

Ticonderoga Owners' Association Newsletter - June 2026



Keep 'em moving, but don't rush 'em," Espinoza shouts over the low bawling of the herd, his voice raspy from trail dust. He moves along remembering his first cattle drive when he was only 5 years old. A possible opening for a historical novel, but I need to leave that for another time.

However, people still have an amazing interest in a cattle drive and an historical trail drive is one of the unparalleled aspects of Ticonderoga. Member Linda Benson wrote, "From our RV, and still in my pajamas, I heard the cows and cowboys calling. I was so excited. I put on my running shoes, still in my PJ's, and followed the traildrive for about 2 miles. Soon I was walking alongside Jason Espinoza on his horseback, and talking about their history. I got introduced to other family members. They were so nice and loved sharing their rich experience with me. I'm really happy to share Ticonderoga with them. This was the highlight of my summer stay."

If you are in Ticonderoga between June 12-17 you may personally witness a trail drive choreographed by TOA member Jason Espinoza, his uncle, Rick, cousin Ramón, and other family members that are direct descendants of Solomón Mestas. This respected way-of-life was embraced as Ticonderoga was being designed and developed.

Some background history:

For over 80 years, the Mestas/Espinoza family has owned property in Los Brazos. The patriarch, Solomón Mestas, purchased land in 1944 on the high mesa for the purpose of grazing cattle during the summer months. The cattle's winter pastures were, and still are, in San Luis Valley near Antonito, Colorado, on the Conejos River.

To change seasonal pastures the cattle were driven 4-5 days over terrain with a dramatic mix of volcanic features, high desert shrubland, and forested mountain slopes.

Prior to Ticonderoga development, William Mundy was running steers to his high properties. Mundy's property shared a boundary with Mestas. Mundy beneficially suggested to Mestas that his cattle be transported around the mountain pass by truck then herded to Los Brazos. Mundy

worked out a right-of-way agreement with other property owners and Mestas to drive his cattle across what is now Ticonderoga Drive and Strawberry Trail. This shortened the grueling trail drive to 1 day.

The current 7-mile route with an elevation climb of over 2,300 feet continues as a unique family effort and way-of-life. Starting at the west gate of TOA, a cowboy is stationed in front to help guide an experienced lead cow. Other cowhands are at the rear to keep the 100-150 cows and calves gathered and push them forward. Once on top, the cowhands assure the calves find their mothers.

The Espinoza's cattle are an Angus Cross Breed bred for high-altitude resistance. During the summer grazing season, cattle receive a wellness check twice a week. Risks for the cattle include bears, mountain lions, lightning strikes and brisket disease - a high altitude respiratory illness.

This year's drive back to winter pastures is predicted to be September 25-28.

Interested in some geographical Spanish?

Mestas is a Spanish noun related to sheep pastures, and also used as a Spanish surname with historical ties to sheep-herding guilds. The singular form of the word is *mesta* meaning the confluence of streams.

Brazos means arms. The arms reach toward Colorado. La Manga translates to 'the sleeve' and refers to the narrow shape of La Manga Pass. Cumbres means the summit. Conejos means rabbits.

Mighty obliged Jason and Rick. Thanks for sharing your family's story.

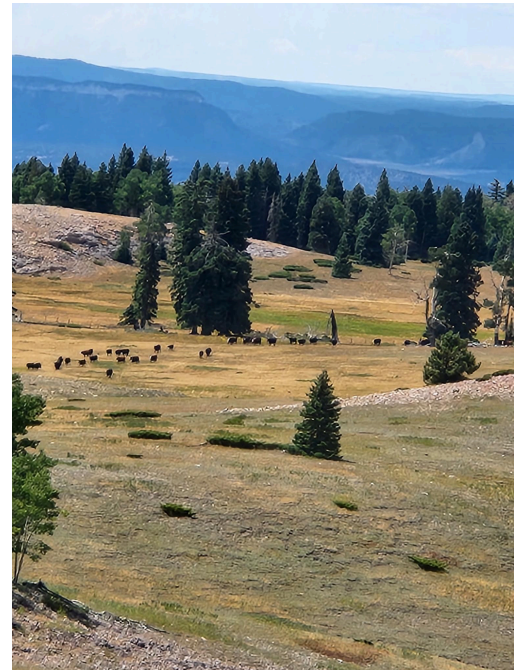
Happy Trails,

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Espinoza Cowhands



Photos provided by Jason Espinoza and Linda Benson