

## Riding the 2014 Chief Joseph's Trail Ride

By Robyn Lay

So I got to cross off one of my bucket list items this summer when I participated in the annual Chief Joseph's Trail Ride. What a blast it was! It was also a learning experience for me in so many ways. Not only did it further cement my bond with my beloved horse Siouxi, it also showed me how strong I am despite several physical limitations and just how much I could accomplish when I had to!

I started out driving from Tennessee in our old rickety 2 horse trailer with several bags of compressed and processed alfalfa hay and a bag of feed. Weed free hay is required starting 2 days before you arrive at the first camp site and it's hard to come by here. So the chopped and processed stuff is a great alternative. I learned that once it dries out your horse will like it better and eat all the ration if you mix her grain with it and then a generous amount of water. Siouxi got this mixture twice per day. She never had any issues drinking water but I still liked that mixing the feed and hay with water got even more into her in this hot dry country.

Back to the beginning; I drove to Minnesota where I paid a portion of the gas to ride to Wyoming with 3 others who were going. They bought extra weed free hay and sold me some bales to give Siouxi in the trailer there and back. Once we got to the first camp site, the club provided hay. I don't normally just switch my horses to another hay straight but fortunately we didn't have any problems. From the time I left Tennessee to the time we got to first camp was 5 days of traveling for me and Siouxi. Already tired..lol.. But so excited I was running purely off adrenaline.



Robyn Lay and WA Ulrich Gem, F3-2616 (aka Siouxi)  
on the 2014 Chief Joseph Trail Ride

The scenery was amazing. I can't even tell you how much like a kid in a candy store I felt being totally surrounded by beautiful Appaloosas of all flavors, loud, solid, you name it - it was there! I found a new favorite virtually every time I gazed around! NO politics. It was wonderful! The food was catered by an amazing chef whose meals were so delicious - everything complimenting everything else on the plate. It was remarkably wonderful. I was never disappointed in anything they served and there were SO many healthy options that I can't imagine anyone having a problem being hungry or thirsty. Bagged lunches every day were also a surprise in both quality and how much food they provided.

The trail rides varied from the hilly to flat terrain of Wyoming and Montana (mostly Montana) to several bits of road riding both paved and non paved. The scenery was amazing everywhere. Rock formations and vistas, oasis where ponds or creeks were and barren looking wide plains that turned out to be full of various types of grass and sage brush. Cute little towns along the way too and when there was any issue, there were folks to help whether it be an MD or a DVM or a farrier or simply a ride back to camp for a tired horse and rider.

I met many people I hope to be in contact with for all the years to come and had many wonderful conversations on the trail. Despite all the good there were some negatives and telling you about those might make any trip you plan better.

First thing I learned is to pack light. I thought I had but I was wrong..lol.. Simplify everything as much as humanly possible! I am even considering next time bringing light cotton pants so that I can just launder them in a bucket and they would dry overnight! I ended up with a PILE of dirty laundry and I had to store it in the bottom of my sea bag so I ended up lugging it around way more than I liked! Also bring a nice sturdy food tray. The old timers all had one as well as a portable chair with table. Luckily I had one of those. They don't provide seating so at meals you bring your chairs and food trays near to where the stage is set up so you can eat and get ready for dancing and such.

Second thing is, if you don't have to camp in a tent, you might have less work to do if you can camp in a horse trailer. Honestly by the time I got my camp set up every night after caring for my horse, I was exhausted and had just enough energy for my bucket bath and bed. I missed virtually all of the evening's entertainments but it just couldn't be helped. I would probably have fallen asleep right by the stage! The upside is, I pitched my tent very near my horse every night and I LOVED that. I also was able to wish on a falling star in the wee hours one morning and the very first night camping with no tent due to heavy winds found me gazing up at the milky way, my horse less than 6 feet in front of me, in complete contentment. Best of all NO DEW..lol..

Bathing is a trial when tent camping. I chose to dip a bucket out of the horse trough every night and have a complete bath in my tent. It felt wonderful to remove the day's grime and dirt. In addition to that it cooled me off and made my sleep more restful.

The main thing is to go with someone who cares about you and will help you. The people at the ride were wonderful in helping me lug all my heavy stuff the first night and I would not have made it without them. However, I continued to have to lug a lot of heavy stuff twice a day to make and break camp. It was exhausting and never easy. I have very bad asthma and COPD and the altitude didn't help much either. It is another reason I say to go as lite as you can to make it much easier should you have no one to help you. Breakfast is at 6 am every morning and dinner at 6 pm unless the ride goes long which did happen to us.

Another thing I regret is that I never knew what time it was! Pretty sure I got up at 4 am the first ride day just because I was terrified of not being ready when it was time to ride out! My phone half the time had no service and getting it charged up was a BIG challenge! I couldn't even call my husband and let him know I got to Wyoming safely till the next day! I will definitely have a portable clock next time so I know what time it is and how long I have to get ready!

I learned that I am a very strong woman and when I am determined, there is no holding me down. I was determined at the start of this journey that no one and nothing was going to interfere with this wonderful experience. I am proud of myself for making it through this mostly on my own and it truly made me a stronger person. I didn't think my bond with my horse could get any better but I was wrong. By the time I got home I had been gone I think 13 or 14 days. It felt a lot longer. It was altogether an amazing experience and I am hoping that both my husband and I can go next year with our horse trailer for sleeping! That would be amazing and I can't wait :)