

Ride Report 10/27/2010

The Rocky Roost Adventure

Or....Return of the Roughriders

Or....The Antiques Roadshow

<http://harmonysrockyfarm.com/>

There is so much to tell that I hardly know where to start, so I guess I will try to go in chronological order. I went on short trip with three other guys. It was special for me because it was the first real, not working at home, vacation I had been on since Marie and I moved here to our farm in 1986. Marie still has not been on one, but she likes it here right well.

It was supposed to be a working and relaxing trip. A couple of the conspirators had arranged an exchange of farm labor for riding Rocky Mountain Saddle Horses. Jim Leahy had found the place while he and his wife, Colleen, were looking for a replacement mount for her. He and Stewart Wickham had made a reconisance mission a month or so ago and Stewart was so enamored that he bought a horse. Stewart's horse is still down there, so this was a rendezvous for Stewart. Steve Gilbert and I were recruited as labor. The labor party..... by far..... got the best of the deal.

We began to assemble for the journey down at 9:00 am on Sunday morning. One of the party was a few minutes late. Little did I know that this was going to be the theme for the next few days. And Steve had to work Sunday so he did not get there until Sunday night. The three of us got there around mid day established our presence at the cabin and turned on the water and the hot water heater and then we stopped for lunch at the Alton Diner.



We finally got connected with our host and learned that the drain was open on the hot water tank and we had burnt out the element. We began to talk about a plan of action. Jim Blanks decided that the first thing we had to do was go riding and his wife Nola went to get replacement elements for the water heater.

We worked out a few logistics and went to the pasture to catch a few horses.

We were greeted by a legion of yearlings who loved attention and wanted to know

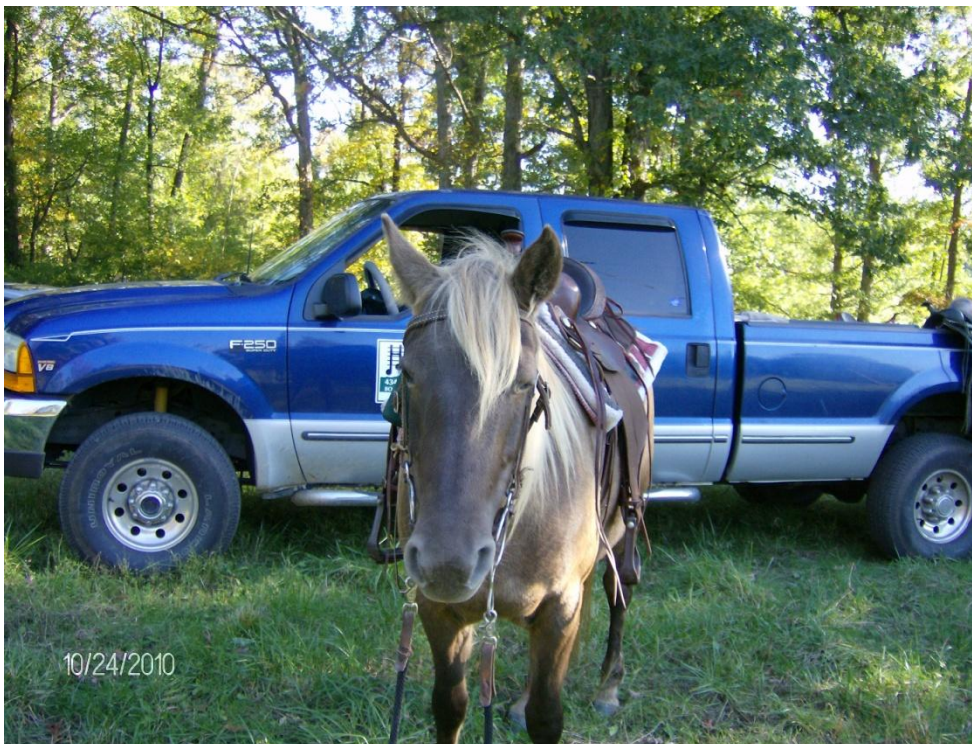
what we were up to. Some of us had to stay with the truck to keep these youngsters from taking everything out of the bed of the truck and in fact tasting on the truck itself.

These precocious youngsters were people loving and in your pocket and were a harbinger of what was to come.



He called up horses out of an eighty acre field and passed out a few cookies and selected the mounts for the day and handed each of us a lead rope attached to a horse. We finally gathered up most of the stuff that the yearlings had stolen and got out of the pasture to get saddled up to ride.

Rosetta was assigned the considerable task of hauling my substantial carcass around southside Virginia on a beautiful October Sunday afternoon. Let me state here that I have upon returning home relieved Paladin Perkins of his title of "The Hardest Working Horse in the Business".



I said that this little horse could not possibly carry me around and our host, Jim Blanks (we had a total of four Jims to deal with) said she would carry me anywhere I wanted to go and do it with style and comfort. I said to myself, "well she is your horse."

We started out a little after four PM and rode for two and a half hours and she never missed a step or got left behind. An effortless ride and a silky smooth gait, combined with a willing attitude and a gentle nature.

Great little horse. I later learned that she was the mother of Pee Wee, the resident Stallion who I met

later. Rosetta had recently weaned a baby and has an appointment with a tall dark stranger to begin the cycle anew.

During our ride, we went down nice trails, we brush popped where there was not clear trail, we rode down the side of the road, we seemingly rode thru peoples yards and we entertained more dogs than you can shake a stick at. These great little horses took it all in stride. We got back on the edge of dark and Steve arrived in time to join us for an excellent dinner.

After dinner the new hot water heater elements were installed and we all pretty much crashed.

The next morning we rose pretty early and went to breakfast. After this hearty start, we spent the morning doing a few chores around the farm. Another stop at the Alton Diner for lunch and then it was on to the pasture for another round of horse catching. This time was not so easy. Rosetta saw me and led a jail break to the far end of the pasture. Jim B finally went ahead alone and caught a few horses and handed them over to us one at a time.

Choco drew the short straw this time and was honored with the task of toting me around.



Choco is the black mare shown at the water trough in the photo above.

In the photo to the right, Jim Leahy modeling his Punkin Helmet is Leading Ella Grace. Jim B and Stewart make an adjustment to the tack on Loretta and Steve is holding pretty Dixie Rose. Steve rode lady who is not visible in the photo. She started out as a handful as she had not been ridden in a while but Steve is a good young rider and soon had her doing very well.

We had a long ride that afternoon and covered a lot of ground and all kinds of trails.

It was during this ride that I discovered what



made this area special. Our host and several others in the community had worked long and hard to have the area designated as an Equestrian Community. The place where we were was just one of several horse centered businesses. In the area there are horse camps, trainers, boarding operations, breeders, trail riding facilities and all manner of horse activities. There is a network of trails and they are all shared. There are horse crossing signs along the roads. The local developers and real estate folks are on board with the concept and market the area as an Equestrian Community. The Alton Diner has a hitch rack out back so you can ride up and tie your horse and go in and have lunch and as our host pointed out a lot of the trails pass nearby to the diner.

We not only rode along the roads, at one point we came out of the woods on a trail and passed between a pasture fence on the right side and a plowed garden plot on the left and came to the road. There was one car coming from the right and three or four coming from the left. They stopped so we could cross the road and while I was dumbfounded at this Choco deftly scrambled up a three or four foot tall bank that was just almost straight up. Star Baby or Perkins would have jumped up it, but she went up it so easy that I don't know what she did. I was too amazed at drivers actually showing some civility and consideration. I told our host that I would not dare ride along the roads here at home. An encounter with an automobile around here would most likely involve them blowing the horn, hitting the accelerator and displaying a rude gesture if they did not in fact run over you.

During that ride we were at one stretch riding along a gas pipeline right of way. It went through some rolling hills and the adrenaline junkie in the group had to do them at speed. I was idling along munching on an apple when the leaders took off and so I gave Choco her head on told her not to get left behind. Another little horse had impressed me.

On this ride we also ran across the riders rest stop pictured below. This photo is from the cell phone so the quality is not as good. The riders rest stop is an old log tobacco barn that has been preserved and had porches and sheds added all around with shade and chairs for riders and shade and tie racks for horses and there was a cooler with bottled water.



I do declare that if I were a younger man or even if we were not so rooted here, I would now be inclined to relocate to that area. But at my age the thought of having to start all over again somewhere else is too daunting to me. I will stay here and perhaps visit there again.

We got back on the edge of dark again and this time we put the horses in the little paddock at the cabin where we were staying.

We all got showered and cleaned up and headed out for another wonderful supper. After supper Steve had to head back home as

his wife had called and they had sick kids. I did not envy him the two and a half hour drive late at night. That night I slept like a rock. At about 5:30 I woke up and smelled coffee and heard Leahy talking so I got up to find that I was the sleepy head and Stewart was also already up. We had a couple of cups of coffee and visited a while and then I got dressed and went out to check on the horses. When I went out I yelled to the guys that it was raining. I had a small flashlight and as I made my way across the stream to where the horses were I heard a noise off to my right. I shined the light but did not see anything. I went on and found all five horses all safe and sound and looking for some breakfast. Threw some hay over the fence for them and went back to the cabin. As we headed out to breakfast and Stewart turned on his headlights, two small doe deer jumped up and ran away. This is what I had walked within thirty feet of and heard but not seen. We went to breakfast and sat around the diner and wondered what we could do if it kept raining. It was pouring while we sat in the diner. I was actually the optimist and told the guys not to write it off yet as I had a

good feeling. Jim B soon joined us at the diner and while we chowed down it quit raining. It was still pretty wet so we knocked around a while and I got to finally meet the gorgeous stallion, Pee Wee. I also saw a half dozen of his beautiful weanling babies who looked like peas in a pod and miniature versions of Pee Wee himself. The weanlings were in a pasture and running and playing, so I did not get to see them up close and I did not have the camera with me.

From there we went to a tack store at one of the other horse operations nearby and we browsed around a bit. Stewart bought a couple of small items and we headed on back to the cabin. We went out and were putting some Tee posts in a new fence line and a little while later Jim B rolled in with a trailer full of horses and said "I thought we were going riding boys". We quickly finished that short line and headed out. He wanted to take us to the local section of rails to trails. An abandoned stretch of railroad that had been converted to multiuse trails. We had to trailer a ways to it.

On the way we stopped at Bojangles for lunch. I love Bojangles chicken and biscuits. No.....I can hurt you eating Bojangles chicken and biscuits. For some reason all the Bojangles closed in Richmond quite a few years ago. I was glad to see they were still in business and the food was as good as ever. It was a real treat for me. There was a time when Marie and I both worked in Richmond that we stopped at Bojangles every morning for a Bacon Egg and Cheese Biscuit.

At the trail, Jim B handed me a little horse named Sweet Pea. My tack almost would not adjust small enough to fit her. I never did get the wide tree saddle tight but I mounted from a picnic table and just made sure to be mindful of my balance. Sweet Pea was just as nifty a little horse as the others I had ridden and turned out to be only three years old and had not been ridden much. She was unflustered and unflappable and had a desire to be out front and the good grace to ride where I wanted her. She was every bit the Sweet Pea.

Jim Blanks had brought Pee Wee as he had not been ridden in a month or more and needed some exercise. He mounted and said "Boys, not much use in yall trying to keep up with us for a while. We are going to ride out and will ride back to you." And they did. That beautiful stallion hit his gait and down the trail they went. He was every bit the gentleman but he had energy to burn.



The trail was 5.5 miles long and totally different than anything else we had ridden during the week.



The footing was good and was mostly a good layer of rock dust and grass. In some spots there was some gravel but all of the mares were barefoot and had no problem.

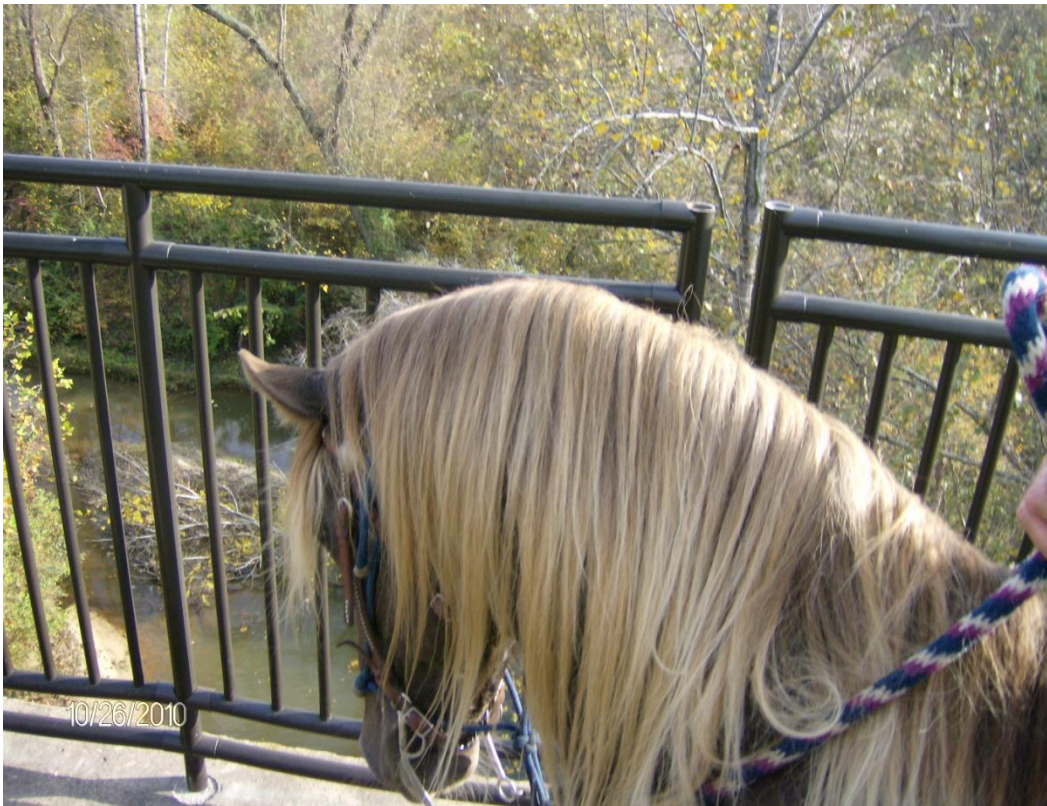
Jim Blanks and Jim Leahey could go at speed which they did. Stewart and I took a little more sedate pace and we were able to ride side by side and visit a bit as the two mares glided down the trail at the easy sitting gait of these lovely little horses.

At one point we came to a bridge over a river crossing. These well broke horses did not even notice.

Even Sweet Pea who did not have a lot of experience was unfazed by it. Now the footing was good and there was no sense of being on a bridge unless you looked to the side. It was only fifty or sixty feet to the water.



Pee Wee checked it out while riding along side Sweet Pea and I.



We all pretty much agreed that this straight line ride down a wide open trail was not one that we would want to make every day. But it was a beautiful change of pace. It was wide open and easy riding and we even let them out to run a little bit. We only travelled eight miles of the trail. The trail was marked every half mile and at the four mile point we took a break and decided that in the interest of time, we would head on back. We had plans to go to an Italian restaurant in South Boston that night and we needed to get cleaned up and put the horses away.

When we got back to the farm we hauled all the horses back to the big pasture and turned them out. Stewart said his good byes to Loretta and I think there was a tear in his eye and justly so. He has bought himself an enviable horse. She is beautiful and well mannered and well broke and she looks like a delight to ride.

After supper that night we sat on the porch and talked for a while and I was surprised to see that it was 10:30 when I finally decided to turn in. In my old age I usually rise fairly early but on the other end I have usually turned to a punkin by 10:00 at the latest.

Later that night I was awakened by a torrential rain beating on the tin roof. The lightning illuminated the sky so that I could see the trees rocking violently in the wind. Oh well, nothing I could do about it so I put the pillow over my head to drown out the noise and went back to sleep.

The next morning we arose and while there was damage in the area from a tornado, we did not experience any damage. We packed up and prepared to head home. On the way out we saw a railroad radio tower twisted into scrap metal and we saw quite a few trees down.

We stopped at the Alton diner for one last western omelet breakfast with good sharp cheddar cheese and real country ham, with a side of home fries and a biscuit and a gallon or so of hot black coffee. Then it was on the road to home.

I had an excellent time. I hope I didn't bother the other guys too much. Leahy informed me that yes indeed I do snore and should get checked for sleep apnea.

I was impressed with the horses. They seem to have a wonderful nature and disposition. Either that or Jim Blanks is the best trainer in the business. While he is near my age he starts all the young horses himself. Maybe it is a little bit of both.

All the people we met were great, even if a couple did refer to us as Yankees. I didn't take it to heart as I have been all over the South and anyone from north of where you are, is always referred to as a yankee. That does not necessarily apply to Florida as parts of Florida and all of Northern Virginia are occupied territory and the genuine Yankees are entrenched. I have not been to Atlanta lately but hear that it is in danger of being taken over again. But I digress. It was a great community, a beautiful locale, good company and an excellent adventure. Going to be hard to sit that big trot next time out on Perkins. But he seemed to be the one of our crew who missed me the most. When I went to the pasture he walked up and rubbed his head on me and wanted me to rub and pet him and followed me around for five minutes with his head under my arm. The others all nickered and mumbled a greeting but they just wanted a handout. Perkins wanted some attention from me. Better go let out all the tack so it will fit him again.