



TWENTY- EIGHTH ANNUAL COLORADO MULE RIDE

By Howard Graham

North Fork Ranch, Shawnee, Colorado was the site chosen by 2004 president Lee Sheard for this year's "Ride of the Aspens". North Fork Ranch is located on the bank of the North Fork of the South Platte River. A very picturesque setting, great guests facilities and terrific hosts, Karen and Dean May.

President Sheard arranged for a group trip to the Flying W in Colorado Springs on Saturday night. This marked the official beginning of the ride activities. A total of twenty-eight riders and spouses assembled for the evening meal of beef and beans and Western Band entertainment. Now we know why they put that cold applesauce in one compartment of that tin plate.

Sunday 09/19/04

A beautiful Colorado morning greeted mule riders as they assembled at the Al-Kaly Mule Train tack room for coffee and sweets. Gear stowed and mules loaded, the convoy left the barn at 9:30 a.m. for the two-hour plus trip to North Fork Ranch. The trip North and West on highway 285 was uneventful and the convoy arrived at 11:45 a.m. Dean had everything very well organized and riders and mules were quickly united with early arrivals.

Lunch, scheduled for 12:30 p.m., was next on the agenda. Karen's tasty Mexican fare followed by cream cheese brownies soon had riders thinking more about a nap

than an afternoon ride. We started with a morning of sunshine and clear skies but about noon it turned to clouds and overcast with a hint of rain. In spite of the threatening skies, the afternoon ride was joined by a majority of the riders. Still the rain that started about 2:00 p.m. (ride departure time) fell on a number of mules still in the corrals. Randy Gibbs was heard to say "he did not mind putting on a slicker to get home, but there was something bad wrong with leaving on a ride with your slicker on". Those hardy souls that took the ride returned in about two hours, a little damp and cool, but in high spirits.

Dean May introduced his family and staff and gave a brief history of North Fork when the riders gathered for the evening meal. Flank steak cooked outside on the grill, broccoli and new potatoes with white chocolate bread pudding for desert set the stage for a week of excellent meals and deserts. North Fork was a egg lying operation in the sixties and the unique Stonehinge House, across the river, was built in 1940 as a home for the Petterson family. Dean and Karen arrived in the mid 1980's and the rest is history. North Fork bears no resemblance to its early beginnings. You could imagine rustlers, gun-fights, romance and all sorts of stories but not a chicken ranch.

Monday 09/20/04

Monday dawn clear and cool. As the sun warmed the morning chill, riders gathered in the dinning hall for a 7:30 breakfast. Pack lunches were the order of the day as we prepared for a 9:00 a.m. ride departure. Monday's ride, scheduled for five to six hours, departed the corrals more or less on time. The ride began with a moderate climb up Dead Horse Gulch . A group picture was taken in a small meadow with riders spread across the face of a rocky ridge. Proceeding up Dead Horse we crossed the upper end of Crow Gulch and rode over into Slaughter House Gulch. After a break for lunch and a brief rest, the ride continued down Slaughter House on the return leg of the ride.

The highlight of the day was a slight detour to ascend Derringer Peak. This is a special place in the hearts of Colorado Mule Riders. It was on Derringer Peak Betty Brown and a few dear friends, in June of 2000, spread the ashes of our mule rider brother Augie Brown. A small capsule inscribed with Augie's name marks the spot. Standing above its resting place in the cradle of a rock, Gene Stille spoke to the gathered riders about his friend and our fellow mule rider companion. It was a very special time as Gene struggled to express his feelings for the loss of a dear friend. Art Lapham also shared his thoughts and remembrances of Augie. Not much talk as we rode off Derringer Peak. The wind picked up, stirred the aspen leaves and left

coolness in the corners of eyes.

Tuesday 09/21/04

A big change occurred in the weather overnight. Rain began sometime after midnight and as riders gathered for a 7:00 a.m. breakfast the rain began to change to a mixture of sleet and snow. The decision was made to postpone the high country ride and the Maverick Ceremony until Thursday. Dean told the group there was significant snow and ice on Kenosha Pass and the conditions were not safe for the planned ride. Some of the older riders remarked this was the first time they could remember a ride being cancelled. It continued to snow, sometimes heavy as the day wore on. Dean took advantage of the inactivity and rounded up some bored mule riders to help his friend Dave get his piano and gun safe moved to the house of his wife to be. Dave, Dean, Harold and Scott DeWalt, Dave Potts, Bob Myler, J.R. Key and I were commandeered. Good thing there were some young strong men in that group. The gun safe was upstairs and the piano was, well it was a piano. It would have been interesting to hear the comments of the folks on the highway who saw men instead of livestock in a stock trailer going down the road in a snow shower.

Seven riders decided to brave the elements and go for a ride after lunch. Dean, Randy Gibbs, Keith Wilson, Bob Myler, Oats McEwen, Bill Winton and Don Ward did in fact put on their slickers and go out. Most of the ride was on ranch property and never far from the corrals. They returned in about two hours, a little wet and cold.

Wednesday 09/22/04

Wednesday was games day and the weather turned for the better. Breakfast was scheduled for 8:00 a.m. Games at 9:00 a.m. to allow a little extra time to get the arena ready. After a day off from riding, everyone was ready for some fun and games. This year marked a change in events that made up games day. Three new team events were added and one individual event dropped. The water relay, ring jostling and the party hose race were added and the keyhole race was dropped. Games day chairman Hal Johnston, assisted by Paul Riffle, conducted the games in the ranch arena. Thanks to Hal and Paul for a great job. Randy Gibbs, Bucky Richards, Bob Thompson, Owen McEwen, Bob Fasnacht and Bob Webb all

pitched in to keep thing running smoothly.

The overall quality of the mules has really improved in the last few years and the competition was fast and intense. It was a day full of fun and friendly competition. Art Lapham gave us all a brief scare when his mule stumbled and fell as he entered the arena. Art came up covered in mud but otherwise in pretty good shape. At that point Art was definitely a strong contender for the Hard Luck Trophy. When the dust settled, or rather the mud, Scott DeWalt, in a close race, earned the high score.

Thursday 09/23/04

After breakfast, mules and riders were loaded in trucks and trailers for a trip to the top of Kenosha Pass. It soon became evident the snow we had on Tuesday was much more intense at higher altitude. Things went smoothly and after about a twenty-minute ride the trailers arrived atop the pass, the starting point for the day's ride.

The trail led north and east as we gained altitude on a series of switchbacks. After a mile or so all tracks disappeared and we were riding in new snow. As we neared our destination the trail became extremely steep. The site chosen for the ceremonies offered a terrific view of the Twin Cone Peaks and Mount Blaine. The site, about 11,760 feet, was nearer the North Twin Cone Peak and perhaps a few hundred feet below. The wind was strong and steady with a definite bite as riders gathered at the base of a small rock outcrop.

Dave Potts conducted the empty saddle ceremony reading the names of the mule riders who have pass before us. Owen McEwen, the author of the empty saddle and maverick ceremonies, conducted the Maverick ceremony for our six first time riders. I have been fortunate enough to hear ten of the thirteen ceremonies Owen has conducted. Each one has been special and defines the spirit of the Colorado Mule Riders. Mavericks and veterans alike will tell you they were emotionally moved. A time capsule containing the names of all the passed and present riders, as is the custom, was buried beneath a pile of rocks. A group photo was taken, with the mavericks holding the mule riders banner and Old Glory snapping sharply in the wind.

Riders mounted and we worked our way down from the Twin Peaks area to a lower and sheltered spot for lunch. The lunch break also offered an opportunity to take individual pictures with Mount Blaine in

the background. The return trip to the trailhead was down via the same route. The biggest difference going down was seeing the trail created in the new snow by all the mules. The decent was faster on the downhill and the mules knew they were headed back to the trailers. We made one stop to take a group picture. There was a small meadow containing a number of aspen, with terrific color, that provided a perfect background. The return trip to the ranch was smooth and the tack was stowed and mules fed in short order.

After the traditional dinner of steak and trimmings, the riders assembled for the awards ceremony. The May family and staff were presented a plaque in appreciation of their superb job of hosting the twenty-eight annual mule ride. President Sheard recognized the Board members and thanked all the committee chairmen and assistants for all their good work.

Each rider was presented with a plaque commemorating the ride. First, second and third place bars were added to the plaques of those riders earning a top three finish in the games day competition. Art Lapham was presented with the Hard Luck Trophy for his spill that scored a 9.125 from all but the French judge. Scott DeWalt claimed the All-Around Traveling Trophy on his dad's mule Cricket. Congratulations to Scott, a first time winner, for a very consistent performance.

President Sheard was presented with a gift in appreciation of his service. Gale Fortney was recognized for his many contributions to the success and longevity of the mule riders. Dave Potts, the incoming president, made some remarks about the ride planned for 2005 at Peaceful Valley near Lyons, Colorado. A photograph session including the mavericks and riders grouped by state completed the night's activities.

Friday 09/24/04

Breakfast marked the end of another successful mule ride. It is always with a little sadness we say goodbye. For most our chance to spend time in the company of our Colorado Mule Rider family comes but once a year. It is, however, a special time. Thanks to all those past and present riders who unselfishly contributed to creating that unique bond that is experienced by those few called - The Colorado Mule Riders.



Dean May owner and operator of the Northfork Ranch crossing the South Platte River that runs through the ranch.



Ken Kleinsorge of Greeley, CO muling Game Day.



Some did have the heavy snow during the afternoon. Don Ward (dark mule) and John McEwen (white mule)



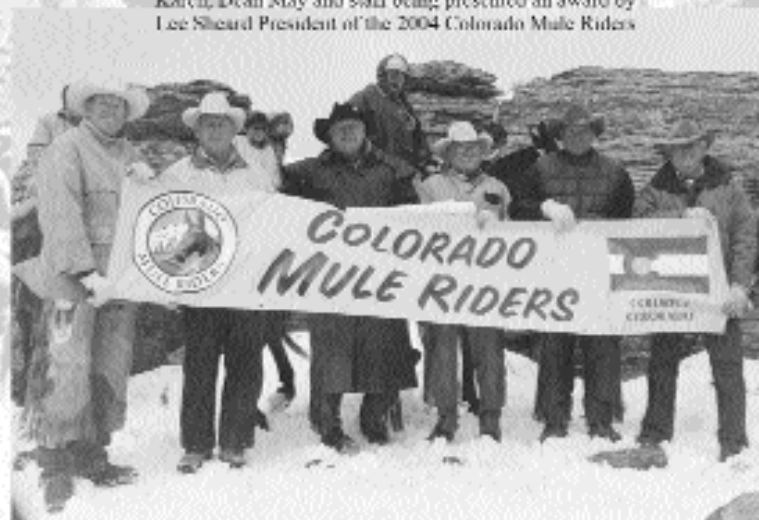
Scott DeWalt take home the traveling trophy. Won by riding to high point Game Day participant. *Congratulations Scott!*



Karen, Dean May and staff being presented an award by Lee Sheard President of the 2004 Colorado Mule Riders



Out going Colorado Mule Riders President Lee Sheard (left) of Johnstown, CO along with and incoming 2005 Colorado Mule Riders President Dave Potts (right) of PinchaSprings, CO



2004 Mavericks. (From left to right) Alan Gilman, Alpine, Utah - Keith Wilson, Alpine, Utah - Donald Wood, Salem, Arkansas - Bill Winston, Goldthwaite, Texas - Mark Majerus, Farmington, Minnesota - Troy Smith, Gadsden, Alabama



Colorado Mule Riders checking out the remains of a long ago cabin in the beautiful Colorado Aspen.



Maverick, Alan Gilman Napping after lunch on the trail. The sun is warm and sleep comes easy



Dean May pointing to a distant mountain with a story to go with it. Dean guides in these mountain all summer and knows them well.