



# Winner's Log— *My ANCER Adventure*

## 2014 APPALOOSA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ENDURANCE RIDE

BY BECKY BATSON

PHOTOS BY GORE/BAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY, BILL GORE AND  
DIANA HIESALU AND DOUG SMITH AND DONALD KERNS

Rivendells Eowyn and I hitched a ride to the Appaloosa National Championship Endurance Ride (ANCER) with my friend, Debra, who had been a great source of encouragement and moral support leading up to the competition. ANCER was being held in conjunction with the Fireworks Endurance Ride in Santa Cruz, California, and my friend was going to ride the limited distance while I rode the 50-mile ride for the National Championship.

We arrived at camp in the afternoon of the Friday before the ride and parked next to familiar faces Becky Noriega and Rivendells Strider, "River," Eowyn's full brother. We set up camp, checked in, and waited for the appropriate time to vet in (get our initial vet scores and approval to start the ride the next day). Since there was time I walked around to say hello and meet the other ANCER participants that I had not met before. I met Laura Spear and Viva Sozar, "Quick," who had quite a nice support team with her. I also met Julie Fig and Goldseekers Wish, "Gem," who had traveled from back east to attend. I also stopped by to say hi to Jacob Cukjati and Miamis Kekionga SHA, "Kiki," whom I had met at Tevis and again at ANCER in 2012 as well as running into him at various other rides. We

also met two other folks riding Appys that were competing in the ride but not the national championship. (Hopefully now that they know about it they will get signed up in the distance program and be involved next time after seeing what a great time we all had). The competition was fierce with 61 horses of various breeds competing at the 50-mile distance and five Appaloosas competing for the national championship.

When it was time to vet in we stood in a long line waiting our turn. We passed our vet check with good scores and now Eowyn had a number on her rump to identify us during the ride. We were ready to go! I put a blanket on Eowyn for the night since the coastal weather was a bit cooler than she was used to. She had her dinner mash and enough hay and water to get her through the night. I had not realized until the ride meeting Friday night that it would be a controlled start which Eowyn had not yet had the pleasure of experiencing. This meant that horses would be lined up in close quarters and you would not be allowed to pass the one person that was chosen to lead the ride out until we reached a certain spot in the trail that ride management deemed safe to start letting people pass. This was to keep people from allowing their horses to go too fast on what ride management had decided was treacherous trail at the beginning of the ride. I was



very nervous and started rethinking my starting strategy as I did not know how Eowyn would behave under those conditions.

I didn't sleep much that night. I don't think many riders do the night before a ride. When it was time to get up, I went out and gave Eowyn her morning mash, tacked her up and threw a cooler over her to keep her warm while I ate a quick breakfast and waited for the 6:30 a.m. ride start. I had no more than one bite of my breakfast when the camper started shaking. I jumped outside to see Eowyn spooked by her cooler flying off. I ate the rest of my breakfast standing next to her at the trailer to keep her settled.

On ride morning it's as if the air is electric and gains intensity with every person and horse that starts moving around. The horses know what they are there for and are excited to get started and want to go. At this point riders like me are nervous and trying to stay calm hoping it will rub off on our anxious dancing horses and hoping there will be no starting line antics on the part of their steed. Once mounted Eowyn and I were on the move walking toward the starting area. I had decided that I would not start at the very front as originally planned due to the controlled start. I would start further back in an attempt to avoid any starting line trouble in close quarters with no way to get out of it. To keep Eowyn and myself calm while we waited for the go ahead to start I found an orange cone to have Eowyn circle at the walk. Eowyn finds it helpful to be moving to stay calm. I find it helpful to have something to focus on rather than looking around at all the other horses and riders and morning antics going on around me.

Once they let us on the trail we fell in line for the controlled start. I thought I had seen Laura and Jacob take an earlier position in the line and made note of it in my head as I would have to catch up if I wanted to beat them. I talked with those around me about my nervousness and it being Eowyn's first controlled start. Everyone was very encouraging and supportive and was careful to give her room as I had asked so that she did not feel too confined. One of the things I love about our sport is the people in it and how great they are. You will always find some bad apples but the majority of endurance folks are kind, helpful, and generous.



DONALD KERNS

We had already come through some beautiful single-track trail in the woods where your horse had to be very careful negotiating the large roots in the trail, crossed a small creek and had negotiated a long series of sand steps going downhill. As we were not near the front and I did not know the trail, I was unaware when they finally released us until I noticed others starting to pass. We were still behind a line of horses and one of the people in front of us was reluctant to let folks pass. We waited as long as we could and while the trail was still wide enough I firmly asked to pass, was waved on, and we went on our way.

We passed the entire line of horses that was in front of us. Eowyn felt good and was full of energy, but under complete control so I let her get on with it. We went blasting down the trail at a long trot occasionally catching and passing another horse or two. I let her canter quite a bit as she likes the canter and we had not yet caught Laura or Jacob. I figured we might be too far behind to catch them and maybe it was an error on my part to start so far back in the line. We came to the river crossing and for safety they made the riders cross one at a time. While we were waiting our turn one of the Arabians in front of us got impatient and started rearing. I was hoping Eowyn would not follow suit and joined with the Arab rider in shouting, "Get down," in the deepest gruffest voice I could muster. One of the riders I had been talking to earlier came up behind me and asked if I was okay after hearing me yell. I let him know it was not Eowyn, but a horse in front of me I was yelling at. Eowyn, though excited, was not affected by the other horse's misbehavior and continued to wait like a champ. We took our turn in the river and a lady there watching the crossing said we were the first Appy she had seen that day. I asked if she was sure as I knew there were two in front of me. She confirmed what she said as we passed and I wasn't going to argue though I knew she had to have seen two others already. After exiting the river we were off again passing more horses.



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The first vet check was only a trot-by nine miles out to check for soundness and see that everyone's horses still looked okay. We had slowed coming in but were waved on and trotted by. I heard them say, "Looks good," so we continued on our way. The next section of trail headed out toward the ocean. There were some very nice views. I pulled out my camera to see if I could get some pictures when I could see the ocean in the distance, but taking pictures while at the long trot is not an easy feat and makes for blurry photos though sometimes you can get lucky. I had not yet caught Jacob and Laura so I didn't want to slow down to get good photos, but wanted something to show my hubby about the trail views when I got home.

We reached the spotters on the trail that turned us onto a short loop that we needed to do, but came back to the same location before you could continue on over the wood bridge. Eowyn and I had just finished the small loop and had almost reached the spotters again when we saw Becky Noriega and River with their riding buddy being turned onto the start of the small loop. We both shouted and waved hello without stopping. It's always nice to run into folks that you know and see that they are doing well. We crossed the bridge, continued on and eventually reached a section of trail that had two-way traffic. The limited distance riders were coming out of the vet check on the same trail that the 50-milers were coming into the vet check. We passed my friend, Debra, on her horse heading out. It was time for another quick greeting as she went her way and we continued on ours. She mentioned that she thought we were in the front. I didn't stop or slow down to discuss as I knew we had not passed Laura or Jacob yet.

We came into the second vet check about 23 miles into the ride to find out that we were currently in second place for the entire ride. There was no ½- or ¼-mile warning sign to let you know the vet check was close, as some ride managements will do, so we rounded a bend in the trail at the canter to see the vet check right there. Normally I would have slowed and walked the last ½ to ¼ mile to get her heart rate down quicker since you have to meet a 60 beats-per-minute heart rate to start your

hold times at the vet checks. Since we came in so hot it took her about 15 minutes to pulse down to start her hold time so though we came in second a lot of folks passed us by being able to start their hold time sooner and leave the vet check to continue the ride before us. While I was still waiting for Eowyn to pulse down I saw the other Appys start coming in. I saw Jacob and Laura come in and was trying to figure out how I had gotten in front of them. Once Eowyn had pulsed down and started her hold time I took her over to be vetted. She passed with good scores and I took her to find my crew bag to get us both some lunch. It was during this time that I noticed Becky and River had also come in. While Eowyn was eating her lunch mash and some hay I quickly ate a couple of chewy granola bars, had a Gatorade, and a Pepsi to boost my energy for the next half.

Once Jacob had seen to his horse's needs he came over to say how well we were doing and see what time we were leaving the vet check. I had told him I was not sure how I got in front of him and Laura as I had thought I had seen them both start ahead of me and I had really been racing down the trail faster than normal trying to catch up. I was very surprised to see them come in after me. Jacob confirmed that he had been in a position to start up front, but did not and ended up starting further back. I only found out later that Laura had trouble with sabotaged trail markers that took her two miles off the trail before they discovered the problem and came back which is why I had not passed her on trail, but had gotten in front of her.

Just before we were about to leave on the third leg of our journey I saw Julie at the vet check and was able to say hi and check in with her. Eowyn and I headed over to the out-timer a couple minutes early and had to wait for the go-ahead to start back on the trail. I thought we would slow down on this next loop since it took her so long to pulse down, but we didn't. She continued to fly down the trail. I didn't ask for it, it was her decision. I just went with it. The enchanted trail was beautiful with all the trees and ferns. It reminded me of a rain forest and I again tried to get a few pictures on the fly. The trail then took us from the State Park property onto private property where trails had just been made for the ride. The footing in some places was deep and steep, but that wasn't an issue for Eowyn. We eventually made it back to State Park trail and worked our way back to the vet check again.

We came into the vet check for the second time about 41 miles into the ride for our half-hour hold. I had hooked up with someone that knew the trail and was able to tell me when we were getting close to the check. This time I was able to walk for a bit and dismount and lead her in. However, due to the afternoon heat and humidity, she still took about 10 minutes to pulse down. Once she pulsed down I had her vetted. Her scores were still good, and her recovery heart rate was okay, but a little high. I told the vet my intention to slow down as we had been going very fast and it had been taking her longer than normal to pulse down in the heat and humidity. The vet agreed that it would be a good idea. There were only a few horses in the check the entire time I was there. There were young girls there to help everyone at the check since there were no crews allowed. The check was so busy my first time through that I didn't get any assistance, but this time I had three girls helping. One holding Eowyn, another filled my water bottles and stayed to talk, and another just came

over to see Eowyn. I don't think Eowyn has ever had so much attention all at the same time. I think she liked it. When it was time for us to go back out on the last nine miles back to camp I had not yet seen any of the other Appaloosas come in. This confirmed to me that I had plenty of time and could slow down.

I guess there was also a biking event going on that afternoon as many mountain bikers came through the vet check while we were there. We left the check at a walk and met many mountain bikers on the trail both coming at us and coming up from behind. Eowyn is good with bikes so we didn't have any trouble passing and being passed by them. The bikers were all very courteous and nice once they saw us. Unfortunately sometimes on the single-track trails you come upon each other rounding a corner which can be exciting, but all went well for us with no mishaps. When a biker does pass us Eowyn likes to try to catch them and I allowed her to move along a bit from time to time to keep her entertained.

Unfortunately I was riding alone when the single-track was crossed by a dirt road. There were a lot of bikers taking a break at that junction and I looked around and saw another single-track trail straight across the road from where we were. I looked up and down the road and didn't see any ribbons or signs that should mark my trail. I didn't remember coming out on a road and the single track across the road looked familiar so I decided to take that trail. I kept coming upon bike after bike and had not yet seen another trail marker, so about a mile or so out I stopped surrounded by bikers and said, "I think I took a wrong turn." I asked the bikers coming from the direction I was headed if they had seen any horses. They advised me they had not though they had seen manure. Luckily at that time one of the bikers from behind us spoke up and said there was a red ribbon back on the road and he had seen other horses turn down that way. I thanked them all and turned to go back from whence I came. As I was approaching the road I saw two horses turning where I should have. I looked around and saw the red ribbon that had eluded me before. We were back on the right track.

I rode for a while with the two ladies when we caught them, but eventually let each of them leave us one at a time after we crossed the river again. I made sure Eowyn took it easy the rest of the way in to be sure her recovery heart rate would be good and we mostly walked though she didn't think she needed to. We caught up with a lady on a bay Arab and walked with her the rest of the way in, back up the sand stairs, and through the beautiful trail we had originally gone out on to finish in eleventh place in the ride overall. The lady on the bay had told me that the lady I just let go was in tenth position and if I wanted to race for top ten that it was okay to leave her behind. I decided to let it go as I knew I was still in first for the Appaloosa Championship and wanted to have a good chance at the best condition for that. After seeing what great shape Eowyn was in at the end of the ride I could have probably raced for top ten with no problems which would have been awesome, but at the time I decided it was good enough to be in first for the Appaloosa Championship and to have a shot at best condition.

It paid off! Eowyn ended the ride as the 2014 Appaloosa National Endurance Champion and also won the George Hatley Best Condition Award. I couldn't be prouder of the little girl I bred, raised and trained! She is proof of the quality, heart, and endurance of our small breeding program at Rivendell Ranch. Who could ask for more?" 🐾



DOUG SMITH

## 2014 APPALOOSA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ENDURANCE RIDE

### RESULTS

2014 Appaloosa National Championship Endurance Ride Results  
Held July 12 in conjunction with the Fireworks Ride in Santa Cruz, California.

#### 1ST

Rebecca Batson riding **RIVENDELLS EOWYN**  
(ApHC National Champion)  
The George Hatley Cup — Best Condition Appaloosa  
11th Overall Ride Time (HH:mm): 6:31

#### 2ND

Laura Spear riding **VIVA SOZAR**  
17th Overall Ride Time: 6:54

#### 3RD

Jacob Cukjati riding **MIAMIS KEKIONGA SHA**  
24th Overall Ride Time: 7:19

#### 4TH

Julie Figg riding **GOLDSEEKERS WISH**  
45th Overall Ride Time: 8:34

#### 5TH

Rebecca Lee Noriega riding **RIVENDELLS STRIDER**  
Pulled – LAME