

Guillaume Hullin triggered the 3000th SOS inReach incident from a remote region of Europe after finding himself stuck in a blizzard. While reading the blog write-up of Guillaume's adventure, I put it out of my mind that I could one day be the 3001st.

I'd been retired for 60 days. I am finding that one of the many misconceptions of retired peoples is they have nothing but time on their hands. I'd like a dollar (or better yet, 5 minutes) for every time I've heard: "Hey – let's get Laurie to do it – she's retired!"

I've spent the last 60 days working on projects I've not had time or resources to complete. Roofing, siding the hay barn, building a shelter for the horses, moving fences to accommodate said horses, installing gates, cutting up firewood, planting alfalfa and learning I fall short of what it takes to be a real farmer. I suppose I'll get the hang of it – after-all, I'm retired. I have nothing but time.

I took it to heart when my neighbor said, "Girl...don't burn yourself out. You don't have to do it all at once. Pace yourself." With that in mind, I readily accepted an invitation from my friend, Janine, to tag along with an all-girls pack trip into the White Clouds Wilderness. Destination: Frog Lake.

We met at Janine's house for a pre-pack trip planning session. We would be camped out for 5-6 days. We decided each person would bring and prepare food for one day. I picked Monday for no other reason than I wanted to get my day in the kitchen over with as quickly as possible.

Lisa and Shelly, trip organizers, went over the common gear they would bring for the group. The rest of us would need to bring only our personal gear. I pretended to listen. I had no intention of leaving any of my usual gear behind. I've got some major OCD when it comes to packing. I take everything I would need to survive on should everybody else and their gear be abducted by aliens...or Yeti's. It could happen.

I spent the week before the trip practicing a diamond hitch on a "blue-mule" I made out of a saw-horse and a blue barrel. It took me a couple tries as I had not packed in several years. I pulled out the boxes of stored packing gear and merrily

rummaged through it like a kid going through their stocking on Christmas morning.

My “kitchen” consists of an Anodized Dutch oven, two plates, bowls, utensils, leather gloves, tongs, a DO stand, pot scrubber and dish towels. Everything I would need to cook Monday’s meal of chili and cornbread with honey-butter. It is widely known that cornbread without honey is a crime against humanity.

Everything I intended to bring seemed to fit in my over-the-saddle panniers without a top pack. Sweet. The over-the saddle packs are a new method of packing for me. I sold my decker and pack boxes when I stopped packing as much. Now that I’m retired with “all the time in the world,” I may go back to a decker.

Everything seemed in order: Tent, sleeping bag...Thermarest sleeping pad, extra rope, batteries, lantern...etc. etc. Shelly offered to bring an extra sleeping cot for me to try. I find the ground gets harder the older *it* gets. Surely has nothing to do with the older *I* get.

Where did that come from? A large orange plastic garbage bag lined the bottom of one side of the panniers. I pulled it out and tossed it aside. Don’t really need that. Or do I? I put it back in...wait. No need to bring extra stuff for no reason. I pulled it back out. It’s like the damn thing spoke to me in an ominous voice: “You better take me, greenhorn. You’re going to need me. Take. Me.” I hastily stuffed the orange bag back in the panniers ...if for no other reason than to shut it up. Creepy.

A caravan of six girls, 12 horses and 5 dogs met in Horseshoe bend at 10:00 am, August 3rd. I was especially excited to be driving my new-to-me Dodge. A pewter-grey mega cab 1 ton, Cummings diesel. No more underpowered, over-heating rough ridding, white knuckle hill climbing for this girl. “Hoss” drove like a dream and pulled the fully loaded Trail Hand like it wasn’t there. Yeah baby.

Approximately 12 miles from the trail head, the smell of burnt rubber and wheel grease wafted from the front of the caravan. I pulled off to the side along with the others and made my way to the front of the caravan. Lisa was pouring bottled water on an exposed and rather hot wheel bearing assembly. Well shit – that’s not good.

Other than Janine, I don't know the gals on this trip very well and one of them, not at all. Lisa – all 5' nothing of her – looked to have more determination than a 6'6 marine on a mission. “We're going. I don't care if I have to leave this thing right here. We are going!”

The girls unloaded Lisa's horses and distributed them throughout trailers that had room. Shelly removed the tire while I stood back and took pictures. Hey – somebody has to be the photo-journalist!

Several vehicles passed like we weren't even there. I intentionally stared each one down. Each refusing to make eye contact as they drove by with an annoyed expression as if our misfortune was their inconvenience. Eventually, Shelly flagged down a local lady with a land-line. They gave her Levi, Lisa's boyfriend's number with a message. “Trailer broke. Bring another trailer to the trail head.

I remember my neighbor telling me you can limp in on three tires if you remove the damaged one. The girls managed to tie up the axle with a ratchet tie and we were off. We were off rather slow...but we were off.

We arrived at Little Boulder Trail early evening. Five of the rigs pulled into a circle on one end of the campground. I pulled in on the other. Not that I'm unsociable – there was no room for my LQ amongst the others. I managed to worm my way into a spot that I could easily pull out of when it was time to leave.

After pot-luck style dinner (aka whatever we could find in our trailers), Lisa brought out a horse she was riding for a relative. The dun mare was as skittish as she was nice looking, especially when it came to wearing a pack saddle. She humped up in a minor explosion at the feel of the pack-saddle on her back. It didn't seem to faze Lisa much: “Awe – she'll be fine. She'll get the hang of it.” I noticed the not so gentle look in the mare's eye. I sure hoped so or this is going to be a long pack trip.

I took the horses and Hank, my border-collie for a walk before bed. This was my first trip in almost 11 years without Shade, my German Shephard. Such a trip would be too hard on her. I left her with friends, Jones and Dusty in Midvale. I would miss her terribly, but I knew she was in good hands. Heck – she probably won't want to come home after being spoiled rotten by those two. Good people. If I die on this trip – they get my horses and my dogs. I should probably should have cleared that with them first, but whatever...

We hit the trail not so bright and early Sunday morning. I've never packed with this many people before. It takes a long time to get that amount of gear situated on that many horses. I milled around the staging area while my packed horses stood tied. I wondered how all that gear was ever going to be packed on 4 horses and a mule. To my surprised – I watched pile after pile dissipate into a combination of pack boxes, soft panniers and top packs. I'll be damn. They did it.

Little Boulder Trail first takes an almost direct incline through high-desert sage. The climb was steep and the shade and water non-existent. Lisa's dog, Blue, showed signs of heat exhaustion. I climbed down, left my ponies in the middle of the trail and hoisted Blue into Lisa's saddle where he would ride to Frog Lake. Maybe that's when Blue decided I could be his other mom.

12 horses laden with riders and packs on a narrow trail does not go without its moments of chaos. Water crossings especially. It seemed a boot (barefoot horses) was lost at every water hole. Horses circled impatiently waiting for others to get their fair share of drink while others managed to hang themselves up on protruding limbs and pack eating brush. It is a safe bet that with 6 women over 50, somebody is going to have to pee. Maybe twice.

Three retrieved boots, 5 pack adjustments, 3 cinch tightening's, 1 dog rescue and several potty breaks later, we arrived at Frog Lake in 5 hours, 39 minutes and 13 seconds. Possibly the longest 10.7 miles done from the back of a horse.

I staked out a tent spot and high-line for my horses apart from the rest. Again, it is not that I am unsociable – but I've learned from experience that too many horses on a high-line is a recipe for disaster. I also don't want my horses getting herd sour and keeping them somewhat isolated helps prevent that.

Sunday evening dinner was served by Janine: Spaghetti cooked over Lisa's old, white gas Coleman 2 burner stove. Unbeknownst to us, that would be the final meal cooked over said stove.

After dinner we took the horses out to graze. I hobble mine or they would end up back at the trailers. Heck, given the right circumstances, they can beat me back to the trailers even *with* hobbles. The others made a "human fence" as they called it – and stood with their horses while they grazed.

I lay in my tent that night snug as a bug on the awesome cot Shelly brought for me. I'm definitely going to have to get myself one of these. They keep you off the hard

ground about 4 inches. The air space beneath is much warmer than the cold ground which sucks the heat from your body.

I lay out my flashlight, pistol and pocket knife within reach of my cot and settled in for the night. The constant pawing of horses prevented sleep from taking over. I lay awake until well after dark. I'd almost dozed off when I heard a commotion coming from my horses. Snorting and stomping followed by the snapping sounds of a lead rope breaking. I grabbed my miner's head-lamp and dashed out of the tent barefoot. Two strides in and the head-lamp goes dead. Swell. Guess I should have checked the batteries on that one.

I could see just enough to find my mare, J'Lo, quivering and wide-eyed. She had somehow pulled hard enough to break the metal clasp on her lead rope. Jack was still secured to the high-line. I refastened J and headed back to my tent hoping she would stay put.

I tossed the dead flashlight back in the tent with a mental note to insert new batteries in the morning. I was about to back myself into the tent when I caught site of the night sky. Stunning. There is nothing like stars at nearly 9 thousand feet. Bright, thick and seemingly near enough you could reach up and pluck one from the blue-black velvet.

I smiled as I began to crawl back into the tent. I could see two trees 30 feet from my tent opening. I don't remember that smaller tree. A tree maybe 4' tall stood next to the larger tree. I cocked my head sideways. "Huh.." As quick and silent as a night owl – the smaller tree stepped behind the larger tree and disappeared. I blinked. What the hell. I grabbed my flash light and shook it a couple times to no avail. I reached for my pistol, chambered a round and zipped myself back into the tent. Hank hadn't made a sound. Nor had he gone out of the tent to protect me while I dealt with the horses. I missed Shade.

I opted not to tell the others what I'd seen. Hell, I didn't even know *what* I'd seen. It wasn't a deer or a bear. It was about my size only shorter. It didn't elongate when it moved. It simply stepped human like behind the tree. I decided it was a Yeti. Albeit a baby Yeti.

I'd made individual breakfast packets for the morning meal. Each contained instant oatmeal, a breakfast bar, applesauce, a tea bag and an envelope of hot chocolate. Probably not a good choice of beverages since everyone but me were coffee drinkers. I built a fire to boil water and took my horses out to graze.

We saddled up after a late breakfast and rode to Boulder chain lakes comprised of: Willow, Hatchet and Sliderock Lakes. We stopped short of Timberline Lake. I recognized the lakes as those I'd hiked up to the first year I came to Frog Lake. At that time, we had tied up at Willow Lake. Some fished while others, including myself – hiked. Shade was with me then. I sure missed having her on this trip. Hank is a good dog in his own right – but I don't think he'd protect you from a gopher let alone cougars or serial killers. Apparently not Yeti's, either.

The horses grazed while we ate our lunch before heading back to camp. The short 5 mile ride took us just over 3 hours with 45 minutes of that for lunch. We were back in camp by 2:00 PM.

I wanted to get an early start on dinner, unsure of how long it would take for the cornbread to cook in the portable, aluminum oven Lisa had brought. The oven sits on top the stove burner. They are pretty cool...when the stove works. The Coleman took this opportunity to stop working. Lisa would get it running long enough for me to sit too close to it, look at it cross-eyed or whatever and it would stop working. She'd get it running again...I'd start to move toward it and it would die. No shit. It was like the camp cooking gods were against me using such modern conveniences. So be it. I brought my little Dutch Oven for a reason. It was a little difficult to regulate the heat for cornbread. The wood in the area was too dry for good coals. However, between the half-assed coals and heated rocks – the cornbread turned out pretty darn good.

Lisa and Shelly tried their hand at fishing. Hank and I went for a walk and snapped pictures. A camp at the head of the lake was recently vacated. A container of lethargic fishing worms and a pile of human feces strewn with toilet paper left behind. I growled and grumbled as I dumped the worms into mud. In hindsight – I should have kept them but I figured they deserved to be set free. As for the shit – there are some things I just can't deal with and other peoples shit tops the list. As long as I live – I will never understand why or how somebody could desecrate what God has created for us to use and enjoy. I guess it's too hard for some folks to dig a damn cat-hole. Makes you wonder how they manage to hike all the way into the lake in the first place. Maybe they were the dirt bikers we heard earlier. Regardless – dig a damn cat-hole people!

I could hear Lisa and Shelly squeal in delight as they each landed a nice lake cut-throat trout. I had made my way back to them and decided to grab my pole and give it a try. I hadn't fished in years. I managed to catch a few. Landing them was

another thing altogether. I'm a fair weather fisherman and the mosquitoes were getting more bites than me. I'm out of here.

Another night of horse stomping and pawing ensued. Louder this time as half the others horses were moved closer to my high-line. I dug around for some Excedrin PM, stuffed cotton in my ears and tried not to think about the Yeti lurking behind the tree.

I got up early to hobble the horses and get a fire going. It might be an hour or so before the others woke so I grabbed my pole and headed for the lake while Jack and J grazed on high mountain grass. I managed to land two, fat cut-throat trout for my efforts.

Tuesday was Janelle's day to cook. Gluten free pancakes with peaches and crisp fried bacon. The gas stove was still being possessed by evil camping spirits. Even so, Janelle managed to present picture perfect pancakes cooked over an open fire. I'm a big breakfast eater. Pancakes and bacon aside – I was still hungry. I'd wrapped my fish in tin-foil and bacon and laid them in the coals.
The.Best.Fish.Ever.

The girls decided to spend the day organizing camp and relaxing, fishing, reading or what have you. I would hike around the two lakes and take pictures.

I set out in the direction of North. Maybe a quarter mile, NE of our camp I stumbled upon someone's camp. Fresh tracks on the trail leading from the tent indicated a man, a small woman or child and a dog. That's odd. We hadn't seen or heard signs of anyone since arriving. Or had we? Could this be the answer to my Yeti sighting?

I made a wide swath around the camp and continued on. Beautiful views of the White Clouds, marshy meadows and lily ponds abound. Lily ponds. I wondered how my Grandma Lillian was doing. Would she pass before I got off the mountain? She was ready to go. She told me she felt she was lucky to have lived a long life at nearly 98 years old. She felt fortunate that most of those 98 years had been healthy and active. She was bored now – unable to do the things she liked to do. She was ready to go ...were we ready to let her go?

I snapped pictures of Lisa and Shel fishing from across the lake. Giggles and squeals of delight at each successful catch.

Lisa and Shel shared their bounty of fish for dinner. Each of us receiving a fresh trout wrapped in bacon and sautéed onions cooked in tin foil over hot coals. I don't remember what else we had for dinner. It doesn't matter – I could live on that fish for the rest of my life.

Wednesday morning was a blur. Did we even have breakfast? We decided to take a short day ride. Lisa was excited to ride the dun mare for the first time outside the round pen. I'll give it to the girl – she's braver than me.

I was saddled and mounted when I heard the commotion. I turned see a lined back dun mare break in two. More yelling. I jumped from the saddle, tied the horses to the high-line and dashed to see what had occurred.

Shel, Janine, Kathy and Janelle encircled Lisa as she lay on the ground, flat on her back. The first thing I heard out of her mouth was: "Is my gun ok?" Followed by: "Did I stay on for 8 seconds?"

The girls went into medic mode. "Can you move your toes? Where does it hurt? Did you hit your head? Etc..etc.

"Just let me lie here for a minute. I'm sure I'll be fine." Her face winced in pain. She could not move her leg/hip without extreme pain. I feared she broke a hip. I was afraid to move her. You always hear it's not good to move somebody. She was laying out in the hot sun on the hard ground. I thought of my thermarest pad. Somebody ran to my tent to retrieve the pad. We rolled her onto it – careful to keep her body and neck aligned.

I carry a Garmin InReach mini SOS satellite tracking device. I hike/ride alone and doing so gives me peace of mind. I figure if I'm conscious I can signal for help – if I'm not conscious, it really doesn't matter much.

I told the others we had two options. I could push the button for help or we could drag Lisa behind a horse off the mountain. I said the latter with a grin trying to lighten the mood. Lisa asked that I please don't drag her behind a horse and instead she would like to try a third option – riding out herself.

Convinced her neck wasn't broke – the consensus was to move her into the shade onto a cot. Thankfully, Lisa weighs less than a nice bale of alfalfa. Shel and I lifted her as careful as we could but the pain was too much. Lisa's little face contorted into a grimace of pain, turning an awful color of grey as she fought nausea and

damn near passed out. Shel and I looked across at each other... concern for her friend etched on her face: "Push the button."

We lay Lisa on a cot in the shade. The girls attended to her medical needs. I ran for a clear view of the sky and activated the SOS at 11:56 AM. I hollered to Kathy and/or Janelle to grab my white mantee while I went for the orange plastic bag now being used as a privacy screen for our makeshift shower. For a piece of plastic I almost left behind....this thing was coming in handy. We laid the orange bag and mantee, held down with rocks, in the meadow by the lake to signal our whereabouts and potential landing spot for life flight.

Now what? I'd never hit the SOS button before. Less than two minutes passed and a message from emergency response replied back: SOS received. Local incident response notified. What is the nature of your emergency?

Yikes – it was then I realized I hadn't paired my Garmin with my new cell phone or installed the app. It was also there I learned how hard it is to type on the device itself. Using the up and down arrow buttons – I attempted to respond. Every time I'd try to put a space between words – the stupid thing would back out and I had to start over. Eventually I gave up and responded without spaces.

Me: brokenhipneedlifs

Me: Onhorsebac

InReach ERS: Confirmed. Local incident response notified.

InReach ERS: Name and age of individual

Me: fiftytvoonetenfemal

(boy,I suck at this)

InReach ERS: Name?

Me: LisaGriffith

And now it's hurry up and wait. I jogged back to camp to check on Lisa. She lifted her pixy like face toward me. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Oh shit. Don't cry

– if you cry – I’ll cry and I can’t type on this damn thing as it is. I whirled around and jogged back in the open to send another message.

Me: Shockalittle

(not sure how it came out like that – but what I meant was she’s a little shocky)

InReach ERS: Confirmed. Local incident response updated.

(And we wait some more.)

InReach ERS: What trail head did you enter from?

Me: Littleboulder

I yelled back at Janelle for the trail head number.

Me: Trailsixeighttwo

InReach ERS: Confirmed. Local incidence response updated.

Janelle met me halfway between my open area and camp with Lisa’s pulse and other vitals.

Me:Pulseeightyotherstatsnorm

InReach ERS: How many in your party?

Me: Six

InReach ERS: Confirmed.

Shel had come out to where I waited with an update. The pain is radiating up to her lower spine and she’s scared.

Me: Painrdiatlowerspingleveleightnaseous

(Man, I really suck at this)

InReach ERS: Confirmed. Local Incident response updated. Help is on the way.

No ETA as of yet.

Me: Ty

Three hours had passed. I jogged back to update the others and check on Lisa. She was sitting in an upright position and looked somewhat better as long as she didn't move.

We were discussing the ordeal when Shel heard the chopper. I ran back to open ground and stared at the horizon, willing the thing to appear. Several minutes later – a chopper appears. It circles overhead...dips down some, and circles some more. I was ecstatic! I sent a message:

Me: Here

(Had I been able to type an exclamation point and several smiley's I would have)

The chopper circled more – descended a little – ascended again and disappeared over the horizon. What the hell!

Me: andgone wtf

(I finally figured out how to make a space)

I was perplexed at why they wouldn't land. Maybe they were worried the propeller blades would suck up the plastic bag and mantee? I ran out and drug both off the meadow. The chopper reappeared – did a few more dips and dives and disappeared again. Well, that wasn't it. I replaced the bag and mantee.

I knew they had seen us. They made it obvious by dipping close and tipping the blades. Maybe they thought the meadow was too marshy to land in? I ran out to the middle to "show them" the ground was solid. Yeah, I know – kind of stupid. Just because it could support me doesn't mean it could support a chopper!

Janine and Janelle had joined me while Kathy and Shel stayed with Lisa. Equally confused – we could not figure why they would not land.

45 minutes into the appearance, the chopper sets down in the meadow next to the plastic bag and mantee. A helmeted figure in a flight suit steps out of the chopper, retrieves the markers and meets me halfway. Another figure follows.

“My name is Colt.” I led Colt the paramedic and Chris the nurse to our camp, explaining and answering questions as we walked.

The nurse and paramedic went to work on Lisa. They asked her weight and pain level. 110 pounds – pain level 8 when she moved – 6 stationary. An IV was inserted before transferring her from the cot to a gurney for transport.

I wanted to get more pictures as they loaded Lisa into the chopper and takeoff. As the nurse, paramedic, Shel and Janelle carried Lisa, Janine held the IV bag and the rest of us helped carry miscellaneous medical supply bags to the chopper. Colt mentioned they may have to leave him behind and come back for him later. A chopper cannot lift off at that high altitude and temperature with too much weight. They told us later that if Lisa had not weighed next to nothing, they might have had to leave her and initiate search and rescue to get her out. They can't fly without a nurse so leaving both the paramedic and the nurse and taking Lisa was not an option.

All aboard – the chopper made several attempts at take-off before setting back down and spitting out Colt. He would spend the next hour and forty five minutes in the company of 5 very tired and stressed women all full of questions.

Colt was a fountain of information. We asked him all measure of questions from what we could have done different to why they didn't land right away. He said they had to burn fuel before they could land. He said there wasn't much we could have done different (except not let Lisa get on that horse). The mantee and orange bag were visible and positioned appropriately. He said sucking the plastic into the blades can be an issue (I think his exact words were: “That would ruin your day”) if it did happen – but since we had held them in place with rocks, we were good.

He said the GPS coordinates they received from incident response were spot on. They received the call at 1:00pm. One hour after I pushed the button. I asked what information they had. I wondered if they were updated with all the info I'd given inReach. He said no. It is their policy that the only information they are given is the coordinates, the weight of the injured party and whether medical or trauma. This is by design so the team does not make a judgement call.

Colt spent his time answering our plethora of questions and offering up invaluable practical and medical advice. He said the two most important items to have in your first aid kit are an Israeli bandage and a Cat 7 tourniquet. He instructed us on the proper use of the tourniquet. Most tourniquets aren't applied tight enough or are

too narrow to do any good. He said it should be tight enough that it hurts and the wearer is unable to extend their fingers. Very interesting. I learned everything from proper tourniquet application to how to chamber a semi-automatic one handed. Could come in handy if that damn Yeti comes back.

Less than two hours passed and the chopper returned for Colt. Before bidding us farewell, he congratulated everyone on a job well done. You always second guess yourself in these types of situations. Should I have done something different? Did we do enough? Did we do too much? It was reassuring to have an experts' honest assessment.

We decided to pack it up in the morning and head for home. The question was – how? We now had two extra horses to tow and none of ours had picketed multiple animals. I broke out my Garmin inReach and sent a custom message to Rob Adams:

Me: Lisahurtbutok...

Me: Confrimifyoucanbringpackhorseinmorning

We messaged back and forth. Rob would leave for Stanley within the hour and arrive in our camp mid-morning.

The adrenalin rush of the ordeal was wreaking havoc on my nerves. I gathered up my horses and led them to the meadow to graze. I wouldn't hobble them. I wanted them close to me. I pressed my face into Jack's shoulder, closed my eyes and breathed in the soothing smell of horse. It's just comforting. Call me weird.

I leaned against Jack and surveyed the surrounding area. Beautiful high mountain lakes nestled at the base of majestic, snowcapped blue-gray mountains. Lush green carpets of meadow grass splattered with contrasting colors of Indian paintbrush and yarrow.

I took a double take at a lone hiker strolling down the trail toward me. No backpack – no walking stick or equipment of any kind. Just a guy going for a leisurely walk in the middle of nowhere.

He was a friendly sort. He rambled off something about the beautiful vistas and colors in a thick accent I could not understand. I hollered back – “Are you

Russian?” I have no idea why I thought he might be Russian or why I even had the audacity to ask! He was not Russian. With arms spread wide and a smile equally as broad he proclaims: “I am no Russian Ma Dame! I am FRENCH! Yes??!” Was he asking me if he was French? Ok..sure. You’re French. Now that I got Russian out of my brain – the French accent was obvious.

We carried on quite the conversation. Likely neither one understanding a third what the other said. His name was “Game” – pronounced “Jaw’me” I asked him to spell it. I’m assuming it was similar to the American Jamie...only way cooler. Everything sounds cooler in French.

From what I gather, my Frenchman was traveling through various parts of the US on foot, mountain bike and skis. I asked him what he did for a living: “Work is BORING! No?!” I do not work! You Americans spend too much important on work, yes?” Well – yes, I suppose we do. We put a lot of importance on things like eating and a roof over our heads, too. Eventually I figured out that Game was a mountaineering guide part of the time and an international traveler the rest. He would work for a year – save money and travel to different parts of the world hiking, mountain biking and skiing. I think I want to be French.

I had to bring him back to camp with me. There was no way the girls were going to believe it unless I brought him home for show and tell.

If Game was surprised to see a camp full of women, he didn’t let on. He made himself comfortable on a log by the fire and enthusiastically entertained us with stories of his world travels. He didn’t care much for the Russians. Didn’t seem to care much for the Turkish, either. He didn’t quite understand the American fascination with firearms but didn’t press the matter. Three of us sitting around the fire with him were packing. The fourth was in a helicopter on her way to St. AL’s.

While it was interesting to get another’s perspective on our cultures and way of life – it was getting late and everyone around the fire was yawning. I asked Game if he had a flashlight. It would be dark in 15 minutes. He said he did not and he would leave in 10. Fair enough.

It’s not who you are – it’s who you list as your emergency contact. True to his word – Rob arrived in camp by 9:30AM with two pack horses in tow. He went about helping the girls finish packing their stock.

We made the decision to break up into two groups to avoid the congestion on the trail we encountered upon arrival. The fast walkers would go first – followed by the slower gaited horses. Rob, Janelle, and Kathy would head out first. Janine, Shelly and myself would wait 15 minutes or so and take up the rear.

The girls tried several configurations of towing Lisa's two animals. Nothing seemed to be working. The horses were not used to each other and some had never towed in a string. I tied my stock with the intention of helping Janine and Shelly get mounted and situated. J's pack saddle was fairly tight. I left Jack's cinch loose until I was ready to mount.

We got Shelly up first, circling her string nervously. Janine was next. Kiger, her mustang, pranced impatiently. I turned to jog back to my horses in hopes to hit the trail and get everyone lined out. I didn't get mid-way to my horses when the commotion hit. The hell bitch broke loose and commenced to split in two...again. That horse can really get some air. She bucked straight toward Jack and J, crashing into J about knocking her off her feet. She ricochet off J and crashed into Jack. Jack was not hard tied and got the hell out of dodge. When it was all said and done...J was still secured to a tree with the pack saddle under her belly. Jack was 60 yards away with the saddle hanging on his side and my saddle bags and camera dragging the ground. Hell Bitch – 1 ...camera – 0.

Jack stood somewhat terrified for me to come to his rescue. I unsaddled him and went back for J'Lo. That pack should not have come off as tight as it was. J'Lo is not built for packing. Her round back and no withers makes for an easily turned saddle. I decided to swap ...ride J and pack Jack.

I'd had enough. My brain shut down. I could not fathom how we were going to get everyone lined out and down the trail. It wasn't the first time the thought of shooting the Hell Bitch in the head and leaving her to the coyotes seemed like a viable option.

I fought back tears and did the only thing I could think to do. I prayed. "Dear God – I need help. I can't do this. I don't know what to do."

Less than 30 seconds post prayer and Rob strolls into our camp horseless. They had a bit of a rodeo themselves. Rob had spent the last 30 minutes chasing two pack horses over the mountain. He'd sent Janelle and Kathy on while he came back

on foot to look for the other two horses. Had he not come back – I think we would still be there.

The decision was made to turn the Hell Bitch loose and let her find her own way home. Or not.

We made it back to where Rob had tied Payette and the little Spanish mustangs. Once more mounted – we picked up the rest of the loose stock on down the trail.

J'Lo isn't much of a walker – but she came off that mountain at the fastest walk I've seen her accomplish yet. She didn't dare slow down or Jack would push her from behind. Serves her right....Jack pretty much dragged her up the mountain on the way in. I love that mare but dang, she's pokey on the trail.

A steady drizzle accompanied us the 10.7 miles to Little Boulder Trailhead. It felt good. It kept the dust down and was easier on the dogs. I normally dread getting back to civilization when I've been in the mountains but this time...I was not at all disappointed to see those trailers.

Kathy went into Chef-mode that evening. She rummaged through packs and camp trailers looking for food to cook the disheveled troops. We ended up with a hodge-podge of chili beans with chips and cheese and left over spaghetti.

We sat around the picnic table discussing the last few days. Conversation led to Frenchie and what a character he was. Suddenly Shelly “shushes” me with wide-eyes. I turn to see our Frenchman strolling over with that broad, care-free grin. We couldn't feed him dinner but he didn't turn down a beer. Kathy broke out the bottle of toasted caramel black velvet. I poured us each a shot and made a toast: “Here's to Pepe Le Pew – our newly acquainted foreign friend and to one hell of an adventure ...thank God...nobody died.” CHEERS!

I slept like a log without the aid of earplugs or Excedrin PM. The next morning, Kathy, still in chef-mode – went on the hunt gathering breakfast ingredients. She managed to scrounge hash browns, eggs, peppers, cheese and bacon. Using my cast-iron skillet – she prepared what she called “hobo-breakfast.” It was like watching an artist create something magical. It was to die for. Even our Frenchman went back for a second helping.

It took me less than 10 minutes to break camp and hit the road. I bid the girls and our Frenchman Au Rivoir before turning the Dodge toward home.

I've since been asked if I regretted going on this trip. I do not. I feel everything happens for a reason. I also believe that no matter the misadventures, mishaps and adversities that occur – as long as you learn something valuable from that experience, then you come out better for it. I sure as hell learned a lot on this one.

Surely, each of the girls on this trip will glean something different from it. There will be things they remember differently than I. There will be things that occurred I was not aware of or vice-versa. Everyone “remembers” experiences – especially those experienced in high-stress situations, differently. We all naturally put our own twists guided by our unique perspectives.

You can't predict or prevent all mishaps. The only way to do so is to never get off the couch and experience life as I feel it's meant to be ...with adventure in your heart and a soul brimming with wander-lust.

The one thing I believe we can all agree on: Whether young, old...seasoned packer or wilderness newbie – whether white, black, American or Frenchman: All work and no adventure is BORING!! No?? Oui Oui, my foreign friend, oui oui.