



It is Friday; I am sitting at my desk at the Simplot data-center trying to finish stuff up so I might get away from the office by 15:00. My cell phone starts buzzing in my pocket. I answer and it is Phil Ryan. Phil asks "if I carry a tow chain in my truck", which I do. I said "yes", and he said "good, because Jon doesn't have one" and hung up.

Great, I knew they were on their way to the North Fork of the Owyhee wilderness and Phil felt we might need a tow chain. Another thing to fret over! We already didn't have a clue if we could or even should try and pack the old barb wire out that had been rolled up the year before, now there was concern that we would get our rigs stuck also.

It had been raining in that area for the last few days and the ground was saturated with water, any low spot was a now a puddle or small lake and the road "Mud Flat Road" was also wet and in many places a bog.

I quickly look out a window and there was still some blue in the sky, so what was there to worry about? Meeting kept me in the office until a bit after 16:00 and the trip back to Sweet, was slow due to all the traffic heading north on Highway 55.

Once home I quickly changed, loaded the stock I was taking and said goodbye to Linda and was on the road by 17:30. I didn't want to deal with traffic, so took a route that took me to Star, then Robinson road to Hwy 45, to Hwy 78 to Grandview. No traffic and making good time, but not the shortest route. All the while the sky was filling with dark clouds and lightning was seen both to the south and east of my course.

Once I turned on to Mud Flat road, I could see I was heading into a storm front and waited for the first rain drops to fall. About the time the road changed from paved to gravel, the rain started.

First just a few drops and then, the tap opened with heavy rain, wind gusts and after a few minutes hail. The road was very slippery, so I had the truck in low-4-wheel drive and was creeping along at between 10 and 15 miles an hour. It is 52 miles from [Grandview to the trail head](#) and under those conditions at that speed, the chance of me getting there before it was dark was bleak. Between lightning flashes I saw lots of rabbits and two antelopes.

The GPS said there was 1.6 miles to go at 21:30, there was still some light and the rain had stopped, but the road was a muddy mess, what would the camp ground be like? Phil and Jon were standing by the road as I pulled up and they said we are really glad to see you, we were concerned you were in a ditch and we didn't really want to come look for you!



They suggested I drive past the trail head road and back my rig into where they had parked, or was it sunk to their axles? I tried this for a few minutes but the road was so muddy and slick I had no control of either truck or

trailer so gave that approach up and just pulled in forward until I was off the road and there was a bit of room for Shannon, who had also signed up for the project.

We got a highline rigged from the hay rack on my trailer to a juniper tree about 100 feet away and started to unload the stock. First out was Tucker, who backed out, lost his footing, and did a nifty back roll. He got up, shook himself off and seemed to be no worse for the experience. The other three unloaded without incident and were quickly attached to the highline and given a bit of hay.

Now thoughts turned to Shannon and the general concensus was, boy we hope she pulled over somewhere, because NO ONE should be driving that road in the dark under current conditions. We stood around for a few more minutes that all headed off to bed.

During the night it rained off and on, increasing the puddle size and making the ground even softer.



Saturday 06:00 dawned foggy and gray, the stock started stirring and the dogs were out checking the camp. I got up, pulled on my boots and went in search of some hay for my guys and started getting the kitchen stuff out of my trailer had hauling it over to Gail and Terry. They had an awning and some higher ground that was still above water.





In the light I could see that all the rigs were covered with mud and that no one was going anywhere until it dried out a bit. Soon coffee smells filled the air and soon bacon and eggs were being served. We were still speculating about Shannon when she pulled up. A different group had put up some signs and they had lured her off the true path and delayed her arrival. She had pulled over and spent the night on a patch of gravel about 20 miles from the tail head.

We got her rig parked right behind mine, and her horse unloaded. She grabble a quick bit of breakfast while the rest of us, started saddling our stock. We had brought with us five riding and seven pack. We had no real idea what was going to work for packing out wire, so we had ... plastic boxes, canvas bags, Utah bags and a couple of manties. I also had some sheets of cardboard to protect from the wire barbs.





It was not long before we were heading up the Cherry Stem road to where the wire was. The stock was wound up, the ground was slick and it was not long, like maybe 100 yards before we had a wreck. Wreck is too big a word, let say a reconfiguration of the pack string. I started with all three pack animals tied together, and it didn't take long for them to get tied into a knot and each trying to kick and bite someone. I got the mess sorted out, putting Misty in the #1 position, with Tucker following. Moosely I put on auto-pilot, something he is good at. This worked better, except for Moosely trying to get all the other stock to be where he wanted them to be, so it was best if I was last in line, with him bringing up the rear.



Mestena, Tucker and Moosely





We rode north on a road for about five miles than down into a canyon, crossed a creek and that is where the trail ends. From the creek crossing you climb a ridge between to canyons, picking your way between rock formations and juniper trees.

After about another hour of riding we were wondering where they hid the wire or if we were on the wrong ridge when some wireless fence posts appeared.

We rested the horses, allowing them to graze on the green grasses. In this tranquil setting is when wreck #2 occurred. Misty and Tucker were facing west and Payette was facing east. All had their heads down and the rope that connected Tucker to Misty got over Payette's ears. He pulled up in surprise and we looked like we were going to do a back roll with me being under him.

I had done this before and this time I made no attempt to stay in the saddle, but landed on one heel and lost my balance and hit the ground hard, flat on my back. Payette didn't fall or step on me, but I laid there for a while, having knocked all the air out of my lungs.





An assessment of my condition told me, while I am sure to have some nifty bruises; otherwise I was in good shape. Payette ran around a couple of trees for a bit while I caught the rest of the group. We tied everyone up and started walking up the ridge and found the first of many piles of rolled up wire. The group that took down the wire did a great job making rolls that were easy to handle and a perfect size for packing. Great JOB!

We brought up Phil's pack stock and soon had both of them packed. He had brought canvas bags and the rolls fit nicely in them. We moved onto another pile and loaded up Terry's and then Jon's pack horses.





Jon brought plastic boxes which also worked well; we used a bit of cardboard to keep the wire quiet. The Utah bags that Misty had were the least successful, just too small for the wire rolls. We ended up sitting on the wire rolls to make them egg shaped and then they fit in the bags.



Moosely had plastic boxes which worked well and Tucker was loaded with manties with cardboard between the wire and him. That was the most successful, in that he carried out about 150 lbs of wire compared to the 120 lbs for the rest. We estimate we packed out around 800 lbs.

The trip out was uneventful, the ground drying as the day went on and while we saw rain in the distance, none fell on us.







As soon as the stock was taken care of, all anyone wanted to do was sit, and enjoy the afternoon with a cold beer. Dinner was pork tenderloin, beans and other sides, followed by a berry cobbler that Shannon made.

While we ate we watched black clouds and saw lightning flashes to the east of us. Just after the last plate had been washed and all were stored the rain started falling so all headed for their bunks. In a few minutes the sound of the rain and hail was like being inside a base drum. It passed after a while and all were soon asleep. It rained off and on all night.

Sunday morning started foggy but by 8 AM was burning off and blue skies could be seen. The plan for the day was after breakfast we would ride to a rock fort that a local had told Phil about.







The route to this fort follows the same road that took us to the canyon the day before. You continue pass the trail we took and ride thru dense stands of Juniper to a small lake in a meadow.

Above this meadow is a rocky bench that looks a bit like a ship's prow. We started bushwhacking up the bench and found a trail, from the low hanging branches over it, I am guessing made by cows.

Once on top of the bench we started riding east to the cliff face. We were soon off our horses and the ground

was a combination of rocks and mud and we were concerned about hurting a horse. We parked them and continued on foot.



In a very short distance we found the first of a number of rock walls that made up the fort. While we don't know the exact story of why this structure is there; a Google search of [Indian encounters of Idaho](#) indicated that in the 1870's there were a number of skirmishes with the locals and the Bannock tribe in that area. Maybe this was built during one of them.







If you got overrun in this position and didn't want to be captured you could get a quick end by stepping off the cliff at your back. It was also very unlikely anyone would sneak up on you from that side.



After exploring the area for a bit we headed back to the horses and back to camp. Dinner was grilled chicken and other tasty dishes and we again watched a great natural fireworks display to the east.





All were in their sleeping bags early enjoying almost perfect sleeping weather.

Monday started with blue skies and after a quick breakfast all packed up and we were soon on the road heading back to their respective homesteads. This was an atypical trip in a number of ways, but all who attended had a great time and we accomplished the task we had set out to do.