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**VALLEY LODGE TRAIL RIDE**

I never thought I would see this day come. I was the third trail boss on the Valley Lodge Trail Ride, and I am very glad to see that it is still active. Over the years, many people have asked me to write a history of the trail ride. This would be difficult for one person, as we have had many trail bosses over the years. The events of each ride are memories of the trail boss at the time, and perhaps a few other people.

I will try to tell you how the trail ride came to be in the first place. Quite a few people have no idea that Valley Lodge was a real place and, in its time, a first-class Western Country Club. There was no golf course; we had stables for 65 horses. There were horses to rent if you didn't own a horse. There was a small western town made up of original old buildings brought in from other counties, including one from where the George Brown is in Houston. There was a small but old jailhouse with bars on the windows and all. An original old log house came from one of the member's properties, built and lived in by his great-grandfather. These buildings were joined together by a boardwalk, so you didn't have to get your boots dirty. There was a rodeo arena with chutes on each side of the announcer stand and small grandstands for people to watch. There was a nice-sized swimming pool, a tennis court, and a 35-acre lake left when the river changed its course many years ago. The clubhouse was made of logs—a beautiful, well-built large building with a large dance floor and a fireplace that could fit a six-foot log. There was a dance every month with a live band and others on special occasions. To belong, you had to own a lot, which was one acre and called a ranchette. The area covered 2,500 acres. They started developing the land with roads in 1957 and began selling lots in 1958. Sunny Look was member number one; he was a well-known restaurant owner in Houston. In 1959, after there were enough members, they formed a civic club to oversee the club, stables, etc. That is when Al McMullen was elected the first president.

The developers of Valley Lodge were "Snake" Bailey and his father-in-law, Mr. Evans. I don't remember their full names. I got to know "Snake" pretty well by riding horseback with him and talking about early Valley Lodge. He said they didn't want to have anything to do with running the place, so they had a board of directors for that job. The board knew they had to do something to advertise the country club out in the middle of nowhere with no golf course, only for horse people. The only way to get to Valley Lodge was either to go out Westheimer, a poorly maintained two-lane blacktop road with many holes, or drive out U.S. Highway 90 to Brookshire, go south until you came to 1093 (Westheimer), turn right, go for two more miles, and Valley Lodge was on the right side, almost to the river. The bridge across the river was a one-way wooden bridge with a light. If you had a green light, it meant nobody was coming from the other side, and you could go. Ha!

In 1959, while they were having their monthly board meeting, the "Fat Stock Show" was having its parade in downtown Houston. One of the board members suggested getting a permit to enter the parade by starting a trail ride from Valley Lodge. That is just what happened. They received their charter, I think in July. The next problem was who was going to be in charge of the trail ride—the trail boss. That was about the time that Sam and Norma Lee Olson entered the picture. They had recently bought a lot, and word got out that Sam had ridden on maybe two Salt Grass trails, so he was asked to lead the new trail ride. Sam Olson was the trail boss for the next four years. Valley Lodge was the fourth trail ride to get a charter, making us number four in the parade.

The idea really worked; the TV stations loved it. My Martha was involved in PR, and we were nicknamed the Champagne Trail because our club catered all our food. We didn't have to start a fire to cook; we just had to wait for the steam line to be set up. As long as the club was involved, we had to keep our number at 100, the max the club could handle. We had a waiting list of people who wanted to ride.

Even though Sam had been on a trail ride, there was still a lot lacking in organizing the ride. For example, on the first ride, at our first stop, we didn't have any porta-cans. Ha! He forgot. We were heading to Houston on Westheimer, and those familiar with that road know there were no trees on the side, at least not back then. All you had were fields of rice or cotton, and to make things worse, we also had the bar truck. Ha! The next year, guess what—we made sure we had porta-cans. Valley Lodge owned a few wagons, one of which was an original chuck wagon. “Snake” found some mules and a driver, and that was one of our wagons. Another was a real original 1790 English Bark. Valley Lodge owned two huge draft horses, Clydesdales, that pulled the wagon. There was also a doctor’s buggy. Snake Bailey's daughter fell off her horse at the first stop and broke her arm. She was the first person to get hurt on the ride. Believe me, we had more injuries as the years passed. Getting kicked was common. Sam was able to buy a surplus army hospital tent—MASH type. We would go to the first night’s campsite and set it up so it would be there when we arrived. We didn't have RVs or house trailers; we put down sawdust and laid our sleeping bags on the ground. A few had old army wood folding cots; I had two, one for Martha.

This is how we got our nickname, The Champagne Trail Ride. In one of the early years, about the second, we were moving through downtown Houston. One of the sound trucks along the street said, "Well, look who we have here—it’s the Champagne Trail Ride. They drive their Cadillacs to Memorial Park, then get on their horses to parade." The name stuck. On our way to Houston, at our steak dinner and dance, we started serving champagne to those who wanted it.

The Valley Lodge Trail Ride was the first ride to have electric lights in Memorial Park. The park was black dark except for campfires and car lights. We brought in a large generator and strung wires with light bulbs attached that lit the place up. That was a good idea but had its drawbacks. It attracted too many people. We took our saddles and bridles off as soon as we arrived in the park and put them in the back of a box truck and locked it. The old joke used to be that a man would ride into Memorial Park on a bareback horse but ride out with the best-looking equipment you ever saw. Sorry, but true. People would pick up anything they could and walk off with it. Also, people would come to our area but leave their trash. It would look like a garbage dump in the morning, and we had to clean it up. One way we stopped some of that was not to leave the lights on very long after we ate.

When the ride first started, no one thought about how long a person should be the trail boss. So after four years, Sam had all he wanted and stepped down. Next was Don Zapp, who decided to hang it up after eight years. Then came Mac Goldsby. I had been trail boss for six years and decided there had to be a better way. I stepped down so we could start a three-year term program. Now we change every three years. To me, that seems to be the best program. I enjoyed it, but it gets old. I could write off the month of February because I was so involved with the ride I had to let other things go, like trying to make a living.

I am 92 and thought, while I am still here and my brain is still working, that maybe I should write down some of the things I remember. I know I haven't put everything down, but it will give those who read this some idea of where we are coming from. We helped put Valley Lodge and Simonton on the map. It's too bad that the club didn't make it; I think it finally closed around 1986. That is a whole other story.

It is hard for me to believe that there have been 19 trail bosses over the years. It hasn't been bad for a project that started out as an advertising program to sell lots for more members to the club. There are none left who voted to try and get a trail ride in the "Fat Stock Show Parade."

I had to have my hip replaced in November 1990, which ended my horseback riding, but thanks to Chris Black and then Bill Fry, who let me ride in his wagon, I have been able to participate a little each year. I have not missed a year. We started 63 years ago but have only ridden 62.

Malcolm "Mac" Goldsby 2/07/23



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