

## Adventures in Wonderland

Well hello there, this is “Kid Cool” comin` at cha` in full flight and outta` sight. Yes my little wild and woolly west weasels, have I a tale to tell you!!

On a day in June ,those fearless frontier Kells County Regulators took flight For Albuquerque New Mexico U.S of A to participate at “End of Trails” and like the song says “looking for adventure”. Little did we know what the fates had in store for us. Clue number #1. Was on the date for a start, “Friday the 13th”. Clue number #2 my airline ticket had three sixes together, 666 “hmmm.....I wonder”. Full of excitement and expectation we sat back to enjoy the first leg of our journey as we winged our way to New York. Landing at Newark Airport N.Y. The fun was about to unfold.

On arrival and about to attempt to pass through immigration we declared to the officials that we had with us firearms. With that the hue and cry went up “ESCORT” an armed officer promptly attached himself to us and marched Slick Vic, Tart `n` Terror, and yours truly off to a large self contained holding area with seats and a perspex wall and more armed officers, all I might add wearing “Homeland Security” badges. Here we were to spend the next hour and half waiting to be processed.

There were approximately 30 inmates in front of us. We had no idea why they were being detained. Grizzly Kerr and Stichin` Sal had not been hindered as they had not brought any “toys” with them. As luck would have it we could see the luggage carousel through the perspex wall. This of course is a large open public area, and I emphasize public. And to put no finer point on it all and sundry had access. Whilst abandoned to our fate in said holding area, we spotted our luggage and “toys” had been taken off the carousel and unceremoniously dumped in the public arena. “Ho hum” this just gets better and better. But joy Oh joy, Grizzly and Sal stumble across our belongings and stood guard over them.

Meanwhile dear reader back in the holding tank, there appears to be only one officer working. The rest are either chatting to each other drinking coffee or just standing around scratching their New York Derry Airs. I truly believed that they were mostly all studying accountancy or financial exams for Wall Street because they all seemed be a lot of BANKERS.

Either way we were totally unimpressed with the so called Homeland Security. Any “Al Queda Musthava Breava” or any light fingered “Jack the Lad” could have half inched (pinched) our firearms. Needless to say we keep our “Norn Iron” gobs and London lips firmly shut.

Eventually we get processed. We are allowed out through the perspex wall to retrieve our toys. The nice officer goes through our paper work (issued by their ATFE) line by line. He then attempts to rub off the serial number on each firearm with his thumb. Finally we get the “your good to go” statement. “Yea huh” we are through, welcome to the home of the brave and the land of the free.

## Part Two -The Onward Journey.

After a lay over of six hours and at last a decent meal we are ready for what ever lays before us, including waiting at the wrong terminal gate for our onward flight then a heart thumping mad dash to the opposite side of the airport to find the correct one. This merry go round of mirth continued on the plane with us sitting on the tarmac for another hour and half waiting to take off. Unbeknown to us there were 25 planes in front of us tarrying for their take off slots. (You couldn't make this up could you).

After a 4 hour flight from New York to Albuquerque we finally touched down in the wee small hours of the morning. To be met by Slick Vic's American chum Lt. Danial Lee. Who had been waiting for hours for our arrival. He brought with him not only his son Blackhawk Bob to meet us but more befitting news. What can this be I hear you cry? Not guessed it yet? Well our luxury large trailer that we had prebooked from RV STEWART RENTALS was being delivered to Founders Ranch for the duration of our visit. On the way to the ranch our trailer had been involved in motorway accident and was now a total wreck. Plus to add insult to injury our hire people carrier would not be available to a lot later on in the morning. As a point of interest, Richard the owner of RV STEWART RENTALS, subsequently went onto be nominated for humanitarian of the year but failed. Only to go on and win the arse hole of the year award for 2008.

Oh by the way dear reader, did I not mention that some of our luggage had won a free trip to Switzerland, Geneva no less. The Tart `n` Terror is hoping to claim the air miles.(Can you believe this Sh###). Finding ourselves in this some what bizarre situation we at last manage to find a taxi to take us to a hotel, to get something resembling a respite. Sweet dreams!!

Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. It's a hot hot hot New Mexico day. Back we all go to the airport to pick up not only our hire people carrier but maybe our lost luggage. A reality check kicks in. Hooray we get the hire car, but no sign of the lost luggage. The lady at Continental Airlines who's in charge of dealing with problems such as these, lives not in our world but in some sort of parallel universe, inhabited by Ken and Barbie and My Magic Pony. We are not allowed to look at her while she works. She informs us that there is a free phone number we can call. But and here's the rub, we can't use her phone, It's against company policy. Actually helping us is not part of her remit. (I swear I'm not making any of this up). This is the face of Continental Airlines customer care and service. Ever helpful and understanding. Compassion much like her dull wit and some what limited charm were all reluctantly still treading water at the shallow end of the gene pool.

Leaving all that aside we climb aboard our people carrier and headed off to the ranch. Thanks to Slick Vic and Sat Nav we arrive at Founders Ranch at last!! But whats this .S###.....still no trailer. Nothing arrives until 7.30 Saturday evening and when it does its to "bloody" small for 5 adults, luggage plus toys. By now I'm begining to lose my grip on reality and the will to live. (if you know what I mean). Stitchin' Sal forever the lady kept her cool and demeanor. She could have easily gone from Stitchin' Sal to bitchin' Sal big time, but sure enough she stood by her man Grizzly and held on in the

face of adversity.

The Tart'n` Terror was hanging on by a thread. Her luggage would not make an appearance for another four days. Her only cloths until then would be what she stood up in, a tee shirt and jeans. Slick Vic our stalwart organizer rose to the challenge of trying to hold everything together. Even under an avalanche of problems and a deluge of aggravations Slick carried on trying to overcome our predicament. I spent my first and only night on a bunk bed. Word had quickly spread of our quandary. Two shooters (husband and wife) who go by the aliases of Texas Jack Daniel's and his attractive good lady wife Shotgun. Came to my rescue by offering me a double bed (to myself) in their trailer. "Re-freakin`-sult. At least I had my sleeping arrangements sorted. Let the good times roll.

"Ugh ugh" next came more trailer trash trouble. Yes this time it was the air con which led in turn to the generator. During the course of our enforced incarceration we ended up having 3 generators. On the ranch water is a precious commodity. We had to purchase water every other day, plus paying to have the human effluent pumped out. (Hey are we having fun or what). Finally we get a break from all this merriment and gaiety. And as a change of pace we head off to visit Billy the Kids grave. (The word irony springs to mind).

On another jubilant occasion we took ourselves off to Albuquerque to look around a large gun shop. We just dribbled with envy at the prices. The locals who we got talking to were interested in our draconian firearms laws and felt very sorry for us. We were looked upon as the poor country cousins more to be pitied than anything else. We then moved on to the Bank of America so that Slick and Tart'n` could cash some travelers cheques Hang on to your hat `cause here we go again. On presenting a number of signed cheques, no problem. It was the last one the cashier queried the signature. "The signature is not the same" they declared. The manager was duly summoned but was unmoved by these interlopers. After a heated exchange and failing to get satisfaction we left. We couldn't believe the amount of complete dick heads we were encountering. (Cheer up things could be worse, so we cheered up and sure enough things got worse).

The Tart'n` Terror and Stitchin` Sal ensured I consumed my daily cocktail of chemical medication. Now whether it was the 100 degree plus heat or being 7000ft above sea level or what we had been enduring, unfortunately it did little for my mood and disposition. Could it be that Slick and Tart'n` Terror who were very popular amongst the Americans and had a host of admirers, perhaps a tinge of jealousy and envy was creeping in on my part, anyway what I did know was, second by second, minute by minute, hour by pigging hour I became more morose more sullen and antisocial. Rather than trying to fight off and reason these feelings I embraced them and spiraled downward. This was born out by an invitation to another trailer from some friends of Slick Vic for a barbecued meal. I attempted to make small talk, but people either didn't understand me or chose to ignore me. So after the meal plus 2 beers I mumbled some inane excuse and promptly left. Welcome to "Kid Cools" fun world of paranoia. I had now become a fully paid up member of "The Quintessential Miserable Misfit Brit Git Society".

Amid all this mindless maudlin mayhem I feel I must mention all the help and much appreciated assistance we all received from Lt. Danial Lee, his charming good lady wife Cindy, and not forgetting the indomitable Blackhawk Bob who was always there when I needed him. Without their input I don't think we would have survived. Anything from feeding us, supplying the ammo we used, beer, water, advice on maintaining the generator, even handing out free hair bands when lost. Dan and Bob hovered over me when I was shooting as I had a tendency to leave ammo at various shooting stages. Thanks guys.

An interesting visit we did make was to the Navajo nations. En route we stopped off to purchase some authentic Indian jewelry. Well at least it didn't have made in Taiwan stamped on it. We visited a place called Sky City up in the bleak and barren mountains. How anyone can function in that heat is beyond me. The village was somewhat stark. Being that it was on Indian land we were told there is no building control, so they build as they so wish. You really do have to have the frontier mentality to thrive in this hostile environment. In the village itself, there was only one tree and this was carefully nurtured. An interesting point of commerce in the village is the price of bottled water. As you start the guided tour the price is \$1.00 a bottle, further on it becomes \$1.50, further on still \$2.00 inflation sure hits hard. As the tour draws to a close the price drops to \$1.00 a bottle. The Indians have sure taken a leaf out of the white man's book and have learnt the value of supply and demand. Should you wish to take pictures of the village that will be \$10.00 thank you. Have a nice day.

It's come, tis Thursday, time to break out the ammo don your cowboy attire and in my case put on spurs. I have my hoglegs strapped to my waist, my lever action and '97 in tow. So lets get ready to rumble. Slick Vic, Lt. Danial Lee and my humble self head for the range to do what we had come all this way for TO SHED SOME LEAD!! Grizzly had got on well with the other visitors to the ranch, and I wouldn't have been surprised if he had not sold time shares in an igloo complex he was promoting. However he, Stitchin' Sal, The Tart'n` Terror shot as conventioners not in the competition. We shoot 4 stages per day and spend approximately one hour at each stage. Each shooter is allocated 2 minutes from start to finish. No hanging about here. Then its onto the next stage. The stages appear simple and the targets close. But when you are on the firing line everything becomes cannabis, it goes to pot! We had, I believe 18 people in our posse. And there were as far as I know 36 posses. So thats an awful lot of shooters to organize and process.

The stages this year were based on Classic Western Movies. The likes of Shane, The Virginian, High Noon, The westerner, The Outlaw, Stagecoach, Magnificent Seven, etc. A line of course is quoted from all of these and other films to start the timer. Then away you blast. Trying in my case not to trip over my tongue or the spurs Slick Vic had so kindly loaned me. The stages were fast and furious but full of fun. Everyone I met had had an action job done on their under lever rifles. You could open the actions with one little pinky. Both Slick and I did well with both pistol and shotgun no misses. Maybe not the fastest but we hit everything. A number of our posse members had more misses than

us. Rifle was another ball game altogether. Now in Albuquerque there is no dirt its just red dust. Slick and I both had rifle problems, the dust got well and truly into the action and either slowed us down or brought us to a complete standstill. What happens is the red dust attaches itself to the oil in your firearm and hey presto you've just ground to a halt. We did notice most of the competitors had thin cotton gun slips covering their firearms when not being used. They obviously knew something we didn't. Now with all this dust I found I was merely concentrating on trying to make the action work rather than sighting on the target. I do have trouble multi tasking. Slick had so much trouble with his Marlin that it just jammed completely and had to be seen by a gunsmith there on the campsite.

The very first day of shooting for us, began at 13:30 thats 1.30 pm in the afternoon in old money. It was just so hot I really thought I would just melt away and turn into a large puddle on the ground with my stetson hat majestically floating in the middle of a large wet patch. The puddle in due course would rapidly evaporate. My little tootsies rebelled against being encased in cowboy boots that had spurs firmly strapped about them. This was a lesson I quickly learnt, no spurs for the following days.

Next days shooting began at of the unearthly hour of 7.30am thats in the morning for the ill informed amongst you. However without a doubt in my small and somewhat warped mind it was the best time to shoot. The air was lovely and fresh and cool to boot, I found it ideal. Some of our posse found it down right cold. As Victor Meldrew would say "I don't believe it".

I began to settle down and enjoy the shooting, this was fun. There were many fine shooters there and everyone was very helpful. If you had a jam up, some kind person would step forward and offer you there own firearm to use. If you made a cock up on the firing line nobody, but nobody took the piss. Which in this day and age is refreshing and dare I say nice. The female fraternity of shooters are something to behold. They sure can hold there own if you'll excuse the expression amongst the men. I had a kind and lovely lady give me a few pointers which was much appreciated.

There were many Australians there and they were certainly good shots and were there to enjoy themselves which they did. They were a good bunch of blokes. One in particular offered me his rifle when he noticed I was having a few problems with the dust getting my rifle, thanks mate. Now Australians like my self speak a dialect of English. Americans being Americans failed to spot the difference between us. As a born and bred Londoner I coped with this for a while. Then like everything else it began to get right up my bugle.

A "high noon" moment had arrived The New Mexico sun beat down mercilessly. Toward me strode "Mad Dog Morgan" an Aussie by birth but through circumstances now lived in Phoenix Arizona. We faced off each other on the dry dusty street, we were Mano o Mano outside the "Dillon" vendors tent. The time had come, we gave each other a knowing smile. We turned our gaze to the guy who ran the Dillon gang tent. It was time to teach these yanks a lesson they would not forget. We each spoke a dialect of English. But it was up to Mad Dog and little old me to to show them the error of their ways. By

trying in vain to show them the subtle differences between the way we both spoke. Once again I failed in my inept way of communication. At the end of the day they still think I'm Australian!!!! Whats the point.

All that was happening to me did little to raise my spirits. I realized I was losing my grip on reality. Having entered a twilight world I began to feel like Alice through the looking glass. For the intellectually challenged amongst you i.e. the right honorable member for Portadown "feeling like Alice" is not a gay analogy but a reference to the famous book by Lewis Carol of Alice arriving in a surreal world. Inhabited by the likes of Tweedledee and Tweedledum and being at the mad hatters tea party. Do keep up!! back to my self-indulgent attempt at psycho therapy. By now Slick Vic and Tart`n`Terror's star was in the ascendancy and they were lauded and applauded by most of the folk there. Grizzly had now become the Cecil B. De Mill of Founders Ranch he was never without his video camera. I'm expecting him to win some sort of Pulitzer prize. Meanwhile I was about as popular as Gordon Brown at a Labour Party conference, but without the fan base. I continued to try and aspire to the dizzy heights of mediocrity, but consistently failed.

I spent some time in the company of Judge Roy Bean sipping Jack Daniels whiskey, discussing in depth the meaning of life and many other light weight subjects, only to be blanked the following day when we met. Then I was asked a question by Ulysses S. Grant which I duely answered, only for him to then stare right through me as though I was invisible. By now, not only had I lost the plot but as far as I was concerned it had absconded to a far off distant galaxy taking my tattered temperament with it.

Saturday brought with it not only a fancy dress parade, but entertainment, plus a cowboy ball. Slick Vic and the Tart`n`Terror had come fully prepared for this event. Now for the Victorian fashion conscious among you Tart`n`Terror was draped in a fetching period ball gown complete with bustle. Slick was in an off the shoulder number in red. Alright, alright thats a lie, he was dressed some what grandly in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish Guardsman's uniform, resplendent with a Bearskin hat. For the participants that took part in the fancy dress parade they also had to tell the judges not only about the character they portrayed but also answer questions about their apparel.

Posh and Becks were really hyped up over the fancy dress gig and they were not going to take any prisoners. The pair had entered with the sole intention of winning. Which they duly did. They were indeed very popular winners, I thought my God there will be no living with them now. But I was proved reluctantly wrong. As a point of note Stichin` Sal looked enchanting in her fashionable Victorian attire and Grizzly was decked out as river boat gambler, but neither of them entered the contest mores the pity. Whereas I was clothed in resentful black with envy green stitching and I hate you all embroidery.

We finally reached a point where we all collectively felt we could do with a dose of civilization. Example, being clean, room to stretch out and not bump into each other and dare I say sleeping in a proper a bed. So we decided to leave the ranch a day early and book into a hotel for some creature comforts. I did not need any persuading, in fact I may have led the charge. We said our farewells to Dan, Cindy, and Bob. Then hit the road for

the hotel. Oh such bliss to stand under a shower for how long I don't know, but to be clean and fresh was overwhelming. To eat at a proper table with real cutlery. To be asked if I enjoyed my meal, and for me to reply, “blandness is a culinary art form I am still developing” gave me such joy.

The following day I was first down into the lobby packed and ready to leave for the long journey home. My heart raced at the thought of perhaps people else where (back home) would still appreciate my sense of humor nay even understand what I say. There was a spring in my step and a song in my heart. A few minor mishaps befell our merry band before we made it home but at least we were on our way.

On arrival home I was overwhelmed with joy at the sight of a cloudy Belfast sky . Upon collecting my luggage and toys, I never gave a thought or a backward glance to my fellow companions, I was out that door and my arse was a cloud of dust, I was gone. Home at last.

Happy Trails dear dear reader.

“Kid Cool”.

[Editors’ note: There are photographs to memorialise the adventures of Alice - sorry Cool Rain Kid – and his cohorts available in the Cowboy Action Gallery]