

Succor Creek Fun Ride

“Just how *do* you stuff an elephant into a Safeway bag?”

“Hey Laurie, how do you stuff an elephant into a Safeway bag?” Is this a rhetorical question, Lorraine? I really have no idea how, or why, anyone would *want* to stuff an elephant into a Safeway bag. I’ve learned a lot since joining the Squaw Butte Back Country Horseman – I’ve learned how to freeze-dry just about anything, how to be a better steward of our natural resources and the benefits of low impact camping. I’ve learned wilderness first aid for both human and horse and how to more safely handle a chainsaw. I have learned proper weight distribution is essential when packing stock and the value of mastering the diamond hitch. Most importantly, I’ve learned that all of this, and more, is an ongoing and ever-changing process. I have not, however, learned how to stuff an elephant into a bag of any kind.



October 7th was on the schedule as a fun ride with an undetermined destination. Rob and Linda would be back east attending their sons’ wedding. Since Rob usually handles this sort of thing, coordination for the fun ride was to fall on me in his absence. I chose Succor Creek State Natural Area.

http://www.oregonstateparks.org/park_13.php.

October weather can be unpredictable with temperatures ranging from the low 40’s to the upper 70’s; sunshine one minute and rain the next. Two years ago, I woke up in the later part of October to 4” of snow on my tent. Still, the high

desert is your best bet when you want to avoid freezing your knickers off in the early fall.

I set up camp Saturday evening a few miles downstream from the park in the proximity of my usual camping spot. A hunting camp occupied my favorite spot. I like the area for the nearness to the creek and a nice tree that serves as my high-line for Jack and Annie. A hundred yards downstream offered little in high-line prospects – but it would do. Thankfully, horse camping has become second nature to Jack and Annie and I could tie them to a cob-web and trust that I’d still have something to ride in the morning.

Cell service is iffy at best this far into the desert. There are a few spots you can get signal if you are high enough that you can see outlying civilization. One such spot I have proclaimed, “Cell Phone Hill.” I would ride to Cell Phone Hill and see if anyone left a message in regards to whether they were coming or not. I cinched Jack’s bareback pad around his girth and swung on with the grace and coordination of a gymnast. OK...that is not entirely true. I have not been able to swing on a horse since I stopped riding anything over 14 hands. Instead, I coaxed Jack next to the wheel-well I had perched myself upon and made a flying leap in the general direction of where I HOPED he still stood. One of two things usually occurs in this scenario. 1. I underestimate and fall short of my goal, hitting the horse square in the ribs, desperately grasping for anything I can reach to drag myself up and onto his back – all the while kicking and flinging wildly about. 2. I overestimate the intended landing and propel my body, head first, up and over the horses back, often ending up off-center across his back with my head somewhere around his hocks and my knees hitting mid spine; the latter being much more difficult to recover from. If one finds themselves in this predicament, I find it best to cut your losses and tumble on over the other side with

as much grace and humility as one can muster. If you do manage to recover without breaking anything – you can always jump up, dust off the seat of your Levi’s while looking around and exclaiming, “I meant to do that!”

No new messages. Either everyone who signed up planned to show – or none of them had my number. I would drive to the park Sunday morning and wait for them to show up at 10:30 AM. If by 11:30 AM nobody had arrived – I would venture out alone. Maybe not as much fun – but any day in the desert on horseback is a good day. With this plan in mind, I rode back to camp. On the way, I stopped by the hunter’s camp and apologized in advance for driving through their camp the next morning. The hunter, unaware that he was camping in *my spot*, showed little concern and, to paraphrase, “will probably be long gone before you drag your lazy butt out of bed.”

The hunters’ camp indeed looked uninhabited Sunday morning as I made my way to the Park. I pulled over in an area big enough to accommodate a number of large trailers and waited. Not more than 10 minutes passed and Janine and Lou Ann, followed by Chick and Lorraine, swung into the parking area and unloaded. We were ready to ride by 11:00 AM.

Succor Creek is a large area with endless possibilities for exploration. I presented a few choices based on previous knowledge of the area. Rob would call this, “local knowledge.” I call it, “Been there – done that.” Nobody had a preference except our die-hard cowgirl of the bunch, Lorraine: “Which is the longest ride, and which is the shortest?” I explained that no matter which direction we went, we could ride for as long and as far as we wanted and asked which one she would rather do, long ride, or short ride? “Duh...LONG!” It was exactly what I wanted to hear. With no particular destination in mind, we crossed the foot bridge at the park and headed North West. I think. It “felt” North West to me, but I have been lost out here more times than I like to admit. I refrained from sharing that bit of information until after the ride.



A chilly breeze persuaded everyone to pile on extra layers for warmth. Everyone, that is, except Lou Ann and I. Neither of us brought more than a light jacket. If it’s true that nerds of a feather flock together, one of us is going to have to learn to be more prepared. The chill came and went with elevation. The higher we climbed, the less protected from the wind. The lower draws and valleys were pleasant by contrast.

We followed a four wheeler trail to the top of a ridge that overlooked the canyon and passed through gates that asked only to be closed behind us. Nobody cared which direction we went. The only consensus was to head for lower ground out of the nippy wind that picked up the higher we climbed. We stopped for lunch at the bottom of a small, rolling canyon with a trickling spring. As each of us rummaged through our saddle bags to retrieve our lunch, I got the feeling the others expected something of me. What could it be? Ah...I know what they are waiting for. They are waiting to see if I brought Beanie Weenees’ for lunch. As expected, I pulled a can of Van Camps out of Jacks’ saddle bags and took up residency on a flat rock. I looked at that can of Beanie Weenie’s and sighed to myself, “If I happen to acquire a dislike for these damn things, I’m



screwed.” Some things a person must do when it’s expected of them. I will be eating Beanee Weenee’s for the rest of my life, like ‘em or not.

After lunch, we looped around and headed back in the general direction of the trailers with no intentions of ending the ride. We could see an old road that appeared to meander up the middle of the canyon on the other side of the park. The best way to find out where any road goes is to ride it. We made our way across rolling desert hills covered in tall, yellow stalks of wheat grass dancing with the breeze. Had it been summer – and green – and Austria – one might have expected Julie Andrews to appear any moment and break into song. Instead – we had Chick:

“A frog went a-courtin' and he did ride, M-hm, M-hm.
A frog went a-courtin' and he did ride,
Sword and pistol by his side, M-hm, M-hm.

He rode up to Miss Mousie's door, M-hm, M-hm,
He rode up to Miss Mousie's door,
Where he'd often been before, M-hm, M-hm.”

Julie’s got nothing on Chick, but just to make sure he kept one step ahead of Ms. Andrews – Chick tossed in a bonus reciting of “OI Shorty.” A Google of the lyrics to “OI Shorty” was non-productive. You will have to take my word for it that such a poem exists. Apparently, the lyrics are top secret and available only to those holding proper security clearance, Tex Ritter...and Chick.



Chick and Lorraine and I rode ahead of Janine and Lou Ann. From behind us came the sounds of laughter and general merriment. Lorraine decided they were having way too much fun without us. Not wanting her to feel slighted, I thought I would contribute to the cause by telling the only joke I can remember. “Hey guys – do you know how to sell a deaf lady a chicken?” No Laurie, how do you sell a deaf lady a chicken?” I cleared my throat and turned in the saddle to better project my not-so-booming voice toward my audience and hollered as loud as I could: “HEY LADY!!!!WANT TO BUY A CHICKEN?!” It was funnier the first time I heard it – and I’m sure there was beer involved. It was then that Lorraine posed a question I did not entirely understand at the time, “Hey Laurie – do you know how to stuff an elephant into a Safeway bag?” I mulled this over. I don’t think they have Safeway stores anymore, do they? How big is the bag? I seldom understand jokes and have a tendency to look for the angle instead of just

accepting the joke for what it is. How big is the elephant? Is it a real elephant, or is it a toy elephant? I couldn't see behind me, but I think Lorraine may have rolled her eyes at me as she proceeded to tell me how you stuff an elephant into a Safeway bag. "You take the "S" out of Safe and the "F" out of Way....that's how." I still didn't get it.



We knew where we needed to be – we just weren't sure how to get there. The trail we followed took us to an old homestead. Weeds and native vegetation have reclaimed a ten acre parcel of farmland. Dilapidated corrals and cabin ruins clung to the old farms historic past. At the far end of the farm, an old, steep road crossed the creek before ascending the sage covered hill. I was fairly certain I'd been on this road before. Regardless, it was obvious to us that the road would lead to the main road above. We needed to get across that field to get to the road. The first gate we came to was padlocked and posted: "No trespassing! Violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." What exactly is the penalty for trespassing as defined by the fullest extent of the law? I would imagine during the period this place was homesteaded, it was legal to shoot trespassers. None of us wanted to put the theory to test. Another gate, a mere 50 yards down the fence-line, was neither posted nor padlocked. Works for me.

A deep, narrow irrigation trench cut the full length of the pasture just inside the fence. Our horses reacted like most horses when encountering narrow, steep trenches. They either vault over it as if they are training for the puiissance, or refuse to budge at all. Jack surprised me by gingerly stepping over, as did the Chick's horses and Lou Ann's. Two Ton took the non-budging approach. I doubt the five of us on our five mounts and the two mules could have pulled that horse over the 18" gap. According to Two Ton, that trench might as well have been the portal to hell and he wasn't stepping over no-stinking portal to hell.

I rode up the trench and found an easier spot to cross. Well, it might not have been easier – but I hoped it would be less scary in Two Ton's mind. A section had been trampled out by cattle or game. While it was boggy and wide – Two Ton decided it was much less scary and tip-toed across. What, you've never seen a 1300lb horse tip-toe?

On our way once more, we crossed the flat, overgrown farm ground and came to an abrupt stop at another padlocked gate. This obstacle was not as daunting as the previous one. To the left of the gate was a hole in the fence where another gate once hung. We cleared the path of wire and rode through the hole and onto the road. We were correct in assuming this little road lead to the main road above. We came out less than two miles above the park.

There's an overview of the creek at a bend in the top of the road. I wanted to take a picture of the



group on top this overlook. If you are afraid of heights, this is not the place you want to be hanging out. The overhang juts out and plummets straight down to the creek below. I'm no judge of distance so I cannot tell you how many feet it is to the bottom. I can tell you that one misstep and you better hope you have all your affairs in order and have made peace with the Lord. I snapped a couple pictures and was about to call it good when Lorraine flagged down a small pickup returning from a hunt. She asked the occupants if they would mind taking a picture of all of us. They graciously obliged.



We had one more obstacle to overcome before riding into camp: a cattle-guard. Lorraine dismounted and nimbly disconnected single strands of wire attached to the cliff side of the cattle-guard. Some of us rode and some of us walked our animals around the narrow ledge to the other side. Janine and I cut down over the hillside and rode cross country to the primitive camping section of the park while the others took to the road. Janine has been working with her little molly, Carmel – getting her use to being on the trail and socialized with humans and other stock. Carmel didn't miss a beat and will make a fine addition to our four-legged counterparts.

Janine and Chick changed a flat on the Chicks' trailer while the rest of us prepared for the haul home. We made a beer and bottled water toast to a successful ride and filed caravan style out of the park.

Tapping my fingers on the steering wheel to the beat of "Froggie went a court'in," it suddenly hit me – "Hey Lorraine...there is no "F" in way!"

The End



