

Trout, Scout and Mules

By Ben Tennison



Wayne Carlton is a celebrity in the hunting world, host of Elk Country Journal, a life time member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, founder of Carlton Game Calls, hunting video producer, guide, singer, song writer, auctioneer, camouflage designer, not to mention he's a genuinely great mule man. Wayne Carlton also puts on hunting and calling seminars all over the country which keeps him in the air or driving down the road to put one on. Wayne is in big demand these days as hunting, fishing and the wilderness life style of recreation are being lived by more of us, the baby boomers.

Wayne Carlton lives in Montrose, Colorado, along with his beautiful wife, Linda. Wayne and Linda with their son, Marc Carlton, and Marc's wife Stephanie, own and operate a relatively new camouflage business called "Camo West". Their new and very quickly successful camouflage pattern is called, "Vanish", The "Vanish" pattern they developed blends in perfectly with the vegetation of the west. Entrepreneurs are what the business community calls them. I call them mule folks. Every one of them are genuine good folks just as most mule people are.

Neta and I met the Carltons some years back when Wayne and his family along with the Reese Brothers Mule Company put on the first ever Rocky Mountain Mule Sales back in 1998 and 99 in Montrose, Colorado. I bump into mules often in that part of the country that were bought by the many in attendance at those first Rocky Mountain Mule sales.

Wayne Carlton has done more than he even knows to promote the mule in the west. He's a mule ambassador. He truly loves those hard going, tough made mules that are born and bred to take the rugged mountains of the west. It is mules that can and will stay hooked with a tough, hard going, mountain man like Wayne Carlton.

Because of his love for mules, Wayne had been kicking around the idea of shooting a show about mules for sometime for the television show that he hosts, "Elk Country Journal". The plan came together last summer in late July. It will be aired on the Outdoor Life Network, (OLN). Using filming jargon, "We put one in the can called 'TROUT SCOUT AND MULES' that will air in January, February or March of 2006. They feel strongly but not promising it will air the first of

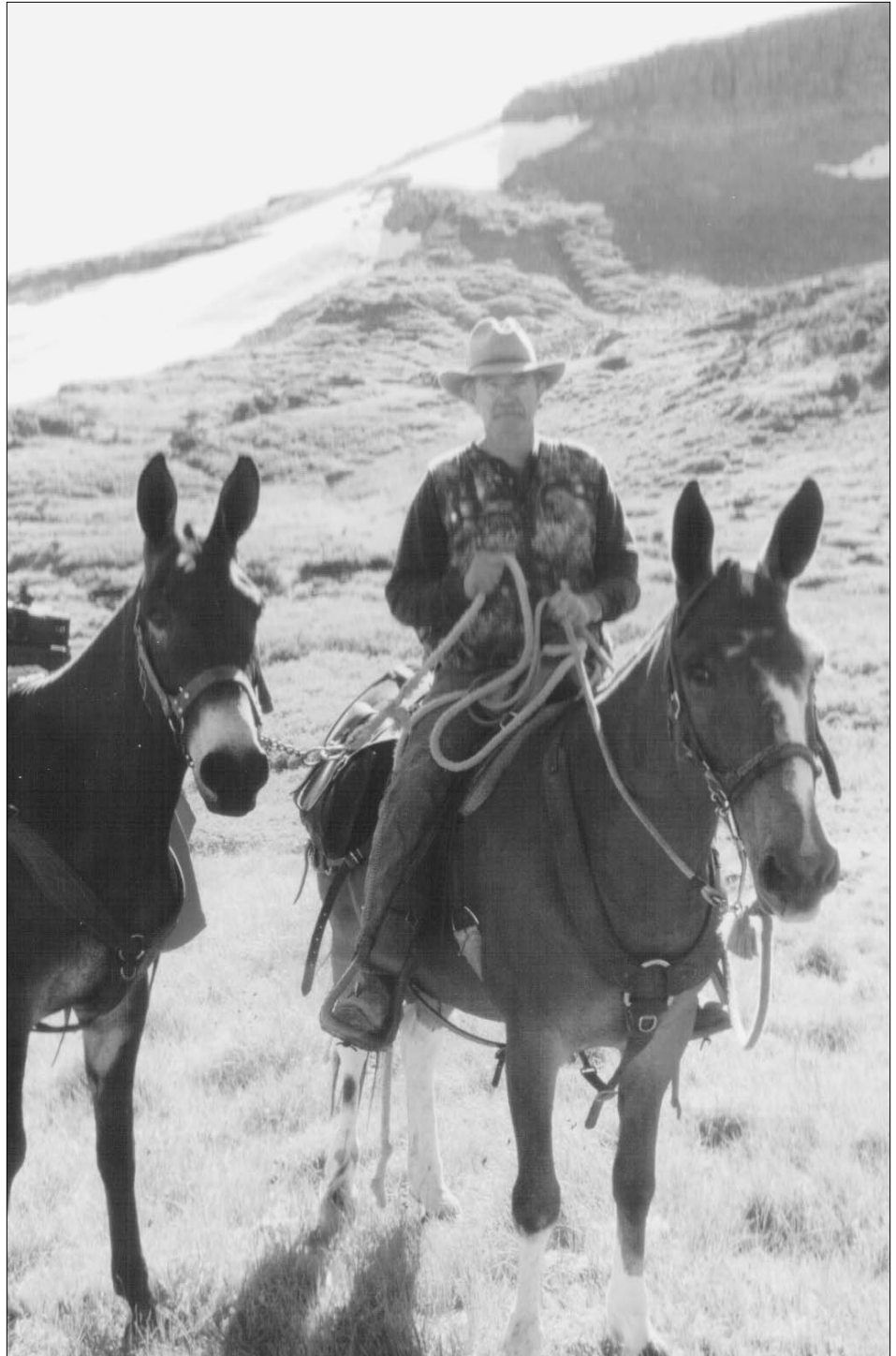
February with the possibility of two different shows. *Western Mule Magazine* was invited along to help in the making of this show. Neta and I were tickled to be a part of the breath taking beauty, rough mountain trails and cool mountain air where this magnificent creature, the mule, shone like the summer's mountain sun did during the filming of the show.

I came away with a new appreciation for those in the wilds of America making such shows as these. I, perhaps as you, thought surely just behind the cameras were all the conveniences of home. I understand it does exist on some of the shows produced pertaining to the outdoors but that does not exist in Mr. Carlton's world. Camped at 11,500 feet, you leave behind a world that does not exist in the wilderness of the backcountry and I'm thankful it does not.

There on top of the world, a wall tent, wood smoke, Dutch oven cooked meals and a pen full of good mules seems quite appropriate. The wilderness areas of America are still wild and we were smack in the middle of it all doing just what we wanted to portray to a television audience. We were taking a little summer vacation, riding mules on high mountain trails, doing a little fishing and finding out just where the elk were living. These mules are just the ticket for those of us who still have the heart but no longer have the legs to take us into wilderness areas that are yours and mine to enjoy. The mule can be your legs and Wayne Carlton and those asked to come and share their knowledge intend to let folks all across America know just what these wonderful mules are all about.

By request of the Forest Service, I'm sorry to say I cannot give the exact location where this filming took place. Because of the publicity this show will receive through *Western Mule Magazine* and OLN they have a concern it could receive too much traffic on it's fragile eco-system. We will honor that request. What we can tell you is that we were in Southwest Colorado and in one of the most beautiful spots I've ever witnessed in all of my riding mules in the mountains. I'm sorry if I sound like a tease. I'm going to get to prove it though. You just watch the show and see if you don't agree.

The first filming was done at the Carlton ranch in Montrose. Marc Carlton who is in the camouflage business today



*Wayne Carlton riding "Buddy" and packing "Dancer".
Wayne is very much at home in the wilderness with an
elk call, bow or gun and sitting in the middle of a good mule.*

comes from a farrier background. As a successful farrier in Montrose for many years, Marc brought to the film the mule foot verses the horse's foot. He was showing how to shoe a mule and talking about the mule verses the horse in general. They filmed Marc for three hours or more I'm lead to believe only a few minutes of what Marc had to say and demonstrate will be shown. It was made clear to us all because

this was a thirty-minute show we would likely be disappointed that something very important to us would get edited out. They filmed for four days straight. Some of the footage was taken at Wayne and Linda's ranch in Montrose but most of the filming was done on the mountain at 11,500 feet to 12,200 plus feet.

Also brought in to help with this show as an expert in the mule industry,

Mr. Ben Freeman of Freeman Quality Saddle Mules from Tucson, Arizona. Ben Freeman and Wayne have been friends for many years and Ben has been with Wayne on lots of hunting, fishing and filming trips into the mountains of the west. Ben, a mule man for many years as well as a mule dealer has lots to tell about the wonderful mule. Wait till you hear the story of how he learned to drive and handle mules (providing that part don't hit the editing floor). Hopefully the story Ben Freeman told about "Uncle Bud" as they called him, who was born a slave and taught Mr. Freeman how to handle stock and taught him to drive mules as a boy will make the show. I had not heard the story myself until cameraman J.J. Adams pulled this story out of Ben and captured it on film. What a wonderful story it is.

Ben layed his mule "Jake" down for the cameras. I suspect that will go over big with the viewing audience. Ben was also very helpful in providing some of the riding mules for the camera crew as we certainly were in places a mule was needed.

Ben rode a three-year-old mule named "Bessie Mae" in the backcountry. She did just great and at the young, old age of sixty-nine, Ben Freeman brought all those years of experience and his mule expertise to this show.

Ben was a little camera shy (and for us that know him, you wouldn't think that was possible). He sure isn't shy around camp or in the back county on the back of a mule. I heard him in the back of the string one-morning singing "Swing Low Sweet Chariot", at the top of his lungs while Wayne and I were busting a gut straightening up a pack saddle on a narrow trail we could barely stand in. By golly, he can sing just pretty darn good.

Ben Freeman did a great job and will add greatly to the portrayal of the fabulous mule to thousands of people. They will know what the mule is all about when Ben Freeman gets done with them. Spend a week in camp with him and you'll know some of what Ben Freeman is all about also, a real character and a really good man.

Ben's mule "Jake", twenty-two years old, that he used for demonstration at the Carlton ranch was chosen to take care of cameraman J. J. Adams during the shoot as well as some precious camera equipment costing, I was told, some \$150,000.00. "Jake" is a great mule and

if no one told you how old he was, you couldn't guess. Jake acted like a colt at times. Ask Ben about "Jake" sometime. As with all great mules, there is a great story to go along with their past. I have a lot of respect for good mules and "Jake" certainly has my utmost respect.

Another expert on the mule species was Dr. Bill Lance of Fort Collins, Colorado. Dr. Lance is a Doctor of Veterinarian Medicine and Founder and Chief of Wildlife Pharmaceuticals Incorporated. He holds a Masters in Wildlife Biology, a P.H.D. in Pathology and Wildlife Diseases, and is a diplomat in the American College of Zoological Medicine. His lovely wife, Sharon, who also is a mule rider accompanied Dr. Lance on the shoot.

Dr. Lance will cause the hair to rise on the back of your neck when he tells of all the animals he has dealt with in his years of veterinary medicine, wild and domestic, "The mule is one of the most interesting of them all," say's Dr. Lance. They took Dr. Lance off to a quiet location to do an interview with him and I didn't get to hear it. I'm going to get to see it for the first time just like you when the show airs. He did say when he came back to camp a statement that he made during the interview was likely going to cost him dearly. He stated right on camera "Josie (Bill's mule, who was in the interview also), was the love of his life." I don't believe it was much of a surprise to Sharon, his wife.

Bill and Sharon love their mules and are wonderful promoters of the mule. Dr. Lance's knowledge of animal behavior and understanding of the mule will cause you to put your hand over your heart when he talks with such passion about these great animals, the mules. But Dr. Lance doesn't just talk about the mule, he lives mules.

We had the great fortune of being with Dr. Lance and Sharon on that mountain for several days. They both truly love them mules. Even though I needed a dictionary to spell some of Bill's accomplishments in his life, what I learned about him in camp I did know how to spell. HE'S A GOOD COOK! And Sharon fixed grits one evening that would be the envy of any Southern cook.

We had a rookie on the shoot, Dimas Mederos. Dimas is the Farm and Ranch - Sporting Goods Account Director for the Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing Company. If you have not noticed, Dickie's Manufacturing Company is



Marc Carlton starting the whole thing off. Filmed her shaping a mule shoe for the cameras.



Your editor in chief Ben Tomison, during an interview covering the mule's history to a mule's care.



Ben Freeman in the middle of "Jake" while getting up after Ben laid him down for the camera. The camera crew sure like that trick.



"Joshua" in harness waiting to be hooked to a walking plow. "Jake", in the middle, waiting patiently for more instruction. "Tote" on the far end is very much awake, for all this is new stuff to him.



Dr. Bill Lance on his mule, "Josie". I quote, "The love of his life. Bill is a outdoors man, hunter, fisherman, lovers to bird hunt and close elk hunt.



Dimas Mederos, riding "Sophie". Even though mules were new to him the back country wasn't. Mules are no longer new to him. I'd say, these two will be burning up those Rocky Mountains in 2006.



The camera crew will chase you like the Paparazzi after catching a fish. Who caught the most fish? Alright, Carlton did but he had me beat up from the climb down and wade to the water fall

sponsoring a lot of hunting, equine and rodeo events these days and are involved in the camouflage end of the clothing business with the Carlton's.

Dimas didn't know much about mules and admitted he didn't know much about mules. Now there's a guy you can help. Dimas was given Sharon Lance's mule, "Sophie" to ride during this filming. "Sophie" was only a three-year-old and normally a young mule and rookie rider are not a good mix but "Sophie" is not a normal mule. "Sophie" and Dimas got along just fine.

Now I want you to picture this; beautiful scenery, clean mountain air, surrounded by the greatness and the mightiness of those Rocky Mountains and a real good mule. Can you guess who fell in love with the mule there? Yep! Dimas Mederos. When you see a fellow standing on a mountaintop in front of the mule he's been riding with hands on both sides of the mule's head talking sweet talk into those big ol' ears, you don't have to be a Doctor Phil to figure out what's fixin' to happen next. I've seen it many times and Dimas fell about as hard as I've seen a man fall for those big brown eyes and huge ears. I'm not sure how he pulled it off but soon after the filming of "Trout, Scout, and Mules", Dimas owned "Sophie". Talking with Dimas since the filming, he informs me he is riding every chance he gets, has taken some riding instruction and the relationship has done nothing but grow. Sounds like we have another mule ambassador in the making.

The fishing was great and I believe you'll get to see some of that on the show. But the trip down to the hidden waterfall to go fishing was a bit of a story that you'll likely not see on the show. It took more than an hour to ride in from camp. It was not possible to get mules down there so it was one of those grab brush, rocks and anything you could grab to descend the 200 to 300 feet down the canyon walls to the water's edge. A two man, one-woman camera-sound crew with very expensive cameras and sound equipment along with Neta who had a 35 mm camera to shoot photos for the magazine went down.

I was chosen to be the star of the fishing shoot. Now, I didn't really know why I was chosen. Dr. Lance was a good fly fisherman I understood and so was Dimas Mederos. Ben Freeman had been there before to this special fishing hole with a beautiful waterfall and virgin fish, but he

elected to stay on top and read a book. I believed they had chosen me because I was special; I know better now.

The descent was a killer and then we all had to walk up the canyon full stream from all the snowmelt, over very slick rocks for nearly a mile to the waterfall. Camera people went down and one filming camera hit the rocks and spit out a battery (which we found). A cameraman went down and was bleeding. Neta went down more than once (she did save the camera and film but I have not a clue how).

The fishing down there was great, Brookies and Cutthroat. The waterfall was just beautiful. They had an underwater camera they had brought down with them but they couldn't get it to work. (I suspect it got slammed against some of those slick boulders on the wade up.) I'm sure the part you will see on TV will look great; a peaceful looking place with a gushing waterfall coming out of the side of the canyon, virgin fish in its pools and hummingbirds working over flowers down there. But there was more to it and you're getting "the rest of the story" to quote Paul Harvey.

We walked the mile back up stream to where the mules were above us. We made the long climb out by grabbing what you could to pull out. It was by no stretch of the imagination, a lung buster. I arrived at the top only to see my friend Ben Freeman with his hands on his knees having quite a belly laugh seeing the effects the fishing trip had on me. When I finally got enough air to speak, I had a few words to say about Wayne Carlton's toughness and did not fail to question Wayne Carlton's sanity. I also had a few words for Mr. Freeman who knew full well what I was in for by going down there. I was special all right. It was beautiful and a very special place, I admit, but I heard me some good advice around the campfire that night. Ben Freeman said, "If I can't ride my mule down it, I ain't goin.'" I heard that!

All places in the wilderness areas are special but once in a while you come upon a place that's just more than special, a place that's real hard to describe, a place that just plain ole demands a reverence when you come into it. Riding to film elk one day we came upon one of those places. No, it was not by chance. Wayne knew we needed to see this place and hopefully the camera could capture the grandeur. I

don't know if the cameras did, I'll find out along with you. I know my 35 mm couldn't capture it but it never has been able to capture these kinds of places.

We had just left after filming a herd of elk and had ridden through the top of a huge snowdrift when we popped up on this place. No one on this trip was ever lost for words; a vocal group would be a good definition. They were lost for words here. Not a word was spoken sitting on our mules looking at the beauty below. Waterfalls across the way gushed out of the melting snow left from the winter. There was lush green grass and wild flowers galore.

Yes, I saw tears streaming down a few faces sitting there on our mules. It just couldn't be helped. The mightiness of He who created it was overwhelming there. I really don't know if God hears one better in these kind of places but it sure makes you feel He can. It has never failed to make me to want to speak to Him in these places, to thank Him for letting me see it and to thank Him for thinking so much of little ole me when He can create something so much more powerful, so beautiful. This beautiful place will likely not fail Him, I will. I did not fail to thank God for the forgiveness He has promised me. Do I sound like a preacher? Well, by golly, these kinds of places will turn you into one.

The first word that was spoken aloud was from Ben Freeman, "Now this is Colorado!"

On the last day they were going to do some filming from the air. The camera crew left Thursday evening to hop a single engine plane the next morning that would arrive at a mountaintop at 7:00 a.m. for filming mules going along its top. Ben Freeman and I were to accompany Wayne to the mountaintop. The mountaintop was an hour and half ride out of camp so this meant mules were caught and saddled in the dark on the frosty morning. We just had enough time for a cup of coffee before stepping on. Ben Freeman and I got to see a little action when Wayne stepped up on his mule "Buddy" in the frosty dim light. I'm proud to say that Carlton has still got it. We scored it a 76 and that's not a bad score coming from two tough judges and way before breakfast.

The Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing Company had supplied all of us a Dickie jacket and it did come in handy that morning. They were perfect every evening in

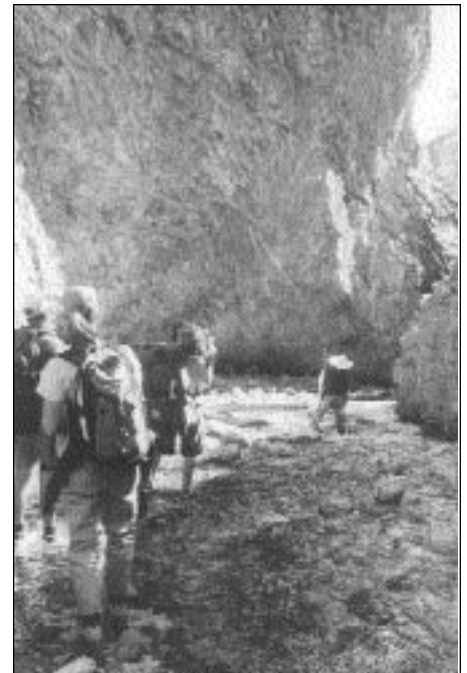
camp too. Zipped up tight, the ride up to the mountaintop during my favorite time of day was outstanding. Climbing to the top, four mule deer bucks were sky lighted just as the sun was about to peak over the mountain. The third buck back was a monster. Oh, the rewards for getting up early!

At nearly 7:00 sharp we could hear the plane way before we could see it. Ben Freeman piped up and said, "Wayne, they do know to keep that plane away from us don't they?" Wayne said, looking a bit sheepish, "Sure, fall in. They'll be here quick."

Here was the scenario. If any of the mules came uncorked, it was all down hill and all except the game trail we came up was over the steep edge. Wayne's mule "Buddy" had already shown us his attitude about being up so early on this frosty morning. Even though I didn't know it for a fact, I was pretty sure "Buddy" hadn't had lots of planes flown around him. I didn't know how he was going to handle it and truth be known, Wayne didn't either.

I was riding a three-year-old who had just turned three a few weeks before. "Tote" had been started in the spring and he had handled all things on this trip well. I knew for a fact he had never had any planes flown around him and I had not a clue how he was going to handle it. I ain't real fond of high places during a runaway. As a matter of fact, I ain't real fond of high places on a calm mule. All I knew was I was fixin' to find out how "Tote" was going to handle an airplane, IN A VERY HIGH PLACE!

Ben had brought "Jake" and "Jake" had seen it all. I was sure wishing Ben would swap me mules right about then. "Jake" evidently hadn't seen too many planes just feet over head either. As we walked along in single file along that mountaintop Wayne was in the front, me next and Ben Freeman in the back and the plane coming in behind us, I could hear Ben talking to "Jake", "Hey Jake, easy Jake." "Tote" was looking hard for what was making the sound. When the plane approached us the pilot throttled the plane back and the engine sound changed dramatically right on top of us. I do believe if he had not done this the mules would have little more than raised their heads but when the pitch changed, things got a little tight. Wayne's mule, "Bronco Buddy", didn't lift his head. Go figure.



They said it looked like the movie "The River Runs Through It". We'll see!



Wayne Carlson and camera crew figuring out a shot. See the shot they chose below. Whoo!



I did stand here with Wayne during some of the filming. Yes, it was beautiful. No, I didn't like standing there.

I know I'm exaggerating a bit here, but I promise it is not a lot. I felt I could have reached up and spun the wheel on that plane. It was low and just to our right. "Hey Jake, easy Jake," kept coming from behind me. I found out later "Jake" was grabbing (tucking) his butt back there. By the second pass "Jake" and Ben were settling in and by second or third pass "Tote" and I were un-puckered, well "Tote" was.

The plane made a dozen passes or more filming with every pass. Somewhere around pass number six or after I realized what kind of shots they must have been getting from up there. The sun just coming up over the mountain with the early morning gold light and three mules were passing just under the hogback. It literally gave me cold chills thinking what kind of footage they might be getting.

The plane headed on west of us looking to find a herd of elk to capture on film. We stepped off the mules giggling like schoolboys about the experience. We saw the plane diving for quite some time in a valley or two over. We found out later they had found three different herds of elk, one herd with over two hundred elk in it.

They came back and filmed as we stood at the edge looking over the vast mountains that lay out before us. I would sneak the camera out from under my Dickie Jacket and snap photos as the plane would go away to circle making another pass and would get the camera tucked back in before they were in filming position

again. Half a dozen more passes and they were off back to Montrose. The silence we now stood in was cherished for a few moments. Stillness on a mountaintop in the wilderness is different. I appolize for not being writer enough to explain it.

We came off the mountain talking like a bunch of magpies about it all and looking forward to a hot cup of coffee and breakfast. The frost still lingered on the mountain.

I only wish I could show you the picture in my head, a picture that will last a lifetime and allow you to experience as I did a wilderness silence. I pray in my writings here you feel you have shared a bit of the experience. Neta and I know we are blessed to have been a part of this. The people we spent the week on that mountain with share the same love for mules as we do and they know full well the beauty we witnessed that week didn't just happen by chance, God created it all.

I'm sorry I can't be more specific than that the show will air on OLN in January, February or March of 2006. (They are leaning toward the first of February with the possibility of more than one show.) Wayne shoots twelve shows a year for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation called "Elk Country Journal" that begin airing in January.

The time spent in the evenings around the campfire was as special as the country we were in. The laughter and the joy that lives in us was even more alive there on that mountain for we were standing in the Almighty's best work, the Wilderness of

the Rocky Mountains. Good food, good friends, and good mules. Watch "TROUT, SCOUT and MULES"! We hope you enjoy it half as much as we enjoyed making it. It was the experience of a lifetime and we believe the mules will be portrayed as the heroes of the backcountry to a public that perhaps doesn't understand just what these wonderful mules are all about.

A special thanks to Wayne Carlton for the experience and to Linda Carlton for the wonderful meals and hard work back at camp and at the ranch; to Sharon Lance who loaned her mule out and helped with the meals and the camp up-keep; to the Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing Company for the fine warm jackets; to Barrett Productions (OLN) who made this happen and to the camera and sound crew who were professional in every way and for their hard work to capture this on film. I had no idea it was so hard. Thanks to Dean Cooper for coming in and helping set up camp. (It would have been way after dark if not for your help, Dean.) Last but certainly not least, to the good mules that took us over those high mountain passes during this filming.

Without you there was no show...



A group photo taken in one of those special places



I'd sneak a photo from time to time, this is one of them