



2009 Michigan Shore 2 Shore, Cindy-Style

Deciding to do the 250 Mile Shore to Shore Endurance Race was an easy one. I grew up in Michigan, so it seemed only fitting that I do it. Setting all the plans in motion to complete the journey, that was the challenge.

For years I've contemplated doing the S2S. I love that part of Michigan. As a family we'd camp along the AuSable and Manistee Rivers in the summers; pass through Grayling on our way to ski Sugarloaf Mountain in Traverse City in the winters; and swim in the cold waters of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan when we were brave enough to. But had I ever thought about crossing the entire state on horseback? Never in my wildest dreams.

The initial planning started about a year ago. We were at a friends in Holland, Michigan visiting the family when the subject came up. It seemed then we were on the right track since we were thinking about it. My husband Steve would have to take a weeks vacation, my parents would drive from Colorado Springs with their camper, and my aunt and uncle from the UP would also join us with their pop-up camper. The day I knew we were going to actually make the journey came when Steve called me to tell me he had taken that first week in August for his vacation so that I could do the ride. That's when it all started to snowball. That was November 2008.

So how does one who has never done that ride even begin putting a plan in motion? I've never even done a multi-day ride before, let alone a 5-day multi-day ride. I quickly began calling

everyone and anyone I knew who had done the ride before. Connie Caudill was first on the list. She and Mike had done it many times. Robby and Diane Doll had done it. Sue Keith had done it, as had Jennifer Plummer, Lois McAfee, Bill Wilson and Earl Baxter. Everyone I talked to gave me good advice. I had even thought about just doing 3 of the 5 days. That's when Mike said to me, "If you're going to do it, you need to do all 5 days. Think about the bragging rights you'll have when you're finished!" Bragging rights indeed, I was just worried about getting through one day at that point.

As the months passed, I ran into a lot of other people at rides who had done the S2S. Many said they'd never do it again, and others said they were going to go in 2009. I quickly tried to gather my posse of friends to join me in my big adventure. Steve and Karen Cummings seemed interested, as did Patricia Bullock, Alice Bryant and Amy Whelan. My junior rider Melissa also seemed interested but could I talk her family into going to help along the way? Those that ended up going were Lois, Connie, Mike, Bill, Robby, Diane and Earl. At least those people I knew I could count on if something were to come up along the way.

MAPS, MAPS, MAPS!! Do they even exist for the S2S? On the www.MTRA.org website (Michigan Trail Riders Association), they have a good deal of info, including maps that I quickly bought. I also bought maps from www.universalmmap.com where I could get Michigan maps specific to that region of the ride (thanks Mike!!). I bought three sets, one for each member of the family. Sure didn't want them getting lost in the woods. I even bought a Garmin GPS for the truck and programmed all the camp GPS coordinates into it. (Two of the 5 were correct so I'd NOT recommend doing that). Beside, Wayne the ride manager, gives out excellent directions for crew and camps once you get there. And I'm keeping those for future reference!

Before I knew it, August was a month away. Melissa and her family had committed to going and were to drive our second truck to be used as the crew truck. Steve had already taken the role of moving the rig from camp to camp with the family (later they were known as the gypsies). He did not want to be involved with moving the rig to each vet check and having the extra vehicle was the trips key to success! The horses had been conditioned enough, but I still hadn't made it through a 50 on either of them after Chicken Chase that spring which made me nervous. I was sad my other friends weren't going, but knew I was in good hands with those that were.

I loaded up on baby powder, desitin, preparation H, and poultice. My mom and aunt were in charge of the meals (that was nice not having to cook all week and worry about meals). Melissa's parents Karon and Derek were gathering all their camping equipment; tents, sleeping bags, coolers, flashlights, etc. I packed and repacked and unpacked for at least three weeks prior. How much hay, how much feed, how many different outfits, HOW MUCH ALCOHOL, you know, typical stuff you take on vacation with your horses. I ended up taking 8 bales of hay, one bale of alfalfa, one 50 pound bag of oats and a 50 pound bag of sweet, plus half a bag of beet pulp. In the end what I took for food for the horses left me with one bale of hay to take home.

Saturday, August 1, 2009

Bright and early we're on our way. It was going to be about a 10 hour drive to Oscoda. We

talked on radios along the way and the time seemed to fly. We only had one mishap when Karon had to “ralph” in a parking lot next to a restaurant called Ralphies. Needless to say we didn’t eat there. Anyway, we arrived at the River Road Camp without any problems.

First camp, River Road Camp. Set up camp, feed horses, settle in, wait for the parents and aunt and uncle to arrive. Have a glass of wine, and play corn hole, have another glass of wine, play more corn hole. That in itself drew a crowd of onlookers all week. I guess that’s mostly a southern game.

Sunday was a day to relax, vet the horses in, and prepare for the week. We managed to find time in between the horse stuff by going to see Lake Huron. It was beautiful. Back at camp we had the crew truck loaded and ready to go with what we needed for the vet checks for the first day. I was nervous and anxious all together knowing this was just the beginning and I’d have a long week ahead of me.

Monday, August 3, 2009 – Day One, heading to South Branch Camp

Monday morning, 7am start. Lots of fresh horses warming up. Melissa and I quietly walk around. I don’t remember saying too much. Must have been the knots in my stomach. But I kept saying to myself, let’s just get through one day at a time and see what tomorrow brings. I found myself repeating that every morning all week. It looked like it was going to rain that day too so rain gear was loaded in the crew truck. And by the time we got to Lake Huron it was raining, actually pouring. The temperature was in the mid 50’s that morning, so I knew the horses would be fine. I also hooked up with a few people that I quickly learned had done the ride before. I was going to stick to them like glue all week. They were going a steady 7-8 mph pace and that seemed good to me. They were Shannon Loomis and Tracy Blue. I later found out that that was Tracy’s 8th attempt at crossing the state. I knew she would be a good one to hang with.

When I got to the first vet check the tire on my crew truck was going flat. Not what you want to experience on the first day and the first check. But Karon was a trooper and got it fixed by going into town and getting it plugged. She made it to the second check just in time. By then Melissa and I were soaked but still in good spirits. One more loop to go and into the second camp, South Branch.

When we arrived my whole family was at the finish line. As you’ll read throughout the rest of the story, they were there everyday to cheer us on. We passed the vet check. All A’s and a couple B’s, but both horses sound and fit to continue. YEAH! One day down, 4 more to go. And still smiling.

Tuesday, August 4, 2009 – Day Two heading to Luzerne Camp

Tuesday morning, 7am start. I think most of the same horses that started the day before are starting again. Twelve horses began the 250 mile journey yesterday and today there are 11. I find Shannon and Tracy and begin my nervous chatter. What is today like, how long are the loops

between vet checks, are we still smiling, why are we doing this, my butt is sore. We get to the first vet check area, and because we have a separate vehicle not attached to a trailer is ideal for us. Karon is able to pull right in and not have to park on the two lane road behind a line of some 25 rigs. We vet in just fine, it's a beautiful start to day two. The morning started out mid-40's and by the time we get into camp the temps reach the low 70's. At this vet check there are about 15 nine year olds sitting on a log singing and watching us. They had been camping and canoeing for 3 days on the AuSable. Sweet. Off to the second vet check. It's along a road again. Rafiq has started to bob his head and I fear that he will get pulled. Unfortunately he does and I have to go it alone without Melissa. It makes me doubt everything I've done so far in getting him there, and makes me doubt Bandit too. But I know I have to go on and put it out of my head. Again, where are my sponsors Tracy and Shannon??

We arrive in camp to the tune of, there's Cindy! Camera's going, people hugging me, Steve taking my horse and getting the tack off. It's a blur but I know I'm done with day two and looking for day three. I'm sad about Melissa not getting through the second day but I hope the a day's rest gets her back out with us on Thursday. Bandit vets in just fine, I'm not even looking at vet scores now, I just hope he's sound. We get back to the trailer and get him squared away, and it's wine time and corn hole. I've also discovered that now desitin is MY NEW BEST FRIEND. I had been putting, rather, lathering it on my horses feet for two days and now it's my turn. Aaahh, relief. Sand plays a big part in this ride the whole week. Having conditioned hill horses does not prepare you for the flat and often deep sand you run into on the trails. But I keep a positive attitude for both me and my horse and my new friends and their mounts.

Wednesday, August 5, 2009 – Day Three heading to Goose Creek Camp

Wednesday morning, 7am start. We're now down to 8 for the 250 for the week. This will be the longest day. That's what Tracy tells me. Little do I know how long exactly that's going to be. I'm off without Melissa this morning. She assures me she's ok and gives me a good luck. Everyone is still on good spirits. Derek is going to join Karon today at the vet checks. This leaves Steve to load up the family and kids and get them to Goose Creek Camp. I have no idea what he does when I leave, and I think he kept that to himself for a reason all week. By now my family is definitely known as the gypsy clan. Steve tells me later that his main goal each day getting into camp is locate the outhouse, a camp area with enough room for three rigs and a tent and space for the horses. He had his work cut out for him. And I love him for that. My parents love him for it too.

Most of the morning is riding trails that are beautiful and scenic. Most of the trails on the east side of I-75 are that way. Once we crossed under the interstate the trail dynamics changed to less rural and less scenic, but I still loved every minute of it. But getting to the last vet check was when our whole day changed. Tracy and I left a few minutes before Shannon from 4 Mile Camp. Plugging along the road we were talking and not paying attention. That is the key to this whole S2S adventure, you have to pay VERY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE TRAIL MARKINGS. Not soon after going down the road a good distance, we lost the trail, lost hoof prints, and pretty much were going to loose our minds. I later learned that they were hollering at us but I guess our endless chatter made it impossible to hear anything. We turned back, turned down another road

that was marked at that turn (which I later learned was the OLD trail), went a good distance before realizing that was not right. Eventually we'd call Tracy's husband Dan and he managed to straighten us out. OK, on to the right trail, way behind in time, hope we make it within the 12 hour limit. I was about in tears. I had come this far, almost half way, only to get lost and way out of our way. I could only hope we'd make it in time at this point. When it was all said and done, we must have gone 12 miles out of the way, and were still able to finish just under 12 hours. Good thing Tracy had her GPS and good thing I had the iPhone!!

At the riders meeting that night I was awarded the turtle award, one of the trail markers, as my token. I will faithfully carry that marker from now on even when I'm not on the S2S trail! I'd still rather follow ribbons!!

Thursday, August 6, 2009 – Day Four heading to Sheck's Place Camp

Thursday morning, 7am start. This will be the second longest day. Melissa is going to start with us, but we're now down to 5 for the 250 for the week. Another pretty day. The weather except for Monday has been perfect. Cool in the mornings and cool in the afternoons without any humidity. We're lucky for that. I leave camp, Steve packs the gypsy's and Karon and Derek follow along to the vet checks. Let me just say right now, I had the best pit crew anyone could ever ask for. Not only is it a tough and challenging trek across the state on horseback, but the logistics of it all in getting your crew to where they need to go and still be smiling at you when you come and go in itself is a challenge. I put my best face on during the whole week because I knew my attitude was going to be key to all of my help still wanting to be there the next day and in the end. Today started like any other, I find Tracy and Shannon, we have Melissa, and off we go. First vet check, Rafiq is bobbing his head again, he's not going to make it today. We decide to pull him. I'm sad again and I realize now that his conditioning level is not the same as Bandits. Something we'll work on when we get home. There's always next year for him!

We leave the first vet check heading for the second vet check. At some point along this trail we come across markings that are fairly familiar to those of the S2S, but not exactly like the markings. But there's hoof prints this time so we move on. We don't run into anyone either who might have turned around, which is strange if this were the wrong trail. Soon we're in a subdivision, we're passing a lake with a camping area, and then a frisbee golf course. Shannon says she thought she heard early in the week something about a new trail being cut to go around something that was off limits. Next thing we know we're on a busy road. Now this is not that unusual for this trail. We had already rode through neighborhoods, crossed busy intersections, and still were on the right trail. And still we're following a blue painted marker. At the next turn we see a sign that says Kalkaska City Limits. Out comes the iPhone, making the call again to poor Dan who by now knows that when my phone number comes up on his phone it means we're lost. As we approach this major 4 lane intersection I see horse trailers across the road. I jump off, run across, knock on the door and it's Marcella, I know her!! We've managed to get directions from Dan by then too and after talking to Marcella briefly we head toward the direction they've pointed us too. Funny, there's a Rite Aid, Arbys, Shell Gas station, I wanted to just go shopping.

FINALLY, a trail marker is sighted. We even see some fellow riders. You can't imagine the relief to be on the right trail again. And once again we've managed to log more miles than needed. But we're into the vet check, and on to the next camp. We find out later we were following some cross country ski trail. Can't they use another color other than BLUE??

We come into camp at around 10 hours ride time this time. Vet the horses in, relieved to be finished. And looking forward to an evening at Ranch Rudolph where we're treated to an excellent meal of chicken, ribs, baked potato and salad. By now everyone knows that we were lost again, and I get to explain the trail for the last day. And the reason I had to go shopping in Kalkaska....for DESITIN!!

Friday, August 7, 2009 – Day Five heading to Garey Lake Camp and the Finish!

Friday morning, 7am start. We're now down to the final 3 for the 250 and I'm riding with the other two. Today is all about being smart and getting through the last 50 miles to the end. Shannon's daughter is riding Tracy's horse Bud (who is a quarter horse and who Tracy herself has ridden several times across the state). Melissa is riding Connie's horse Cass, who rode 3 other days. We were all very appreciative of Connie's offer and Melissa was thrilled to be able to ride with us on the last day and to go to Lake Michigan. I know we all wish it were on her own horse, but she's happy just the same.

Today is also about not getting lost. I thought this was a pretty day to ride like the first two days. But now I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed and anxious about just finishing. I did manage to take some photos along the way with the iPhone, which is a good thing since most of the time is spent looking for trail makers and paying attention.

First vet check we're all doing fine. Second vet check the realization of only having 25 more miles starts to hit home. On the way to the third and final vet check we pass through our camp. Of course my whole family is there, all in their matching Shore to Shore shirts, rooting us on and taking more pictures. The end is almost near, 6 more miles to the finish. I try not to think about it too much because I'm afraid I'll lose it and cry. It is quite a journey, both physically and emotionally. And considering this was my first attempt, I'm even more emotional about it.

There's the finish. Wow, I can't believe we did it. I am so blessed to have such an amazing animal. We vet through, weight in for BC, saddle back up for the last 3 miles to Empire for ice cream. This is the annual tradition for those that finish all 5 days, and I am looking forward to riding into town for it. I'm pretty sure Bandit was not happy to have me put the saddle back on him again, but I kept promising him a good couple weeks off before I saddle him up again. He walks on like a trooper, and into town for ice cream and to stand in Lake Michigan. After the ice cream we walk further to the shoreline. We are looked upon with uncertain stares from people who have no idea what's going on. There are some that know exactly what we just did and congratulate us. It's a beautiful sight to see Lake Michigan, and remembering back 5 days to the start when we touched the sands and water of Lake Huron.

Would I do it again? **MOST DEFINITELY!** Would I do anything different, absolutely not. I had the most wonderful family and friends accompany me on a journey of a lifetime. If you asked them if they'd join me again I believe they'd say yes whole heartedly. As I write this I am teary-eyed again as I relive my trek across the state of Michigan. See you in 2010!

