

A Wild Ride in the Alaska's Wilds

Trail riding in Alaska is a wonderful thing. We have hills, sun and even some rain. We don't get many chances to compete in our event of choice but we enjoy the opportunity for the one time a year we do get. We love learn how we could get better at trail riding our horses. Sometimes the judges from outside (anywhere outside of Alaska) tell us our horses aren't in as good of shape as horses in other states but we do our best. Not many of us are quite as taken to trail riding at -20 degrees with 2 hours of sunlight as we are at +60 degrees with 20 hours of sunshine. We do love to ride and thanks every year to some wonderful volunteers, we get to compete in one North America Competitive Trail Ride.



This year, our ride was called "The Bald Mountain Butt Buster" or (BMBB). From most of the riders' point of view, it was a total success and blast. Sure, there were some issues, it turned out to be one of the LARGEST Competitive Trail Rides in the WHOLE USA. According to the judges, the turn outs for the CTR in the lower 48 haven't been that great this year, probable due to the economy but we almost DOUBLED our normal turn out!@!! This caused some small problems in the beginning but the management team did a wonderful job and kept to ride going.



camp set up and get the horse checked in.

Check in went pretty smooth. Not surprisingly, the first time horses and their riders were all a bit excited and nervous and had trouble maintaining their gaits be it a pace, trot, or the single foot, but we all got through it. I had a lot of people I didn't even know their names asking me questions and I was more than willing to help them get through it all. I love it when people are

It all started on Friday for us, packing and washing horses in the rain and getting everything loaded. Normally I only have one horse to worry about but this year, I invited 3 juniors (two 12 year olds and one 14 year old) to ride with me in the Open plus two adults first timers I suggest do the one day, novice ride. When we finally got everything load we had a regular caravan, three horse-trailers, one RV and two or three other support vehicles, all heading to the CTR site to get



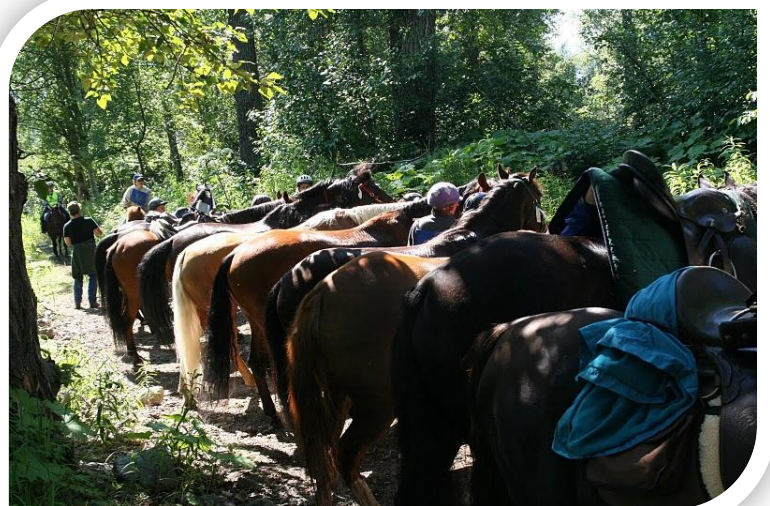
successful and are happy with their horses. So my own "girls" who had been working with me all year or at least all summer were kind of on their own as I tried to help others do just a little better. It is a nice feeling to be recognized as somebody who is willing and able to help. At the ride briefing Friday night, there were lots of questions both from all my riders and others. This briefing didn't get over until close to 11pm. Makes for a long day, but who cares, it's only one weekend a month. In Alaska, folks do these long days all the time in the summer for there is just too much to do. We have all winter to sleep!!!



Saturday Morning started at 5am for us. We got our horses fed, cleaned, had breakfast ourselves and were ready for our 8am ride. With all of our watches changed over to ride times (or 8am), we were very much surprised when we went up at 8am to discover we had missed our departure time by a few minutes. We never hear any announcements!!! This just meant we got a late start on the ride, not that bad except it kind of set the tone for the whole day. "Not that bad but not the best it could have been"

Not to be deterred by a little bad luck at the beginning, myself and the three girls got our maps out and set off across the hay field. The first obstacle, though not a judged one, was a cow pasture. One of my horses I know is terrified of cows but she actually did O.K. We passed one horse who was terrified while its buddy was standing past the cow waiting. Probably having that calm horse standing past the cows helped us for all of our horses walked past very well. Of course all the cows had to run over to the fence and check out the horses, like they had never seen horses but a couple live with them. All part of an interesting ride. Moose on the trail might be O.K. or even bear but COWS are just SCARY. We all made it past the cows eventually and down the trail we went. Within 15 minutes, we had made a wrong turn and ended back at ride camp. Here we were thinking we had mastered reading the simple maps but we turned right instead of left. We were on the afternoon return trail. When we made it back to camp, we figured it out and got back on track, this only put us about 20 minutes behind.

Next, the trail had you climbing the mountain, Bald Mountain, and of course, there was a P&R at the top. Now it was a very hot and the long climb. We actually don't get many days out of the 60's and most of our trail where we train is flatter or rolling hills but not steady climbing for 5 or 10 miles. This day was absolutely beautiful, in the 70's, sunny and a wonderful day except for climbing mountains. One of my



young rider's horse didn't recover as well as normal we got a 10 minute hold due to a slight too high heart rate. Now I know the other three of us didn't have to wait but I don't leave a team member, especially a 12 year old, for Alaska is wild country and it's better to stick together. There are grizzlies and mean mother moose where we were riding and I would never leave a team member. So we waited, offer water and kept our fingers crossed. Cricket, the horse, did recover and we moved on down the trail. The rest of the morning went fine with us discovering that All the riders in the open class had gotten lost somewhere and we were actually ahead of them instead of behind them all!!!!

After lunch we managed to get confused again due to flagging and our ability to read a map not as good as it could have been. I was fairly sure from the previously night brief that we were to go left out of camp but I really wanted to girls to use their maps and discover this too so I took a few extra minutes to get everybody on the same spot on the map and going in the right direction. By mid afternoon, you could tell we were getting tired when I told the girls I couldn't hear them very good because the Wind was in my eyes!!!! We all started laughing at that one. We might have been getting tired but our since of adventure and good humor never deserted us.

During Saturday, we had several river crossing, other obstacles like hill climbing and everything went great!!! Our only disappointment was we came in almost 30 minutes late and were afraid we would be disqualified. This would have prevented us from riding Sunday which we really wanted to do. The other sad thing was my horse's back was really sore. I'd been trying different saddles all summer but didn't really find one that worked for my horse. My horse Monet did really good all day and it's sad to know I made her really sore.



The really wonderful part was the Vet judge came to my trailer helped me examine Monet and suggest I go with a Synthic Saddle for Sunday to help distribute the weight differently. The other wonderful part was one of my friends was so helpful and went back to my barn 3 times to help me get the right saddle and stuff that Monet needed. With the help of a different saddle, some wedges placed in good places, I think Monet was OK to ride on Sunday. Her back was still sore but she moved out willingly Sunday morning and did all day. Saturday was another long Alaska day with us not getting to bed until well after midnight, but it was still light, so who cared.

Sunday we were up at 5am again. The girls were ready faster than on Saturday. They were doing great for so little sleep. I pretty much left them on their own for I had to take Monet up to see the

Vet judge to ensure Monet was OK for the day. We did worry a little all day that we had come in late on Saturday but since nobody told us we couldn't ride, we just kept on going. This day proved to be an exceptional day, we never got lost, our horses were more willing to more out and it was raining just a little. Most people hate riding in the rain but we actually enjoyed it, especially at first for it helped keep the horses cool. We ended up chasing a Moose down the trail but that fully if kept moving away from us and did not really slow us down. Sometimes moose scare horses but Monet just kept her eyes on it until it disappeared into the woods. How they can disappear some completely is beyond me but they do.

We had no problems at the P&R and things went well. By Sunday we had figured out a little plan to help our horses. Since we were riding in a group of four (three juniors and myself), I always had to go first through the obstacles, my horse was willing and I could show the girls how I thought it should be done at least. Remember this was the girls first ride ever and we were all riding Open. We did a back around a figure 8, side pass to pick up a ribbon and place it on a tree, enter a muddy river bank and climb out a steep bank on the far side, go through a gate and probable a few others that I can't remember. Monet did everything I asked absolutely perfect. Even the vet judge comment I had a wonderful horse. Cricket did all the stuff asked pretty good and the other two tried, what more could you ask. They had only be training for the CTR for about 5 weeks, I was impressed with their results. Young horses and young riders, all coming together to make successful teams.



We came in Sunday, right on our target time. Everybody was proud of their horses. I don't think you could have purchases any of our horses for any amount of money that day. Monet didn't place as high this year due to the sore back but I thought she actually did better than Last year!!! I placed 2nd in open light weight rider so know I can still improve my riding ability. My three girls all tied for First in Open Junior. Judges said that was a first for them that all three riders had exactly the same points. So they had to use the tie breakers to determine who got what place. Remember I said we had come in late on Saturday? well these penalty points where part of the tie breakers for the girls.

My two Novice riders had a wonderful time but had to ride for Distance only due to coming in too late so they didn't get to place. Their points however were very high. Each of their horse had slightly different problems so they just decided not to worry so much about the time and have fun. I think they did. there were both Glowing on Monday!!! My girls on the other hand were SLEEPING all day on Monday!!! We are all ready to go do it again. Wish we didn't have to wait a whole year!!! Fairbanks 2011, same weekend in July!!! Hope to see you there.

