



Riding Silver away

An adventurous man and his horse cross Ottawa's path

By LOIS RUFF
Herald Staff Writer

It was a long, grueling day, and the last words out of Matt Parker's mouth when he stopped on the trail weren't happy ones: "It's a rough road, and I don't know what beat I am."

He was referring to K-68, the highway he was traveling on by horse after leaving Pomona

State Park, about 10 miles west of Ottawa.

Parker couldn't ride his horse, Silver, along the highway because it was too dangerous. So he was forced to trek the remaining three miles to town to get help and a place to sleep.

As Parker talked things over with his mother, Parker offered to give his son a lift into town.

"I don't want you to take me in there, not even a little bit," he said, slightly embarrassed that his father even would ask.

"I think it's pretty hard and at the same time I really respect what he's doing," Bill Parker said of his son. "He picked up a book of a challenge for himself."

Ottawa adventures

It was a dark night with the intention of staying the night and getting to town the following morning. But the Kansas weather had other plans.

Parker and Silver had to battle the storm that swept through town during the night. After getting into town, the heavy rains made it impossible for Parker to pitch a tent, and the barn where he was staying flooded, forcing him to stay the night at a motel.

In the middle of the night, Parker said he woke up to a painful burning sensation in his chest and discovered a mysterious rash. Doctors examined him and suggested Parker loaded up on ointments and prepared to head out to the hospital.

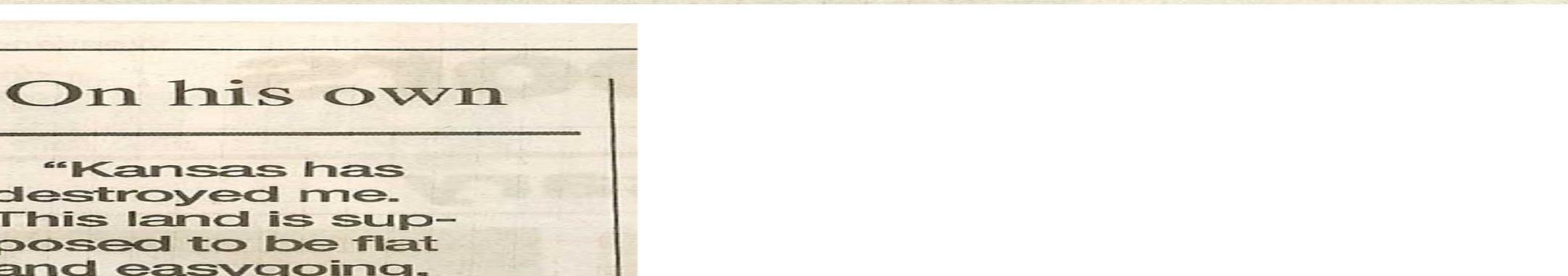
"Kansas has destroyed me," Parker said. "It's not supposed to be flat and easy-going, but ... I don't know."

Parker said he was his first time in Kansas and it was "kind of scary." And he would know. Parker has seen a lot of bad and a lot of adventures in the two years that he has been on the trail, and he has been shot, the trail has been tracked by a mountain lion, and he has had an emergency surgery because of internal bleeding.

Not everything dramatic happened while in Ottawa, though, and Parker and Silver were home Thursday, heading toward Olathe.

What keeps him going

Parker said he tries to cover about 20 to 25 miles each day with Silver. On a good day, the two can cover



Matt Parker puzzles Silver after a Wednesday night of storms and unrest in Ottawa. Parker survives on hospitality and donations from the people he meets. He tries to get people to help put up his horse when he stops while he sleeps in a small town nearby.

Parker, a 24-year-old adventurer, is about halfway on his journey to be the first person to ride horseback across the North American Discovery Trail.

The 5,000-mile long trail winds through the deserts and mountains of Utah and Nevada, the Colorado

Rocky Mountains, St. Louis, Cincinnati and Washington D.C.

Parker started the journey in May 2003 and originally planned to live at the time, and he plans to end up at Cape Henlopen, Del. on the Atlantic Coast.

'Ride of Passage'

Parker said he didn't start thinking seriously about riding the trail until he moved to California to live with his brother. From there he heard stories of people who had had the idea of

"I had heard the idea of doing the trip for most of my life, but I had no idea that the rites of passage that existed in the past don't exist now, especially in urban communities."

He said today's rites of passage include the willingness to drink, smoke, go to college, have sex, "and somewhere along the way we've lost some of the old rites of passage are just a timeline put on you by society," he said.

For Parker, however, the trip is a personal journey, the ultimate test of his character, strength and sheer will to complete the trail.

He can't imagine anything more difficult, he said. "I really wanted to do something meaningful."

After beginning the trail in 2003, Parker and his former horse, Smoky, crossed Niagara Falls and stopped for the winter. In

See ADVENTURE, Page 10

Page 10

ADVENTURE: On his own

(Continued from Page 1)

"Kansas has destroyed me. This land is supposed to be flat and easygoing, but ... I don't know. It's rolling. Now Ohio and Illinois — that's flat."

— Matt Parker, adventurer

the distance in about three hours. Other days, it takes more than four hours.

On the tour days, Parker said he easily becomes disoriented. "I think the journey has lasted more than two years, he had to see his car to get some extra money, and he is only about halfway to his goal."

So what keeps him going? Parker paused, a faint smile on his face.

"Every now and then the people say, 'There are signs that you're on the right path, that people are good, and you're going to go to work out.'

And for him, he has met countless families and individuals along the way who have invited him to offer him a place to sleep, a good meal, and some pay for Silver and his previous horses.

He has accepted their hospitality and he has refused to ask for donations.

Reverk Communications, a marketing firm that also handles publicity and donations for Parker, said McGrath, one of Parker's publicists, said Parker passes for what he's doing shows.

"He's so full of energy, young and passionate about what he's doing," she said.

Reverk's publicist added,

"Parker said people who live in the city tend to be more hesitant or sometimes hostile when he comes through their property. Rural residents, however, seem to be more open and understanding of the what he's trying to accomplish."

He worried that the further east I go, the more skeptical people become," he said. "No one still believes that things like this do happen."

He will continue his journey and Silver throughout their journey and to see photos from where Parker has been. Visit www.rideofpassage.com.