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FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

2019-08-03 - Belle's Secret Garden

Mountain rain in summer is different. Oh, it can pour at times, but generally it comes down so fine and gentle that you barely notice it.

Belle was disappointed that we missed one of her favorite places during our last mountain ride, so even with rain likely, she talked us into visiting her "secret garden". The sky didn't look too threatening as we started out . . .



2019-08-03 - Belle's Secret Garden

. . . but as we hit the trail it grew cooler and cloudier. Sure looked like rain.
"It's not too far. Just up this way. Oh, don't worry." That seemed funny, coming from the "Oh, my hair!" girl.



So, off we went . . . with some snacking along the way. This time of year, the entire forest is a giant salad bar to them.





"Where the heck do you suppose this place is? Thunder asked."



"Well, this is kinda pretty."



Even though the gray skies drained color from the scenery, it had a quiet beauty.



Hard to beat a trail like this.



2019-08-03 - Belle's Secret Garden

Soon, a soft, misty rain began. It was so gentle; it didn't faze any of us.



At times the trail nearly disappeared in the lush foliage.



"Do you suppose she knows where we are going?"



We took a little break.



Nice to have horses who stay put - in the wilderness.



"Come on, Belle, let's go find this garden of yours!"



"There it is!"



She was right. It was like something Monet would paint.



There were little pink flowers . . .



. . . and delicate ferns . . .



. . . and these bright blooms for a splash of color. Mother nature sure is an artist . . .



. . . and this very strange thing (no one wanted to get close to it).



A truly beautiful place . . . even on a gloomy day.



"See?" "Yup, you were right, Belle!"



She usually is. "It's my woman's intuition!"

MM

2019-08-05 - Old Lincoln Days

Lincoln, New Mexico's "The Last Escape of Billy the Kid" may be the longest running folk pageant in the country (begun in 1940, famed local artist Peter Hurd played Billy during the first one). It remains the centerpiece of the three-day Old Lincoln Days celebration.

Once again, Belle was invited to lead the parade. She is now so well-known that many spectators greet her by name!



Of course, it isn't all work for her. She enjoyed free snacks from some of the vendors. "Oh yummy, kettle corn!"



She did some shopping. "These are very nice. Do you have anything a bit . . . uh . . . larger?"



Greeted countless fans . . .



. . . and posed patiently for photos throughout the historic village.



The Old West seemed to be alive everywhere.



Virtually the entire town is an historic site. This is the operating post office . . . just as it was in the 1880's.



Nearby is the original Tunstall Store, which figured in the community's lusty and violent past.



It is stocked with a variety of authentic merchandise, stored in the basement for more than a century.



Billy reportedly hid beneath the floorboards of the store's living quarters.



Many historic moments are recreated, including the reenactment of a famous gun battle between opposing forces during the infamous "Lincoln County War", which raged here from 1878 until 1881 - and which made Billy the Kid a legend.



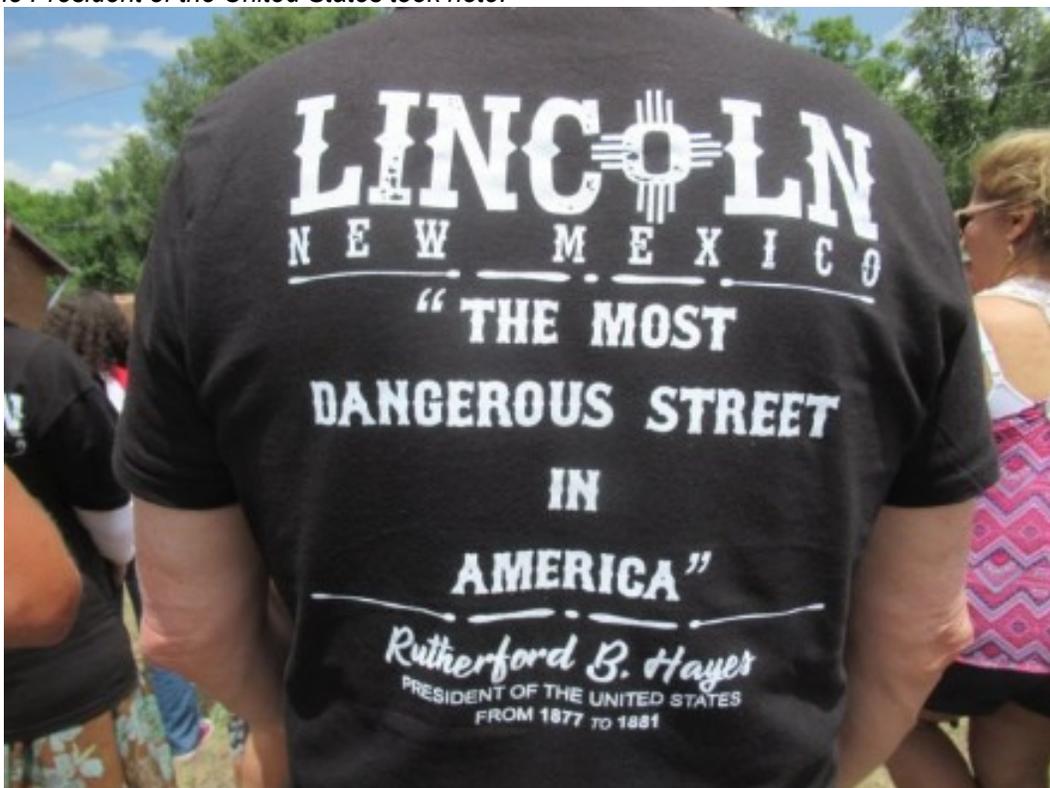
Those were deadly times.



This photo was taken through the same window used by Billy to shoot Deputy Bell in 1881. A marble plaque marks the spot.



Even the President of the United States took note.



Of course, there are peaceful moments, too.



Before we left, Belle did some historic demonstrations of her own.



I was very proud of our little girl.



MM

The elk arrived back at the ranch.

Late yesterday, a lone scout on the hill . . . in front of a dramatic thunder cloud.



Their annual visit has begun.



Nobody sleeps in . . . long before dawn this morning, the symphony began. Bulls bugling, and calves screaming their high-pitched bird-like squawks. At first light, I took a look. Someone was looking back!



The entire herd was here.



LOTS of babies, including this nursing contortionist (still with its "fawn spots").



As I said, many babies (they are the noisy ones . . . and busy) . . .



. . . but they sure are cute!





"Gotta itch!"



The whole herd helps with the little ones. Several moms oversee teaching them how to negotiate fences.



As they moseyed along, I followed them to a nearby pond. They knew I was there. I'm sure they have seen me (with the horses) before.



Note the mom with the laid-back ears on the right; she's teaching manners to the young-uns. "Watch where you're going! Slow down!"



They splashed and played in the water (the raised edge of the pond limited my visibility for photos) . . .



. . . and enjoyed quiet moments, too.



Elk are very Zen.



Even the babies (who typically are on the move ALL THE TIME).





Something special to share with you.

MM

All day, we watched enormous clouds form, grow, rain, diminish and reform.



By early evening, it looked like a ride along high Nogal Peak would be interesting.



The trail us was cool and lined with flowers.



In places, little brooks ran through it.



Wild elderberries are ripening now. Soon, locals will pick them for preserves (and wine).



We disturb a herd of elk - bull, two moms and their calves.



Massive thunderhead clouds grew around us.



Thunder loves to run to the top. He is beautiful in motion.



A spectacular vista awaited us - storm clouds create otherworldly effects in the Tularosa Basin below.



Rain fell in buckets, curtaining the thirsty desert.



In every direction, monster clouds hovered in the distance.





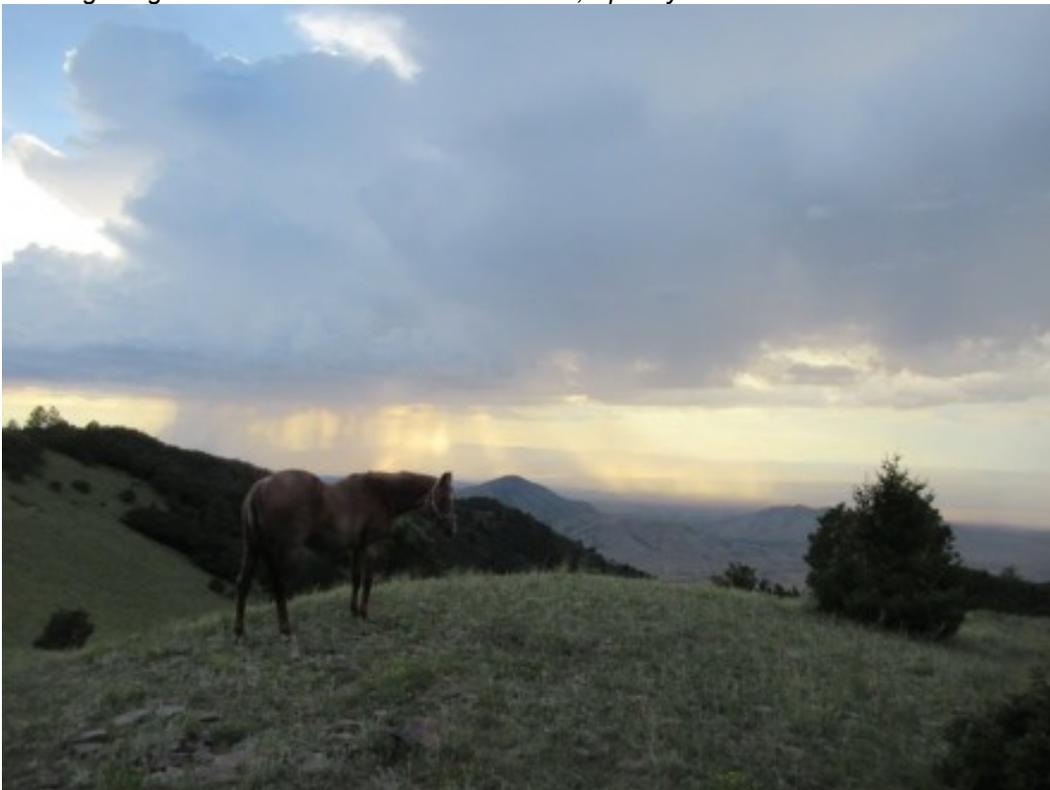
They didn't bother the horses.



Who enjoyed the show, as they grazed contentedly?



Finally, it was getting dark - time to head back. Come on, Spanky!



A beautiful ride home.



Another elk herd - this one more curious.



Finally, it was too dark for pictures - but the camera barely managed to capture these two big bull elk in the moonlight.



MM

For generations, the Lincoln County Fair has provided a genuine, down home celebration of this ranching community. It is a combined effort of the agricultural 4-H club ("I pledge my Head to clear thinking, my Heart to greater loyalty, my Hands to larger service, and my Health to better living . . ."); and the FFA/ Future Farmers of America (whose members have included race car designer and driver Carroll Shelby, and singers Johnnie Cash, Willie Nelson, and Beyoncé!). Young people raise livestock to be auctioned to fund their educations. In the process, they learn life-long attributes such as integrity, honesty, hard work, and responsibility. Parents are discouraged from lending too much assistance - financial or otherwise. These young people do it on their own, as exemplified by the 4-H slogan, "Learn by doing". When many kids today have no idea where their food comes from, these youngsters are already providing it.

The Fair features homemade baked goods, preserves, produce from home/ranch gardens, arts, and crafts - like this complex handwoven afghan. There are no commercial exhibits . . .



... but it's the kids and their animals which dominate the show.



2019-08-09 - A Real County Fair

They work hard all year, for this special event. The day of competition is a busy one - with preparations including bathing and grooming. It's serious work.



There are bovines, like this steer being carefully blow-dried.



Swines, sheep, goats . . .



Rabbits . . .



. . . and poultry - ordinary . . .



... and exotic (don't know why this photo of a crested chicken turned out to be so dramatic - looks like it is under water!).



Each of them proudly raised by a dedicated youngster.





Then comes the competition (a win can make a big difference to their effort's profitability).



All ages of exhibitors and animals are included.



The anxiety of the judging . . .



... and a winning smile!



Everyone gets a chance . . .



... and each, in their own way, is a winner.



As are those of us who will benefit from these industrious young people, for years to come.

MM



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RANCH

2019-08-11 - *Moment By Moment*

Monsoon season in New Mexico is an either/or proposition. Either skies are incredibly beautiful - or they are obscured by dousing rain.

We tried to ride all day. But either it was pouring here; or raining where we might have ridden elsewhere.



Sure made for dramatic skies.





Here it comes . . . run for cover!





The deer emerge when the sun comes out. "Hey! We're not stupid!"



None of it matters to these baby swallows (likely the last batch of the summer) - they are cozy in their nest up under the eaves.



This went on all day, but here was a nice break late in the afternoon.



So, we enjoyed the sunshine right at home. Lulu came along, too.



Everything was fresh and clean.



Lulu enjoys some 'girl time' with Belle . . .



... and she and Thunder have a serious discussion of some sort.



We turned it into a nice little family outing.





Thanks for joining us!

MM

2019-08-12 - *Early Start*

As the monsoon season peaks, mornings are the best bet for a dry ride.

We started out early for the Fort Stanton trails (which were designed to shed water). It looked pretty good . . .



. . . and the trails were dry.



Not too dry - plenty of snacks along the way.



As we climb, Thunder pauses to take in the view.





We stop by one of Spanky's favorite rolling places (nice and sandy), but rain had turned it into a little pond.



"Darn! I don't feel like a swim in that . . ."



As noon approaches, more clouds begin to form. Thunder speeds us up.



"Hey! Race you to the top!"



Now that's a vista.



Way up here, these bees are busy.



We keep our eyes on those building clouds.





We hear the rumbling of distant thunder - probably time to move on.



2019-08-12 - *Early Start*

We left just in time. From home we can see the rain coming down . . . right where we were riding a short while ago.



Later in the day - picture perfect.



MM

What is it about the summer air? Mark Twain wrote: "Warm summer sun, shine kindly here; warm summer wind, blow softly here." That's the way it felt, on a beautiful summer afternoon at Ranchman's Camp.

Oh, that summer sky . . . everyone was ready to get out and enjoy it.



Spanky thought that looked like a good direction.



Along the way, Thunder had some fun racing in and out of arroyos. "Whoopee!"



The rest of us preferred a more leisurely pace.



Thunder slowed down and joined us. The country rolled on, like an endless green sea . . .



They settled into a relaxed walk together (with plenty of snacking).



Lucky them - lucky me.



Back aboard Belle, we discover another arroyo.



Thunder and Spanky scout ahead.



"Enough of being down in a hole!", they seemed to say.



They climbed up for a better view from above.



But Belle's 'women's intuition' had other ideas . . . green, green grass just around the next bend.



Alas, it was time to head back.



2019-08-13 - Ranchman Sky

"Summer afternoon - summer afternoon, to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language", Henry James. We might agree . . .



MM

2019-08-14 - *Lulu Goes to Town*

Lulu enjoys going along into Ruidoso on errands - and visiting nearby Cedar Creek picnic area, which is especially nice this time of year.

The road to Cedar Creek.



Lulu goes exploring.



2019-08-14 - *Lulu Goes to Town*

It's a special spot - offering picnic facilities like this covered pavilion, and lots of easy trails.



Ferns galore along the little creek.









MM



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2019-08-15 - *Lush Land*

Skull Trail is among the most remote - and rewarding - our mountains have to offer. It's lush with ferns and flowers, and shady oaks. A peaceful place.

This area tends to attract monsoon rains, but we took a chance.



Near the trail head, Belle enjoys some tasty summer grass.



Then she and Thunder have a little frolic before heading up the trail.



The lower trail follows a beautiful narrow valley.



Soon, it leads through lush ferns . . .



. . . and beneath natural arbors of shady oaks.



The foliage becomes more dense.



Much of the trail is steeply inclined; I am happy to dismount and walk along with the horses.



Higher and higher we climb, until we get our first look at Nogal Peak.



We've already climbed a couple of thousand feet.





"Almost there!", I keep promising Belle.



At last, we approach the crest.



Breathtaking.



Our beloved high country in all its summer glory.



They take an alpine break - the grass is sweeter here.



Spectacular trust. If you look very closely, you will see the horses in the far distance, at the base of the Peak. They are free in the wilderness.



While I take in the magnificent view, which very few have ever seen.



Yup - they're still there, waiting for me! Special horses.



Reluctantly, we bid farewell to this extraordinary place.



Walking through the deep grass, Spanky looks like he is right out of an Andrew Wyeth painting.



Happy hikers on the trail home.



A beautiful day in a beautiful place.



We're grateful to share it with you.



MM

2019-08-16 - Ride in Our Own Back Yard

It feels like our back yard, but it's actually the forest behind the house.

Chores done (sorta . . .) and a beautiful evening. "You guys want to go for a little ride?" They were on it.



Those lazy clouds above.



Through the little aspen grove.



Thunder scouts things out.







A fun run.



Close to the house, we came upon our elk herd.



Dad was with them.



2019-08-16 - Ride in Our Own Back Yard

If you look closely, you can see the remains of some "velvet" on his antler (blood vessels needed for development of the bone-like horns). When the rack is mature, it sloughs off, exposing the antler.



A late-season calf - still with fawn spots . . .



... and a curious mom.



At home, the bucks were waiting.



"Hey man, you nearly missed happy hour!"



A dramatic end to the day.



MM

In spite of her femininity (or likely because of it!), Belle is a very practical girl. She knows the green summer grass is seasonal. So, she has been bugging us to visit the Bonito Valley, where it grows especially thick and lush.

It was a sleepy summer afternoon when we set out. "Come on you boys - hurry up for goodness sakes!", she urged.



"See? I knew it!"





"Yup, Thunder, I'm glad she kept bugging him about this!"



"Ya' know, he has a lot on his mind - so you have to remind him . . ."



"Hey! How about this nice grass over here?"



"I think we should check out the little swimming hole."



"Darn! Wish I had brought along my new swimsuit . . . (and wish I had stuck to my diet . . .)"





"I like it when she skinny dips, heh, heh."





"I know, Thunder, let's go over where the grass is really deep!" "Okay."



"Come on, Spanky, it's over here. If we don't go, we'll never hear the end of it."



"I don't see what's wrong with this grass." "You know how she is . . ."



"I think it's this way."



"No, silly - it's over there."



"(Sheesh . . .)"



"She's right again."



"This stuff tickles! (giggle)"





Thank you, Belle . . . and thanks for coming along with us!
MM



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2019-08-21 - *Morning Magnificence*

We heard the elk foraging around the place all night - punctuated by the shrill bird-like calls of the calves; and the throat-catching bugle of the bulls.

In the daylight, we found the trespassers in front of the house.



Dad was watching over his family . . .



... and it appeared that Thunder was doing some babysitting, too!



What a magnificent animal.



Looks like Junior thinks so. "He's my dad!"



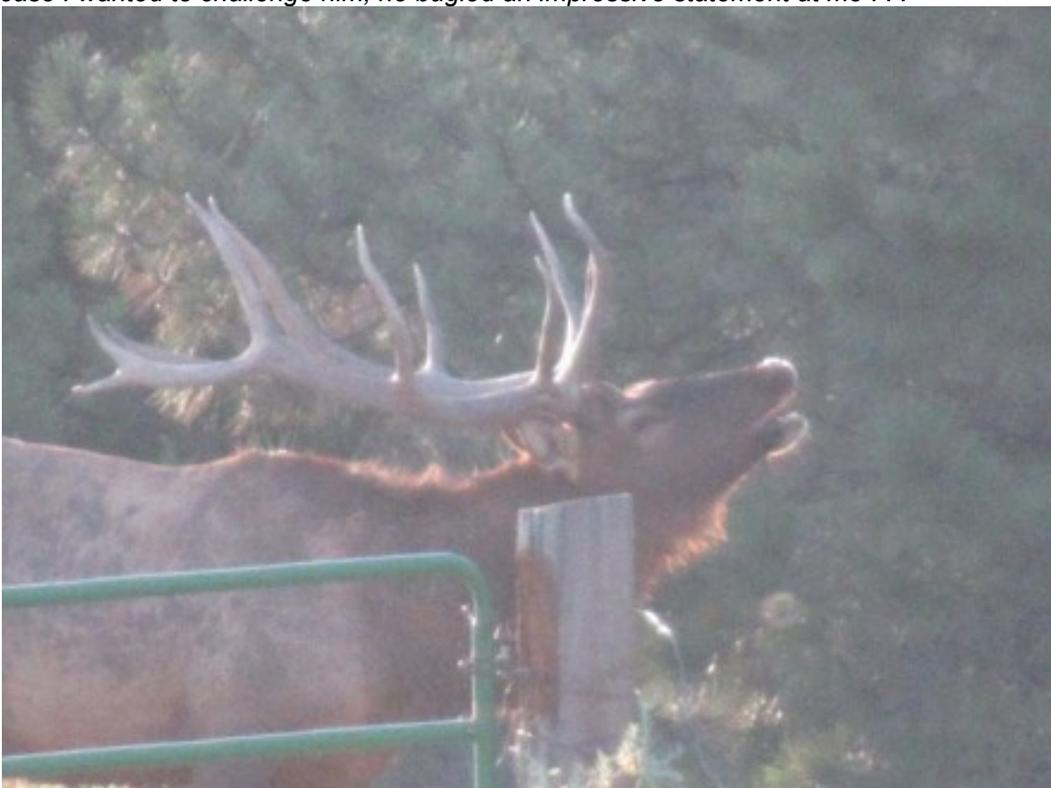


He knew I was watching . . .





Just in case I wanted to challenge him, he bugled an impressive statement at me . . .



2019-08-21 - Morning Magnificence

. . . and again, just to be sure. What a thrill, to be addressed by an elk!



Then he sauntered on.



Thunder took the whole thing in. "Hey, wait a minute - that's my dad your talking to!"



"Yeah, whatever . . ."



He's king of the forest.



"Uh-huh".



He has much to be proud of.



What a great morning to share with you!
MM



FOLLOWED
DREAM
RANCH

Belle was keen to enjoy some more green grass at Bonito Canyon.

"Clear water and a nice salad . . . why not?"



Also, she likes the soft, meandering trails.

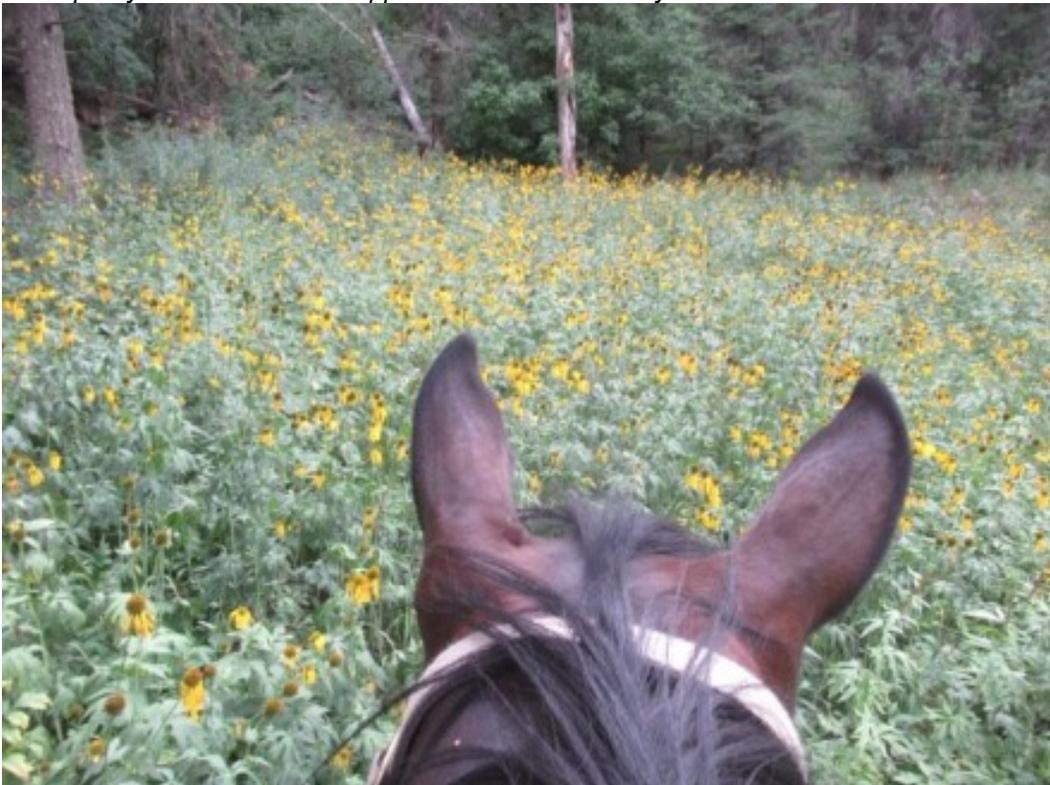


2019-08-22 - *Back to Bonito*

Technically, this area is an "open" campground; but we rarely encounter anyone here.

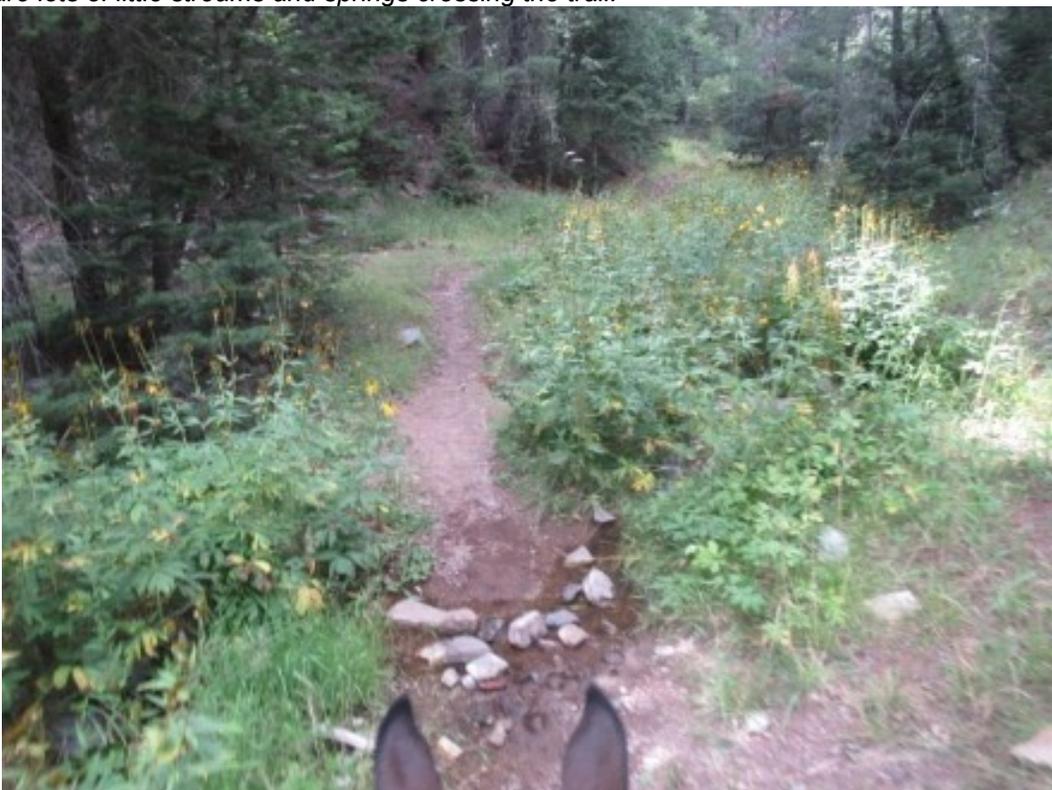


"Aren't those pretty!" Belle has a real appreciation for the beauty of nature.





There are lots of little streams and springs crossing the trail.





The boys like to snack and talk.





Beautiful country.





After our ride, this mom elk and her little one greeted us at home.



MM



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DREAM
RANCH

2019-08-22 - Trophy Room

Our trophy room has no walls - and the trophies all belong to the original owners.
The happy hour has become "the big bucks club"!



It's remarkable how well they all get along.



It really does seem to be their social time.



2019-08-22 - Trophy Room

Occasionally, some elk cousins will pass by (mom elk is checking out the metal deer on the driveway . . . her baby isn't too sure just what those things are).



Some amazing antlers developing this year.



2019-08-22 - Trophy Room

I don't know why they call them "wildlife" - these guys are gentlemen.



There go the elk.



"They know they're always welcome . . . "



"Yeah, but they have their own club."



This antler rack is a standout.



Still growing, in its "velvet" covering.



Sure, is nice to have friendly neighbors!
MM