

Blade-a Carter Reservoir Wild Horse

It was May 6, 2007 when we first saw him, while finishing an afternoon horseback ride on the public lands east of Cedarville. Several bands of mustangs were ranging in this part of the BLM's 23,000+ acre Carter Reservoir Wild horse herd management area. Colts cavorting with their peers, mares munching on the dried grasses, while the lead mare and stallion kept watch for danger was a sight to watch. It was a comforting sight to see these "families" of buckskins, bays, blacks and paints existing so well in this high desert wilderness.

Riding back to our trailer he was spotted, an unusual movement on the hillside in front of us that didn't quite fit in. Mingling with a group of five cows was a slightly taller, browner shape, watching us. Studying the shape, we could see he was a young bay stallion. He appeared to be about two years old, probably run off from his parent herd by the alpha stallion.

Horses are herd animals and this 'teenager' hadn't joined with a bachelor band, but with some cattle. This is somewhat out of character for horses. Then he started to move away. It was as if he lumbered on three legs, his body dipping low at each stride propelling him with a forward stumbling shuffle. Yet all his legs touched the ground. Something was wrong. Only when he turned away could we see his problem, his shoulder blade stuck out about ten inches in a grotesque and painful looking manner.

He must have broken or dislocated his shoulder when driven from the herd. Not a good sign for survival through the winter, especially since he couldn't seem to find or keep up with a herd of his fellow bachelors.

With a silent wish for his survival or at least for a death without too much suffering, we loaded our horses in the trailer and drove off.

High desert winters can be harsh, bitter winds, below zero temperatures, and blowing snow cuts deep into the body and soul of whomever is out there. As snow covers the ground, grasses disappear. Predators appear, mountain lions stealthily prowl the landscape looking for their next meal, usually a weak animal.

The cows would be moved in the Fall, and the stallion would be facing the winter injured and alone.



This slender red stallion with black mane and tail and distinctive stripes down his back and legs, and with a horrendous injury just did not seem to be a prime candidate for survival. We named him Blade because of his shoulder. If his time on earth was to be short, at least he'd have a name.

June 26, 2008, riding through the area we spotted an old palomino mare, a light dun foal and a bay stallion. It was a rather rag tag looking group. Our eyes focused on the stallion. Could it be? How could it be? As we edged closer the little band cautiously started to move away. The stallion's lumbering gait following after his family looked familiar. As he herded his family away from perceived danger he turned and we saw his shoulder. No doubt! It was Blade! Not only had he survived the winter, but he had a little family. Obviously his shoulder injury did not interfere with his ability to throw a good looking foal.



The tough little mustang had made it.

Throughout the year he and his band were seen wandering on the public lands situated in the Nevada hills east of town. His huge deformed shoulder was still there, his limp still bothered him, but he was surviving.

Always he placed himself between us and his family. A warning to us, "don't get too close," and a comfort to his family, "don't worry I'll protect you."

January 2009, it was heartening to see him again. His band had another member, an older white mare.

Blade was becoming a symbol of survival against all odds, a reminder of the strength it took to exist in this harsh land; a reminder of a time when cowboys rode their mustangs when settling the old West.

This tough little mustang really was a symbol of America past.

Then it was learned that the Carter Reservoir wild horses would be gathered. According to the BLM the herd had become too large, 177 wild horses distributed in small family units were destroying the environment.

September 18, 2009-The day dawned, a slight nip to the air was a reminder of coming Winter. The calls of birds welcoming the day pierced the incredibly blue sky. Then suddenly they were quiet. It was an ominous quiet soon followed by the 'wop, wop' sounds of a helicopter.

Blade heard the noise, but what was it? In his four years of life he had never heard this sound before. Gathering his family he quickly urged them away from the increasing noise. Yet

the more they trotted the louder the noise. A black form appeared in the sky bearing down on the frightened family.

Blade urged his family into a lope, always keeping between them and the monster in the sky. For miles they ran, increasing their speed to a gallop. Sweat from physical exertion, sweat from fear, sweat from the pain in his shoulder, poured from his body.



“Don’t worry, I’ll protect you,” “keep running, run for your lives,” he seemed to urge his family. Yet the monster in the sky got closer. Soon only a few feet separated the terror-stricken stallion and the skids on the helicopter.

Blade and his band didn’t see the trap until it was too late. The gates closed behind them.



The helicopter left, but now another danger faced the terror stricken family. In the small corral other stallions, stronger stallions, challenged the exhausted bay. Fighting to protect his life and family Blade didn't see the BLM and contract personnel take his two mares, yearling colt and this year's two foals. Blade's family had just been stolen from him, forever.

Valiantly he fought for his life, again and again other stronger confined stallions challenged and attacked him. With his previously injured shoulder, space was his only hope for safety. But in this confined space, he had no room to run. Time passed, then he and the other stallions were chased into a truck and transported over rough roads to a holding pen for further transport to holding facilities for processing.



Photo taken 09-18-09

Severely injured horses are shot or put down during a gather. Blade looked severely injured to the unknowing eye. They might not know it was an old injury and shoot him. By BLM standards/figures he was unadoptable. It was asked he be turned loose to possibly find a new family. The sound of money promised for each horse captured drowned out our plea on behalf of the tough little stallion.

Was it the terror-stricken miles he ran? Was it the pain from his injured shoulder ripping apart his body? Was it battling stronger stallions? Was he injured further being transported to the holding pen in a truck crowded with other fighting, terrorized stallions? Was he injured further being placed with the fighting, frightened stallions in a small holding pen? Or was it the loss of the life and the freedom he knew?

An excerpt from the official BLM report of the Carter Reservoir wild horse gather where four horses died:

"Number of animals died/euthanized-not gather related 2

9-16-09, one 7 year old stud came in lame with a swollen shoulder. He was hauled to the contractor's temporary holding facility. When the next trip to the holding facility was made, the stud was found dead."

Yes, he was a bay stallion. Yes, he had a previous shoulder injury.

But he wasn't found dead on the 16th, it was the 19th.
He wasn't seven, he was only four years old.
He had a family. He wasn't bothering anyone.
His name was Blade.



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