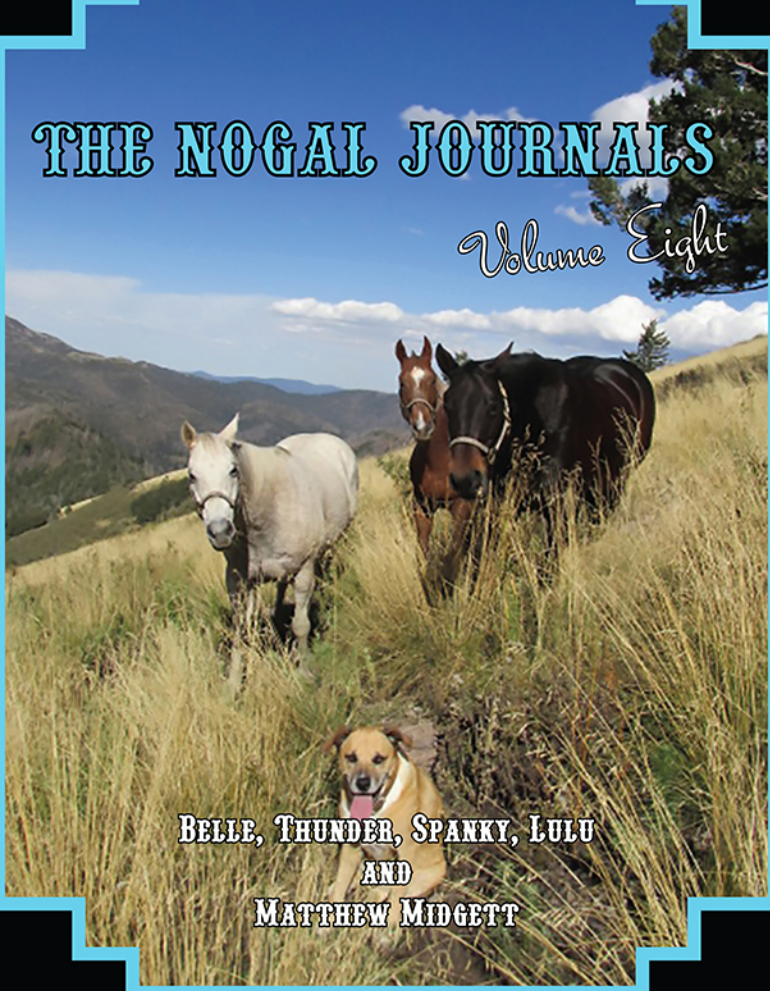
THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Eight



Belle, Thunder, Spanky, Lulu
and
Matthew Midgett

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume VIII

Part 1 of 3

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

Cover Design: Laura Reynolds
Printing: PrintStar San Diego
First Edition February 2016
All photographs (c) Matthew Midgett. All rights reserved.

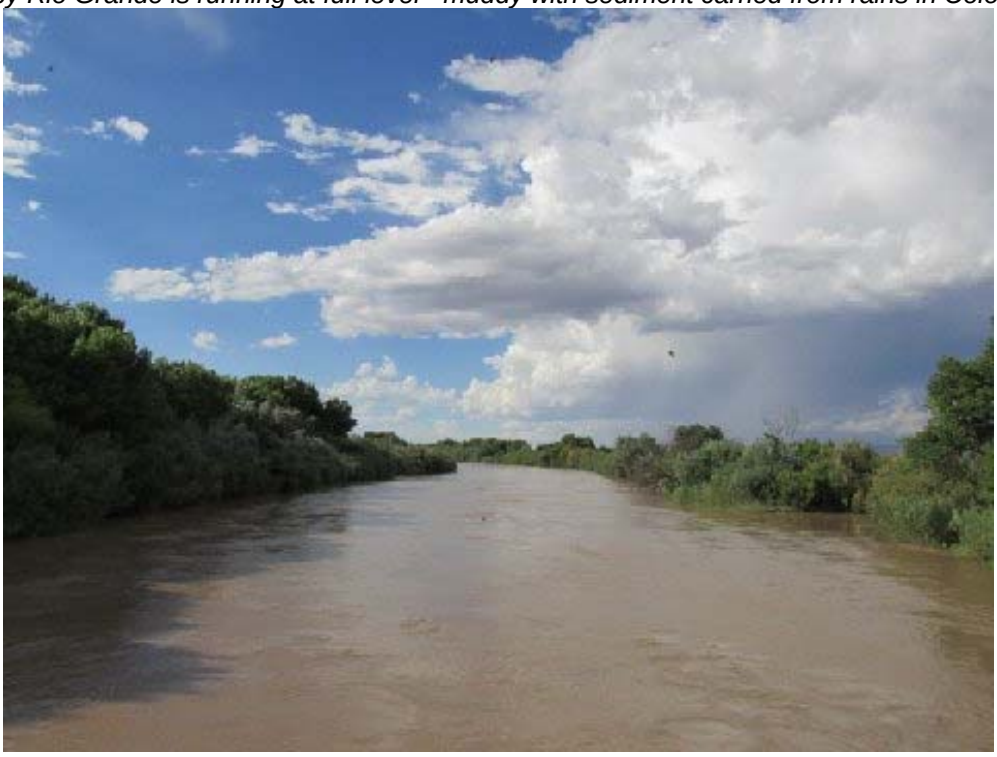
Please use the BOOKMARKS TOOL:

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

2015-06-16 – ***Thunder The Archeologist***

Spanky lost a shoe, so we made a quick trip for a fix with Dacodah (. . . if you consider a 200+ mi. round trip "quick"!) On the way home, we stopped and took what we figured would be a short ride in the familiar area of Carthage - the abandoned historic coal mining town, largely obliterated by the Bureau of Land Management (for some reason, the BLM bulldozed and buried nearly all the historic buildings).

The nearby Rio Grande is running at full level - muddy with sediment carried from rains in Colorado.



Heavy monsoon clouds formed, drifted and drenched the desert all around us. Thunder kept an eye on them.

I think, just to be "one of the gang", Lulu sometimes grazes along with the horses.

We've seen these ruins before. Spanky and Thunder take another close look . . .

. . . but then Thunder spotted something in the distance . . .

. . . and led us there, around and through several arroyos.

Situations like this test their problem-solving abilities; fun to watch them work it out. (Thunder's head is blurred by a raindrop on the lens - from a passing cloud).

Success! Thunder took us right to the ruin. I think he has figured out that such things are of interest.

He seems curious, too.

Several buildings at this site.

Lots of historic debris emerges from sandy graves.

Who drank beer from these blue-glass bottles, a century ago?

The clouds continued to form. Rain really coming down in the distance. Somehow, the horses can sense when a downpour is headed our way.

Distant clouds give the illusion that Spanky is outrunning a Tsunami.

Lulu couldn't reach the water over the edge of this cattle tank, so she figured out another way (note the big rain drops hitting the surface).

Thunder circled us around on our way back, directing us to another set of ruins.

Likely from the region's early 20th-century ranching past.

This structure is nearly gone.

There is debris all around; we are very careful. Belle isn't sure just what that thing on the ground is (neither was I).

Thanks, Thunder for an interesting tour!

And thanks, Dacodah, for the shoe repair! MM

2015-06-19 – ***A High Country Ride***

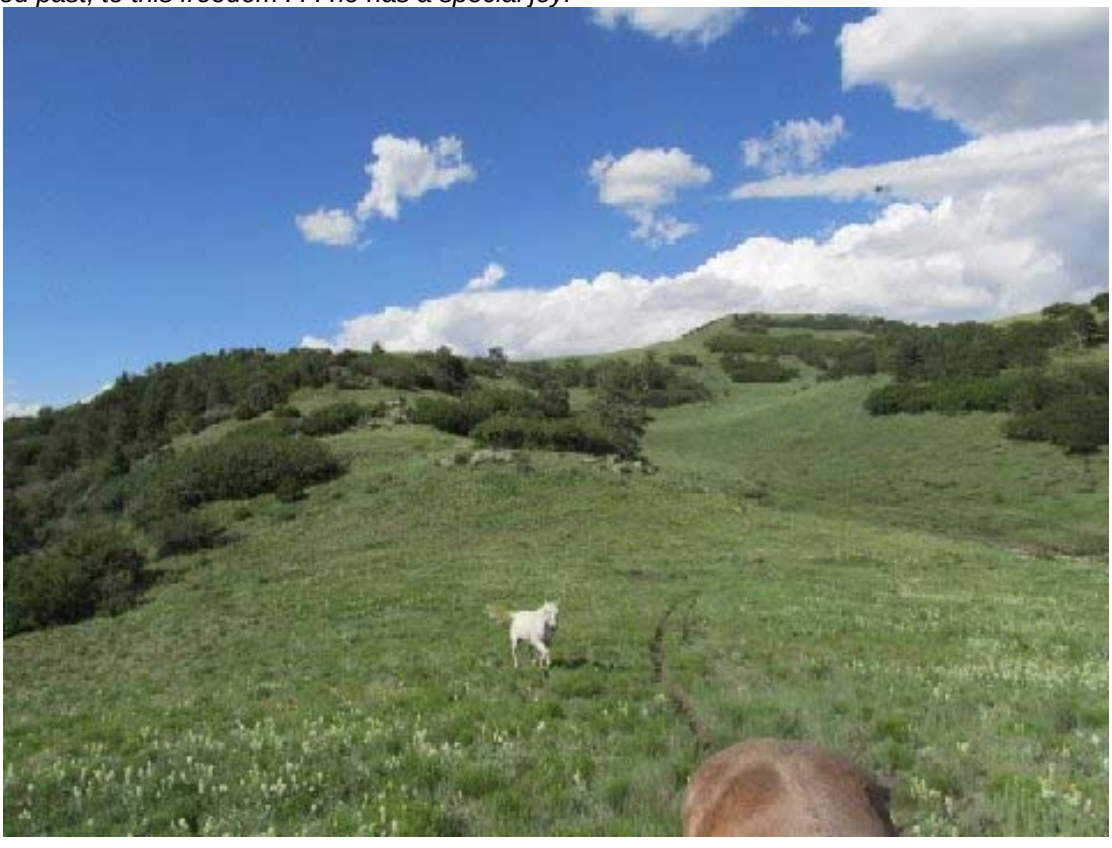
It was a beautiful day, so with our chores (pretty much . . .) done, we head up into the Sylvan Canyons above Bonito Lake. This "summer green" is a special treat - we take none of it for granted.

Recently, there are lots of these wild roses blooming everywhere.

A dilemma (Belle found a way around).

Lulu and Spanky share a drink beside the trail.

Here comes Thunder! I think he sometimes lingers behind, just to have the fun of catching up. From his abused past, to this freedom . . . he has a special joy.



Lulu strolls through the flowers . . . when suddenly . . .

. . . a very young elk calf (still had "fawn spots") jumps up from its grassy bed. When they go grazing, elk moms tell their kids to "stay right here, until I get back" - and they do! He returned to his place after we passed.

Lulu struggles through the tufted grass.

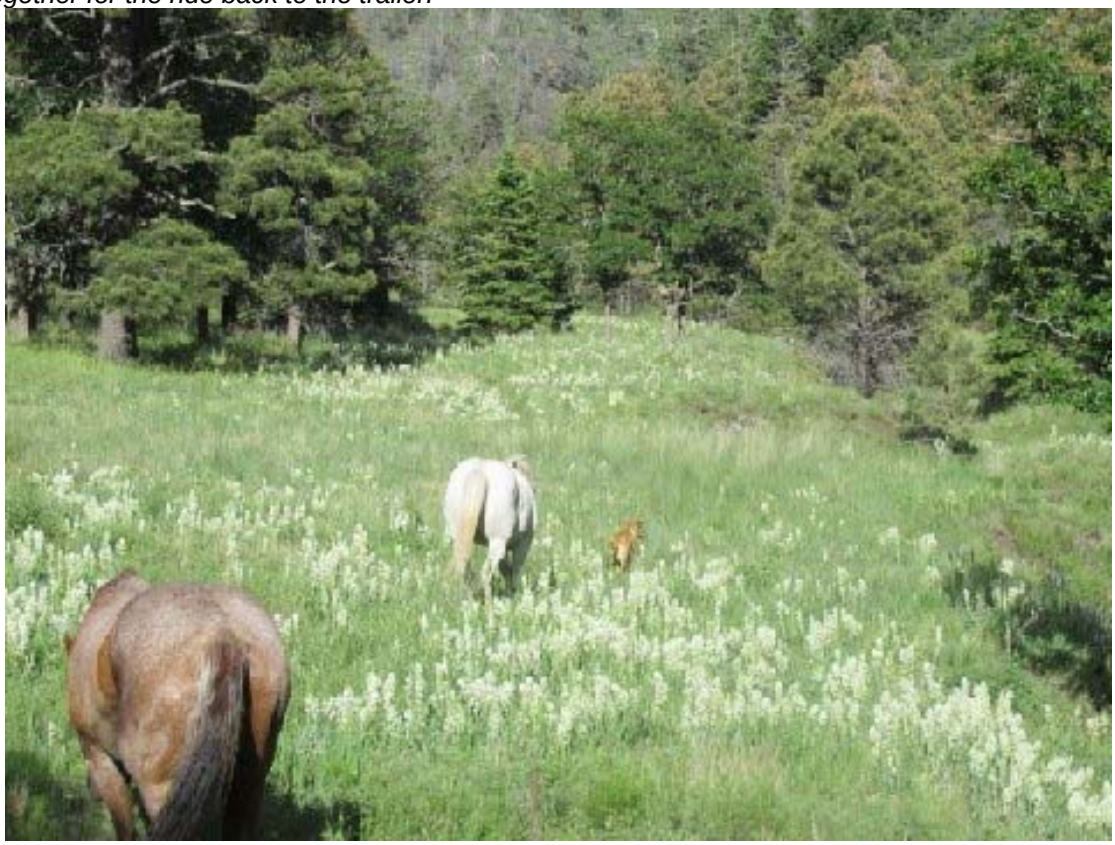
Thunder has an easier time of it!

That little white spot is the remarkable Spencer Theater - interesting to see a performing arts center from this vantage point, high in the wilderness.

Speaking of vantage points, this guy stubbornly held his branch as we rode directly beneath him. He kept his eyes on us.

In the distance, Thunder races down a meadow; Spanky takes a more leisurely pace.

All together for the ride back to the trailer.



Headed home. A good day; a good ride.

Thanks for joining us!
MM

2015-06-19 – ***June Skies***

Early summer skies are interesting around here.

Clouds heavy with moisture. We never know where the rain will fall.

. . . just over the hill!

2015-06-19 – ***June Skies***

MM

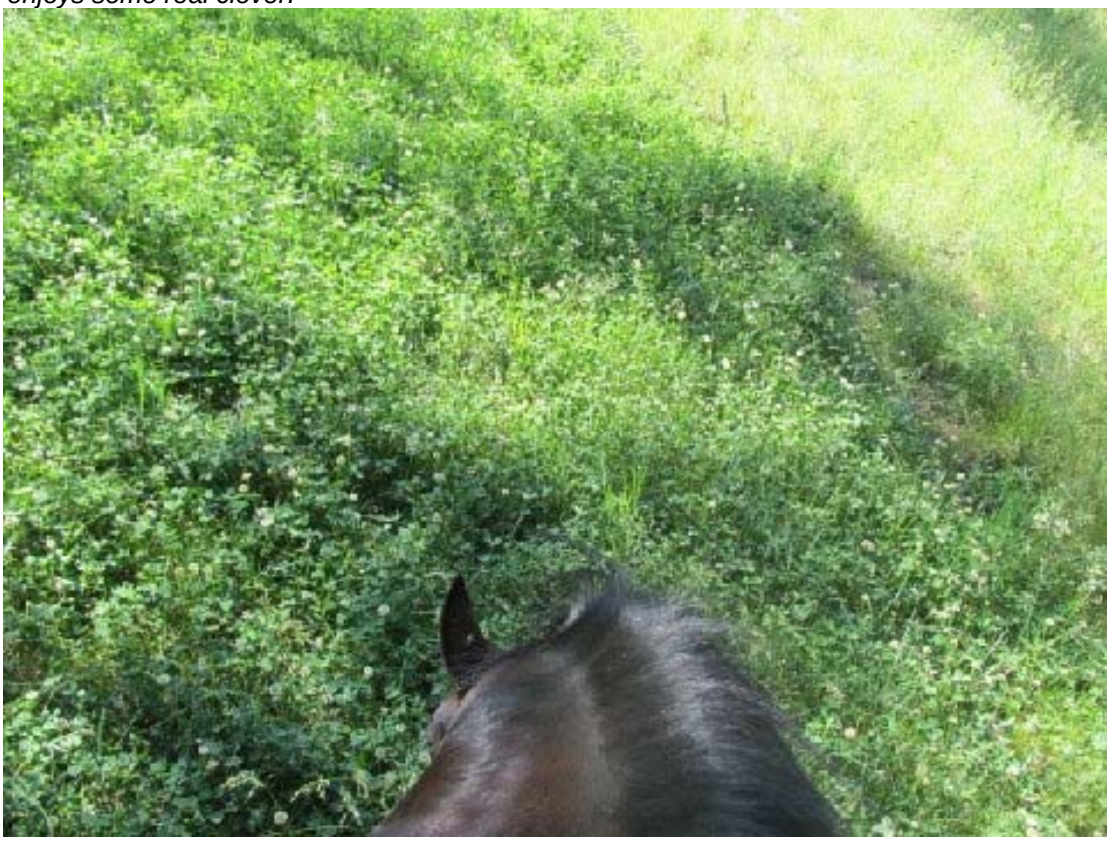
FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

2015-06-21 – ***Ride Along The Bonito And An Announcement***

Summer rides along water are always special.

Lulu has learned that wading is cool!

Belle enjoys some real clover.



"Hey, Thunder! STOP TAILGATING!"

Lulu scouts for us.

The old apple orchard is loaded with fruit this year. The elk and deer will be waiting . . .

Lulu's turn.

ANNOUNCEMENT: It looks like our Nacho is expecting a little one!

"This would happen right during swimsuit season!"

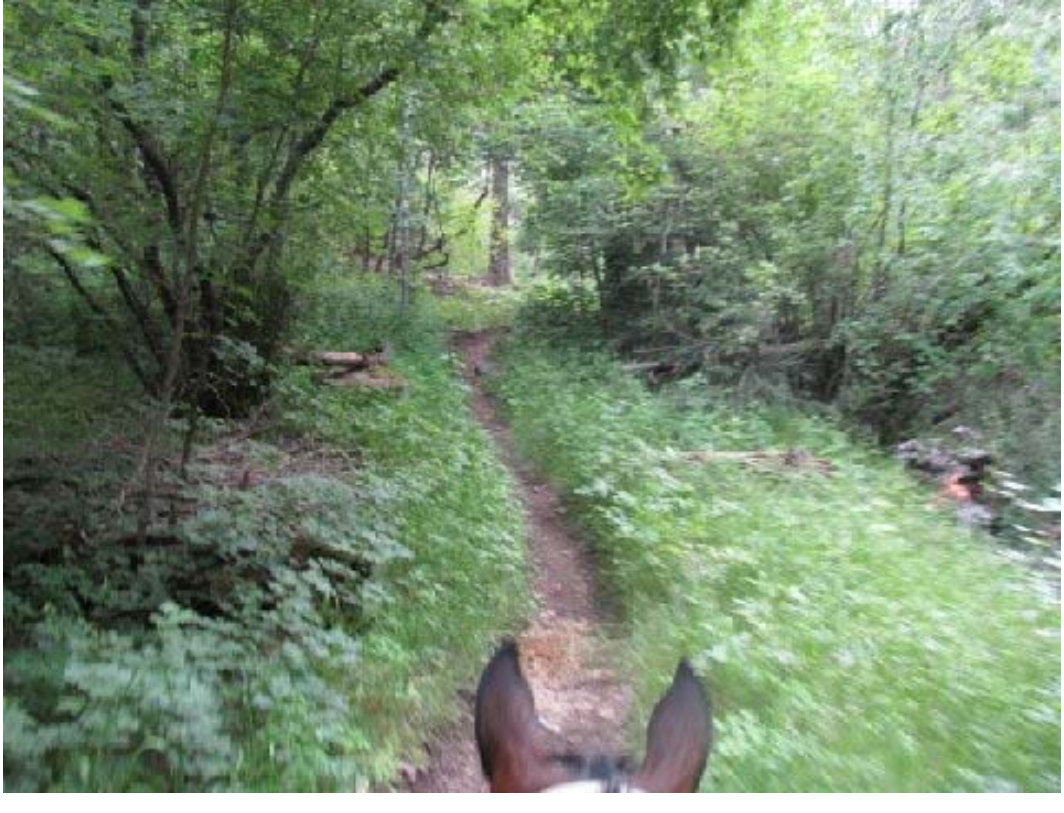
MM

2015-06-22 – ***Longest Day-Light Of The Year***

We always look forward to the longest day of the year - but sometimes miss it. Not this time! Figured it would be best to celebrate at the top of the mountain, so off we went.

Hmmm . . . rain up there? We decided to risk it.

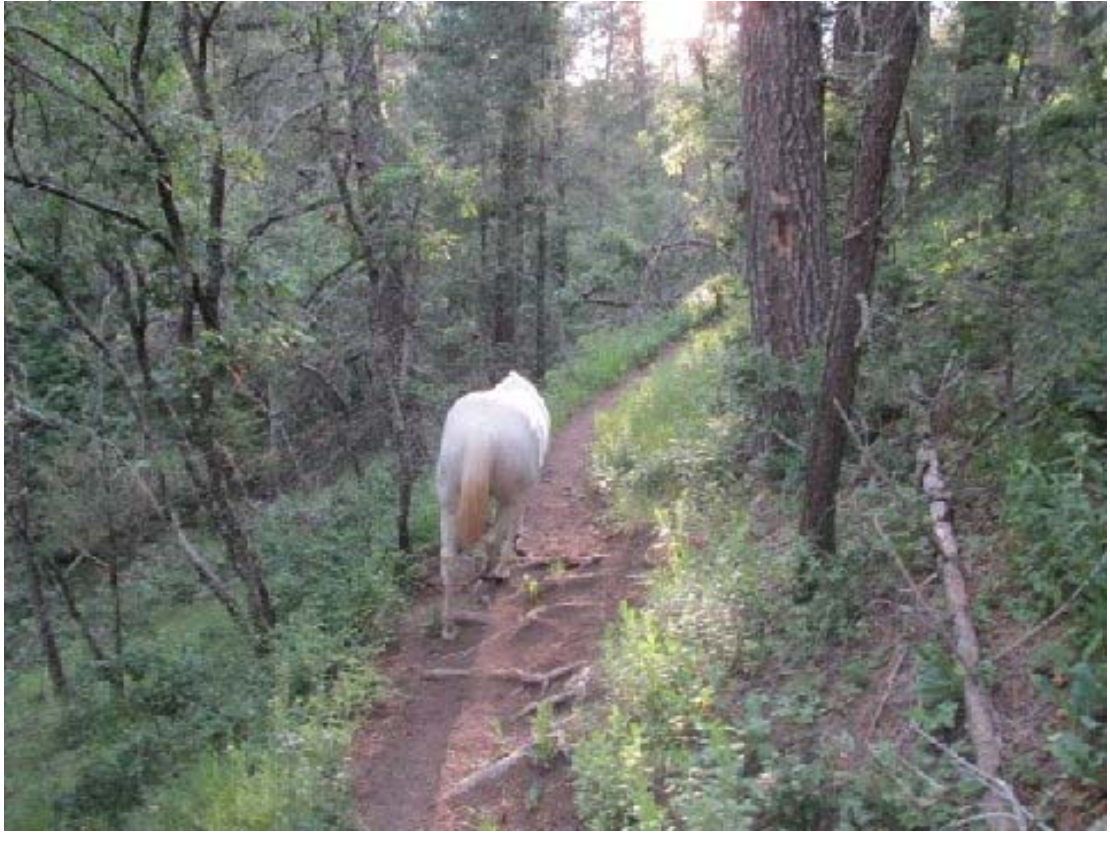
The sun didn't set until nearly 8:30 - we started out in the fading light of the canyon.



It was a very still evening. We heard only the trickle of water.

This wild rose looks almost like a backyard plant.

Up and up we climbed. Would we make it in time?



Hurry, Thunder! (Those tracks in the background are parallel elk trails; no roads up here in the wilderness).

We made it!

A sunset snack.

The latest sunset of the year.

As we rode back down in the enveloping darkness, we surprised LOTS of elk (with lots of babies); they must have wondered what we were doing up there!

Now the days get shorter . . . sigh.
MM

2015-06-26 – ***Dodging Drops***

The weather folks say our monsoon season came early. We could have told them that!

It was blue skies when we started out. By the time we got to Ranchman's Camp (just five miles away), the clouds had rolled in. No lightning, so we took our ride.

They all stayed close - as though to say, "We better be ready to run!"

Still a blue patch over the Capitans to the east.

. . . but in the west, Sierra Blanca is shrouded in rain.

An ominous image . . .

If you look closely, there is a wall of rain headed our way.

We high-tailed it to the trailer and got home just as the sky opened up.

This morning looks pretty good - we might head out again . . .

MM

FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

2015-06-26 – ***Green Belt***

It looked like rain up on the mountain, so we visited lower Mills Canyon, instead.

Belle contemplates our crossing.

Spanky takes his time.

Thunder dives right in!

He and Lulu have a game of "catch me if you can!"

"Ha ha! I won".

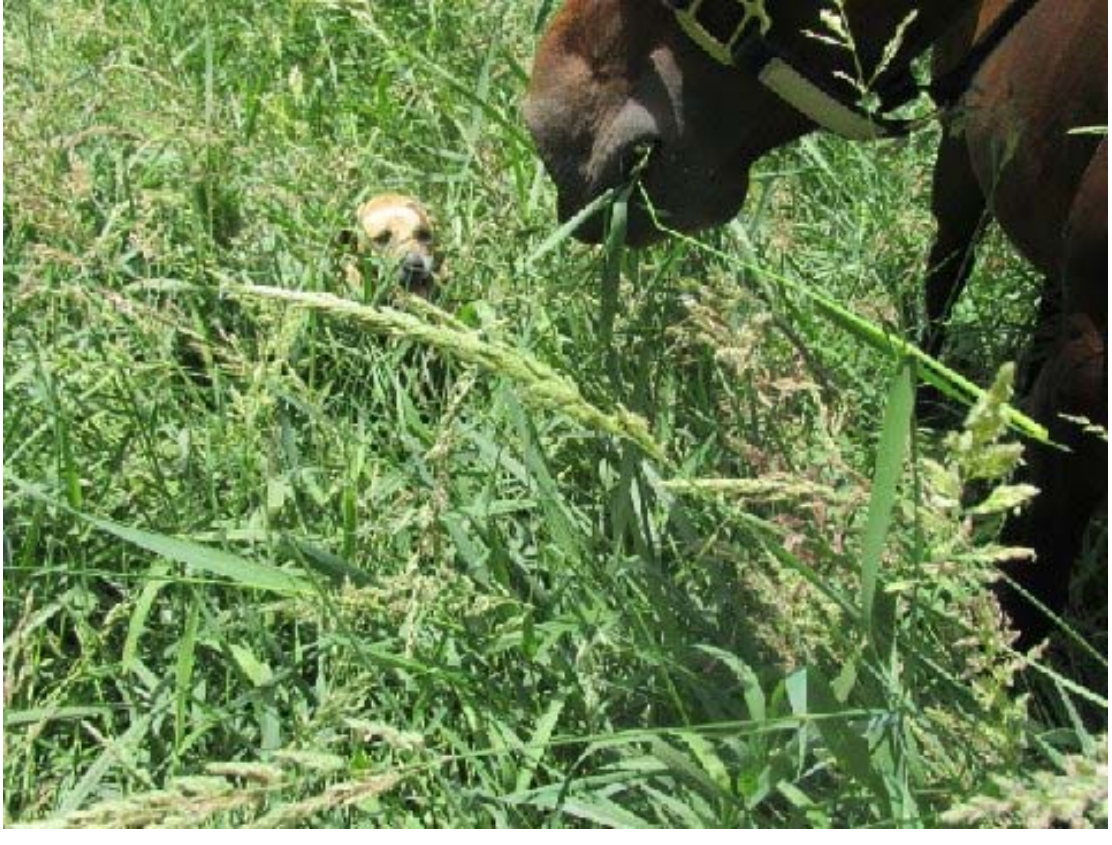
"Hmmm . . . I don't think I've tried that grass over there . . ."

"Well, if Lulu can do it . . ."

Spanky takes the bridge on his own.

This is a little "meadow" along the creek, where they sometimes graze - but this time the grass was too tall (head-high). Spanky and Thunder wanted nothing to do with it. Even Belle wasn't sure . . ."There might be a T-Rex in there!"

. . . and poor Lulu was lost!



"Do I hear native drums beating?"

"Whew! Glad I'm outta there!"

"This is more like it!"

MM

2015-06-26 – ***Rain Ride***

After our ride at Mills Canyon, it looked like the clouds on the mountain might be clearing . . .

So we headed on up. Sun at first . . .

Then the sky got VERY dark.

We turned around as the sky opened up on us (falling rain doesn't show very well in photos).

Drenched!

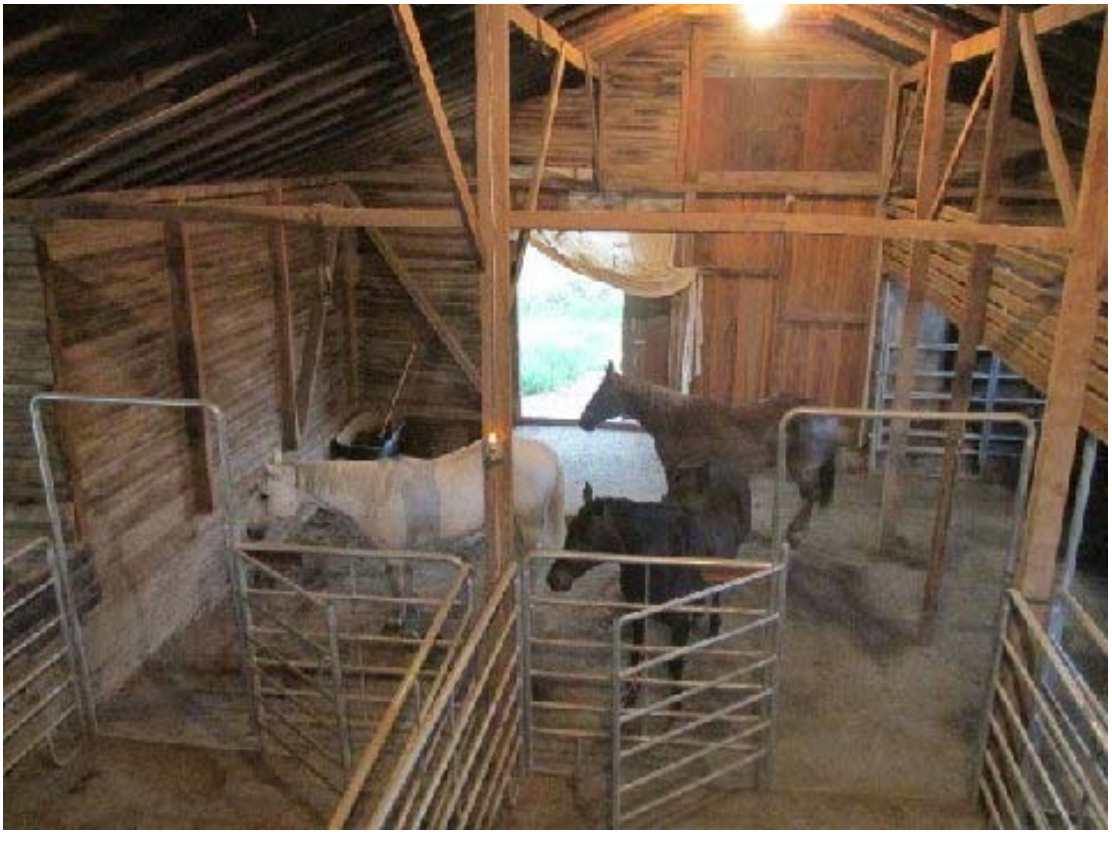
By the time we got back to the trailer, the rain had stopped.

Don't know what these flowers are . . .

MM

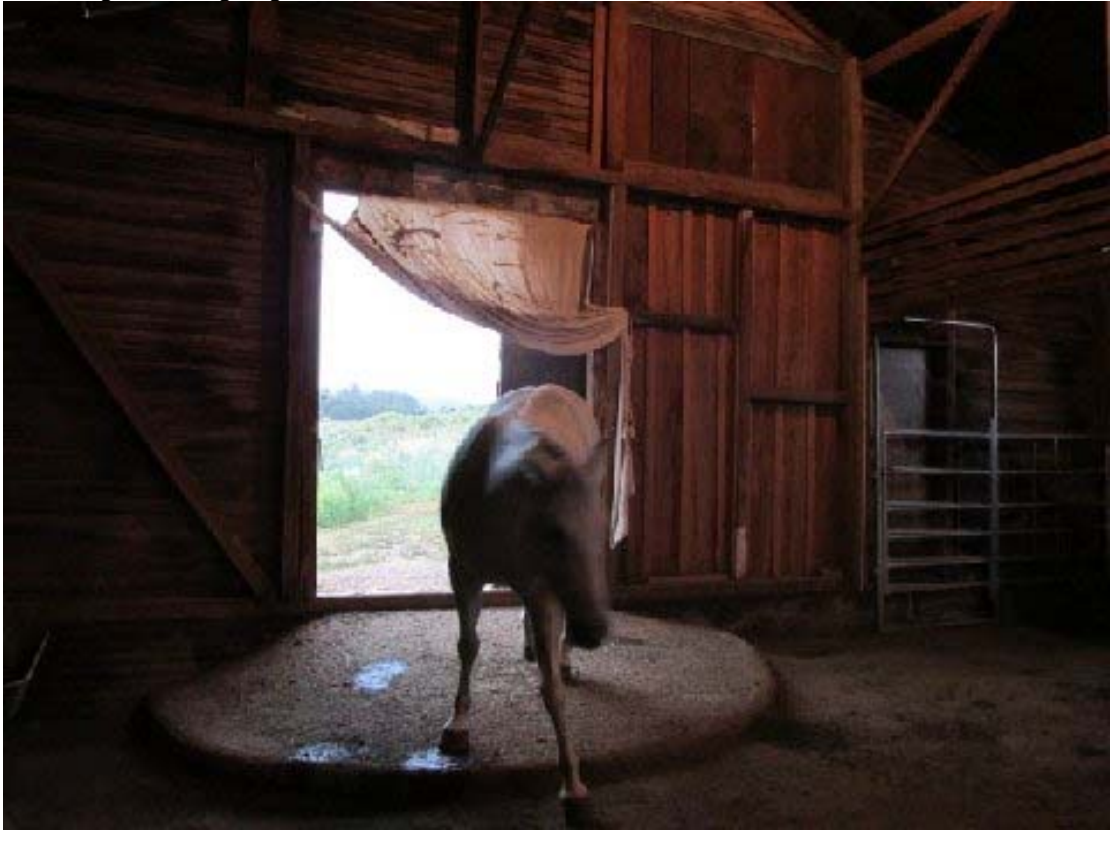
2015-06-27 - ***Cozy***

To me, there are few things cozier than horses snoozing in a barn on a (VERY) rainy day.



2015-06-27 - ***Cozy***

Thunder thought about going outside. "Naw".



MM

2015-06-29 – ***Other Side Of The Capitans***

The Capitans are one of very few East-West running mountain ranges in the country (there is only one such range in the east; and the Tranverse Ranges of southern California). We generally ride on the south side of the Capitans, near home, but when Lulu and I planned to go to Roswell for a presentation, we chose to take the much less traveled route around the northern flank of the mountains.

On the north side of the mountains. That's the Capitan Gap in the distance - in reverse of the way we normally see it.

Roswell is about 70 miles from home. It's a beautiful drive this time of year.

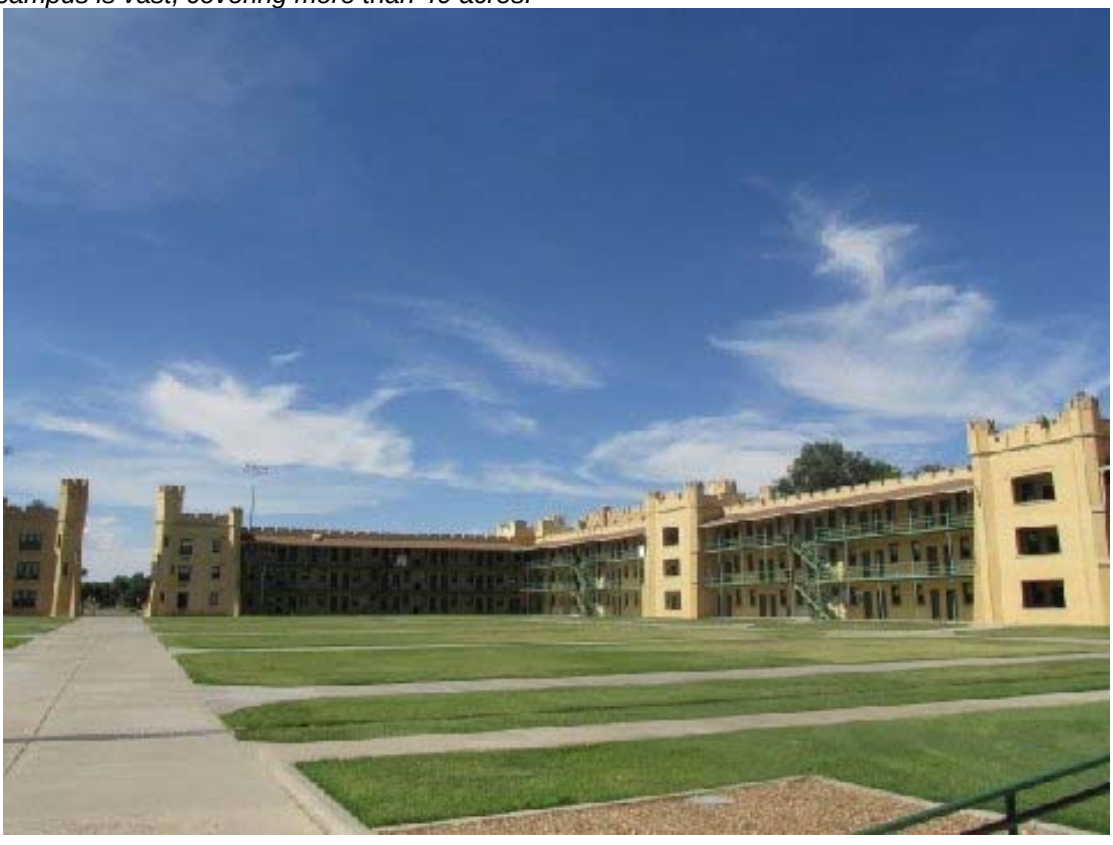
As we continued eastward, the terrain became rolling desert prairie, which continues into the panhandle of Texas, Oklahoma and the mid-west. We are "on the edge" of the country's mid-section.

This is cattle country, right up to the outskirts of Roswell. The peak in the distance (below the sign), is the eastern end of the Capitan Mountains.

While in Roswell, we visited New Mexico Military Institute (the bucking bronco is their mascot).

Resembling South Carolina's famous Citadel, NMMI is the nation's oldest State-supported, nationally accredited, coeducational preparatory military boarding high school and junior college, offering 4-years of high school and 2 years of college.

The campus is vast, covering more than 40 acres.



The 1,000 cadets are housed in dormitories surrounding parade grounds.

They share two-cadet rooms like this one; with desks and work spaces below bunk beds.

It's impressive!

After her all-day road trip, Lulu was glad to be home. I think Wilcox was happy to see her!

MM

2015-06-30 - ***Lucky***

This is a story about a bunny named Lucky. That isn't the bunny's real name; more like a nickname, but it will be "Lucky" from now on!

Bunny was hopping around a ranch in New Mexico, when suddenly, Big Furry That Meows carried bunny to “The Place With No Grass”. Plop! Big Furry just dropped bunny there, and then wandered off. Bunny took inventory; not even a scratch. "Now what?" wondered bunny.

That's when bunny met The Hand, and that's when bunny became "Lucky". It seems Big Furry invited bunny to lunch, or for lunch. No one knew for sure, and there is a big difference. The Hand made certain Lucky was not going to spend lunchtime with Big Furry. So Lucky relaxed, and explored “The Place With No Grass”.

Lucky thought it was very nice, and enjoyed meeting the Silent Thing With A Big Nose, but somehow “The Place With No Grass” just didn't feel like home.

That's when The Hand carried Lucky into the Place That Moves. Bouncing along, Lucky could see the world going by. "What will happen next? Lucky wondered. A few minutes later, The Hand carried Lucky out from the Place That Moves, and Lucky saw something wondrous.

The Hand showed Lucky flowers . . .

. . . and gurgling running water.

"Golly!" thought Lucky . . .

"*This is amazing!"*

Lucky had never even dreamed of such a place!

The Hand let Lucky look around and choose a new home, far away from Big Furry That Meows. Lucky found the perfect spot!

Lucky knew right away. It had a tangle of logs for hiding, shade and sun, and the sound of running water nearby, and lots and lots and lots of grass!

Lucky sat for a while, taking it all in. "I really am lucky!", said Lucky.

The Hand waved a friendly good-bye, and Lucky scurried off home in a wink!

Lucky is happy.
MM

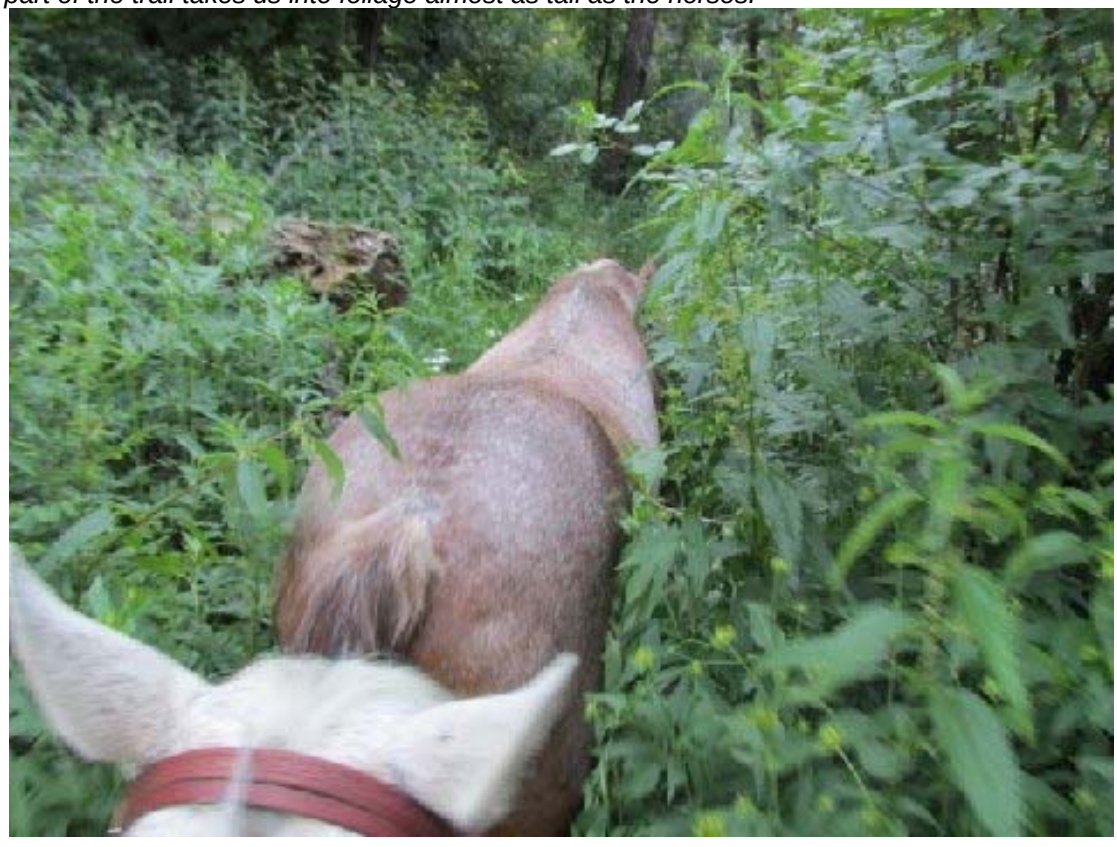
2015-07-01 - ***Moonride***

A peaceful summer's eve, after a busy day, the quiet of a forest ride.

Spanky negotiates a tricky spot.

The air is still, carrying the fragrance of the forest - with the sun's fading light dappling around us.

This part of the trail takes us into foliage almost as tall as the horses.



Belle scoots through. "Did I just hear something in there?" (See her ears?) "I think something is following me!"

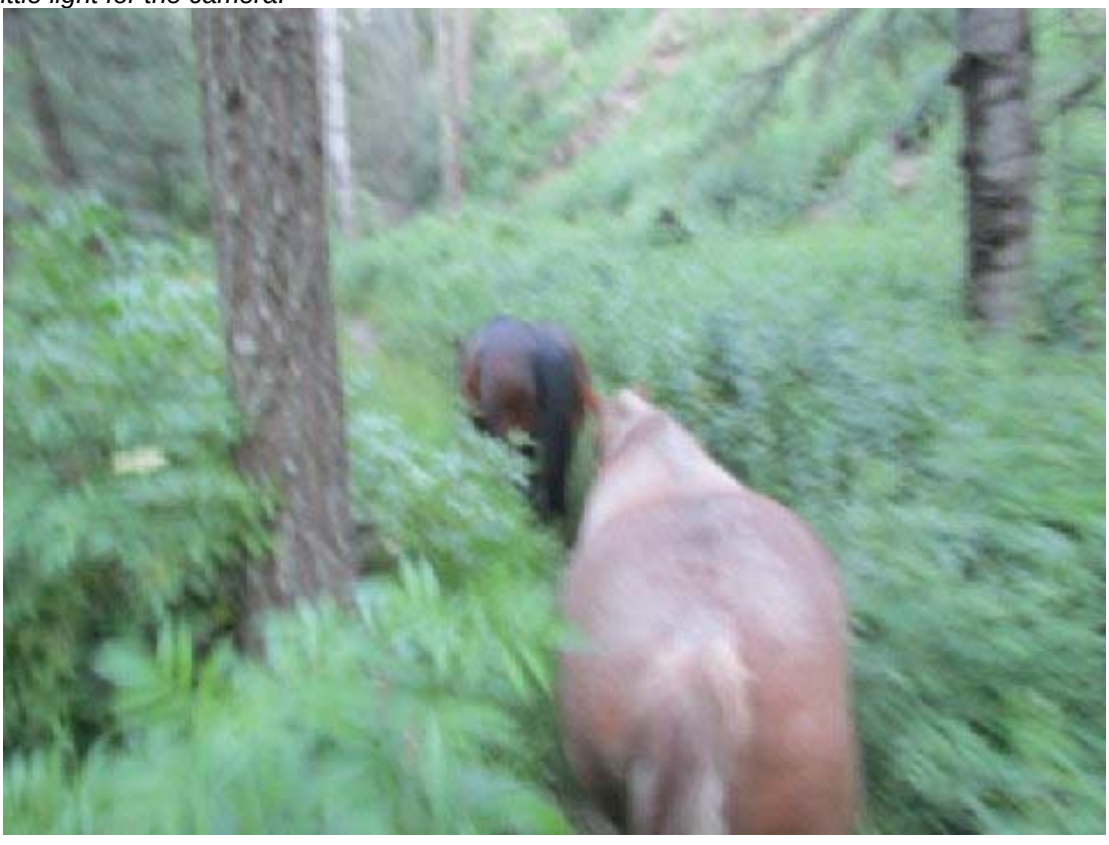
Lulu is somewhere in those ferns.

"*Here I am! Ha! Ha! Belle! It was ME!"*

"My nerves! I need a little snack to calm down . . ."

It's getting dark. We head for home.

Too little light for the camera.



We finish the ride by the light of a full moon, through the pines.

Thanks for joining us!

MM

2015-07-03 - ***Monsoon***

We got slammed with monsoon rain late yesterday. It's supposed to continue off and on through the holiday weekend - not so good for the parade, rodeo, barbeques and fireworks . . . but remembering drought years, no one is complaining!

The deluge.

Makes for interesting morning skies.

Wishing you a very Happy 4th of July!
MM

2015-07-04 – *4th Of July Parade*

Capitan's 4th of July parade is a big deal around here - it immediately precedes the Smokey Bear Stampede Rodeo, and features lots of horses - and one longhorn bull!
Celebrating the "Smokey Bear" theme, our vet outfitted her mini-team with Smokey hats!

. . . and there were burros in tutus . . .

Thunder wasn't too sure about that thing . . .

"Hmmm . . ."

. . . but it worked out just fine.

2015-07-04 – *4th Of July Parade*

It was a record crowd for this little village.

Lots of patriotism here!

Thunder was flawless in the parade, but when it was over, he wanted to know where his family was. He was very happy to see them!

First, a roll.

2015-07-04 – *4th Of July Parade*

Then a reunion. "WHERE have you been???"

Then play.

Happy 4th! MM

2015-07-06 – ***Rodeo Images***

The Smokey Bear Stampede Ranch Rodeo and Pro Rodeo four-day event is considered one of the best in the west - and its related activities (parade, dances, concert, fireworks show, etc.) are the reason why Travel and Leisure listed the little village of Capitan (pop. 1443) as the "Ninth Best Place to Celebrate the Fourth of July".

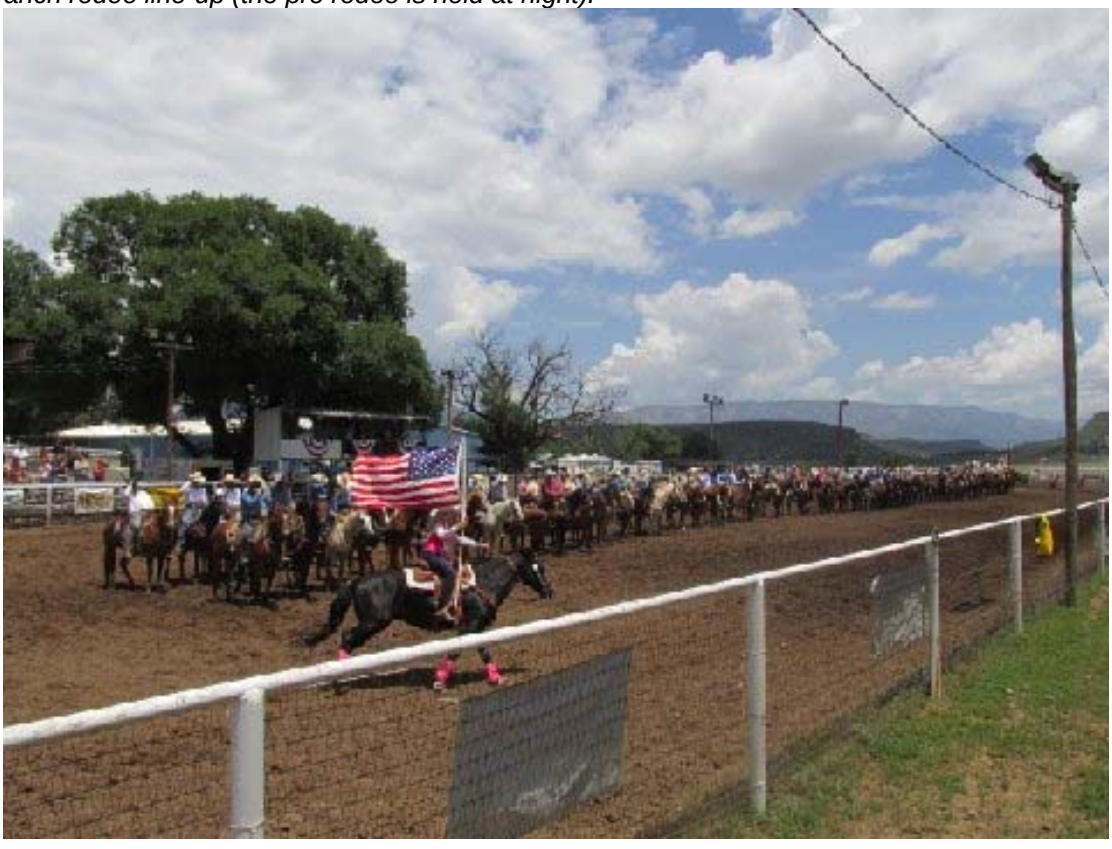
Here are some images:

Before.

After.

The National Anthem - acapella.

The ranch rodeo line-up (the pro rodeo is held at night).



The ranch rodeo is a family event - often multi-generational.

2015-07-06 – ***Rodeo Images***

It was a fortunate weekend. Although we got more than an inch of rain at home (less than 10 miles away), the parade and weekend rodeo events were dry.

Ranch saddle bronc riding.

I try to avoid this on my rides.

A surprisingly soft landing!

Many of the contestants wear pink shirts in support of New Mexico's Cowboys For Cancer Research ("C4CR"). Last year alone, C4CR provided about $250,000 to Drs. Jeffrey B. Arterburn of New Mexico State University and Eric R. Prossnitz of the University of New Mexico, who are collaborating to study a new receptor that sends signals to cells. Dr. Arterburn is working on creating new chemical compounds that selectively activate or inhibit only this new receptor, working to find drugs that can block or "turn on" the receptor, depending on what the patient needs. Dr. Prossnitz and his UNM collaborators are testing these compounds for activity in many diseases and conditions, including cancer, autoimmunity and heart disease. In cancer, the use of drugs to inhibit this new receptor could mean an important advance in treatment. In addition, Dr. Arterburn is creating new radioactive compounds that can be used to find innovative ways to image tumors without the need for surgery, leading to improved diagnosis and the evaluation of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. These same radioactive compounds could also be developed as cancer therapies themselves. Drs. Arterburn and Prossnitz and their teams are currently testing all these compounds in human cancers and other diseases.

From the rodeo arena to the laboratory . . . in New Mexico.

MM

2015-07-08 – ***Happy Couple***

Nacho stopped by with the (presumed) father of her soon-to-be baby. A party was hosted for them by some dear, deer friends.

It was a very festive crowd!

2015-07-08 – ***Happy Couple***

These bucks dressed in their best velvet, for the occasion.

There was lots of gossip. "And did you hear . . ."

2015-07-08 – ***Happy Couple***

Here they are - the happy couple! (A glowing Nacho on the left, and her proud-papa buck on the right)

Still not certain of when the baby is due . . . but we wish them well!
MM

2015-07-10 – *Wild – Flower Power*

"The wildflower . . . bred by no one, uncultivated;
raised hard, raised rough.
No glass pane to shield you, nor tender hand revealed you,
standing all the sweeter 'gainst the grass."
Clinton Arneson

Sometimes a field of flowers . . .

Is growing in MUD!

MM

2015-07-12 – ***Lulu Goes To The Stars***

Located in a very remote corner of central New Mexico, the Very Large Array (VLA) is the most scientifically productive telescope ever developed - a monumental icon to astronomers (and movie goers - it has appeared in countless films including Jodie Foster's "Contact", "Independence Day", and "Terminator"). VLA is the crown jewel of New Mexico science - used by researchers worldwide to make landmark discoveries about our Universe and how it works. Lulu thought it would be fun see it up close.

We chose a day with heavy monsoon downpours.

If you look closely, you will see one of the telescope's dishes in the distance, about to be overcome by a cloudburst.

Each of the 27 enormous (230 ton!) dishes, spaced out on an ancient lake bed, work together to gather and record faint, natural radio waves traveling through distant space from objects such as galaxies, black holes, and baby stars.

The VLA has found water ice on Mercury; detected radio waves from mysterious Gamma Ray Bursts; discovered the first "micro quasar"; and a billion-light-year-across empty "hole" in our Universe. It can "see" into our Solar System - all the way to the edge of the observable Universe.

Lulu is impressed by the antennas enormity - and that they are periodically repositioned along more than 82 miles of specially-designed railroad tracks.

She gets a special tour inside the secure control center. The telescope is in continuous use - observing deep space day and night.

She listens carefully to detailed descriptions (the telescope has more than 3,000 miles of fiber optics, and its super computer uses 170,000 watts of power to perform 10,000,000,000,000,000,000 mathematical operations per second!) - so she can try to explain it all to me. (Good luck!)

Although the telescope is made up of 27 giant antenna dishes, there actually are 28 of them - one is always in a special Assembly Building undergoing service.

These huge motorized drives move them around.

The VLA is made more striking by its location in the middle of nowhere.

Pronghorns graze nearby.

It was an interesting day!
MM

[Nacho update: STILL WAITING]

"What? I'm eating for two, you know!"

FOLLOWED DREAM RANCH

2015-07-14 – ***Elk Day Care***

The moms are back, with their little ones (taken from the front porch at dusk).

The calf on the left still has its "fawn" spots.

Nursing time.

Twins?

The moms take a little break.

Moving on.

MM

2015-07-14 – ***The Gallery***

Nearly daily rain means lots of grass and weeds . . . today was mowing day (again). I used a power mower (loud), weed eater (louder), and yard tractor (deafening). I kept working through the occasional thunder shower (and even some good-sized hail - I just kept going). Suddenly, I felt as though I was being watched.

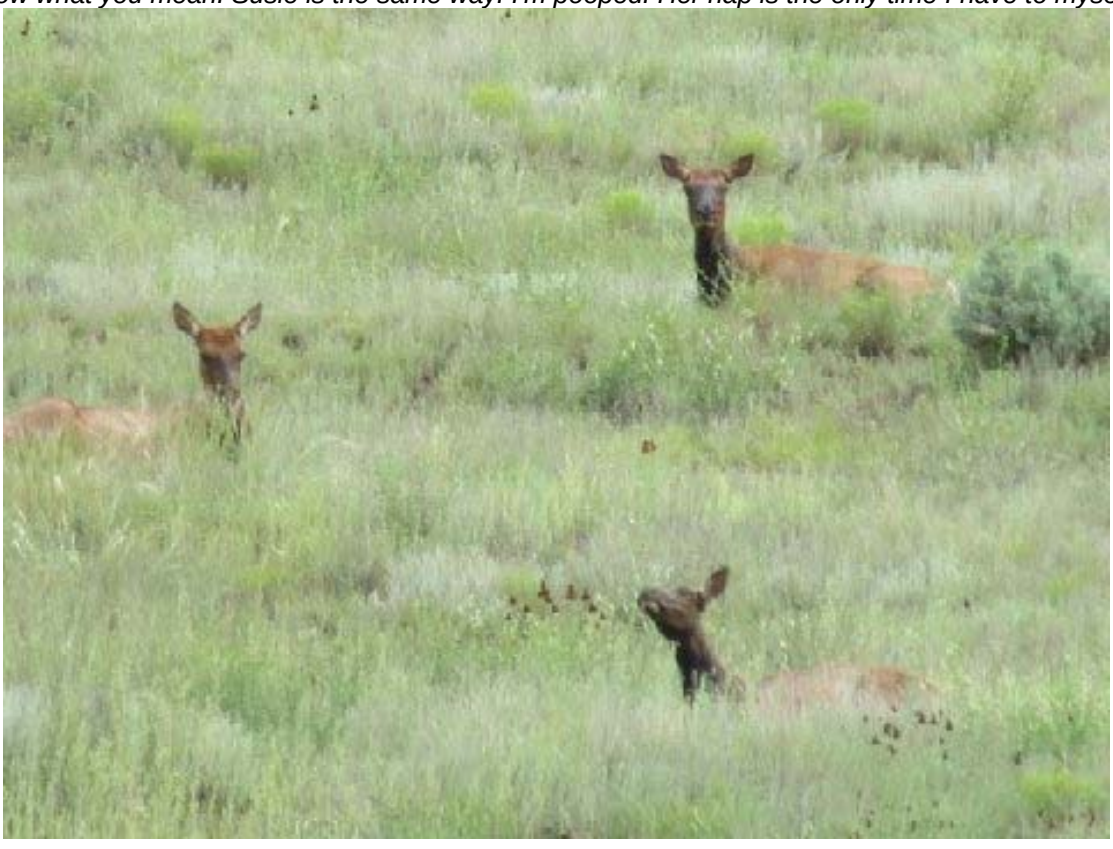
Sure enough, despite the racket (or maybe because of it), some cow elk were taking it all in from the hillside.

The noise sure didn't seem to bother these "phantoms of the forest".

Eventually, they settled down to observe me in comfort.

"I finally got Jimmy down for his nap. That calf doesn't let me get any rest!"

"I know what you mean. Susie is the same way. I'm pooped. Her nap is the only time I have to myself."



As I worked on the lawn, their heads swung back and forth, watching me, like the gallery at Wimbledon!

"What do you suppose he is doing?"

"I think it's a grazing machine; maybe he is making fast food - like at ElkDonalds."

"*Yuck! That stuff it terrible for you!*"

"Whew! I'm getting tired just watching."

"Think I'll take a little nap. Wake me if anything interesting happens".

MM

2015-07-16 – ***Graz In The Rain***

During a pounding thunderstorm last evening, I looked out and there was Nacho - waiting for her apples (the other deer had already eaten their corn snacks, and left for shelter before the rain started).

For some reason the heavy rain doesn't show on camera - but you can see the water flowing. Nacho gets extra apples "for the baby".

Then I noticed the elk grazing on the hill behind her. It was nearly dark, so the photos aren't great.

If you look closely, you will see a couple of babies, learning to graze like the big elk (calves join the herd at two weeks of age; they are weaned at two months, but will stay with mom for about a year).

It really was raining hard - a couple of them are lying down.

One looks me over. I guess they are used to me.

"Yeah, those are my cousins, but we don't see much of each other, except at the holidays . . .

MM

2015-07-18 – ***Sunny Flowers***

The morning was gray and dreary - drizzle on and off. I figured "no ride today". Then the electricity went off (some kind of area maintenance). So we reconsidered. Glad we did!

By the time we got to the trail head, the skies were clearing (New Mexico is like that).

We were greeting by some mighty happy flowers!

I decided to let the horses set the pace on this ride. I never used the single lead rope which serves as my "reins" on Belle.

They stopped to eat along the way, of course, but only briefly, then they continued on. Very reasonable about it. I do the same thing at buffets.

Sometimes walking . . . sometimes trotting.

These are TALL flowers!

Little Lulu is hard to spot among the purple aster-things!

Very happy dog.

A glade of oaks provides shade (all winter long; they look like skeletons).

Cool water.

Spanky overcomes a dilemma.

Friends.

When we got back to Argentina Camp, my loose horses passed visiting horses in various pens with no incident - they acknowledged the other horses, but kept going with me. I was very proud of them. Then, Thunder loaded himself into the trailer - the others did so as well. I think it was their way of thanking me for their freedom.
MM

2015-07-20 – ***Skull Trail***

Skull Trail is different from the rest. Although it climbs up to the top of the Sacramento Mountains, it skirts the deep pine forest, traveling along a narrow wooded canyon.

As we arrived at the trail head, the sky clouded over; disappointing for photos, but wonderful for riding. Thunder enjoys a snack before we take off.

Lulu tries some clover. I am convinced she does this in order to be sociable with her horses! "Hmmm... delicious (actually, a little bland for my taste)".

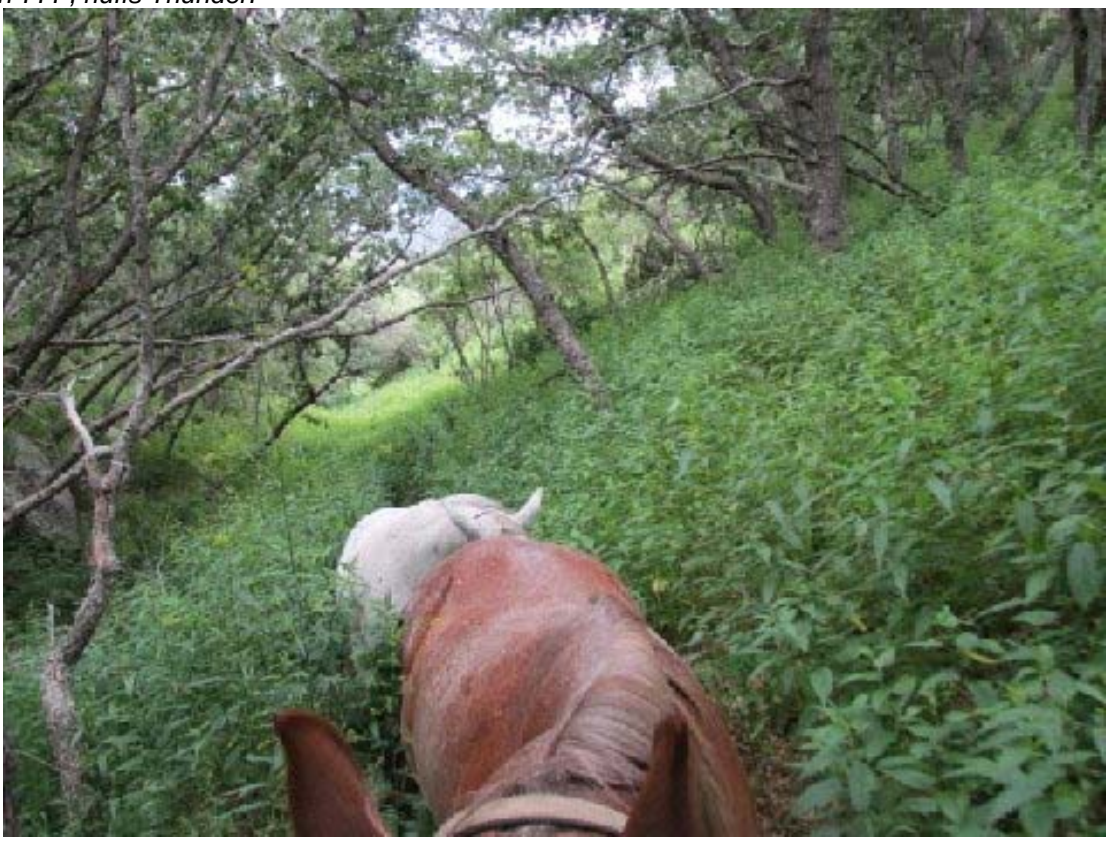
The sky became ominous, with layers of clouds racing in all directions - the edge of a deteriorating hurricane moving our way. We discussed canceling the ride, but the horses voted to go on.

Our trails get so little traffic, they quickly become overgrown. Belle pauses, "Hmmmm . . ."

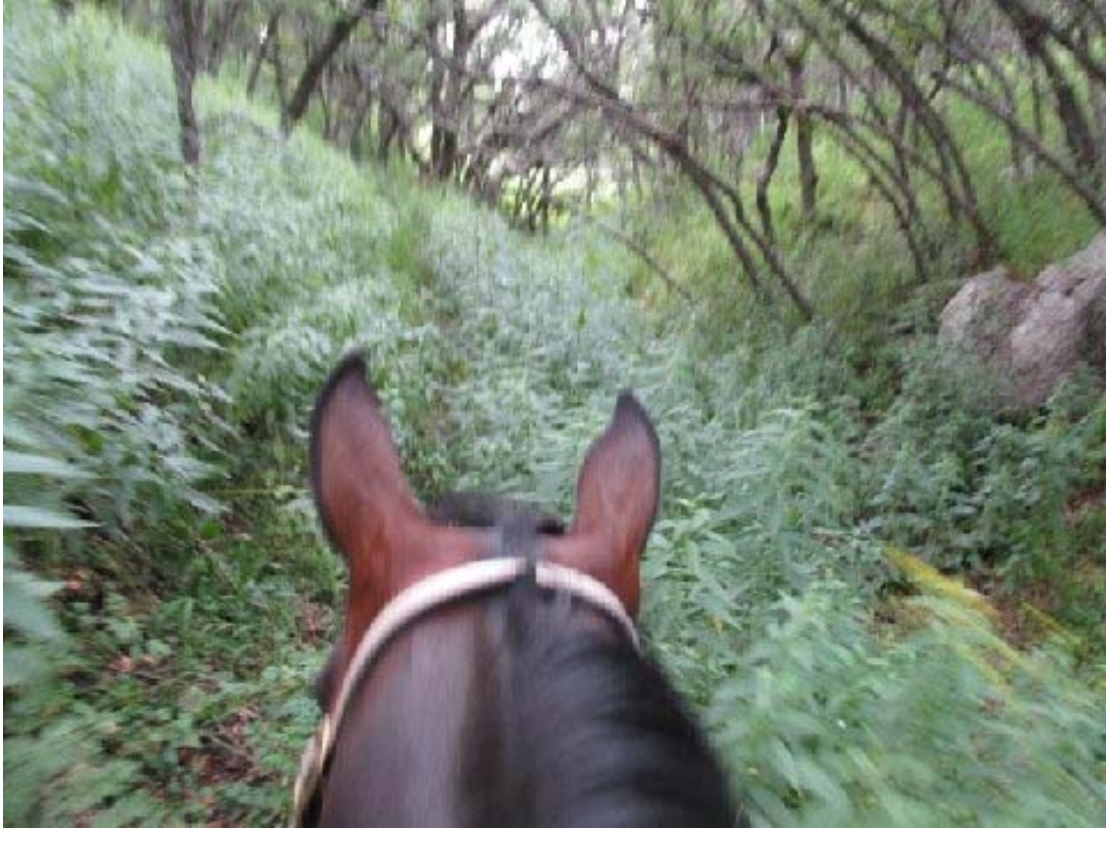
Thunder takes the lead, into (and under) an oak grove.

It's fun to watch them change positions as we ride along. Spanky enjoys finding a way to sneak ahead of Thunder.

"Grrrrr . . .", huffs Thunder.



A brief gallop uphill.



Belle has to find the way.

As we come into a fern-covered clearing . . .

. . . a buck pops out of the oaks.

I think he was confused by the loose horses, thinking they might be "friends". When he finally spotted me, back into the trees he hopped! "Sorry, my mistake!"

"Cowboy wisteria".

We near the top. It is raining all around us.

Thunder and Spanky, a' la Andrew Wyeth.

A mountaintop bouquet (and butterfly).

The rain came closer - heavy curtains of water in the distance. We head back down at a good clip. Our trail is hidden in there . . . somewhere.

Thunder finds it.

"*Hey! Wait for me! (I hope this is the right way . . .)".*

Thunder thinks he sees rain coming: "Hurry up!!!" I'm off Belle - I like to walk along, and have an eye-to-eye experience with them.

Back home, these elk don't seem much interested in our arrival.

Although it poured rain in every direction (and at home), we somehow found a dry spot for our ride. Thanks for coming along!
MM

2015-07-21 – ***The Neighbors***

"Look, Thunder honey, there's the elk family next door."

"You don't suppose they think those metal deer are real, do you?"

"I mean, elk aren't the smartest things on earth, but . . ."

"I don't know, Belle. Here they come."
"Now, Thunder, please don't say anything about the deer."

"Go over and talk to them, honey".

"Hi, neighbors!"
"How'ya do'in? Hasn't all this rain been wonderful?" ("They're awfully quiet, Belle.")

"Pssst, Thunder - you know they don't speak horse; you gotta talk elk to them."

"Oh, for goodness sakes . . . okay."

"You guys seen any fake deer lately? (Haw Haw Haw!)"

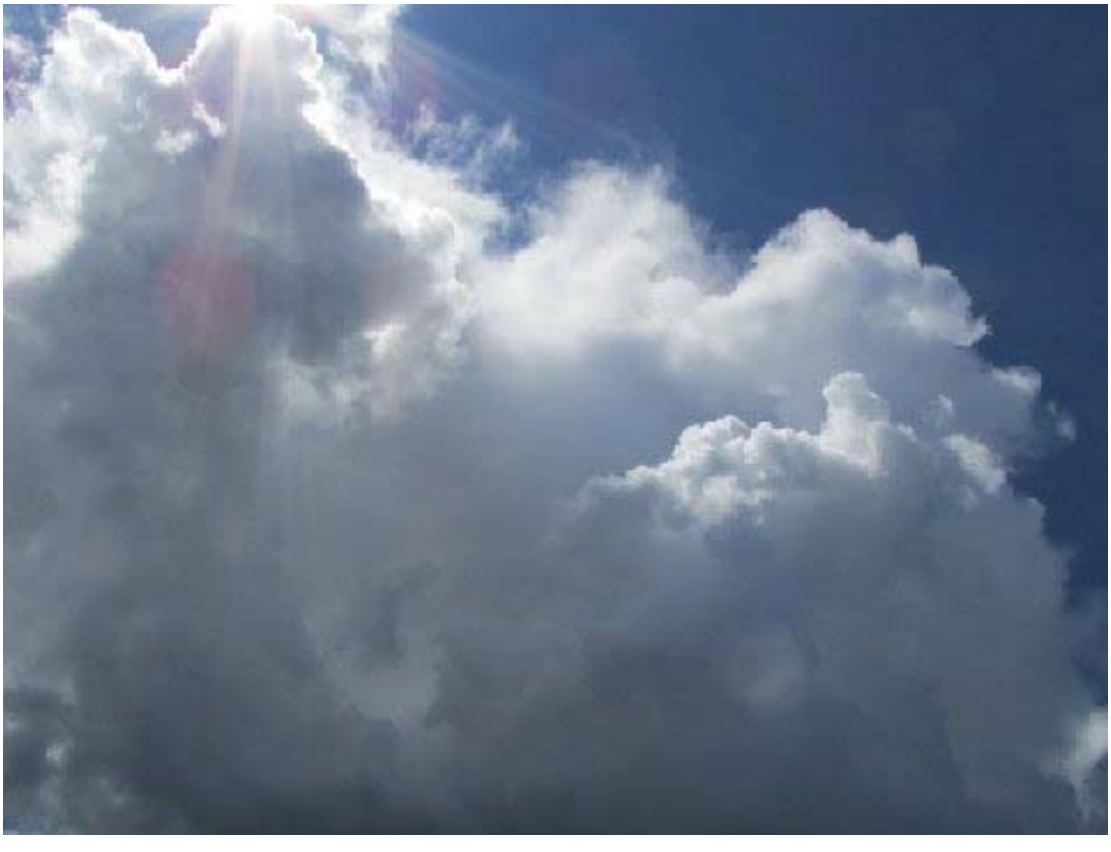
"Uh, sorry. Gotta go - we have an appointment."

"Oh, Thunder, how could you!"
"It was just a joke!"

MM

2015-07-22 – ***The Circle Of Life***

Ya think it might rain? (It did).



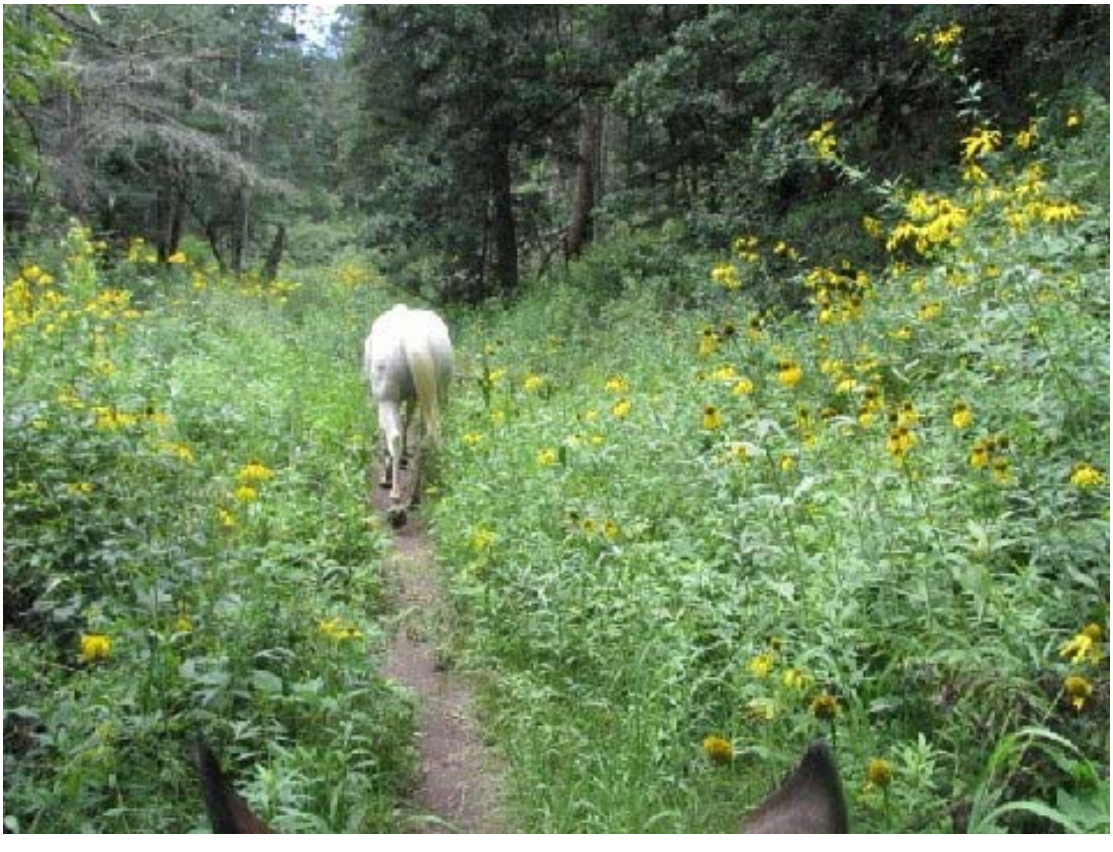
When it was over . . .

The newest (temporary) members of our clan. These baby barn swallows have outgrown their nest, but seem hesitant to leave (could it be all those cats below?)

Their parents kept landing on them to keep them warm (even though they have grown very fast, and are now nearly adult-size); this morning they have finally left the nest. The circle of life. MM

2015-07-23 – ***Summer Of The Mountain***

As far as we are concerned, this is the "Summer of the Mountain" - we have never seen it greener. Despite a prediction of "80% rain" yesterday, we decided to head on up.



As we reached the top, a giant storm formed behind us . . .

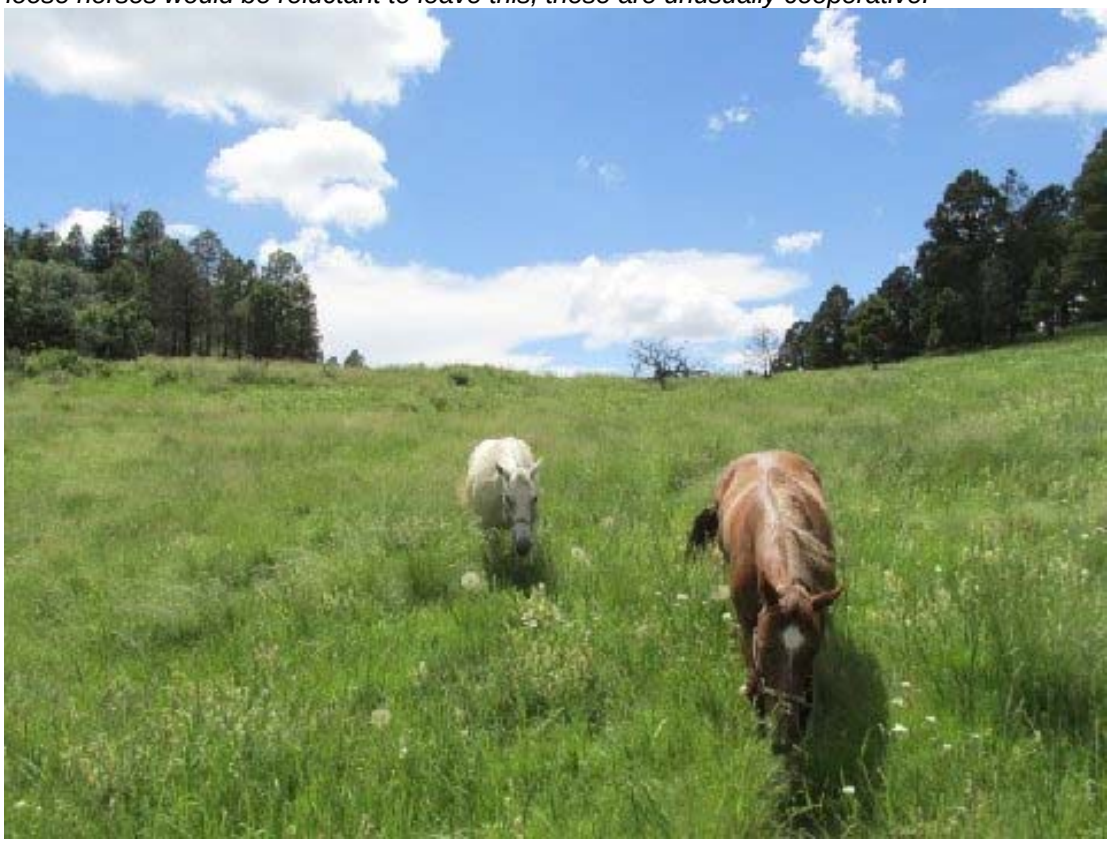
Soon, it was as black as the devil's heart. See the line of sunlight/shade beyond Thunder? That's how close the rain came.

We hung out in the meadows . . . waiting. Would we be drenched?

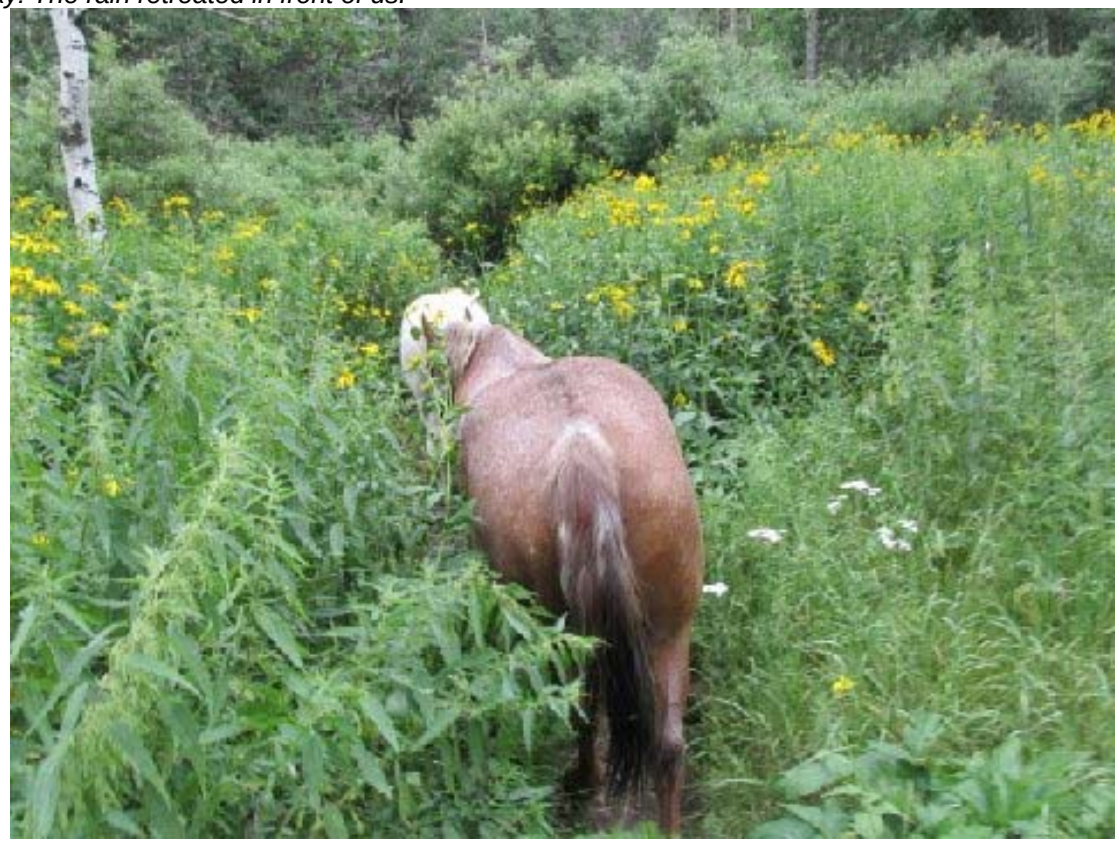
Horse heaven!

The storm seemed to stall just below us. We ventured down a ways.

Most loose horses would be reluctant to leave this; these are unusually cooperative.



Lucky! The rain retreated in front of us.



Both of them making certain Spanky is coming along.

Lulu and friends.

Spanky winds around an obstacle on the trail.

We don't usually see so much moss in dry New Mexico.

Come'on Lulu!

At home, the bucks show off recent antler growth, still in "velvet".

MM

End of Volume 8
Part 1 of 3

Please Follow Us Some More...

See All the Journals.

JUST CLICK HERE!