

CREEDE

In 1998 Robert invited us to join him on the annual Emerald Ranch horse ride in the Rockies. I had already done this once but this time was to be special as he had persuaded Margie to come as well. The ride was planned to take place in August after I had finished working at Ramiilaj and overseeing the placement of *Pulse* that Robert had given the Aspen Centre for Physics.

I had intended to install *Pulse* the previous year, but on opening the box found that somewhere along the line it had been dropped and smashed into a crumpled heap. Looking at the damage was one of the most heartbreaking moments of my life.

Fortunately in the little town of Basalt down the valley from Aspen I found an engineering firm that could mend it. The blacksmith did a brilliant job of welding all 90 pieces that made up *Pulse* back into position!



'Pulse', Aspen Center for Physics

When I had first been to see the owner of the firm I discovered that he also carved wooden Indian totem poles with a chainsaw, so I asked him to carve a Chilean totem over the winter as a present for Ramiilaj. As I have already written we had first come across a Mapuche in the Santiago Natural History Museum. It had so intrigued me that I had son Mark carve one for the Agecroft garden on returning from our trip to Easter Island in 1995.

The engineer agreed to carve a 12-foot high Mapuche from a fir tree while he was repairing *Pulse*. He did a superb job and when Margie and I arrived in Aspen he delivered it to Ramiilaj at the same time that he returned the sculpture to the Institute. I am not sure that Robert was overly thrilled by his present, but once we had it erected by the pond in the horse paddock and he had climbed it, I believe he approved! Sitting on top is an amazing experience, as you seem to be flying, especially in Aspen, because you have a vast view out over the Rocky Mountains.



'Mapuche', Ramiilaj

Robert has been incredibly generous to the Aspen Institute and the Center for Physics. He gave them a heroic edition of *Intuition* as well as an edition of *Pulse* and one of *Janus* in 1996.



'Intuition', Aspen Institute



'Janus' and RIII, Aspen Center for Physics



'Janus', Ramiilaj

Robert's mother, Louise Currie, was to stay at the house while we went riding. Louise is a legend in her own time and her life story reads like a novel. When Robert was a baby, Louise decided to change her life from being a lawyer's wife in Washington to that of an actress in Hollywood! To accomplish this she drove across America with her baby and then enrolled in an acting school. During her career she made over 50 talking films, and became an incredibly successful movie star. She is petite, beautiful and possesses amazing energy that completely belies her now being 90 years old. She is a stunner!

I had become friendly with a Professor John Miller, Director of the Montana State University's Center for Computational Biology. John liked my Symbolic Sculpture and asked if he could use *Life* as a logo for the Center. I was very flattered by this and also by Robert and Damon agreeing to donate an edition to the university.

They also said that they would donate a 20-foot high edition of *Evolution* to the Museum of the Rockies, part of the Montana State University. Robert decided that we should all fly up and have a look at the Center, the sculptures, and the museum that is famous because it has the best collection of dinosaur fossils in the United States. These are cared for by Jack Horner and his tiny, beautiful and charming wife, Celeste, who found the largest T-Rex yet discovered. Everyone who meets Celeste wants to take her home, but she always refuses to go! I am told that she has given up fossil hunting and now drives a giant 16-wheel road train!



Star 'Louise Currie' with her son, Robert



Life



'Evolution' and 'Life', Museum of the Rockies, Montana

We took off one sunny morning from Aspen and reached Bozeman an hour later having flown over Yellowstone National Park. For some time I have been absorbed by Super Volcanoes and the Toba eruption on the island of Sumatra. Toba is the largest eruption to take place in the last 74,000 years, leaving behind a hole 50 miles long and 20 miles wide. The scientists claim that it caused a six-year long winter that reduced the population of Modern Man to under 10,000 adults. The Yellowstone Park caldera was also caused by a Super Volcano eruption that took place 600 million years ago. The scientists think it is due to erupt again, give or take a million years, as the land to the north is starting to rise, forcing the lake to move south!

Craters are amazing as I saw for myself when Robert Hefner took me to see the one in Arizona created by a nickel-iron meteor impact 49,000 years ago.



'Meteor Crater', Arizona

When the meteor hit, it dislodged half a billion tons of rock from the earth's surface, leaving a 4,150-foot wide crater, 570 foot deep, three miles round. Standing on the rim of this colossal hole in the ground leaves one feeling very insecure, but then think of Toba. It is 1000 times bigger!

We had a fascinating day seeing around the laboratories of the Center for Computational Biology and then the Dinosaur Museum with Jack Horner. Looking at their collection of dinosaur fossils is as awesome as the meteor crater. The dinosaur models were barely credible and when their mechanically-driven jaws chomped I was glad they were all extinct! Perhaps the meteor 65 million years ago that wiped them out was a good thing after all!

We said goodbye to John Miller after having a snack of black bean soup in a cowboy saloon and flew home back over Yellowstone witnessing one of the best sunsets we had ever seen and a glorious *green flash* as the sun disappeared under the horizon. I found a cabinet that contained a bottle of tequila and a chest of ice so we sipped and gazed in wonder at the beauty of the world. It was one of those moments when one feels utterly blessed.

The following morning it was time to pack up and fly again, this time crossing the Great Divide to the Rio Grande River. We landed at a tiny airstrip that served Creede, once a booming gold-miners' town in the old days of the lawless West. One of Louise's favourite film parts had been as the heroine in *Gun Town* where she played *Buckskin*, the daughter of the mine owner. Instead of a pistol she carried a stock whip. It was lucky that she did as she used it to cut the rope that was round her boyfriend's neck with one crack of the whip just as he was about to be lynched, having been falsely accused of robbing the stagecoach carrying the mine payroll. Her lover fell from the tree into the buggy and they galloped off into the sunset! Louise said that she hated horses, but in those days you had to do your own stunts and did as you were told.

The boss of the ride was Tom Payne. He also was straight from the old days as he had been a gold miner in his youth and in fact had been the Colorado champion driller of a 12-inch hole to take a stick of dynamite using a chisel and 4 lb hammer. He had won the State title 16 times and US Open Championship five times! You couldn't meet a nicer man or more of a Mountain Man. He told me that the first gold discovery was made by a mule driver who picked up a rock to hurl at a wayward animal. He was set on doing this when he suddenly realised it was double the weight of an ordinary rock of that size, and when analysed it turned out to be a nugget of gold!

Tom is also a famous tracker and when I told Damon this he hired him the following year to take him elk hunting with an English longbow! Damon didn't get an elk, but had a fantastic time trying.

Robert owns Emerald Ranch with Brian Egolf, alias the *Silver Stallion*. Brian and his wife, Rosie, are very keen riders and his family had taken summer holidays in Creede for years. Emerald Ranch is in the mountains above the town and only accessible in the summer, being snow-bound in the winter.

When you get there, having driven past a deserted miners' village, you burst out of the trees onto a small pasture meadow. A stream runs across it down into a lake that Brian has reconstructed from an old Beaver pond. When Brian and Robert were discussing the lake I suggested that they should have an island in the middle, which they subsequently built and christened 'Robinson Island'. I was very flattering to have something named after me!

Robert once suggested that we should put a 30-foot high *Elation* on the island but I feel that might never happen. How he would get it there is beyond my imagination, but then the Americans did walk on the Moon so I guess they don't think anything is impossible.



Tom Payne and Robert Hefner III

Some years ago in their wisdom the water-conservation people who look after the Rio Grande catchment decided to blow up all the beaver dams. Fortunately they have reversed this policy and now the beavers are back, but some of the dams need human help in the form of giant bulldozers.



'Emerald Ranch' home pasture and 'Robinson Island'

One of the wonderful things you can do at the ranch after riding all day is to go and sit quietly by a dam and watch the beavers at play as they swim around like large black Labrador dogs, head just out of the water. When they think there is danger about they give the water an almighty whack with their great rudder-like tails. One evening we watched a father and mother with their cub play for an hour. It was pure magic.



Emerald Ranch chuck wagon driven by Randy

The ride from town up through forests of spruce and bristlecone pines to the ranch is done the traditional way on a chuck wagon that is pulled by two beautiful draft horses. We had left Aspen in brilliant sunshine but had landed under some very menacing black thunderclouds. As we rolled along the dirt road in the wagon the storm got nearer and then suddenly a bolt of lightning came hurtling down into the trees only 25 yards from the road with a *bang* that shook the earth. The intensely bright flash of light gave both the horses and

the passengers one hell of a fright as the clap of thunder seemed to be only just above our heads. Rocky Mountain storms come and go quickly so we were soon back in brilliant sunshine, but all a little shaken as we had literally felt the ground heave beneath us.

The camp crew had erected some tents and Margie and I were shown to our quarters. The ground isn't that flat around the campsite but this proved to be a help as the afternoon's cloudburst had poured in through the tent flap that had been left open. One end of the tent held a six-inch deep puddle of water and as it had a waterproof floor the only way to drain it was to kill it with my knife. Apart from that we had an idyllic spot as beside us a tiny stream burred its way between mossy banks covered with wild flowers.



The Robinson Suite

The kitchen tent was manned by the cowboys' wives and the amount and quality of food they produced had to be seen to be believed. An enormous pine log fire was lit every afternoon so when we arrived home it was a roaring blaze with flames that sent sparks flying up into the black night skies. Campfires are marvellous, even though you can only manage to roast one side at a time. Maybe the abundance of tequila actually kept us warmer than the fire!

Overnight the horses are corralled on the pasture just down from the camp, so the early morning walk usually ended up with us feeding them sugar lumps stolen from the chuck wagon.



Margie saying good morning to her horse

One evening a hill-billy guitar man came up to the camp with a young 15-year-old girl called Melissa to sing for us. I have never heard a more melodious voice in my life. She was enchanting. I arranged for the man to make a recording in a professional sound studio and we often play the tape in the car. The sound of her voice brings back the magic of those evenings at the Emerald Ranch camp as we sat around the fire eating steak and sipping red wine. What magic it all was and what marvellous memories remain!

Keeping warm at night is a problem when camping above 11,000 feet. Margie solved the problem of the bitter cold by wearing all her spare clothes plus a balaclava, thick wool gloves as well as being encased in a feather sleeping bag! We had not experienced that kind of cold since our *Grand Traverse* walk over the Alps from Geneva to Nice with the three boys.

Saddling up for the first ride is always exciting, as you are neither sore nor exhausted. On the second day some of the keenness has rubbed off because muscles that have not been used for years are feeling pretty stiff. By the fourth day, when the stiffness has left, you don't want to stop, but that is usually the day before you have to go home! On my first ride with Robert we used American cowboy saddles, which are not as comfortable as the Australian stock saddles. The main problem with them is the angle the stirrups hang, putting enormous pressure on your knees. When I dismounted after my first day's ride my legs buckled under me and I collapsed to the ground! Luckily no one saw as Robert had been telling the cowboys that I had once been an Australian cattle drover!

Before the next ride I took him to a saddler in London where he bought four 'Dinkum Aussie' stock saddles, which he was very happy to do as his own knees had also felt the strain. The cowboys had never seen anything like them and asked if they could try one, soon agreeing that they were more comfortable

as well as kinder to the horses because they are less than half the weight. I couldn't lift Tom's saddle off the ground it was so heavy.



Margie and 'Little Man' with an 'Aussie' saddle

With us on the ride was Robert's right-hand man, Orlando. He and his wonderful wife, Candida, have a daughter called Andrea and a son named Alexander. She is one of the best cooks in the world and he runs the Ramiilaj homestead. They are also expert gardeners and look after the flower beds around the house and the vegetable garden that is on the roof of the stables so the deer can't raid it at night.

They both come from a village in Portugal, where nothing has changed for centuries, and where they have built a house for their retirement. Candida's family has lived there forever so everyone in the village is related. Orlando and Robert have become the closest of friends and when a horse rolled on Robert breaking both his ankles, Orlando nursed him while the bones mended.

Candida keeps a pig in their garage in Portugal, feeding it on the scraps from the kitchen. When the pig reaches the right size Orlando slaughters the poor animal that by then has become a family pet. This pig killing is quite a ritual and one year when it was due to happen Orlando suggested that Robert should fly down and take part in the ceremony and bring his accountant Bob May, 'Silver Stallion', and myself along as well.

We climbed aboard a helicopter by the Thames for the trip out to the airport, hovering for a moment above the river before sweeping downstream over all the famous bridges and past The Tower of London where Sir Thomas More had been executed. I looked down on All Hallows Church where my first life-sized sculpture of François Gilot teaching Claude to walk now resides. What a ride! I have never seen such a sight nor had so many memories stirred back into life in such a short time.

I was so unprepared for the acceleration and angle of climb when we took off in Robert's new Falcon Jet that I spilt some wine from my glass! We landed an hour later in Oporto and were met by Orlando in a van for the short trip to his village where his wife, Candida, welcomed us with our first dinner of roast pork, a suckling piglet, head and all. After breakfast the following morning the guests went for a long walk while Candida's entire family prepared for the butchering. We had been introduced to the victim the night before who obviously had no inkling of his fate as he had eaten a hearty last meal!

Candida's father, mother, sister, brother and various cousins all assembled in the garage for the act that took place with a horrendous amount of squealing. Once that gruesome bit was over the job of burning off the bristles commenced accompanied by an awful smell of burnt skin. I thought about the days on the farm in the Ninety Mile Desert when I used to kill a sheep every fortnight for us to plough our way through. That had been a picnic compared to killing this pig!

While the sacrificial bristle burning was going on Candida and her mother were cooking the congealed blood. With great ceremony this was brought forth on a silver salver, covered with sprigs of parsley, placed on the carcass, and we were then invited to partake. Well, for good manners, it was necessary to do so, but I can tell you if it hadn't been for the many tumblers of red wine that went with it...!



Orlando with a 'Yankee' saddle



Resting at 13,000 feet

Back to Creede. On the second day we rode over a 13,000-foot high pass where the scenery was quite mind boggling. The mountains around us were so high that they carry pockets of snow all year round on their shaded northern slopes. The 'Aussie' saddles were brilliant, even though they were not broken in. Because of their lightness we lucky four were able to ride through a snow drift without having to dismount and lead our horses. The others were forced to do so and wade through snow up to their knees!

On the third day we rode over the central volcanic peak of the Creede caldera which is approximately 90 miles around. I tried to grasp the size by thinking of the Meteor Crater at Flagstaff that had seemed so immense but only had a three-mile circumference! *Ninety* compared to *three* is beyond comprehension, or so it seems to me! On the top of the central peak there is a tiny lake where we stopped and ate our picnic lunch while watching a roe deer and her fawn grazing the steep cliffs opposite us.



Tom Payne and 'Willard', his pack mule

Suddenly Willard the pack mule became very agitated and started to whinny and dance around. Tom stood up and pointed to where a young couple were hiking down the trail from the pass with their gear on the back of a llama. Tom explained, "Mules can't stand the smell of llamas," and went to whisper comforting words in poor animal's ear.

On the very steep trail back down the mountain the lead horse trod on a wasps' nest. I was riding at the end of the file with Tom and by the time we had reached the nest its inhabitants were not very happy and attacked, which caused a lot of pig rooting and snorting from our horses, not to mention curses from the riders. We all managed to stay put in our saddles and were soon out of danger, but it had added a *sting* to the end of the day. Ha Ha!



Calamity Jane and Dingo

Brian and Rosie plan to live up on Emerald Ranch and have built a large wooden barn for the winter. The ground floor is taken up with stables and the living quarters are above the stalls, just like Swiss farms in the past. On our last night they organised a barn dance for the camp crew and brought in a band. We danced for hours to hillbilly songs, the men keeping their hats on and wearing high-heeled boots in true cowboy style. It was a splendid evening, but we found that dancing energetically at 11,000 feet is tiring work!

We had had a great ride but when Robert invited Margie to come the following summer she declined. Once frozen twice shy. Instead I asked him if I could bring our dear friend, Anna Coyle, who runs the Bradshaw Foundation in Geneva, as she had often said to me that she would love to ride in the Rockies. We flew over the following year for my final ride in the Rockies and had a fabulous time, but I decided my riding days had come to an end, even with the 'Aussie' saddles!

One of the problems with riding in the Rockies is altitude sickness that causes the 'mother of all headaches'. The amazing thing about these headaches is that if you drop down a 1,000 foot the pain immediately stops, but it is something you have to be aware of as you think you're going to die.



Emerald Ranch Cowboys...



...and forbidding mountain peaks

The high Rockies are one of the most exhilarating places you can imagine. The air is so pure it almost lifts you off the ground when you take a deep breath. Knowing that around you are vast tracks of land only inhabited by wild animals transports you back to a time before the peopling of the continent about 20,000 years ago. A world void of any man-made pollution, and one where pristine nature ruled in all its glory.