

Close Encounter with Wild Horses

My wife, Betsy, and I are always seeking a little adventure, so decided to head out on a trip to the Sheldon Wildlife Refuge in remote northwest Nevada with our three horses for a few days of riding. The Sheldon is over a half of million acres in size and administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It is home to a variety of wildlife but is known for it's populations of antelope and wild horses.

Betsy and I camped at Badger Camp which is about 60 miles east of Cedarville, CA with the last 55 miles being dirt roads. Badger Camp is located in a box canyon, with lush meadows fed by springs, and has a sturdy horse corral. The surrounding hills and valleys are laced with springs and meadows and were green with lush grass and spectacular wildflower displays as a result of a wet winter and a fire that burned portions of the landscape back in October 2007.

After setting up camp, we noticed a band of three wild horses on a distant ridge and also saw a single large bay horse on a closer ridge. The first two days we spent riding out of camp seeing mostly deer, and the distant band of horses did not pay much attention to us. The second afternoon we hobbled our horses in the meadow next to our camp and were in our camper relaxing. By a stroke of luck, I happened to look out at the horses and was shocked to see the large bay stallion headed down towards our hobbled horses and only 100 yards away. We ran as fast as we could, unhobbled the horses, and raced to the corral. The stallion was hot on our heels and finally stopped 40 yards away from our camp complete with two German Shepherds. He glared at us, went and sniffed the grass where our horses were feeding, stomped his front feet for awhile in a nearby pond, and then headed back into the wild. It appeared that he wanted our herd of horses to be his herd of horses.

So on our third and final day of riding we headed out in another direction towards a valley that is known for antelope and wild horses. One of our goals of riding in the Sheldon was to see wild horses in their natural setting. Little did we know what would happen next. As we rode past a large spring entering the valley, we noticed a two herds of horses of about 25 animals each feeding on an adjacent ridge. However, there were two horses much closer to us that seemed very interested in us and headed our way. They were a large dark mare and an older looking scarred sorrel stallion that had a slight limp in the front end. The mare stopped at 50 feet but the stallion kept advancing and, at about 10 feet, we were starting to get somewhat concerned. We tried swinging our lead ropes to scare him to no avail and threw and hit him with a water bottle which backed him up a few feet. He appeared to have no fear of us and continued to advance on us. I ride a mustang mare and know how dangerous she can be towards other horses if she wants to be, so this stallion was very intimidating. Not knowing if it was the right thing to do but with nothing else working, I dismounted my horse and lunged towards the stallion screaming, throwing rocks, and swinging my lead rope. He backed off enough for us to escape. It will be an adventure that we will never forget.