

The Winter Wreck

By Rob Adams

Many movies get the audience hooked by zooming in on the lead character in some dangerous situation and then flash back to a scene 24 hours earlier. Here is such a scene, starring Rob Adams.

High on a ridge in the 4 Mile wild horse area lays a young horse on his side in a gully, feet pointing up slope. Rob's left leg is trapped under the horse by the saddle and saddle bags. Flash ahead to two hours ago...

With the total lack of snow below 5500 feet, winter riding ranges have been expanded this year. I have been riding my colt, Payette, most weekends and Sunday. January 8th looked to be another nice day, so I put out the word to a couple riding buddies that I was thinking about riding 4 Mile Creek. Two passed, but Laurie Bryan was game. We would meet at 11:00 at the bridge, just before the Y. After tacking up, we started on the loop route we often ride. The ground, for the most part, was frozen or dry and the stock had no problem with footing. There were a few cows still in the area, but we were looking for the mustang bands. We watched for fresh hoof prints, stud piles and other signs that might indicate wild horses in the area.

As we crested each ridge, we enjoyed the views as I pointed out different land marks. Entering a large bowl at the top of the last ridge, I mentioned that this was an area where we often saw the wild bands. We were riding up a small gully, scanning for mustangs, when Payette turned 90 degrees and started up the north side of a frozen bank. Payette lost his footing. Imagine if you will, the camera panning in for a slow motion close-up. Payette begins to slide backwards, sitting on his haunches before pivoting to the left and landing on his left side with his feet pointed up the gully. In the split second it took for this to happen, I considered bailing off the horse. Instead, I remained seated in an attempt to help him regain his balance. My intentions were good, but in hindsight, I should have bailed. Over we went in a heap at the base of the gully. So there we were, Payette on his side with me lying along his neck with his head next to my chest and my left leg pinned under him from mid thigh. I was wearing chaps that protected my leg some, but also held it in place under him.

A quick assessment of the situation: I seemed to be unhurt, but was not sure how I was going to get us untangled. Payette tried to roll himself to his feet, but the saddle, saddle bags and myself, prevented that from happening. I was also concerned that he might break my leg in the process. I held his head and patted him so that he would stop thrashing.

Laurie jumped off her horse and ran over to see if she could help. She should have taken a picture, but was more concerned about me then having a featured picture in the 2013 calendar.

We discussed a number of options, including Laurie taking a dally on her horn and pulling Payette off of me. Plan "A" was for Payette to tuck his front feet and for her to pull on his lead rope. He started to come up on his knees, releasing his weight from my leg, and I wiggled out from under him. He was then able to stand up and we all just stood there for a minute shaking. Had plan A not worked, plan "B" was to unsaddle him. Had plan B failed, plan "C" was Laurie's dally idea. If none of those options worked, plan "D" was try and get some help via cell phone.

After an inventory of my condition and Payette's, it appeared we had both come through the event with minimum damage. Other than my left stirrup leather being a bit more scuffed, all was good. I led him to the top of the ridge, climb back on and we finished the ride without further adventures. I will say that I paid a lot more attention to where he was going and what the condition of the ground was. He seemed to be a bit more careful where he put his feet, as well.