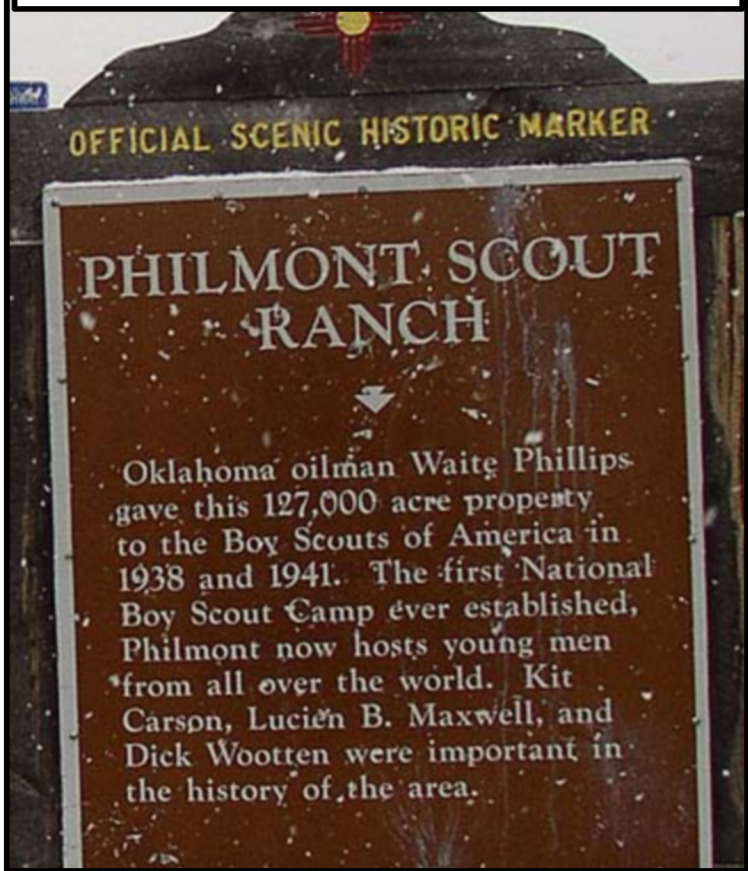


OVER THE MESA

By Andrew Thomas

THE STORY BEGINS AT PHILMONT SCOUT RANCH IN NEW MEXICO.



IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 2010 AND I WAS 18 AT THE TIME. I WENT TO PHILMONT TO TEST MY SKILLS AND STRENGTH.



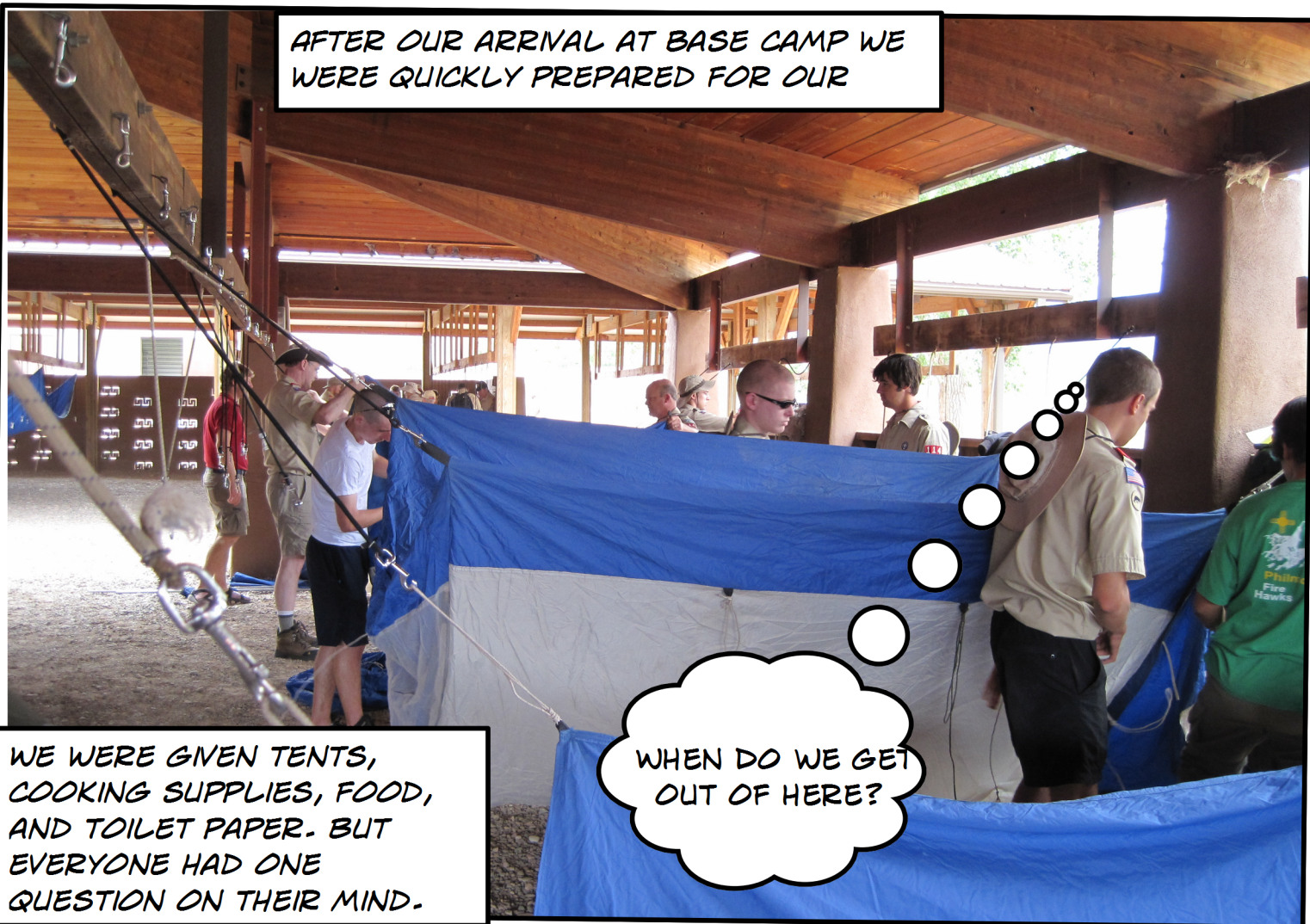
I WENT WITH 7 MORE OF MY CLOSE FRIENDS AND 4 ADULTS TO MAKE UP A CREW OF 12 WHICH IS THE LARGEST CREW THAT CAN BE MADE. THE MAN IN THE RED WAS OUR RANGER, JAC, WHO HELPED US GET STARTED AT BASE CAMP.



EVERYBODY WHO GOES TO PHILMONT KNOWS ONE THING THAT ALL CREWS REALIZE SOONER OF LATER.

YOU ARE ALONE

AFTER OUR ARRIVAL AT BASE CAMP WE WERE QUICKLY PREPARED FOR OUR



WE WERE GIVEN TENTS, COOKING SUPPLIES, FOOD, AND TOILET PAPER. BUT EVERYONE HAD ONE QUESTION ON THEIR MIND.

WHEN DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?

AFTER THAT WE WERE THROWN INTO THE WILD.

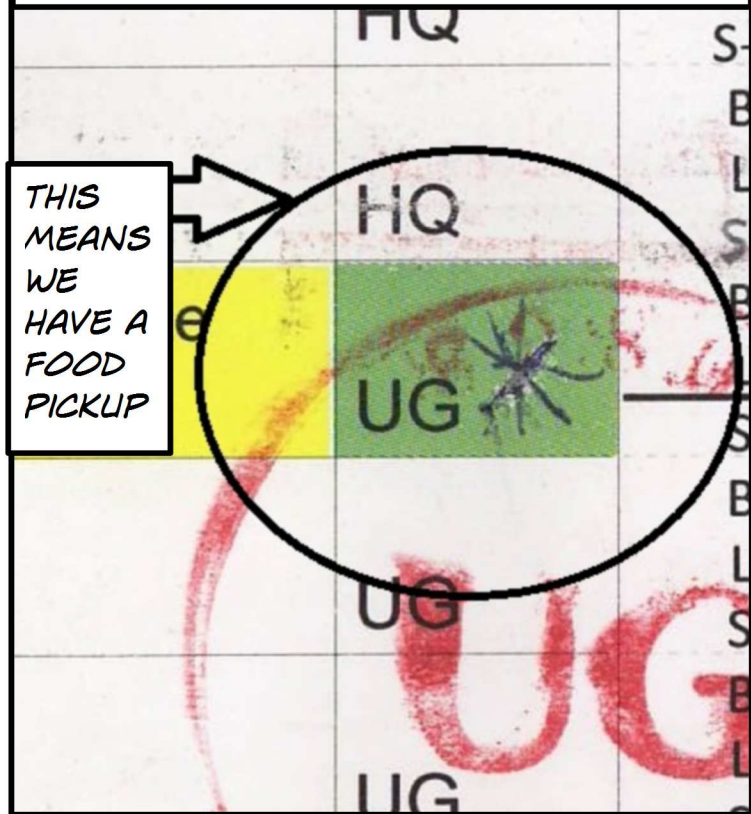


SO...WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

AFTER A FEW DAYS OF HIKING AND VISITING MULTIPLE CAMPS WE HAD TO HIKE TO A NEW CAMP CALLED, HARLAN.



I REALIZED THAT TODAY WE HAD A FOOD PICKUP AT HARLAN. OUR FOOD WAS SHORT AND WE ONLY HAD TWO MORE MEALS.



THIS MEANS WE HAVE A FOOD PICKUP

SOME ENJOYED THE FOOD MORE THAN OTHERS....



IT LOOKS EDIBLE...

WE MADE OUR WAY UP AND AROUND A MESA THAT BLOCKED A DIRECT PATH TO HARLAN.



ARE WE THERE YET?

NO.

WE STOPPED TO EAT BREAKFAST WHICH WAS OUR SECOND TO LAST MEAL.



AT LEAST OUR PACKS ARE LIGHTER NOW

THEN WE MOVED ON SO WE COULD MAKE IT TO THE CAMP BEFORE IT BECAME TOO HOT.



NO!!

ARE WE THERE YET?

FINALLY WE ARRIVED AFTER HIKING ABOUT 6 MILES FROM OUR LAST CAMPSITE.



EVERY CAMPSITE HAS A MAP TO SHOW WHERE POINTS OF INTEREST ARE.

WE APPROACHED THE CABIN WHERE THE RANGERS LIVED TO COLLECT OUR FOOD.



EVERY CAMP HAD AN ACTIVITY. WE HAD DONE SOME CHALLENGE COURSES AT OTHER CAMPS.



THE RANGER TOLD US THEIR ACTIVITY AT THE CAMP WAS SHOTGUN SHOOTING

WE WERE ESCORTED TO OUR CAMP AND THERE I ASKED ABOUT THE FOOD PICKUP. THE RANGER GAVE ME A STRANGE LOOK AND ASKED ME TO RETURN TO THE CABIN WITH HIM.



I RETURNED WITH THE RANGER TO DISCUSS WHAT HAPPENED. AFTER I TOLD THE STORY HE TOLD ME THAT WE HAD BEEN MISINFORMED AND HE GAVE US OPTIONS OF HOW TO FIX OUR PROBLEM.

WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT YOU DID NOT STOP AT UTE GULCH TO GET YOUR FOOD. YOU WILL HAVE TO GO BACK TO GET IT.

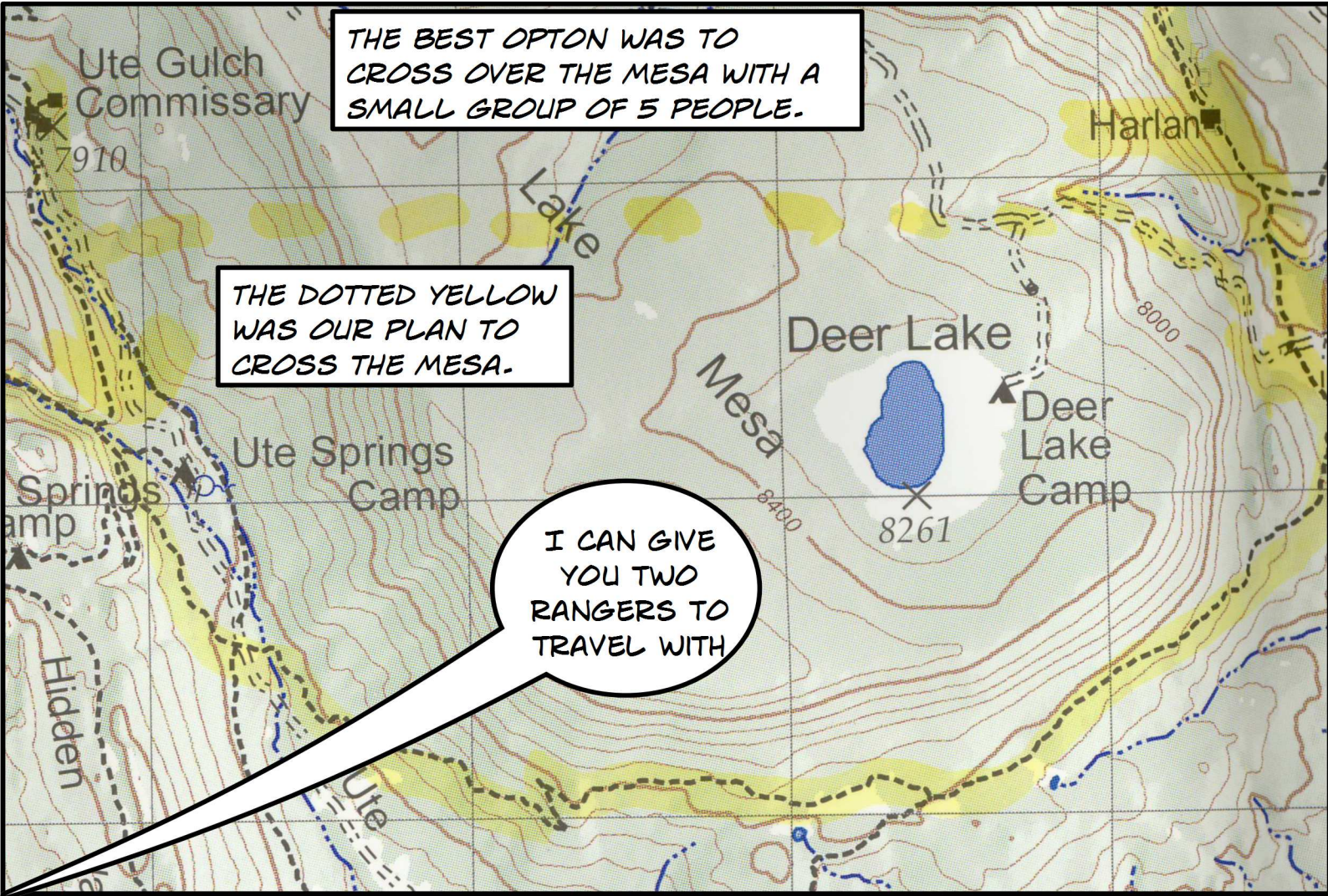
GREAT...



THE BEST OPTION WAS TO CROSS OVER THE MESA WITH A SMALL GROUP OF 5 PEOPLE.

THE DOTTED YELLOW WAS OUR PLAN TO CROSS THE MESA.

I CAN GIVE YOU TWO RANGERS TO TRAVEL WITH



I EXPLAINED THE SITUATION TO MY CREW AS WE ATE THE LAST OF OUR FOOD.

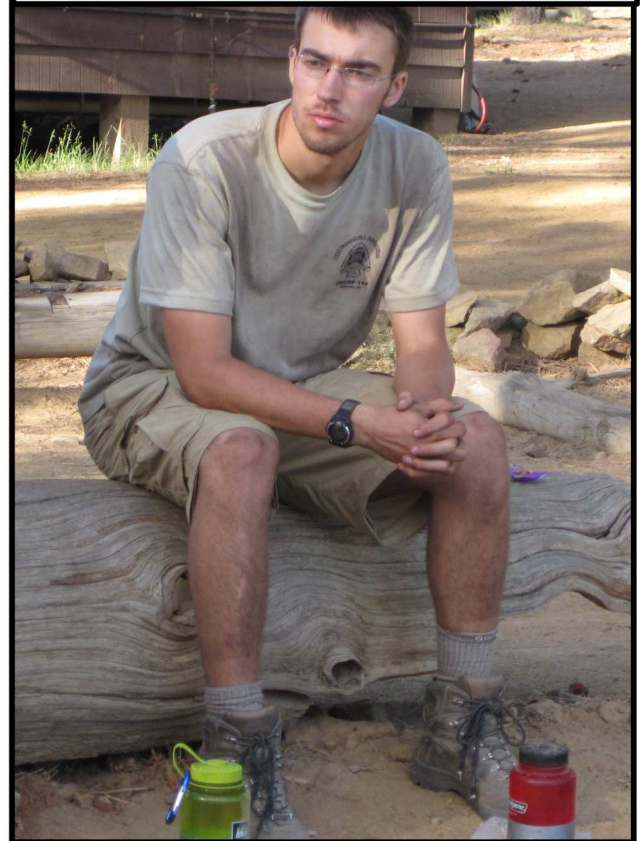
SO I AM GOING TO BE BRINGING ONE OF YOU AND ONE OF OUR ADULTS TO GO GET THE FOOD AND TRY TO GET BACK BEFORE SUNDOWN.



PEOPLE WERE WILLING TO GO BUT SOME HAD MAINTAINED PERSONAL INJURIES FROM ALL THE HARD HIKING.



MY DECISION HAD TO BE MADE QUICKLY AND I HAD FEW OPTIONS. BUT I FINALLY CHOSE DAN.



THE ADULT WHO WANTED TO JOIN US WAS NAMED MR. WEICHMAN. HE WAS AN EXPERIENCED HIKER AND WAS EXCITED TO GO ON AN UNBEATEN PATH. HE WOULD BE JOINED BY TWO OTHER ADULT RANGERS THAT WOULD BE TRAVELING WITH US IN ORDER TO INSURE OUR SAFETY.



DAN IS ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS, HE MAY BE A BIT SHORT BUT HE IS STRONG AND LOVES HIKING. HE WAS MY FIRST CHOICE.



CONFIDENT IN MY DECISION I HEADED OUT WITH MY SMALL PARTY.

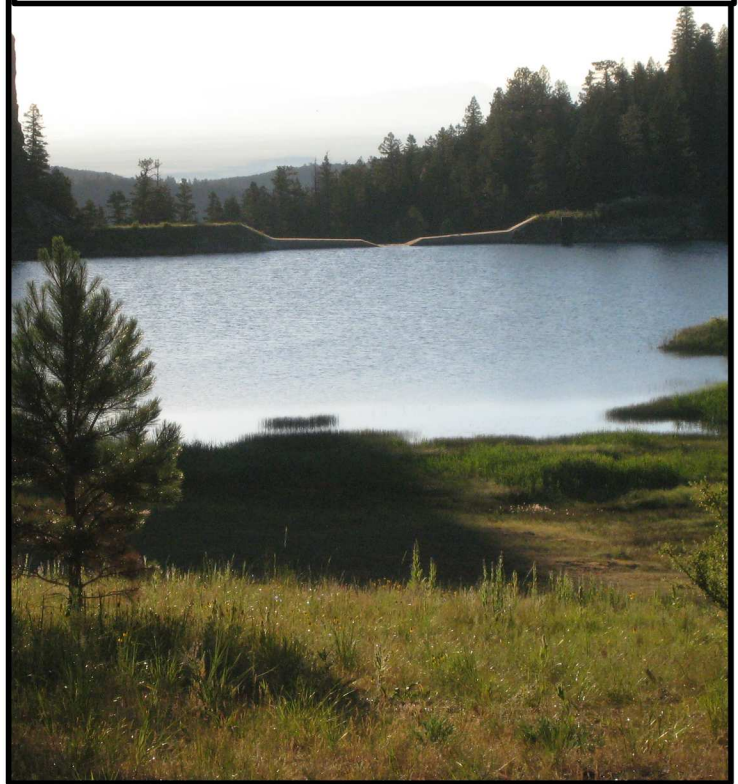
WHILE WE WERE GONE THE REST OF THE CREW WOULD WORK ON A SERVICE PROJECT TO MAKE A PATH NEARBY.



WE STARTED HIKING EAST UP THE ROAD IN ORDER TO REACH THE TOP OF THE MESA. ONCE THERE WE STARTED ACROSS.



AT THE TOP OF THE MESA WAS DEER LAKE WHICH WE HAD TO TALK PAST. THE LOWERING SUN REFLECTED OFF OF THE WATER'S SURFACE AND IT WAS A VERY BEAUTIFUL SIGHT.



WHEN WE REACHED THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MESA WE HAD TO CLIMB DOWN A STEEP CLIFF. FROM ROCK TO ROCK WE JUMPED OUR WAY DOWN BEING VERY CAREFUL NOT TO TRIP.



SOME OF THE ROCKS WERE LOOSE WHICH MADE JUMPING EVEN MORE DANGEROUS. WE HAD A FEW CLOSE CALLS BUT NOBODY HAD SERIOUS INJURIES.



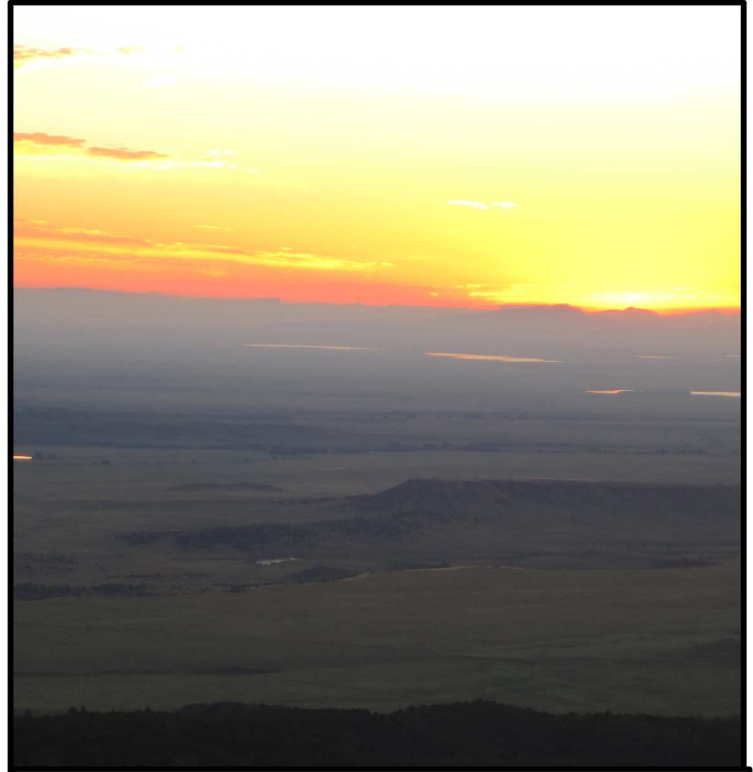
WE GOT OUR FOOD FROM THE COMMISSARY AND QUICKLY MADE OUR WAY BACK.



WE HAD TO GO ALL THE WAY AROUND THE MESA AGAIN BECAUSE THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO GET BACK TO HARLAN. THE PATH WE TOOK WAS TOO STEEP TO GO BACK UP.



I THINK I HAVE SEEN THIS BEFORE...



THE SUN WAS SETTING AND IT WAS NOT SAFE TO TRAVEL AT NIGHT. WE WALKED QUICKLY AND OUR SMALL GROUP MADE GOOD TIME.

WE RETURNED JUST BEFORE IT GOT TOO DARK. WE THANKED THE TWO RANGERS AND I WENT STRAIGHT TO BED.



THE NEXT MORNING I TOLD THE STORY TO OUR CREW AND WE DECIDED THAT WE SHOULD MOVE OUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.





WE PLANNED OUT OUR ROUTE TO THE NEXT CAMP, VISTO GRANDE. WE LEFT HARLAN WITH PACKS FULL OF FOOD. DAN AND I WILL ALWAYS HAVE THAT EXPERIENCE THAT NOBODY ELSE DID. WE FINISHED OUR JOURNEY SIX DAYS LATER. SOME OF US WILL RETURN, OTHERS WILL NOT.