Myths of Time: The Wild West!
Lesson Nine

LEGENDS OF THE WILD WEST: The Red Ghost

In the 1880s, a wild menace haunted the Arizona territory. It was known as the Red Ghost, and its legend grew as it roamed the high country. It trampled a woman to death in 1883. It was rumored to stand 30 feet tall. A cowboy once tried to rope the Ghost, but it turned and charged his mount, nearly killing them both. One man chased it, then claimed it disappeared right before his eyes. Another swore it devoured a grizzly bear. "The eyewitnesses said it was a devilish looking creature strapped on the back of some strange-looking beast," Marshall Trimble, Arizona's official state historian, tells us.

Months after the first attacks, a group of miners spotted the Ghost along the Verde River. As Trimble explained in *Arizoniana*, his book about folk tales of the Old West, they took aim at the creature. When it fled their gunfire, something shook loose and landed on the ground. The miners approached the spot where it fell. They saw a human skull lying in the dirt, bits of skin and hair still stuck to bone.

Several years later, a rancher near Eagle Creek spotted a feral, red-haired camel grazing in his tomato patch. The man grabbed his rifle, then shot and killed the animal. The Ghost's reign of terror was over.

News spread back to the East Coast, where the New York *Sun* published a colorful report about the Red Ghost's demise: "When the rancher went out to examine the dead beast, he found strips of rawhide wound and twisted all over his back, his shoulders, and even under his tail." Something, or someone, was once lashed onto the camel.

The legend of the Red Ghost is rich with embellishments, the macabre flourishes and imaginative twists needed for any great campfire story. Look closer, though, past the legend — past the skull and the rawhide and the "eyewitness" accounts — and you'll discover a bizarre chapter of American frontier history. In the late 19th century, wild camels really did roam the West. How they got there, and where they came from, is a story nearly as strange as fiction.

How much water can a camel's hump hold?

A *camel's* hump does not hold *water* at all - it actually stores fat. ... If a *camel* uses the fat inside the hump, the hump will become limp and droop down. ... The hump is not used for *water* storage, but *camels* can go for long periods of time without *water*.

One of the wackier ideas in American history, the U.S. Camel Corps was established in 1856 at Camp Verde, Texas. Reasoning that the arid southwest was a lot like the deserts of Egypt, the Army imported 66 camels from the Middle East (at the cost of approx. $135,000,000.00 in today's money). It was believed camels could conceivably help develop the recently acquired southwestern territories. Camels were swift and strong and could penetrate regions into which burros, horses and even mules (which are pretty amazing themselves-check out the info in the text box later!) could not go without ample supplies of water (the chief desert problem for the traditional military animals was lack of water and forage). It was imagined that American soldiers would be astride dromedaries chasing hostile Indians off trails that crossed emigrant routes. And they envisioned camels carrying small artillery cannon on their humps, advancing Old Glory farther and farther into the west and south.

Despite the animals' more objectionable qualities—they spat, regurgitated and defied orders—the experiment was generally deemed a success. They could run 16 miles an hour (which wasn't such a virtue when they escaped) and it was discovered that six camels could do the work of 12 horses and in 42 hours less time, and that they climbed trails that wagons could not manage. As the Civil War broke out, exploration of the frontier was curtailed and Confederates captured Camp Verde. After the war, most of the camels were sold (some to Ringling Brothers' circus) and others escaped into the wild. The last reported

sighting of a feral camel came out of Texas in 1941. Presumably, no lingering descendants of the Camel Corps' members remain alive today.

Thirsty Yet? Hump Slump

A hump full of water could come in handy in a camel's line of work, but these bulges are actually filled with fat. That store of fat is like a spare tank of gasoline in your car trunk. When food and water become scarce, the camel extracts energy from that mound of fat. In fact, the longer a camel goes without eating or drinking, the more visibly deflated its hump becomes. But give it adequate water and food, and camel humps plump up in a matter of days.

So just how long can a camel go without water before its hump starts to slump? In How long can you go without food and water?, we learn that humans can last only three to five days without any water in temperate conditions. During (cooler) winters in the Sahara Desert, camels have been known to survive six or seven months without actually drinking [source: Lumpkin]. Granted, camels get liquid from the plants they eat during that dry spell, but it's still an incredibly long time sans drinking water.

In peak summer months, when the mercury rises higher than 110 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius), their non-hydrated stamina drops to around five days [source: Lumpkin].

Like the thrifty vacationer who takes full advantage of complimentary breakfast buffets at hotels, camels make the most of their liquid reward when they reach an oasis. They rehydrate faster than any other mammal, able to gulp down 30 gallons (113 liters) of water in just 13 minutes [source: National Geographic]. After all, the wise camel knows that the next pit stop will be a long, dry walk away. Learn more about amazing camels here!

The Amazing Mule!

Mules can outperform both of their parents (donkey father and horse mother) in almost every field that makes them useful. For example, it's noted that if you *really* pushed a workhorse to its absolute limit over decent terrain, you could realistically travel 50-60 miles in a single day. An average mule can cover that same distance over mountainous terrain and just to rub it in, it could sleep for only four hours and then do it again.

As if that wasn't ridiculous enough, a mule also needs less maintenance and can happily subside on less food than a horse. But here's the really crazy part: that's not even close to maximum distance a mule can travel. In 1882 a single pack mule carrying over 200 lbs. in supplies broke an endurance record by traveling 85 miles in 12 hours *through a desert!*

Thanks to their donkey blood, mules are extremely well adapted for desert travel and are for the most part, immune to the effects of heat and can survive for far longer without a drink than either parent animal.

One of the defining traits of mules is that, like donkeys, they make excellent guard animals. For some reason, like their daddy, mules *hate* coyotes, wolves and foxes, so much so that if they detect one in their enclosure, they'll run over and try to bite its face off. Unlike horses, which bolt when they're faced with danger, mules will stand their ground. And thanks to their keen hearing and eyesight, they have an almost 360-degree sense of awareness that means they're practically impossible to sneak up on.

And, George Washington loved them, seeing them as an invaluable asset that could revolutionize American agriculture. Washington was so convinced of this fact that he wrote to the King of Spain asking for permission to buy some of his legendary Spanish donkeys so that he could breed his own mules, for America.

The Spanish King, moved by Washington's passion, sent him one of the finest male specimens he had, for free. When Washington asked what the donkey was called, the courier delivering it simply replied "Royal Gift." Along with Royal Gift, Washington also received two female donkeys, from which he was able to breed the precursor to what is now known as the "American Mule." The day Washington received that donkey was October 26th, the date we now know as Mule Appreciation Day.

Really? Water? That's No Obstacle!

Purpose: To demonstrate that water is heavy and that carrying it long distances is challenging

This challenge can be done by individuals, who carry water over a short distance, or by groups, where teams race one another while carrying containers of water.

Your body loses water constantly through sweat, urine, and even breathing. You must replace the water your body loses for your organs to continue to work properly. Dehydration occurs when your body doesn't have enough water, because you're losing more water than you're taking in. When in the desert if you allow yourself to become thirsty, you're already to the point of dehydration. Hard work in hot climates can result in 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 quarts of sweat lost **per hour**.

Water planning is complicated because water is heavy (about 8.3 pounds per gallon) and may be considered perishable. Water stored in small containers gets hotter than water stored in large containers. As water gets hotter, it becomes less desirable to drink with stronger flavors. These facts make it difficult to carry an adequate supply of water, and frequent resupply is often required.

Everyone must carry at MINIMUM a gallon for each day and you'll need extra due to evaporation. Your body can absorb only about one quart of fluid per hour. Drink one-half to one full quart of water or sports drink each and every hour you are hiking in the heat.

When calculating water requirements for a whole day, you also need to consider other requirements, such as shaving, brushing teeth, and wipe/baths. On the average, these functions require almost 2 gallons of water per person per day.

Don't forget water for your animals!: Ex. The average horse will need to intake 5 to 10 gallons of fresh water per day under normal conditions. Just like humans different horses crave or need different water amount intakes.

Materials:

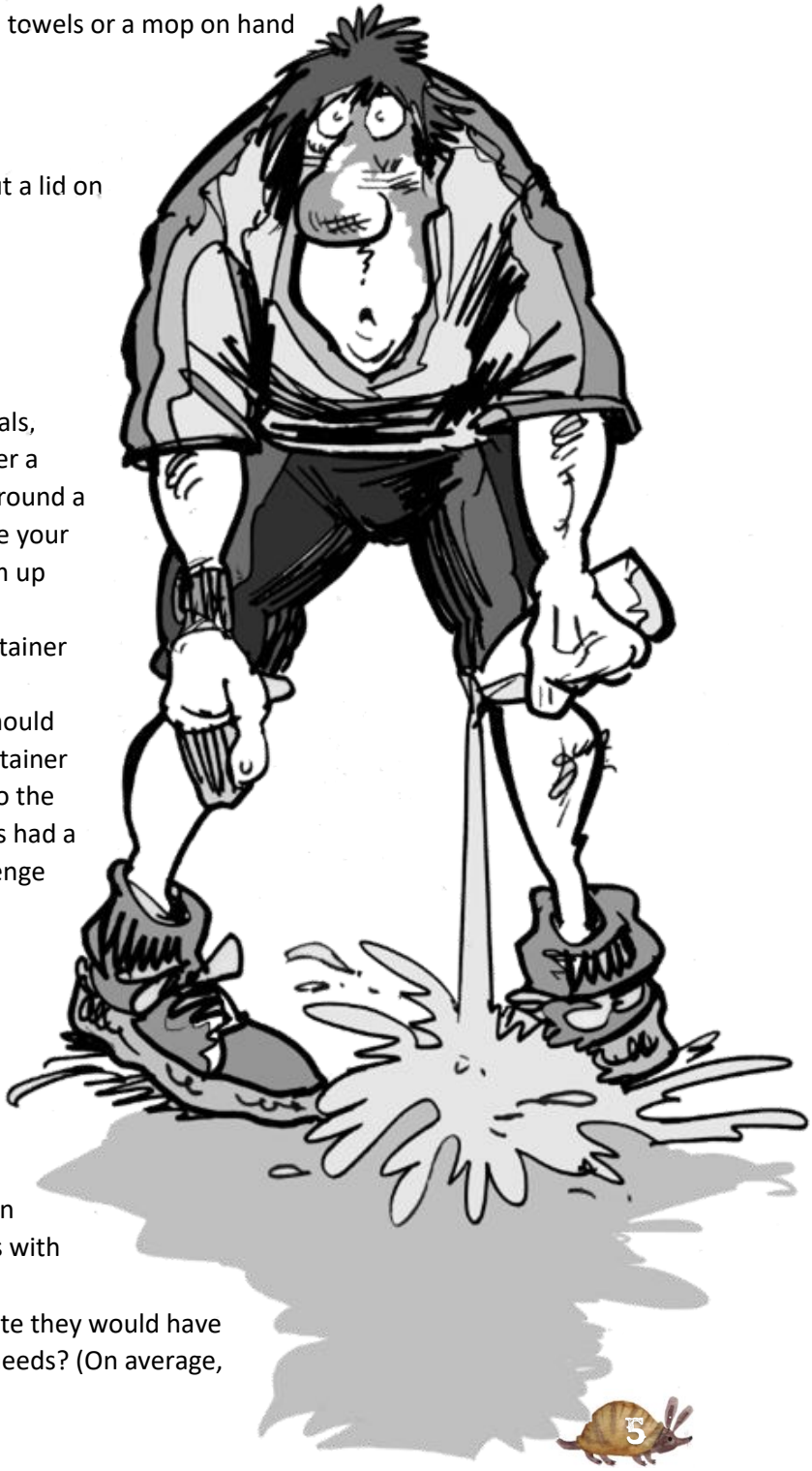
- Container: One-gallon plastic milk jugs or five-gallon containers with lids (e.g., utility pail, bucket used to hold paint or joint compound, water container with spout used for camping, or pickle bucket from restaurant)
- Water (Water weighs eight pounds per gallon. Use an amount appropriate for the young people in your group. For children under eight years old, use one one-gallon milk jug. For ages 8–12, use two one gallon milk jugs. For ages 12–15, use one five-gallon container. For people 16 years and older, use two five-gallon containers.)
- If you are doing this activity indoors, have towels or a mop on hand in case of a spill.

PREPARATION:

- Obtain container(s) and fill with water. Put a lid on each container.
- Set up racecourse/obstacle course in a playground, field, or large room.

PROCEDURE:

1. If the challenge is to be done by individuals, have them carry a container of water over a shorter distance, such as several times around a table. If it is to be done by a group, divide your group into two even teams and line them up behind a starting line.
2. Give the first person on each team a container filled with water.
3. When you give the word to start, they should race around the course, carrying the container by hand. Have them give the container to the next person. Continue until everyone has had a turn. The team that completes the challenge first wins!
4. Process the activity by discussing questions, such as:
    - How did it feel to carry the water? (Point out that if one has to carry many gallons of water for even short distances, supplying a troop of soldiers and their animals or even simply yourself and your animals with water is not easy.)
    - How much water do they estimate they would have to carry to supply their group's needs? (On average,



a person living in sub-Saharan Africa/in the desert uses four gallons per day, while someone living in the US uses 82 gallons per day. Would they like to have to carry that with them every day? What if you were going on a loooong trip?)

- What are some of the issues associated with carrying water long distances?
- Where might people traveling through the countryside get their water? (Typical sources are lakes, rivers, wells, or rain collection systems.)
- What issues might be associated with collecting water from open sources, such as lakes, rivers, wells, or rain collection systems? (They may be contaminated with disease-causing organisms and parasites.)
- How much time do you think fetching water for your companions and collecting firewood for cooking requires each day? (Several hours possibly.) What about cooking your dinner over a fire? What kinds of things won't you be able to do in order to find the time to fetch water and collect firewood?

Just for fun: Have students watch the short and fun Fata Morgana [a mirage.] Burning in the desert sun, Eduardo - a lemonade seller with a small stand - is fighting the urge to drink his last and final bottle of refreshing lemonade. Then, a thirsty customer comes crawling towards his stand...