

## A HORSE NAMED SKOAL

By Marie Nylund.

His sire and dam are unknown as is his bloodline - one can only guess based on his conformation, height and sturdy good looks. He had a career in the Warden Service for many years both as a saddle horse, packhorse and became a reliable kids horse. The old buckskin gelding left many fond memories from his warden service career and as a retiree. His name was Skoal and this is his story.



Tessa Verbeek photo collection



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A buckskin gelding was recorded in the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch records as being born in 1982 and was given the name Skoal to align with the alphabetic naming system of the warden service horses. Skoal may have been older, no one really knows. He arrived as an unbranded buckskin gelding and is listed on the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch records as having been purchased from F. Ziffel. (Frank Zieffle of Twin Butte is listed in the 1986 Alberta Brand Book and he may be the original owner of Skoal.) At the time of his purchase, about 1984 or 85, Parks Canada was purchasing horses some of which came from the Pincher Creek area. I believe former Ya Ha Tinda Ranch foreman and retired park warden, Fred Dixon assisted with finding horses for Parks Canada in the Pincher Creek area.

Skoal was of sturdy build, of quiet disposition, stood about 15 hands high, and had a kind, trusting eye. It did not take long for Skoal to become a reliable saddle horse and packhorse for the wardens of Banff National Park.



A Park Warden on patrol. Photo Park Warden Service Alumni collection.

Whether he was used as a patrol horse or packhorse or simply taking care of the kids of the Warden Service, it didn't matter to Skoal. Wildlife encounters and river crossings were never an issue either. Many people came back safely from trips that might have ended badly had Skoal not "shown them the ropes" and the way back home.



Peter and Charles White, riding Duce and Skoal 1994. Photo by Cliff White.



Cowboy Jack Pengelly and cowgirl Leah Pengelly with Skoal 2005. Photos compliments of Ian Pengelly.

Skoal retired from the warden service when he was about 25 years old and was fortunate to make his next home with the Larry Frischke family of Sundre who were looking for a quiet gelding for their daughter Tessa. Ya Ha Tinda Ranch Manager Rick Smith matched Tessa up with Skoal, it proved to be a perfect fit. At the time, Tessa needed a horse that would help build her confidence and enjoyment of riding. Skoal achieved all those goals and more. While a part of the Frischke family he received tender loving care for many years.

It was a pleasant surprise on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 during the Park Warden Service Alumni's celebration of the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch centennial when Larry, Joan and Tessa Frischke added to the festivities with a surprise visit from "Skoal" who at that time was 35 years old. The presence of this old horse brought back many fond memories to several retired park wardens in attendance that day.



Photos compliments of Tessa Verbeek.

In early February I received a phone call from Larry Fischke who told me that Skoal quietly passed away on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021. While this was sad news it also gave me a sense of peace that this old horse had lived such a good life and had been cared for so well in his retirement years.



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Photos courtesy of Tessas Verbeek

Tessa posted on Facebook:

*"A special old friend left us, just shy of 39 years old. Skoal lived the life of two horses - the first quarter century he spent in the Banff Park Warden Service. He touched a lot of lives as the mount and packhorse of many, many wardens before we had the privilege of having him retire with us. For the past 14 years he had my heart as the gentle and steady guy that helped my confidence after some wrecks. No matter how many horses I have ridden since, he will always, always be my favourite."*

*"This is the place that you're born to be, on a buckskin horse in the high country."* High Country Nights, (The Wardens).

Skoal's final resting place is at the Ya Ha Tinda, the home where he first started his career with the Warden Service. Rest in peace Skoal.