

"MAN WITH A PLAN" CROSS COUNTRY HORSEMAN MAKING "RIDE OF PASSAGE"

Matthew Parker, 25, of Ann Arbor, Michigan and California, was probably noticed by many area residents as he made his way across Washington County on Highway 8 on Wednesday and Thursday, July 6th and 7th. As horsemen aren't rare, most prob-

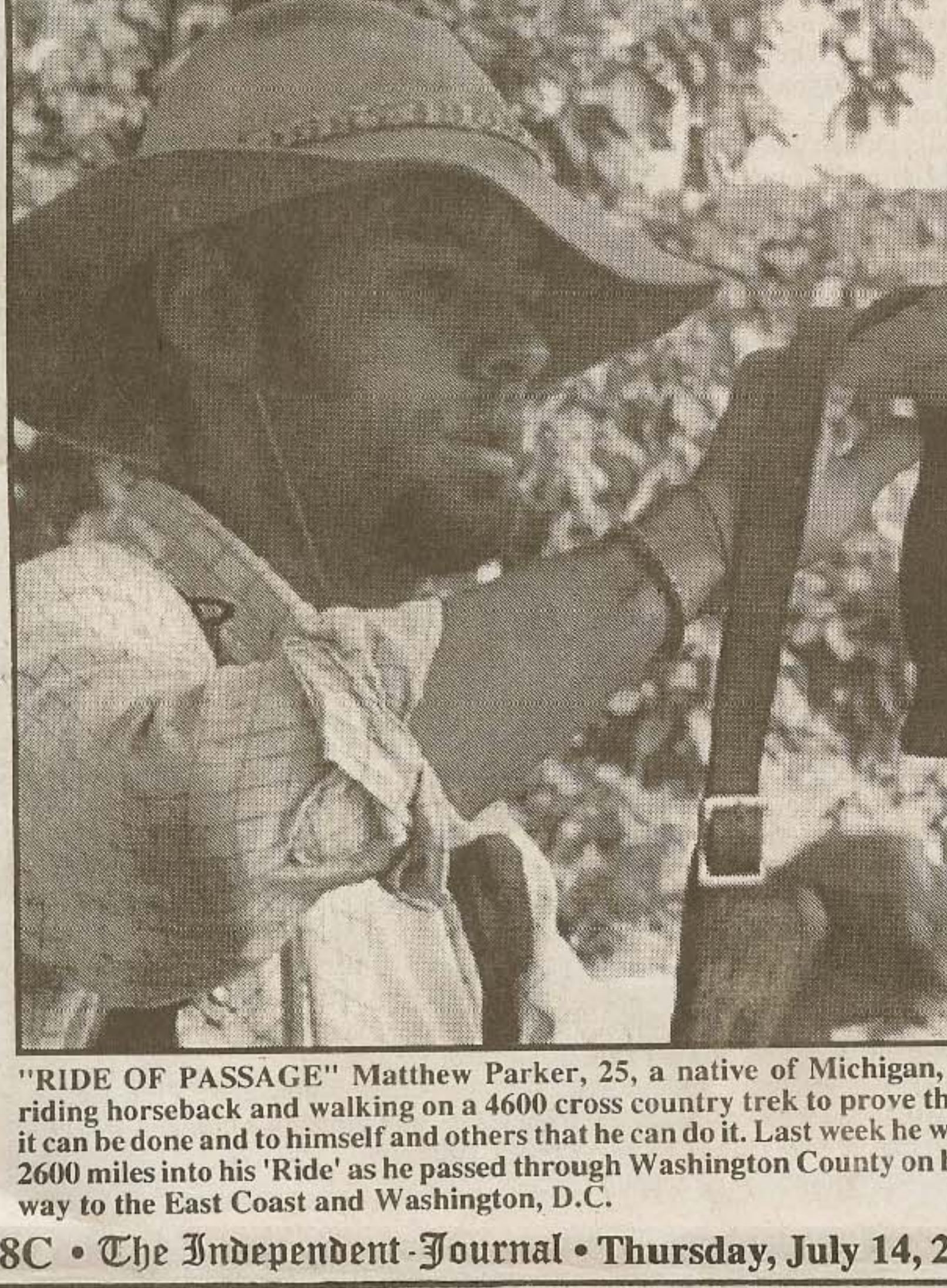
ably never questioned where he was from or where he was going. Matt is on a quest to ride completely across our nation from California to Delaware. He says the total distance is about 4600 miles and so far he's made 2600 in three hitches over the

past two years. He is now confident he will complete his 'Ride of Passage' with a goal of Washington, D.C. where he will talk with his Senator and hopefully the President since he also is a horseman. Matt plans to ask them for a job. He noted, "I'm interested in politics and I really like the D.C. area. When this is done my experiences will give me a unique perspective about how the people feel across this Great Nation. I believe I'd be valuable to them- maybe with the Secretary of Interior."

Matt Parker is a native of Michigan. He was educated there receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Hope College, a small private liberal arts school.

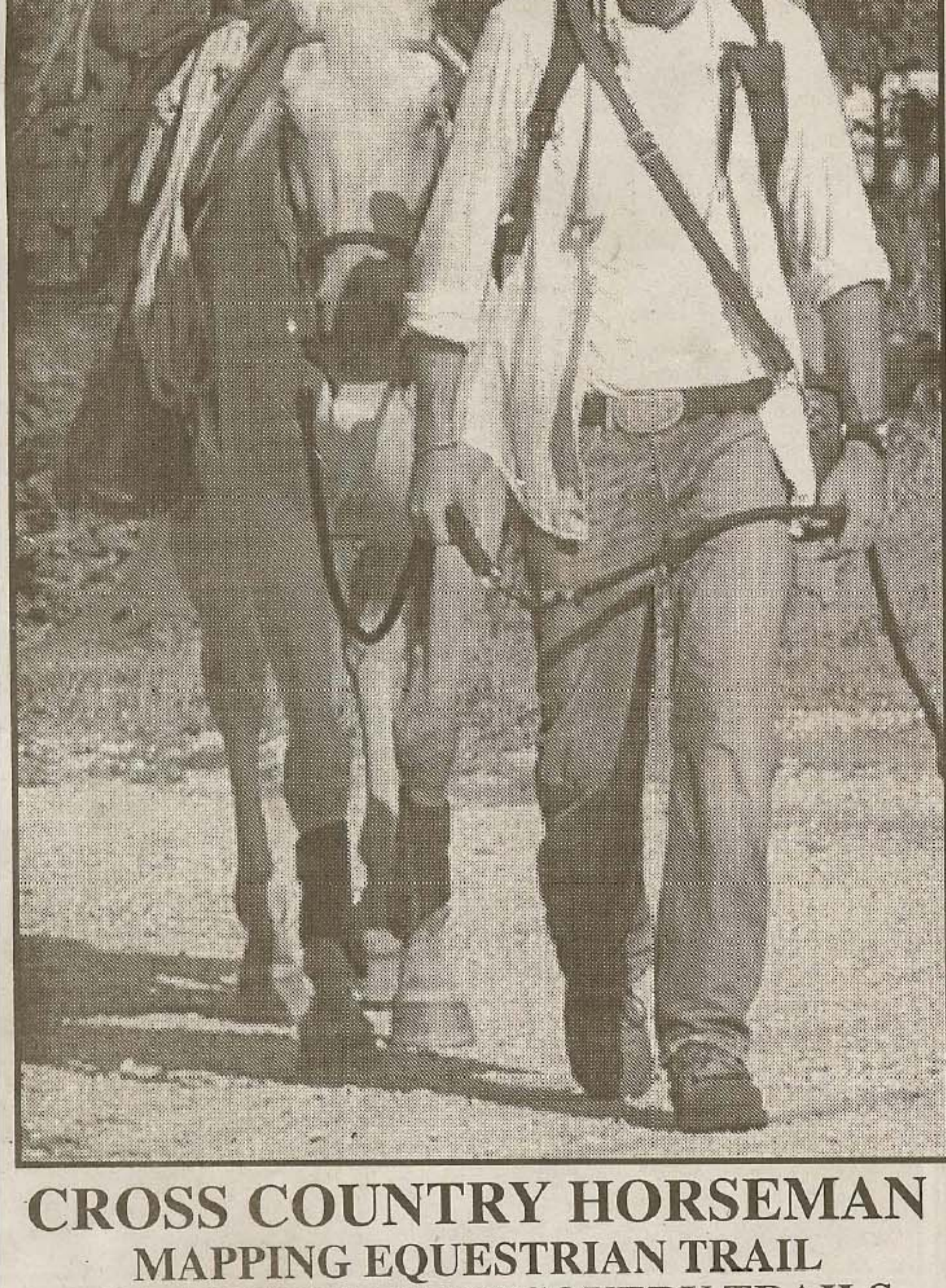
He moved to San Jose, California after graduation from college where he lives with his brother, Chris, while es-

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"RIDE OF PASSAGE" Matthew Parker, 25, a native of Michigan, is riding horseback and walking on a 4600 cross country trek to prove that it can be done and to himself and others that he can do it. Last week he was 2600 miles into his 'Ride' as he passed through Washington County on his way to the East Coast and Washington, D.C.

2005-2006 FIRST DAY SCHOOL CLASS DATES ANNOUNCED
 School Districts serving Washington County have announced their 'First Day of Classes' dates for the 2005-2006 School Year as follows:
 Potosi R-3 School District will open on Thursday, August 18th with full day classes.
 Valley R-6, Caledonia-Belgrade, will start the new school year on Thursday, August 18th. (Open House Aug. 16th.)
 Kingston K-14 School District, Cadet Route, will open for the new school year on Wednesday, August 17th.
 Richwoods R-7 Elementary School will begin classes for 2005-2006 on Monday, August 15th.
 West Co. R-4 School, Leadwood, will hold its first day of classes for the new term Thursday, August 18th. GLL28



I've only crossed California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Kansas and now Missouri- after crossing the Mississippi we'll come to the littler states."

He went on, "Kansas was really hard. My head wasn't in it. I couldn't focus. I had a terrible girlfriend and I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere- the state is so long and barren."

"I met this girl in Michigan. She was from Colorado and we got together. She never really understood what I was doing or why I was making this ride- letters and phone calls weren't enough. She needed someone to be there in person- It really hurt me- I was ready to ask her to marry me. I'm still not over it! The break up was really rough on me."

Matt says he now realizes that people can't comprehend another person's goals- everyone's goals and dreams are unique, specific to themselves.

Parker said he rode horses as a kid until about 10 years old then was a "city kid" through Middle School and High School and moved back to a rural area where his interest in horses was renewed.

Matt said, "Two of the big questions I'm asked is 'Do people join in and ride along?' and 'Is one ride all you plan to make?'" He noted- "This is not like Forrest Gump- people don't join in- people aren't that dedicated- They quit very easy."

Parker said, "This trip stems from a great deal of disappointment and very little faith in my generation. When you've gotten everything handed to you, you can't understand it's value- Give a kid a toy (or whatever) and they break it- But if you buy it yourself with money you've earned you take care of it- forever!"

"I don't want to be a part of a generation known only in the future for fast foods, electronics and drugs- I didn't see any roots my generation was putting down rather they're just skimming along taking what they can get. I decided I wanted to see if I could do something that was the opposite of what was expected- To stretch myself beyond bounds anyone thought I could go."

"I already have the best education money could buy... and it didn't teach me a thing about manhood."

"My generation takes freedom for granted because it didn't fight for it. For the most part they are dedicated to nothing but five o'clock, payday and personal gratification."

"The older generation knows what it's like to do manual labor- working for a living- that made a man out of you- understanding and accepting responsibilities- I wonder if people my age, who never get a chance to see this country the way I've seen it, will ever

"Hardly anyone today wants to make tough choices- ones that have to be made day after day."

"This trip for me is a Rite of Passage to manhood- The quest and the walk-about are basically gone- Rites today are much easier and require far less thought and commitment."

"I look at it as a Time Line- at 16 you get your driver's license- first taste of independence; Then at 18 years you can vote and buy cigarettes- Most of my friends only cared about cigarettes; at 21 you can drink legal. During this time you've gone through high school, some thru college- you find a girl, have sex- get a job- None of this answers any questions about life- It's just passing of time!"

Parker says he tries to make about 20 miles per day- Running a little behind at this point. He had hoped to cross the Mississippi on the Ferry by July 4th.

A lot of it depends on his horse "Cincinnati" (recently changed from 'Silver' a name he says they "talked over and decided it just didn't suit him.") "Cincinnati" is a 7 1/2- 8 year old Appaloosa.

Area residents probably noticed that Matt was walking leading the horse. He became saddle galled, so Parker gave him a two day rest riding only an hour each day. He was planning to ride an hour, walk an hour Thursday.

This all came at a very bad time because Matt's boots wore out- He

CROSS COUNTRY HORSEMAN MAPPING EQUESTRIAN TRAIL FOR AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAILS

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establishing residency so he can enter graduate school.

Matt says, "I talked and thought a lot about riding a horse across the United States."

"I looked around and decided I didn't really have anything going on that couldn't be put on hold."

"The 'Ride' had always been a dream of mine since I was young."

"I talked to a few other people about it and about 10 months went by- Finally I decided I could do it- and would do it."

"I remember we were watching 'The Price is Right' - I told my brother and some friends I was going to ride across the country on horseback."

training, riding horseback on the Sacramento Bike Path six or eight hours a day and working nights as a bartender- I got only a couple hours sleep- we built endurance."

"I left Sacramento on the Bike Path May 28, 2003."

The first year Matt made it into Utah. He trained in Utah the next Spring and hit the trail again.

On December 5, 2004 he became stuck in a heavy snowstorm at Osage City, Kansas. The horse he was riding refused to go any further. Matt made arrangements and shipped him back to the owner in Provo, Utah.

He then hitched a ride north to the I-70 corridor at Council Grove where he caught a Greyhound Bus and went home to Michigan.

Matt trained in Michigan this

Spring. He bought a horse and had it shipped to Michigan. He trained with two horse trainers- it was a hard regimen for the horse. They are a married couple who are Horse Whisperers. Matt stated, "Without them I would certainly have failed!"

Parker is keeping a Daily Journal of his trip. He has a publicist and is hoping to write a book about his experiences when he is done.

One of his early contacts when planning the ride was American Discovery Trails- He had heard they had a horse route. Although the group is fifteen years old and has many trails mapped across the country it is still in infancy. The routes are not connected and he learned that no one had ever ridden on these trails by horseback.

He is riding where he can on existing pedestrian and bicycle trails and believes he will be the first to ride and map the longest horse route in the U.S. at about 4600 miles.

Matt was put off by the fact that Missouri's Katy Trail doesn't allow horses saying, "Walkers and bike riders keep it to themselves because they don't want to have to watch out for horse manure- That's pretty one-eyed I think!"

The rider keeps his pack light- saddle and all only about 60 pounds. He reminds himself to pack light- He eats mainly freeze dried food with his big meal each day being at dinner time. He is shying away from fast foods rather purchasing his needs at small stores and supermarkets. "This way I can travel light and cheap," he noted.

Parker continued, "In my 2600 miles

common bond."

"This has taken years of preparation to succeed- The hardest thing is being sequestered- nothing to call your own- Every day you are at the best of someone else- having no space to call your own really wears you down."

"My stopping by has really meant a lot to the people I've stayed with- we became closest of friends overnight- but then I'm gone again- It's really tough."

"Near the end of the day I begin to look for a place to put up my horse. If he has a place fenced where he can roam and graze- If he's happy- I'm happy!"

"Already I've come into the lives of hundreds, no thousands with articles such as these all across the route so far- and I hope I've made a positive impact on them- For the most part they have on me- People have been better than I have ever expected."

Parker said his worst time so far was when he crossed Nevada and Utah- the hottest months ever on record- noting-

"The heat melted everything from my deodorant to camera and even my pride!"

The young man concluded his interview by stating, "I suppose I've always believed in God, but this trip has brought a faith in God and a deepening of my religious outlook that I never thought was possible. I'm certain that at some point I will go into the ministry field."

Parker expressed his appreciation to Larry and Sue Jarvis for their help and hospitality and said he needed to give special thanks to his parents- His Dad- Bill Parker is retired and his mother, Katie is Human Resources Director for the Northville Public Schools. They have been very supportive of him as has his brother, Chris, who will be visiting him in Illinois next week.

We wish this dedicated young man success on his quest and in the future.

You can read more about this adventure at www.rideofpassage.com- Parker says the name is a take off on Rite of Passage and best depicts how he feels about what he is doing. GLL28

bought a new pair at The Family Center in Rolla. The long walk has developed a lot of blisters for him. They stayed overnight two nights at The Rafting Co. at Steelville, then walked and lead to Huzzah Valley and again walked and lead to Larry and Sue Jarvis' home on Highway 8 Wednesday, July 6th.

Matt spends most of his time on the trail listening to books on tape and he carries a cellphone, but rarely is able to use it. (No service.)

The rider says he has found people to be friendly for the most part- least so in Missouri- He said he'd run into a couple of really bad experiences in Missouri- two out of 100 people- other states one out of 100- not really that bad, just fresher in his mind.

He noted however that, "The scenery in Missouri is definitely my favorite- It's beautiful here- a lot like my home state. I love the oak forests- they're gorgeous- I can only imagine how beautiful they are in the Fall."

The horseman says, "The first thing I'll have to say is that people aren't accustomed to helping strangers-

accustomed to helping strangers- People don't like to get outside their comfort zone."

Asked about the cost of such a trip, the rider responded- "It costs a lot- It doesn't cost a lot to live this way- grass grows and water flows- I make an occasional hotel/motel stop."

"Also people occasionally put you up for the night- Basically we just camp and poke along."

"It takes a lot out of you personally- People enjoy, maybe even envy you- They look back to something they wish they had done- and it brings a

