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Folks over in the western part of Canada dropped their English accent somewhere down the line. Way back, the ones from the Eastern Provinces sounded British to us. (Goat Whisker's the Younger's mother was Canadian. Few know Whisker's is a half-breed.) Only place we heard British accents was in the movies, or on the radio, so the few Canadian visitors might have been talking like Northeastern people, for all we knew.

The ones around Jasper spoke real soft, or that's the reading my hearing aids received. Away from the congested areas of the world, citizens don't have to shout over city busses releasing air brakes and about a thousand decibels of automobile horns and engines roaring away, with the tune of a multitude of boom boxes throbbing in between.

To ride in the wilderness, however, doesn't require an oral examination. Dudes mount horses with the same innocence of purpose and result as they straddled hobby horses when they were children. About the most important contact the wrangler seems to have, besides helping the rider mount, is to tell them their horse's name. Not the kind of names used around ranches, but flavorful ones like "Comanche," "Blaze," or "Sky."

I rode at the tail end of five riders and three pack horses, too far back to talk or visit. Horses out of control, or practically out of control, are uncomfortable if not dangerous on a slick, rocky trail. The trail was too

narrow to ride double file. Lunch was the first chance I had to meet the wrangler on a one-on-one basis. She came around to retie my horse hard and fast to a pine stump. Wanted to know how we pack animals in Texas, or I thought that's what she asked.

So I told her all the old horses and cripples go to East Texas to a packing plant that ships the meat overseas, or makes it into pet food. "Some ponies are spared by soft-hearted cowboys that'd make better soap than keepsakes," is the way I finished my answer. She looked confused. She must have thought I meant the soft-hearted cowboys needed to be soaped. After we remounted and rode a while, I figured out she wanted to know about the pack horses in Texas, not the packing plants.

Name of the base camp is Shovel Pass Lodge. Shovel Pass is a bit further on up the Wabasso Trail from the lodge and higher in altitude. The name comes from a party of intrepid explorers in the old days who made wooden shovels to clean a late snow from the pass so they could go on their way to Maligne Lake. Lots of feeling was put into naming the different passes as they were so critical in travel and in routing the railroad through the north.

The lodge had a book about Dr. James Hector, who not only found and named "Kicking Horse Pass" in the late 1850s, but was the very one kicked by the pack horse inspiring the name. The doctor had along his faithful Indian guide, Nimrod. Consequences of the blow were so severe, Nimrod laid

old Doc out on a tarp and began to dig a grave for his master. Luckily, the ground was hard and frozen, and Dr. Hector came to before the grave was finished. Dr. Hector became Sir James Hector later on for exploring the Rockies. Nimrod, I suspect, was given early retirement for being an overeager grave digger.

The reverse happened to "Boog" Martin out in Magdalena, New Mexico. One winter, his dad made "Boog" and another cowboy move an Indian's grave from the tribe's sacred burial grounds back up to the ranch, but I had told the story so many times I was reluctant to repeat it even way off in the wilds of Canada.

The name "Hector" fit in on my ride. A roan pack horse bore the name. The year before, "Hector" had been one of the outfitter's personal mounts. Until this "Hector" spooked at a distant hiker wearing a red shirt, he was one of the boss's pets. But after he bucked down one side of Shovel Pass, forcing his owner to bail off in desperation, he became a pack horse full time. "Hector" took his disgrace plenty hard. On the last part of the trip down the muddy trail, hikers wearing red shirts could have jumped up in his face without bothering him a bit.

Along after daybreak every morning, the wrangler brought in 10 or 12 head of horses wearing bells, clanging the litany of hundreds of remudas. Her dog kept the horses moving toward the pole corrals. The timber line behind camp formed a natural boundary. I never was able to understand

what kept them from going around the short rail fence and pole gate blocking the trail. Each day, riders came in leading pack horses bringing hay or other supplies to close the lodge for winter. The wrangler made it clear to close the gate on the way back.