

## 2003 Wus Tevis Journal

By Adda Quinn

Being ladies “of a certain age”, most of us had already concluded that we would never be able to ride in the Tevis Cup race (1 horse, 1 rider, 1 day, 100 miles).<sup>1</sup> But being avid trail riders, we were keenly interested in riding the route that the July 12, 2003 Tevis Cup race was run on the Western States Trail. But we were also wusses, and not about to do it in one day! So early in the year we began feeling out our friends as to whom might be interested in doing a “Wus Tevis” ride, as we began to call it affectionately. Some people said immediately: Nope! too hard, too long, too many logistics. Others said an enthusiastic yes, but life interfered with medical problems (horse colic, etc.). There were a variety of impediments right up to the first ride day. Kate, at Squaw Valley Stables where some of us were going to stay the night prior to the ride, called the day before to say they had strangles there, and not to come. So, the stalwart final six that met at Robie Horse Camp west of the Sawtooth Mountain behind the town of Truckee on Monday July 14 were the Wus Tevis Riders of 2003.

- Casey James, age 60, riding a 7 year old Missouri Fox Trotter named Starfire. She was the central organizer/enabler who knew everyone who made the trip. Casey is NATRC and rides out of Gardnerville, NV.
- Marion Arnold, age 57, riding an 8 year old Arab with only one year of real trail experience named Bubba. She was our guide and is local to the area. See further information below.
- Lili Hakanson, age 52, riding a 5 year old Missouri Fox Trotter named Sundance Kid (aka Sunny) the youngest horse to start. Lili rides out of Saratoga CA. She organizes gaited horse clinics and rides NATRC.
- Dana Baldwin, age 45, riding a 20 year old Paso Fino named Premero, NATRC, AERC LD and wannabe Tevis Cup competitor. Our youngest rider on the oldest horse. Dana rides out of Shingle Springs where she is a 4H leader.
- Pat Dallam, age 57, riding a 13 year old Arab/Kiger Mustang mix named Tawny GPSed our route. Pat is a natural history docent for Coe State Park and is a San Mateo County (CA) Mounted Search And Rescue member who hoped this ride did not become a training exercise!
- Adda Quinn, age 58, riding a 12 year old Missouri Fox Trotter named 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox (aka Cocoa), co-founder of EnviroHorse<sup>2</sup>, natural history docent for the Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District and San Mateo County (CA) Volunteer Horse Patrol member.

Husbands Mike Harper, Don James, Bruce Baldwin and George Sublett provided logistics which made this ride possible. Friends Jody Gebhart and Marty

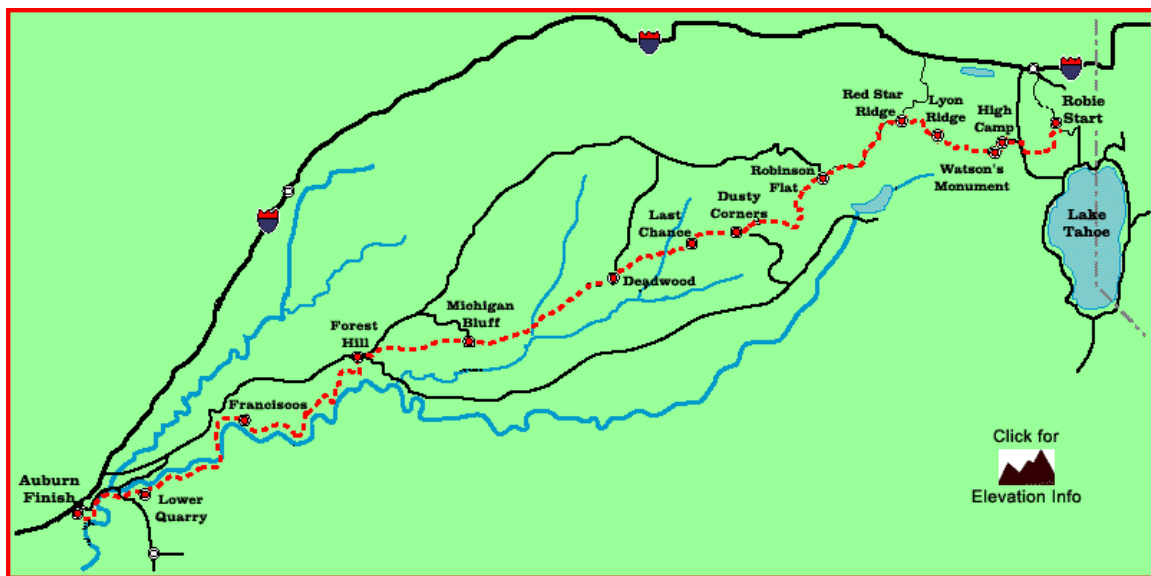
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.foothill.net/tevis/abouttheride> The ride was first organized by **Wendell Robie**, an Auburn businessman and devoted rider of the Sierra high country. Many people in the '50s doubted that any modern-day horse could cover the rugged trail from Lake Tahoe to Auburn in a single day. Wendell and a few of his friends proved them wrong in August of 1955. He continued to hold the ride annually thereafter and organized the Western States Trail Foundation to preserve the 100 mile trail and the Ride.

<sup>2</sup> [www.californiastatehorsemen.com/envirohorse.htm](http://www.californiastatehorsemen.com/envirohorse.htm) to provide science to keep horses on trails

Brookman provided organization and trailhead checking in addition. Hugs and kisses to you all!

Those of you familiar with endurance riding will immediately recognize the name Marion Arnold, granddaughter of Wendall Robie, and 1969 Tevis Cup winner in her own right. Casey, Lili and Dana had met Marion through NATRC previously. Casey called her when we started planning this trip to see if she might be interested in leading us. Marion had a stroke in 2000 and suffers from balance problems which make riding extremely difficult. We were very pleased when she decided to join us and actually gave us a mission for the ride: to pull yellow marker ribbons from the Tevis Cup ride route. Some of us had initial concerns that riding with Marion would mean a fast pace which we were uncomfortable with conceptually because of the difficult terrain. But pulling the ribbons was a slow and occasionally arduous job so we ended up with about a 3 mph pace, which was just fine for wusses. Marion said that she preferred the term "Leisurely" Tevis Ride to "Wus" Tevis Ride, a mind shift which we were later to embrace.



The 2003 Tevis Cup and Wus Tevis Ride Route<sup>3</sup>

We met at Robie Horse Camp Monday night July 14 for introductions and a fabulous potluck dinner. To do this ride, you must get permission to pass through private property in Squaw Valley, but if you are fewer than 8 and are not camping, you do not need a wilderness permit for the Granite Chief Wilderness portion. The ride started Tuesday morning at 5:30 AM. Right off the bat we climbed up to the Watson monument in the Emigrant Pass saddle at 8750'. With the late spring rains, the wildflowers were prolific throughout the trip and streams were rushing. Marmots and ground squirrels were visible and busy. Butterflies were everywhere. Views down into Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe were lovely in

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.foothill.net/tevis/trail/WSTRAIL.HTM>

the cool morning air. Heat was not really a factor most of the first two days due to the elevation of the terrain.

Being essentially anal retentive, compulsive people, most of us over-packed the first day. The longer we rode, the less we attempted to carry. I eliminated an entire cante pack after the first day when I realized that I was going to survive the trip without its contents. Many of us had studied the take-along lists on the Tevis web site and had confused ideas about what others deemed essential. Read them, then go with what you would normally take for a twenty mile ride, but do take extra drinking water for you and a baggie of dry food to wet later for your horse to boost its energy.

The first day was very slow due to pulling race ribbons. It took an extra hour from Robie Horse Camp to the Highway 89 bridge underpass, and several extra hours in Squaw and the Granite Chief Wilderness. The Wilderness area was of particular importance because even one rag-tag end of ribbon could result in a \$500 fine for the Western States Trail Foundation. Since the extreme runners also use the same route and helped to flag the trail initially, many of the ribbons were so low to the ground that they could only be pulled by dismounting. One was so high in a small pine tree that the only way we could get it off was to bend the tree over. Those who flag the trail next year need better standards for ribbon placement!



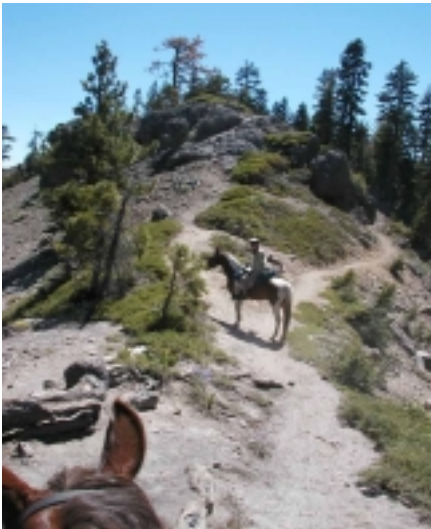
Casey James on Starfire, Lili Hakanson on Sunny, and Dana Baldwin on Premero (l-r) Hiway 89 at Squaw

The Granite Chief Wilderness is a spectacular, pristine area, but the trail is not easy. At one point my horse, Cocoa, slipped off of a steep slab of granite and fell over a five foot cliff, fortunately ending on his feet with me still in the saddle after some pretty scary seconds holding on. Marion, who has never been a fan of gaited horses, said she was impressed with how calmly Cocoa handled the situation. Water literally runs down many sections of the granite making it even more slick for iron shoes. We dismounted and walked many downhill segments

due to the stony impediments. But then we ARE wusses, and can do things like that!

Our route took us down the Red Star Ridge.<sup>4</sup> As soon as you catch a glimpse of French Meadows reservoir to the south, look for a wide gently sloping hill full of willows on your left. There is a nice pond just off the road to the left which is the last water for horses until Robinson Flat. We took a lunch stop at Wubena Pass about 2:30 PM, where most of our time was spent feeding the horses wetted pellet food to give them energy for the rest of the trip which included Cougar Rock and the Elephant Trunk--land forms that conjured terror to most of us. From then on, Marion decided that we would only pull yellow ribbons that we could reach on horseback, as the going was too slow and tedious. Good decision!

Most of us had seen the video of horses climbing Cougar Rock and it didn't look so bad. We could do it. But seeing it in person brought out the wus in us. No one was interested in trying the climb since the horses had been on the road nearly ten hours. The by-pass road to the right was perfect. Further up the ridge Marion stopped to tell us how we were to take the Elephant's Trunk and scared us to death. When we got there, the old trail that she had been describing had been rerouted (thank god!) and the new alternate was steep, but perfectly doable. The old trail was literally straight up the face with disaggregated soil as tread and we were very glad to have avoided it.



Pat Dallam and Tawny on Cougar Rock (l) Cliff jumper Cocoa and Adda Quinn at Robinson Flat (r)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.foothill.net/tevis/CHECKPT.HTM> Much of this historic route passes along narrow mountain trails through remote and rugged wilderness territory. Participants who are unfamiliar with this area should use caution when planning training rides with their mounts, especially in the high country and the route out of Foresthill to Francisco's. MUCH OF THIS TERRITORY IS ACCESSIBLE ONLY ON FOOT, ON HORSEBACK, OR BY HELICOPTER. .... The mountains, although beautiful, are relentless in their challenge and unforgiving to the ill-prepared. (Note: Several of us purchased backcountry heli-lift insurance before we left on the trip. AQ)

We clopped into Robinson Flat about 6 PM that evening after 12 hours and 36 miles on the trail. Hubbies and rigs awaited us, but we were too tired to socialize or eat much. Didn't even feel like drinking a glass of wine. That's tired! Took fists full of ibuprofen and went to bed early. Lili decided her youngster had had enough and elected to leave with Dana, who had planned to ride only the first day due to the age of her mare. Both went home happy, but tired. I was having concerns whether I could do another day like that.

We had excellent signage posted by the Western States Trail Foundation. Their signs read "WS", further reinforcing our concept that this was, indeed, the WuS Trail. We also had the ubiquitous yellow ribbons from the race. However, we did NOT have horse scat which we had expected to mark the trail. This was quite surprising. The coprophilic coyotes up there were doing a wonderful cleanup job! Even with the horses on tie lines at night, these stealthy scavengers would come in for a midnight raid. Manure we KNEW was there when we went to bed was gone by daybreak. And NO SCAT was on the trails one day after a race where a some one hundred horses had passed by.

6:30 AM four of us were back in the saddle, ibuprofen reinforced. The going was much easier the next twenty-five miles, despite the dreaded canyon crossings. The initial route was gentle, downhill-sloping, soft red soil trails though cool forests. Stories about Wendall and Marion are legendary. Marion treated us to some of them as we rode.

We passed an old cabin. An earlier Tevis competitor had lost a horseshoe. He stopped at this cabin where he found an old discarded mule shoe and some roofing nails. With a rock, he pounded the shoe on backwards until he could get to a farrier.

In one Tevis Cup race Marion rode her sister's pony without a cinch on the saddle because her sister had given the horse a girth sore prior to the event. Marion had to do a running vault up over the horse's butt to mount. Since the race has 19,000 feet of "up" and 22,000 feet of "down", this is no small feat.<sup>5</sup>

In another Tevis Cup race Marion had what she called a "49 Mile Stallion". The horse simply quit on her and she was on foot for the last 51 miles, but she still got the buckle! She did everything she could possibly think of to get the stud moving, including twisting some sensitive parts to no avail.

She had us in literally tears of laughter with the following story. Marion wanted to ride a horse that her granddad did not think was safe for a 12 year old, but she rode it anyway. That day, Wendall was also riding with a man from Marin County who had a Thoroughbred just off the track and they decided to have a horse race uphill. Marion's horse got out of control

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.foothill.net/tevis/FAQ.htm>

and was in a full run. Rather than lose face with her granddad, as she overtook both racing men on their horses, she began whipping her out-of-control steed and screaming GO! to feign the appearance of keen competition. Once out of their sight, she still had no control over the animal. To stop, they ended up running full speed into the side of their horse trailer. The horse fell over and knocked her off. She jumped up quickly, unsaddled and was casually grooming the beast by the time grandpa came into view. Wendall never said anything about it to her, but the next week he began ponying her horse to trail break it for her.

Marion has broken nearly every bone in her body from dare-devil riding as a youth and is suffering now as a consequence. We were initially intimidated about the prospect of riding with her. But there is not a nicer person to meet. Anything we wanted to do was fine. She insisted that we all take turns leading the ride (because Wendall always lead and she resented it). She was very open and forthright. While we knew each other and our capabilities through someone else in the group, she knew none of us, and yet was willing to take us on a long and difficult ride. Still gutsy! After this experience, we would ride with Marion anywhere. She took good care of her Wus Riders and we felt safe on the trail with her.

Heading down the ridges you go through legendary places with names like Dusty Corners. At Last Chance the trail continues straight ahead, but be sure to take a brief stop at the springs and meadow just off the intersecting road to your left (then a quick right turn). On the Deadwood Ridge, be sure to stop at the cemetery with its canyon view to see where Dru Barner's ashes were scattered.

The nastiest part of the second day was the canyon of the north fork of the middle fork (yes, that's right) of the American River. Two miles and 2000 feet straight down and up. And I do mean straight, even if there were switchbacks--they are the steepest that I have ever done. I dropped my camera on one of them and had to inconvenience the other three riders to stop on a 30% grade while I dismounted to retrieve it. As if the terrain wasn't enough, they torture you with putting a swinging bridge over the river so you get to bounce simultaneously up, down and sideways while crossing it!!! I have never seen Cocoa's eyes so wide!

In comparison, the El Dorado Canyon following was a piece of cake with its gentle three mile lateral descent. Most of us dismounted and walked down both canyons to give our horses a break, and because we are wusses. Here follows another tale from Marion:

There is a spring along the east side of the El Dorado Canyon trail that Marion called "Kaput" Springs because a horse named Kaput went over the cliff when it backed away from the water too fast. Kaput was owned by a town local who had no money and mooched off of everyone. Poor old Kaput should have been shot down there because he was badly

injured. But it so happened that there was a photographer from Sports Illustrated at the spot who took pictures of Kaput's plight and Wendall did not want to give people the wrong impression about the Tevis race. So he called in a helicopter to rescue Kaput at his own expense. Kaput made the front page of the next issue of the magazine.



Pat Dallam on Tawny, Casey James on Starfire and Marion Arnold on Bubba at Deadwood Cemetery

After a long steep hot climb up to Michigan Bluff, we met a local homeowner, Gary Hall, who gave us cold drinks and let us water and hose off our very sweaty horses. Talk about Western hospitality! Thank you Gary! Another 25 miles and 9 hours on the trail. We got in at 4:00 PM. Spent the next two hours driving up and back to Robinson Flat to bring my rig down. My special thanks to Casey and Don for help with logistics the last two days!

By the end of the second day of watching the Fox Trotters perform over this difficult terrain, all three trotter owners were very gratified to have Marion tell us that she had to reevaluate her previous disdain for this breed. The MFTrotters she had seen at horse shows had no back end development critical for hill trail riding. She was very complimentary of Sunny, Starfire and Cocoa.

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Bubba, Marion Arnold and Pat Dallam (l-r) in Michigan Bluff at Gary Hall's house of western hospitality

We camped at Foresthill that night after Marion left us to go home. Pat and Mike had ridden the next trail segment down to Drivers Flat in May during the Fun Ride. So they opted instead to ride from Drivers Flat south to Poverty Bar and back. We all took our rigs down to Drivers Flat the next morning after dropping two tacked horses at the Foresthill Trailhead. Don brought me back to the trailhead where Casey and I got a 7:30AM start on the 19 mile trail segment which we finished by 1:00 PM thanks to our speedy Fox Trotters. The views of this branch of the American River are awesome. Ruck-a-Chucky rapids! So too are the sheer drop-offs from the trail you have to ride on! This section is where horses have died as the racers must trot it in the dark. It was scary in broad daylight. But the major factor for us by then was the heat. It was over 100 degrees by 11:00 AM. When we got to Auburn it was 104, which would have likely put that canyon at 110 degrees for our 1.8 mile ride up out of it.

We decided not to do the final leg from Drivers Flat to Auburn at this time. While the Tevis Cup warrants lowering the American River water volume from the dam above to enable racers to cross it safely, the Wus Riders didn't have quite the same cache. We will do that final leg sometime this fall when the river is down.

So would we do it again? Probably. But logistics are really an issue, especially if you want to sleep in your own rig at night. And Marion was right to object to our term "Wus" for this ride. *This trail is not for wusses.* There are many people and horses that could not do it, even in stages. But for those of you with seasoned, well-conditioned horses, this ride is a 10! I consider it one of my personal life achievements. It was tempting to wus out every night. But by morning things always looked better. Because of Marion Arnold, superb horses, wonderful friends, our great husbands, and ibuprofen, we made it through and will always cherish the experience. Try it. You'll like it.

Happy Trails from the Wus Tevis Riders of 2003!