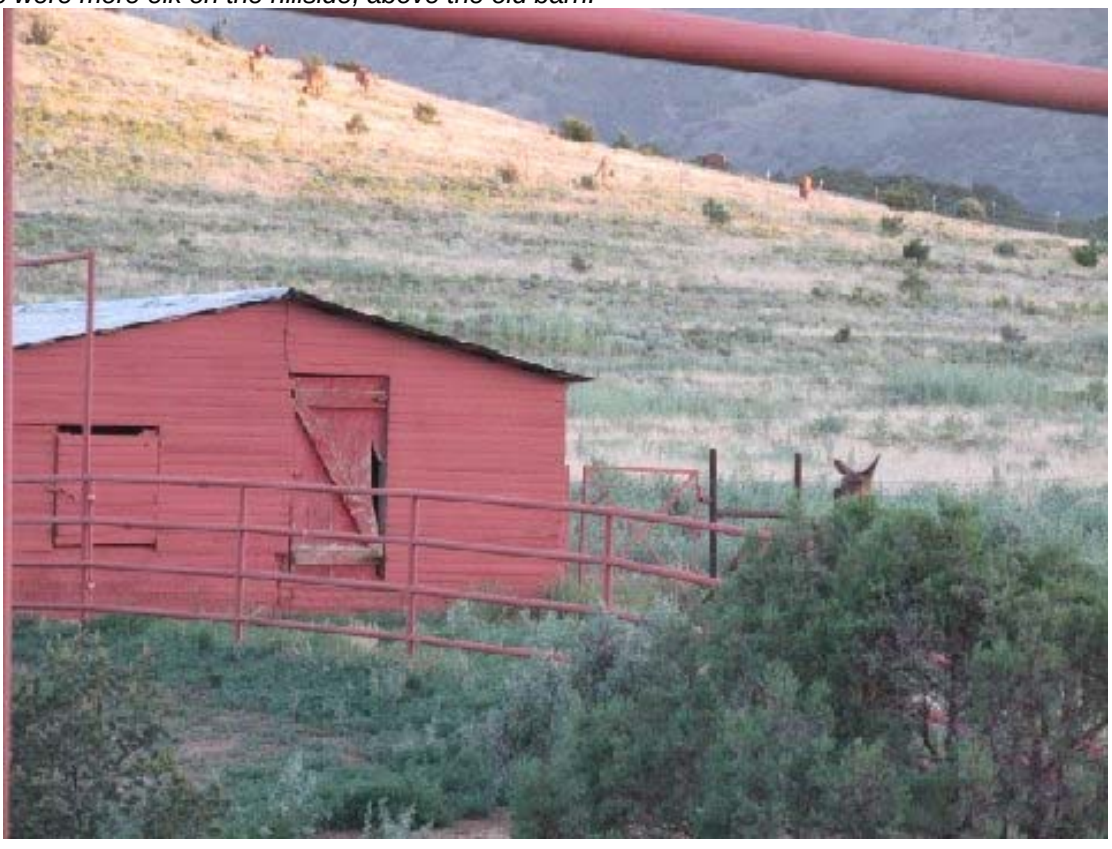
Oh, my gosh! He was right - Spanky and Belle had guests!

What's more, they knew I was there, too. Didn't seem to bother them.

Remember my wondering if the elk recognized my horses on our ride up Nogal Canyon? Well, I guess I got an answer.

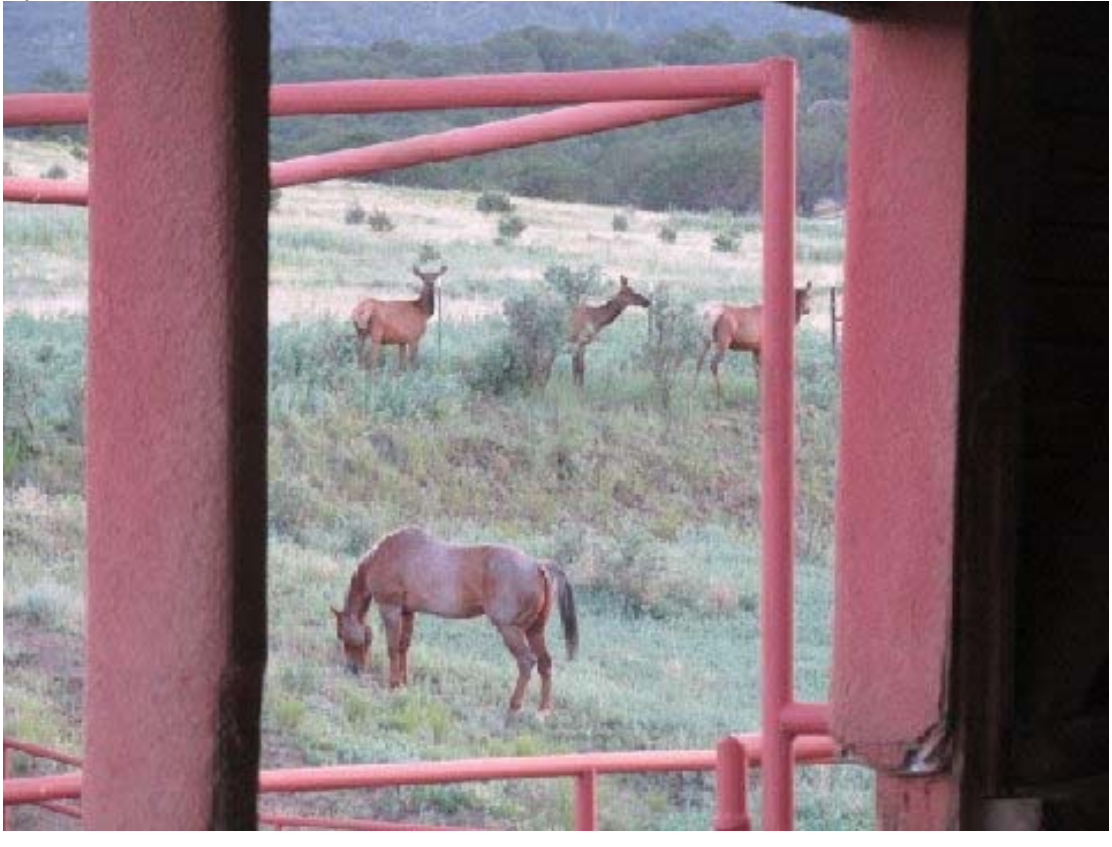
This young bull elk is just developing his antlers - there will be lots more growth this season.

There were more elk on the hillside, above the old barn.

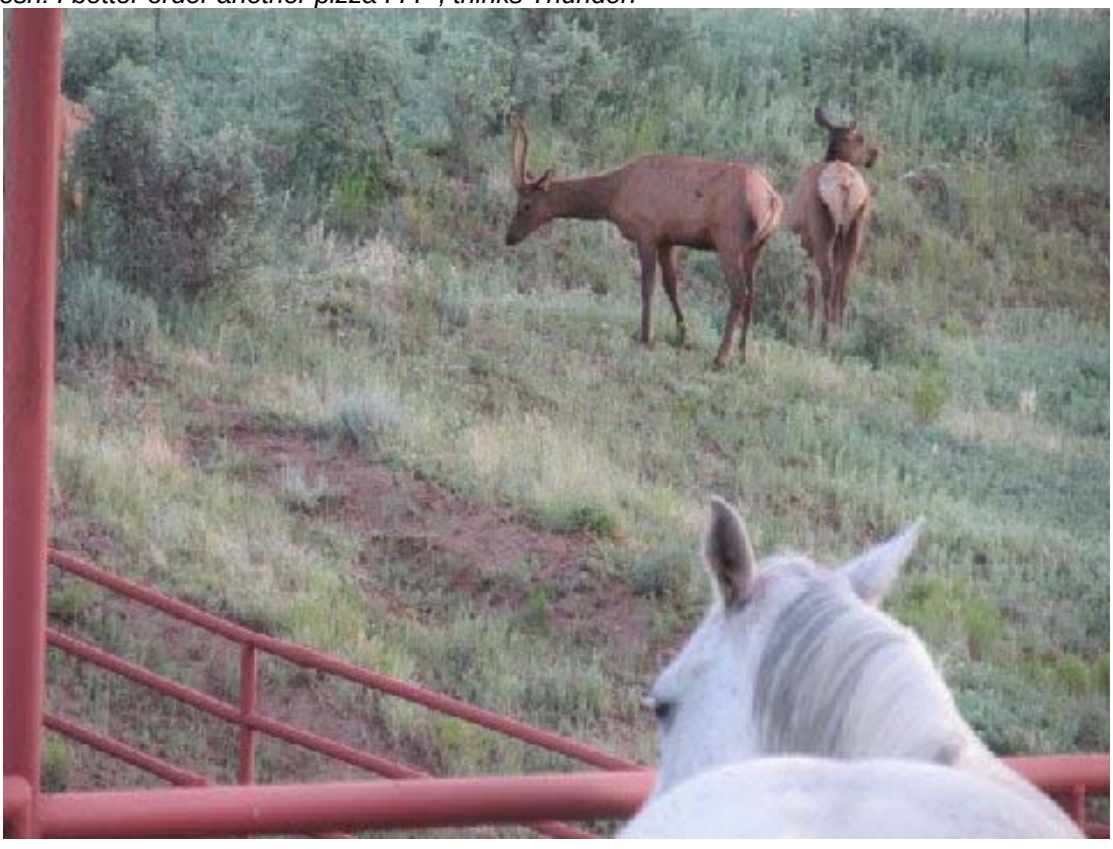


They all kept coming closer.

Right up to the barn.



"Sheesh! I better order another pizza . . . ", thinks Thunder.



I think it is magic - and I am so glad to share with you. Sorry about the back-to-back emails, but I just couldn't wait!

MM

2014-06-26 – ***Crummy Photos – Great Moment***

It was well into dusk when the horses and I decided to take a quick, late ride in the forest behind the house. The sun had already set. I didn't even realize I had taken the camera along, just from habit. When we got to the old Forest Service cabin, Lulu ran ahead. I saw a flash through the trees and could tell she had spooked a small herd of about 10 elk that had been grazing in a meadow. The elk ran into the forest, and Lulu came back to stand next to Belle and Me. We were about to ride on, when I noticed something.

A lone young cow elk had come back from the retreating herd, and was walking toward us.

She kept coming closer. I was impressed that Lulu stayed quietly by my side. Thunder and Spanky started to graze. Belle watched the elk.

My camera makes things appear further away than they are. This cow is maybe 20 ft. from us.

She crept closer. Finally, she was only about 10 ft. away. She just stood there (I took more photos, but the low light made them very, very blurry).She really looked right at us; not at all a "phantom of the forest".

She just stood there like that, until we rode away. We did our usual route, and when we came back through (it was nearly dark - much too little light for photos), she was in the same area and approached us again. I thought she might follow us home (wouldn't that be cool!) . . . but she just watched us ride up the trail . . .

A special encounter I wanted to share with you!

MM

2014-07-02 – ***Summer Sunset Rides***

Fall rides on crisp mornings under the turning leaves; winter rides through a snowy wonderland; spring brings rides along flowing mountain streams; but for summer, it is hard to beat sunset rides in the Rio Grande Valley; Warm, balmy breezes and cloud-strewn, painterly skies.

For one reason or another (a bent shoe, a lost shoe, new shoes, etc.), we recently spent time at Dacodah's, and joined him and his crew for several sunset rides in San Lorenzo Canyon.

The quiet, early evening is magical there this time of year.

Spanky, Thunder, and Lulu lead the way.

See what I mean about "painterly" skies?

Riding among hoodoos and mysterious arroyos.

Thanks, Dacodah for the shoes, rides, and photos.
MM

End of Volume 5 Part 3 of 3

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