



SERA NEWSLETTER

SOUTHEAST ENDURANCE RIDERS ASSOCIATION

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**This could be the view from
your window
at the**

SERA CONVENTION!!

January 12-13-2018

**Amicalola Lodge,
Dawsonville, GA**

Make your plans to be there!!



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Nancy Sluys

PRESIDENTS LETTER

An Endurance Story

Once upon a time there was a new ride manager who although relatively new to the sport, was willing to take on bringing back a ride from years past. She even had the guts to have it be a two day ride with a hundred offered the second day. Everything rocked along just fine, entries came in, two days before the ride people starting arriving at ride camp. Then.... Her world turned upside down.



She had a critical family emergency that required her to travel out of state and be gone the whole ride weekend. Some riders who were already at camp that day and the next day were mentally preparing themselves that the ride might get cancelled and it would turn into a camping/training weekend.

Then the endurance magic started happening. A rider who came to ride volunteered to step in and manage the ride on Friday. Now this rider had never been a ride manager. The head vet stepped in and took charge of deciding trails. The head timer recruited new people to train.

Friday went off as if nothing had hiccuped. Then the rider who had managed Friday decided she was better equipped to continue on and manage Saturday especially since there was a hundred. She again gave up her ride plans.

Whatever things that were going on behind the scenes (which there always are in any ride)-- the riders knew only that everything clipped right along and it was like nothing had happened. As someone who rode the hundred I had a great, well managed experience in every aspect.

The ride was Shockaloe. The endurance heroes were Velvet Shultz, Ike Nelson, Nancy Gooch, Terri Clark. I'm certain there were many more angels who pitched in.

We should all feel proud to call these folks our friends and compadres in the sport we love. And if we have the chance to step up sometime it would be a tribute to them.

Ride on!!
Sudi

EDITORS LETTER -

Hi Folks, well the 2017 ride season is over and the first ride of the 2018 season is in the bag.

Wow! How the time flies!!! Once again I didn't get to do as many rides as I would have liked but I did enjoy the ones that I was able to attend. The SERA volunteers work extra hard to bring you a quality endurance ride experience and it shows. Southeast rides are some of the best around!



I competed on 3 different equines including Zanie (FYF InZane+), Snap (ABA Kamaals Regalo) and Danny the Mule (Jet's Danny Herlong) and enjoyed the differences between them. Zanie is my campaigner, she knows the game. We only did one ride together this year but we mentored a first time endurance mule and rider through the 50 at the Biltmore and Zanie's wisdom & patience showed through. Snap is still learning the game. A talented and fast horse, he needs to learn to tone it down on the first loop and save some energy for later in the ride. After a few starts this year he is beginning to figure it out. If I can continue to get that first loop fixed he should be a good 100 mile prospect, maybe in 2018. Danny the mule is learning the ropes and proving to be a steady competitor who doesn't let much bother him. He will be graduating to 50s in 2018. Up and coming will be his sister, April, who I had the opportunity to acquire. My endurance future looks bright with hopes that my biggest problem will be to decide which one to ride!! I may be looking for some catch riders!!

Hope you all had a wonderful ride year! Happy Trails, Nancy Sluys

SERA Needs You!

Please take a moment to renew or become a member!

You can renew online at

Seraonline.org

Individual membership is \$25 Family is \$30

Thank you!

**Make your reservation for this year's convention
January 12-13 2018
Amicalola State Park Lodge
800-573-9656**

There is no fee for members for the Convention! Come see what we all look like without our helmets, and learn from our fantastic speakers! If you haven't previously been a member you can join now and attend the convention for free!

This year's line up:

Friday 2-5 pm

Dr. Jose Castro. Lameness, back issues, chiropractic

5 pm

Appetizers/ cocktails on the back deck

Saturday

9:00 Members meeting

10:00 AERC meeting

11:00 Rachel Land/Clare Summers " Our adventure in the Mongol Derby"

12-1 Lunch on your own

1-2:45

Lara Worden

What's in the bag? Analyzing feed

3-5

Meg Sleeper

Conditioning for Endurance

6:30 Banquet and Awards

(Please reserve your banquet spot with Tamra Williams. Cost for this is \$25.00)

8:00 Men of Soul Dance party

“MENTOR” REDEFINED BY LAUREN SAUNBY

Completing a 50 mile endurance ride on my Missouri Fox Trotter mule, Maggie Mae, was not just on my bucket list, it was an intentional goal that I knew would be the catalyst for a life changing event. Sometimes you just know that you're about to do something that will change you forever. So it was with tremendous anticipation that I looked forward to the Biltmore Challenge. Although I'd completed half a dozen NATRC rides, I knew enough to know that I knew nothing about endurance riding, and that voice inside told me to make sure I wasn't going to try my first 50 mile ride alone.

I have a new friend I met through the NATRC events, and I knew she also participated in AERC events, so I asked her if she'd mind me riding with her in the upcoming Biltmore Challenge. I had no idea that she was listed in the AERC new rider's literature as a mentor in our area. I had no idea I'd struck gold, and she was too humble to let me know. Humility: one of the many attributes of a great mentor.

I'd never ridden my fabulous mule, Maggie Mae (no bias here, I'm entirely open minded when it comes to my best four-legged friend!), on a 50 mile ride in one day. We had ridden 100 miles over the course of a few days, but at a walk. My very basic understanding of the endurance world told me that walking would be infrequent if we wanted to finish in the time allotted. Could Maggie up her game to trot out for all those miles? I needed someone with more experience to assess her conditioning; I didn't want to jeopardize Maggie's health. My new mentor jumped right in and invited me to ride with her for a weekend, two consecutive days of challenging mountain trails. Availability: another helpful attribute of a great mentor.

Before the ride I had a veritable plethora of questions for my mentor, and it was a smorgasbord of seemingly unrelated, anxiety producing thoughts and doubts, filled with the words “What if???” and “What happens when???” My mentor was so patient I actually started feeling guilty about how much of her time I was taking – not that my guilt stopped me, of course, it just meant that I tried to space the questions out. The week of the Biltmore Challenge I received a message from my tireless mentor, “Read your email, I sent you another list.” How could there be anything more to know? I'd already pressed her beyond the average human's endurance with my pleas for more knowledge about electrolytes, more ideas about hydration prior to the ride, a better time table for resting Maggie before the event; what question could I have overlooked, and how kind of her to offer yet another list of helpful ideas. Patience and thoroughness: two essential attributes of a great mentor; the first one is a must for a new rider's needs, the second is imperative for a safe ride.



And then, my mentor did the unthinkable when she subjected herself to camping next to us. She actually invited my husband (our crewman!) to set up our portable corral so that it was facing her own corral. She invited us to her living quarters trailer to eat a hot, nutritious, delicious meal; we brought the salmon and she had everything else prepared. The talk was all about endurance: vet checks, the essentials of successful crewing, equine nutrition before, during and after, rain gear, pommel pack contents and hydration. We would ride out in at least 4 inches of slodgy mud which was likely blanketing all the trails, but my mentor didn't hesitate to tell me it would be fine, we would ride out on the trail conditions we had and we'd adjust our pace to meet the conditions. It seemed like I could get a good night's sleep and not obsess about the trail conditions, after all. Reassurance: something every great mentor supplies in abundance, mine certainly did!

Ride day! Rainy, overcast, inch upon inch of slippery mud everywhere, and my mentor met me between our trailers with a smile that barely fit on her face. It was contagious and we were both excited for the adventure ahead of us. My first endurance ride EVER! I'd ridden 34 miles in one day under a fair sky with dry trails at a walking pace, but this day promised to be far more eventful, I already knew that.

If I expounded on the details of our adventure at the Biltmore Challenge, the cost of printing the story might bankrupt the newsletter. I'll only hit on the highest and lowest points: my first vet check and hold was a pretty idea gone ugly. My mule and I were caught up in a frenzy of riders who all converged on the same piece of real estate in the same moment in time, and Maggie Mae was inconsolable and crazy. A very compassionate vet pulled us aside and assisted us in getting through the ordeal. Maggie got all 'A's and her CRI score was stellar. In other words: Maggie was better prepared than her rider! Through the hold and the vet check, my mentor remained unswervingly steadfast and kept reminding me that it was a learning curve, that the next hold would go more smoothly -- "Wouldn't you like some fruit," she asked, and on we went. Optimism: an essential component of mentoring.

The second vet check and hold time went far more smoothly. Maggie Mae was a faster learner than the human part of our six leg team. She ate and drank, thanks to my mentor's electrolytes; I'd brought far less than was needed for Maggie Mae during a 50 mile ride. If I had eaten and drunk like my mule did, I might have fared better in the last loop. I finished the 20 mile (2nd) loop with enthusiasm to spare and eager to canter out of the hold area with 35 glorious miles behind us, but I headed out without eating much at all and not drinking nearly enough -- what's that expression? "You can lead a rider to water but you can't make her drink?" I think it goes something like that. By the last 5 miles I had nothing left physically. I hit a wall. Wikipedia defines that event as "sudden fatigue and loss of energy is caused by the depletion of glycogen stores in the liver and muscles... the respiratory exchange ratio was lower..." Well, I thought my liver had probably fallen out, so it didn't matter if the stores were depleted; as for the respiratory exchange, I was literally panting and couldn't catch my breath. My black lab has never panted as much in his entire life as I did that afternoon. When I said that we must be lost on the trail because we'd been riding the last 4 miles for at least 10 miles at that point, my mentor told me to dismount and walk just a short way. I did, and it momentarily cleared my head -- "momentarily" being the operative word in that sentence, as a fogginess settled into my head.

When I remounted it wasn't long before I became unstable in the saddle, leaning to the right and jeopardizing my mule's back with too much pressure on the right side of the saddle. Then it happened, the unimaginable just 10 hours before: my mentor caught me as I was coming off the saddle. She literally held me with one hand, mid-air, and stopped Maggie Mae while I battled a severe right leg cramp. She got us over to the grassy side of the trail so that if I came off I wouldn't hit the gravel. She fed me gluten free cookies and electrolyte capsules, and she stayed close to me. Quick thinking and problem solving: only a mentor could have gotten me through that seemingly endless 4 mile loop just a mile from the finish line.

By now my husband was calling. Our hard working, one man crew was unable to imagine why he hadn't yet seen us at the finish line grinning and giddy with the air of conquerors, sitting high in the saddle. Instead, I was fighting severe leg cramps the entire last mile.

"Go on," I told my mentor.

"We won't even talk about that," she said.

"I can't stand the thought of you not completing in time," I told her. "You only have a few minutes, you can canter to the finish and get your completion, I'll walk in behind you," I told her, and I sincerely meant it as my leg cramped and I rode twisted in my saddle.

"I won't leave you, we'll finish together and we'll do it on time. I'll get you there," she told me, and she sincerely meant it.

There we were in the rain: two sincere women, one struggling, the other eternally hopeful and steadfast. Hopeful and steadfast: two important attributes of a great mentor.

Finally, we had less than ten minutes to finish. My husband called and told my mentor to leave me at the stone bridge, he was driving there at that moment and he would put me in the Jeep and pony Maggie to the trailer. He couldn't imagine what had transpired on the trail to prevent me from finishing the 50 miles, but he knew me to be physically tough and he thought that it must have been something serious. He wanted my mentor to get her completion, to finish in the 12 hours allowed. She wouldn't even entertain the thought of it, she put her cell phone away and didn't take it out again. Loyalty: one of the most treasured attributes of a friend, perhaps the greatest attribute of an endurance mentor.

We finished the ride with 3 minutes to spare, and the end wasn't pretty. I was cramping so badly I couldn't get out of the saddle. I fell into my husband's arms and he got me into the Jeep while my mentor ponied my mare to the vet check area about half a mile away. I was shaking with the chills and someone wrapped me in more coats and sat me in a chair where I could watch my husband as he trotted Maggie Mae out for her final vetting. Her CRI was the best she'd had ALL day: 46/44. She had scored all As in every vet check that day. The same vet who had assisted us earlier in the day was there in the rain, examining Maggie Mae. "She got better as she went," he reassuringly told me. "You did good! You finished."

We finished, we won. "To finish is to win!"

But I got more out of that first ride than just a finish and the Turtle Award. I gained a genuine understanding of the kind of mentor I hope to be for the riders in my life: my 4H Club members, my fellow trail riders, my husband and my young neighbor whom I'm just starting to mentor. The term "mentor" had been redefined for me in a very tangible, meaningful way.

A solid mentor is someone who has humility, makes themselves available, and is patient and thorough. A good mentor offers reassurance and is optimistic and quick thinking in their problem solving mode; hopefulness and steadfastness cannot be understated. For me, that great mentor is Nancy Sluys, whose loyalty never waivered, even with the possibility that she would have to forego a completion time in her own 50 mile ride just to stay with me at my turtle pace. Nancy's no "turtle" by any stretch of the imagination -- this mentor who has completed numerous 50 and 100 mile rides. But on May 5, 2017, she forewent her typically very competitive pace and walked her turtle-charge across the finish line. Nancy Sluys has redefined for me what it is to truly mentor; and now it seems natural that a great mentor would become a very valued friend.



I'm hooked! My mentor/friend got me addicted and I'll ride in another 50 miler before this year's done – but first I'll stock up on electrolytes and trail food while I train a lot of cardio. And who knows? Perhaps one day you'll see me cross the finish line as I mentor a young rider following the stellar example set for me by my kind and loyal friend.

If I could bray with happiness to express show much I loved completing the Biltmore Challenge, you'd be able to hear me all the way across the region. Can a turtle yell "Yee-Haw!" ???

SERA Members!!!

Please be sure to check what awards you may be eligible for on the SERA web site. Many are self nominating. Deadline Dec.15!

<http://www.seraonline.org/>

Shag's Story by Anita Rees

Starting in the mid 80's I was pretty involved with CTR's then later endurance riding, to the point I really didn't care about much else. I'd work, train, compete – period. Then I got divorced, priorities changed, and I was out of endurance for almost 15 years. It was always fun talking to my old endurance buddies and hearing about their rides but I really had no desire to get back into competing.

A couple years ago I was mentoring one of our neighbors who said she was interested in learning more. Well ... long story... that was a complete flop but I did kinda get the bug again so jumped back in starting w/ a 50 at Biltmore in May, 2016. I've always loved riding at Biltmore, but boy it felt so strange being there and hardly knowing anyone anymore!

After that I started going to a few more rides, meeting more people and re connecting with old friends. Now I wonder why did I ever get out of this great sport in the first place? Will I ever race for top 10 like I used to, and do more 100's? Probably not. I'm a lot older and fatter now, with bad knees and a bad back. But it's still fun to have goals and be out there doing the rides! It's so nice to be around endurance folk again, hadn't realized how much I missed it until I came back. Now I find myself in the old habit of planning my year around upcoming rides and checking the point standings every month. What a shock one day to see my horse Shag in the standings! Of course that's only because I've gained so much weight I'm riding as a MW now, plus it was early in the season. Lol.

As some of you have seen, Shag is not a typical endurance horse. He's a very athletic, very opinionated Standardbred ex speed racking horse. He's much heavier than most A-rabs and therefore takes longer to cool down in hot weather, but other than that does fine. And did I say he's opinionated? Let me add stubborn too. In a lot of ways he's atypical for the breed. But I love his toughness and he's finally to the point of learning to calm down and listen, and can actually behave himself (for the most part) and go quietly with other horses at the start of a ride.

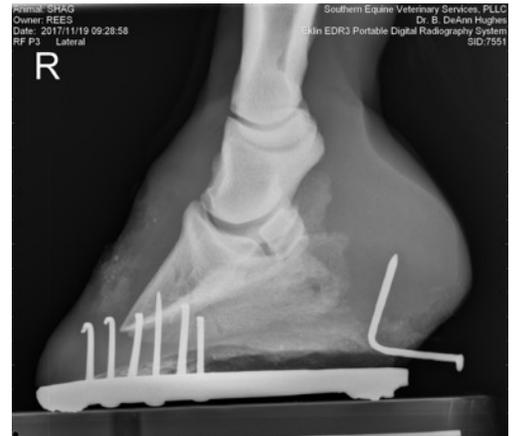


Photo by Becky Pearman

So, this past year, I'd had our whole ride season all planned out – we were going to do about 500 miles of rides including the South Mountain 75. Shag's never done more than 50 but I felt he was ready to move up. But just when everything's going great these horses do have a way of keeping us humble... In August Shag banged his LH leg up bad enough to bruise the cannon bone. Shortly after that he did both the 50 and the 30 in 2 days at Iron Mt and finished fine, but by the 2nd day that area on the LH was a little inflamed and sore. He had 2 weeks off then we started the BSF ride, went maybe 25 miles and he was grade 3 lame LH. I felt bad, and in hindsight should probably have given him more time off after the last ride, but who knows? He was lame for 2 days then was sound. Anyway, he had 2 months off after BSF. That whole episode was disappointing but certainly not career ending. I started him back again was thinking about shooting for a ride in December.

2 weeks later, went out to feed and saw him walking funny. He wasn't even lame to the point that anyone (except a paranoid endurance rider) would notice. I picked up his foot and found the end of a nail sticking out of the heel bulb. A horse owners worst nightmare... I was absolutely sick. A hundred thoughts went thru my mind at once, none of them good. Something like that could be not only career ending but life ending.

I ran into the house shaking and crying, called my vet and told her we were on our way in. Radiographs showed the nail had gone into the digital cushion at a 90 degree angle, so missed all the important structures in the hoof. We were very, very lucky! We pulled the shoe and treated it like an abscess. I've never been so happy to treat an abscess in my life! Shag was acutely lame the day after the nail came out, but has been sound ever since. He's getting reshod today and I'm thinking good thoughts about next ride season.



Happy Trails!



The Wyatt family at Run for Horses at the Biltmore- Photo by Becky Pearman

SERA!
It's a
Family Thing!!

Gambling on George by Megan Grant

It started with an earnest Facebook post a few weeks after relocating from Iowa to the Charlotte, North Carolina area.

I'd done the hunter/jumper thing for years but loved trail riding and had always been keen on giving endurance a try. Additionally, I had heard stories about endurance riders collecting horses like Breyer models, and thus sometimes needing the assistance of other riders to exercise them and keep them fit. This seemed like an ideal fit for my broke, horse-less self. And to my surprise, I did find a mentor with extra horses some twelve miles away.

Patsy Gowen, long a fixture on Southeastern endurance rides and former ride manager of the Sand Hills Stampede, agreed to take me on. We rode mostly on weekends at the local greenway and sometimes at Sand Hills; Patsy on her decade horse, PW September Hero +/-, and I on Hero's experienced and older half-brother, Abraham Sonthan +. Abe-y Baby, as Patsy liked to call him, had been pulled from his most recent rides because of lameness but was just 55 miles shy of 2,000 LD miles. She felt strongly he had at least 55 miles left in him and loaned him to me for that fall's Sand Hills Stampede and JD's Carolina rides. As luck would have it, Abraham stayed sound through both rides. Though we finished towards the back, he was able to retire with his 2,000 miles and I had my first two completions. I was hooked.

Going into that winter Patsy voiced an idea, something that had started as a spark and clearly had been stewing in her brain for some time. Would I be willing to start riding her off-the-track Thoroughbred, Gamblin' George? I was hesitant, to say the least. George had a reputation that preceded him, and it could be described as disquieting at best.

A New York-bred sired by the venerable Say Florida Sandy, a winner of over \$2 million in 98 starts, George did not find success on the racetrack and at first only limited success on the trails. Ridden by Patsy's daughter he finished a promising fourth in his first ride, an LD, but then was pulled in his next two: The first due to lameness and the second for being over time after losing a shoe. That was in 2013, and George had not attempted an AERC ride since. Patsy herself had taken him for a ride last year at Sand Hills that has gone down in infamy amongst the local endurance community: George propped and dumped Patsy on the trail, taking off at a gallop and disappearing amongst the pine trees. I'm told it took over three hours to find him.



The 2017 ride season started, and I achieved my goal of completing a 50. Several in fact, all on horses generously loaned out to me. Take No Prisoners on Dani's Final Magic. Leatherwood on Sovereign Will. Black Sheep Boogie on Lord of Kings. Ride Between the Rivers on 24 Carrot Gold. Even an LD at Biltmore on SAS Rodeo Drive sandwiched in the middle. But nothing on George.

Truth be told, I couldn't even fathom bringing George to a ride. When I wasn't away for an actual endurance ride I was still riding him on the weekends with Patsy with mixed results. Some days he was relatively quiet, even docile. On others he was a loose cannon, sometimes bucking and kicking, or just flatly refusing to cross bridges or creeks. During one outing he dumped me after leaping a mere berm and galloped away before eventually being caught by another trail rider. I could only imagine how his misbehaviors would escalate at a ride, what with all of the energy and excitement. Or how poor his vet scores would be given his steadfast refusal to drink from streams and puddles during our training rides.

And then there was the matter of his feet. Despite attentive and regular farrier work as well as hoof supplements George was, as many Thoroughbreds are, prone to chips and nasty cracks in his front feet. (To this day, he bears a large crack up the center of each front foot, giving the appearance of cloven hooves.) This had rendered him extremely tender-footed and dependent on shoes for traveling any length of ground, be they sandy trails or gravel roads. Combined with his history for losing shoes it was hard to imagine George's feet holding up long for several loops of trail at an endurance ride.

So after a lameness pull during this year's Sand Hill Stampede, I began casting my net on Facebook for a mount for the upcoming Broxton Bridge ride. No takers.

"You could always ride George," offered Patsy. I was not at all sold on the idea, instead envisioning myself getting bucked off while George tore down the trail past other horses and their disapproving riders. Or perhaps spending countless minutes in front of water buckets, fruitlessly pleading with him to drink.

But over the next few weeks something began to change in George. He began to settle down during his conditioning rides with only an occasional feel-good buck here and there. And newly shod, George now strode out confidently with his ears pricked and eager for more trail.

It was time to take a chance on George.

The day before the ride was rainy and cool. Patsy, having arrived first with Hero and George, texted that the two had settled in well but her stomach was "in knots" at the thought of me riding him the next morning. Gulp.

My fears were somewhat alleviated when I arrived at camp later that evening. George vetted in well and seemed unconcerned with all of the action going on around him, instead coolly eying the activity with nonchalant interest. He was the same way in the morning.

While everyone else left on time Patsy and I hung around for an extra twenty minutes before heading out, half-expecting some fireworks. But with the exception of some sidestepping and snorting as we headed out there were none. George quickly settled down and traded leading off with Hero for the rest of the way.

There were no bucks, kicks or spooks, nor did he try to run off with me. In fact, he was the perfect gentleman all day, and he genuinely seemed to enjoy himself.

George ate everything that was put into his bucket and even volunteered clean up what Hero left behind. So much so that he finished the day only fifteen pounds lighter than what he started at. He also stunned Patsy and I by drinking from nearly every tub and puddle he encountered on the second, third and fourth loops. This contributed to solid vet scores of almost entirely A's and pluses for his gut sounds. George and I nearly turtled, but I couldn't have been prouder.

In our short partnership George has already taught me something new. I've known that horses can surprise you in many ways: They may spook at something they've seen a million times before. They can take a lame step after hundreds of miles of being sound.

But he showed me that they can also can rise to the occasion when given the chance.

FORT VALLEY by Nancy Sluys



According to AERC Virginia is in the Northeast Region but seeing is how it is clearly below the Mason-Dixon line it makes sense that the state was adopted by SERA! The Fort Valley ride, held by the Old Dominion Rides organization is a beautiful and challenging mountain ride that is worth making the trip for. Claire Godwin and a host of volunteers go out of their way to show you a good time.

I rode Snap (ABA Kamaals Regalo) on this ride and my goal was to start slow and teach him how to calm down on the first loop, which has been hard for him. I hooked up with Mary Howell, who also was looking to start slow and we eased out of camp and set a

conservative pace up the first mountain. As we reached the top the sun was peaking over the ridge line, illuminating our first of many mountain views. Mary's horse and Snap were pacing well together and he was settling into the ride by the time we made it down to the Shenandoah River.

My strategy worked well and Snap had plenty of energy for the rest of the ride, finishing towards the back of the middle of the pack with all As and gas left in the tank!



The Further Adventures of Danny the Mule by Nancy Sluys

After regaining our confidence at the Ty Evans mule clinic Danny and I were looking for adventures. I headed to the Asheville, NC area to ride with my friend Lauren and her mule, Maggie, for the weekend. The first day we rode about 15 miles in the Pisgah National Forest on some logging roads and enjoyed the start of the fall color. Our plans for the next day were interrupted when we checked the Forest Service web site and discovered that the trail we planned to use was closed due to storm damage. We decided to go to the Biltmore instead but when we reached the gate we were turned away. Due to a large event they weren't allowing horse trailers on the grounds. Were determined that we were going to ride so decided to hit the highway and head east to South Mountains where we new the trails were open and fabulous. 1 1/2 hours later we were finally saddling up, just in time to hit the trail for a 16 mile loop. We arrived back at the trailer at dusk!

Danny's behavior was so good I decided to enter the Run for Horses 30 mile ride at the Biltmore the following weekend. The weather was beautiful and the trails were dry, such a contrast to the spring ride! I didn't have anyone specific I was riding with so I was hoping to hook up with someone on the trail with a similar pace to give Danny company. For most of the first loop we leapfrogged back and forth with a number of riders with anxious horses and we were having trouble settling into a good pace. A few times when I felt him get a little pushy in the bridle I got off and hand walked until I felt our connection return. A few miles before camp some steady non-Arabians came along and we tagged along at a more sensible pace back to the vet check. The second loop went better, until we got to a place about 2/3s into the loop where we came back pretty close to camp only to turn away in the "wrong" direction. Danny and I had to have a conversation about which direction was correct and thankfully I won out! Eventually we made it back for the final vet check and our completion. Danny's vet card was perfect and he looked fresh as a daisy.



Our next adventure was to enter a Coon Mule Jumping Contest at the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival in Ferrum, VA, just for fun. Mules can jump from a stand still. Coon hunters used mules because they could cover rough ground quickly in the dark and when they came to a barbed wire fence they would lay their coats over it and jump their mules over in hand. Of course this became a contest to see whose mule



could jump the highest from a stand still. I had watched the contest last year and was disappointed that there were only 2 mules entered so I figured I'd come back and enter my mule to help with the numbers. I worked with Danny to teach him how and he was getting pretty good. When we got there I was happy to see 6 other mules had entered, 4 in our division. Danny jumped until about 3 feet then he called it quits. That's ok, we were just having fun!! The winner jumped 52"!!! Two weeks later I got a surprise in the mail. A check for \$140.00 for our 4th place prize!! Heck, I didn't even know that it paid out!!

Danny and I had another big adventure on the calendar. We were heading to Big South Fork to ride with my friend, Marlene and her mule, also known as Maggie (seems to be a popular mule name!). We rode for 3 days in a row and saw a lot of beautiful trail that I have not seen before since I have only ever been there for endurance and NATRC rides.

Danny reunites with his previous owner & namesake, Danny Herlong



The next leg of the journey we were going to travel to Alabama to the Raptor Run ride, managed by Jody Buttram (Danny's breeder), to attempt Danny's first 50. Jody and Joni had decided that they were not mule people after all and had put Danny's full sister, April, up for sale. Well, I couldn't resist that and I was going to get her!! When we got there it was like a family reunion with both of Danny's previous owners there and lots of folks who saw him grow up. He was a celebrity!

The morning of the ride, as I was tacking up, I noticed Danny's front leg was swollen. Not

sure what was causing it I opted not to start the ride and volunteered instead. The following morning another leg was swollen and I realized that it was fire ants that was causing it! Glad it was nothing serious!! The ride turned out to be a tough one as the temperatures climbed to the upper 80s and the hairy horses were having trouble pulsing down. I guess I was glad that we didn't start, I want Danny's first 50 to be a really good experience so we will wait for a good mountain ride in the spring!

The next day I drove to Jody's farm to pick up April. As I pulled up to the field and April and her mother walked up Danny started stomping in the trailer and just about came out the window! He sure recognized these two. No way I was going to let him out, I might never get him back on!! April also recognized Danny and leaped into the trailer to be with him! Now I had 2 mules!! I decided to lay over in Knoxville, TN to break up my trip and when I let them out in the paddock it was like they had never been separated, they walked off together obviously discussing the past 7 years since they had seen each other!



April, on her way home

So now I am probably set for life with two strong endurance animals since mules live much longer than horses and have a longer useful life as well, they will most likely outlive me! My future stories will include the adventures of April as well!! Happy trails!!

SERA

AUTUMN SCENES FROM SERA COUNTRY!

Ride Manager- Claire Godwin DVM

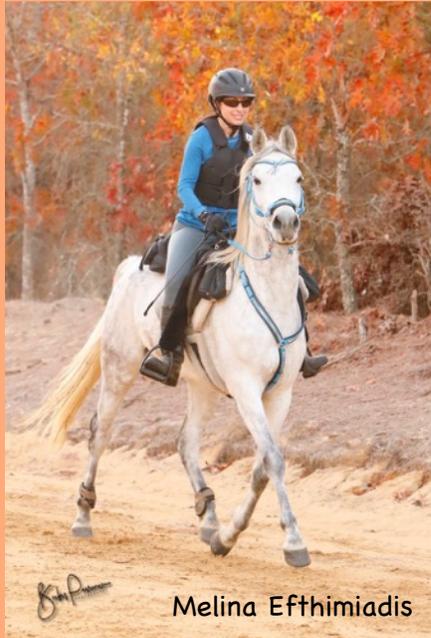


Fort Valley Timers - Flora & Christy

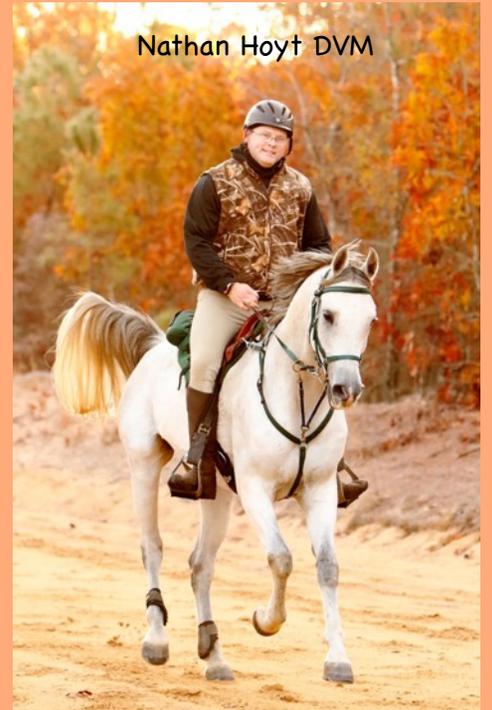


photos by Nancy Sluys
unless otherwise noted

JDs Carolina



Melina Efthimiadis



Nathan Hoyt DVM

JDs Carolina - photos by
Becky Pearman

Fort Valley



JDs Carolina

Jane Moss



Broxton
Plantation

Patty Gale



photos by Becky Pearman

Joe Schoech & Susan Kasemeyer

Flash Accardo & Joe Long



Beth Cochran Memorial Sportsmanship Award



Dr. O



Danny, Otis & Nancy

Please help me keep this newsletter interesting and send me your stories, tips and news!!!

email- minglewood@surry.net

Deadline for the next issue

January 30, 2018

Thank You, Nancy Sluys



Happy Trails!!!