

## Ride Report

# 2019 Redwood Ride

by Glenna VanBuskirk, Northwest Region

The July 20, 2019, Redwood Ride was set in the Redwoods near Orick, California, and it was fantastic! Originally, I had planned to do this ride with a friend, but she had to cancel last minute, leaving me to wonder: could I drive that far, and do this ride, by myself? Orick is about an hour south of Crescent City — a very winding three-hour drive for me, some of it along the coast.

Ride camp was set up at the lovely Orick Rodeo grounds and by the time I arrived at noon, there appeared to be only one spot left in the “circle” of rigs inside the grounds. If I didn’t feel nervous enough, I apparently took a spot someone was trying to save for “a newbie” coming in at 5:00 p.m. After a minor confrontation about who should have the site, she relented (me being a newbie too!) and let me stay there. (Apparently you can also park alongside the exit to the grounds, next to a fence, but it isn’t nearly as nice as being part of the circle). Not a great first impression, but I’d gotten up early to get here before the best spots were gone.

I set up the portable corral and let Cody (Zeulner’s Last Hurray is his registered Morgan name) in to enjoy a little movement, while I set up camp. Water for the horse — ✓; hay for the horse — ✓; bed for me — ✓! (Slept on a pad in the Yukon with a sleeping bag and pillow, pretty comfy but missed the foam pad I had lost last year.)

My camp neighbor’s horses were color-coordinated with beautiful braids and tail ribbons, and the man and wife were a handsome, friendly couple! Shelley and her husband, Curtis, allowed me to start the ride following them! A big confidence booster for me! They owned a Rocky Mountain horse with lots of endurance miles, and a Standardbred who was relatively new to endurance riding. I made friends by suggesting my corral was too close to their horses and moving it back toward the edge of the enclosure, out of their way more. Shelley was sweet and helpful when she found out this was only my second endurance ride. (Later they were invaluable when it came time to getting on my overly-excited Morgan horse).

There was a potluck that first night, with plenty of food. I’d brought broccoli salad (the second broccoli salad that arrived), and it was heavy on salad and dessert, light on protein, but we had a good time talking to each other, eating, and then attending the pre-ride meeting.

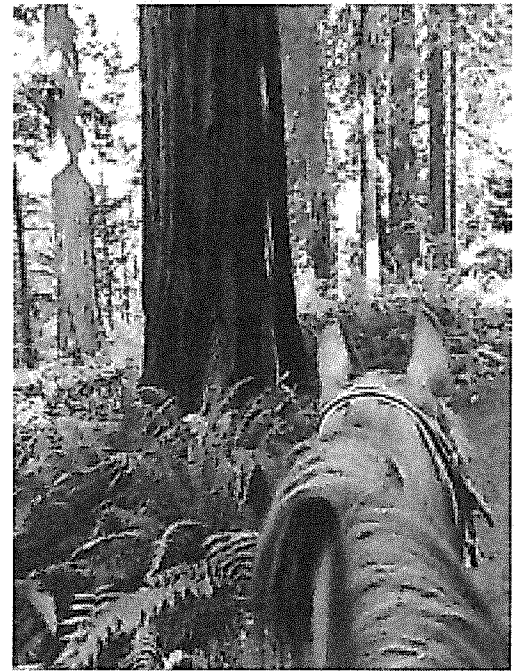
The pre-ride meeting is a short talk about the upcoming trail, how to follow the ribbons and use your map. Any slightly dangerous spots in the trail were discussed, along with start times for the 50 miler and for the 35 miler. The longer distance started at 6:00 a.m., and the 35 milers started at 7:00 a.m.

I slept OK the first night and awoke very early as usual. I got up at 4:30 and fed Cody his special pre-ride mix of grain, bran, electrolytes and alfalfa pellets, and plenty of hay. I didn’t want him too hungry for the ride, but also wanted him to have a chance to digest his food. As it turned out, he was too excited to eat anything except the mash with the electrolytes.

The 6:00 a.m. horses were started and were walking, trotting, gaiting and cantering along the ridge of the levee in clear view of Cody and the other camp horses. This excited Cody to the point that he was trembling with excitement, whinnying and pawing at the ground. He could barely contain himself, and I had no idea how I would be able to get on him when the time came. Fortunately, Shelley had already made friends with him the night before, and he respected her just enough to let her hold him while I hopped aboard. (Or should I say labored to lift myself into the saddle of a moving target?)

As soon as 7:00 a.m. finally came, we could get out and trot too! Thank goodness for movement with a horse like Cody! Once he could trot, we were flying along behind the two gaited horses Shelley and Curtis were riding. They both could rack faster than Cody could trot, which is amazing considering Cody can out-trot most horses at the canter! I rode with them for a while but could not expend all that energy at the canter, keeping up with these magnificent gaited horses. About 30 minutes into the ride I finally caught up enough to tell them I’d be riding back a little, that I couldn’t keep up at the trot.

Ironically, Cody and I were never far behind those two, and caught up with them at the one-hour vet check at the midway point. Riding the ride by myself was fun, too! I could pace Cody based on his heart monitor readings and by letting him pick the gait (when in doubt). He liked to trot on level and slight hills, and on some very slight downhills, but preferred to walk up steep hills and steep declines. So that is how we did it, Cody’s way. The trails were winding, shady, redwood paths, and incredibly beautiful the entire ride. There were plenty of water stops and streams, but Cody would not drink until the vet stop midway through the ride. He certainly tanked up then and when they took





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his pulse, his recovery was fast (60 resting rate must be reached to let competitors keep going on). Of all things to forget, I had forgotten my sponge to cool him off with! Luckily the ride provided some sponges and I could sponge cool water all over Cody at the vet checks.

The last half of the ride, Cody and I were mainly on our own, passing someone now and then, only to have them pass me again later. Some folks were on the 50-miler, and some on the 35-miler, so you never knew if you were talking to “the competition” or not. It didn’t seem to matter. Most people were very sociable and friendly.

At the final vet check, it had gotten warm, and Cody was tired after 35 miles. He took a few tries to “pulse down” to 60, and until the vet (not just a crew person) did the reading, he would not stand still or calm down. (He has “white coat syndrome” AKA “fear of anyone other than his mommy touching him.”)

But the vet seemed to calm him, and he finally hit 60. I asked the vet, “Should I bother going for best condition? We are new, and this is just our second endurance ride.” It blew me away when he responded, “Of course you should test for best condition, you came in third so far.” That was a shock to me and made me realize my gaited-horse neighbors were likely winning the 35-miler.

So, I had Cody tested and he did OK except on the run out and back. The vet said he was tired. He said he needs a little more conditioning when I get home. I thanked him and made a mental note: “more scheduled rides, no excuses!”

That night was the dinner that ride management provides, and it was delicious! Baked chicken breasts, homemade potato salad, green salad with strawberries and a berry dessert!

The award ceremony was after dinner and first they did the awards for the 50 milers, and there were lots of awards! I almost thought I wasn’t going to get an award, when I realized they had not started the 35-mile awards yet. When they did, I got a top 10 award, and I received one of the ceramic bowls with “Redwood Ride 2019” on it, as well as numerous little horsey goodies in a Redwood Ride bag.

I was so proud of Cody for coming in Top 10 and congratulated my neighbors for their wins as well. “To Finish is to Win” really does ring true in endurance riding. But as usual, actual winning is preferred.

The next morning his legs were completely tight without any swelling, and I hadn’t done anything to help with that. I don’t have the fancy cooling bandages, etc., yet. And there was no water source to just stand in or hose him down with.

By the way, he did bust out of his corral panels in the middle of the night (probably the result of rolling and getting hung up in the rails) and someone woke me with a flashlight in my truck, saying, “Your horse is loose, but we put him in the wood corrals.” After thanking them profusely, I went and checked and sure enough he must have gotten under the corral and tried to get up and undid the whole thing. I can’t believe it didn’t wake me!

Having had this experience I can honestly say, I am totally hooked. However, I want him really ready next time. Not ready for a 50-miler but hoping to do a couple more 25-35 milers this season.

The Redwoods were truly gorgeous. The people were friendly, especially considering they all knew each other and didn’t know me.

The drive home along the coast was pretty, and I was so glad to arrive home safely, with a sound horse and happy but tired body. The worst part about the aftermath of the ride, was just sitting down or getting up, anywhere, for the next four days afterwards. My thighs were useless!

Poor Cody was sore as well, not his usually antics down the hill, greeting me with demanding whinnies at mealtime. But by Wednesday, he was back to his old tricks, doing spinning, sliding and rowdy bucking all the way up and down his hillside. And hollering, “Where’s my dinner!?”

