

The Recorder

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Woman traces pipeline path on horseback

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BY ANNE ADAMS • STAFF WRITER



Sarah Murphy and her Percheron, Rob Roy, stayed the night on Miracle Ridge with Bill and Lynn Limpert Tuesday. The duo was set to depart Wednesday on their way to West Virginia. (Photo courtesy Lynn Limpert)

MONTEREY — There were “Sarah sightings” all week around here.

Residents of Augusta, Bath, and Highland counties came across Sarah Murphy on her horse, Rob Roy, as they rode from West Augusta and Deerfield, roughly following the path of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Murphy is a long-distance rider, and she’s done this before. Rob Roy, a Percheron thoroughbred draft horse, stands at 17 hands and at the age of 24 (about 65 years old in human years), he’s got plenty of experience.

He’s a little nervous around trucks, though. When Murphy and Rob Roy took a similar ride a few years ago to protest mountain top removal, they were hit by a logging truck.

The trucks on these roads for the ACP haven’t made this trip easy. “But he’s holding up well,” Murphy said Tuesday evening, from their overnight stay in Little Valley.

Murphy grew up in Augusta County, and said she wanted to see the pending pipeline construction route up close. She’s 35 years old and has a place in Nelson County now, not far from Wintergreen, where she renovates, or “flips,” RV campers. The pipeline route will cross nearby, and she’s concerned for the environment, and the safety of residents along the path.



Folks arriving at Woodland Union Church Sunday morning were surprised to find Rob Roy in the front yard, happily munching. His owner, Sarah Murphy, was warmly welcomed for a meal and church services. (Photo courtesy Katha Seacord)

This ride, she hopes, will help call attention to the potential damage the pipeline would cause. “It’s a good way to help remind people about it,” Murphy said. “Folks who have been fighting this are getting a little burned out, and I’ve also been surprised how many don’t know about the project.”

She sympathizes with those working on the pipeline, too. “I don’t fault them,” she said. “They are providing for their families ... it’s sort of like I don’t believe in the war but I support the troops.”

Her boyfriend opposed her ride, initially, she said, “but he’s coming around. And he’s starting to see that his own ideals are in opposition to this project. People take on corporate power in America. If you don’t think you, as an individual, can be an agent for change, then what’s the point? If you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention.”

She said there are so many ways to see the pipeline project, but she doesn’t like people losing their land, or the state agencies that don’t seem to be doing their job with oversight.

Along the ride so far, Murphy has mostly been on the roads, and she’s highly respectful of crossing private property. But she certainly gets attention along the way.

Bath County troopers “pulled her over” on her way north, she said, after someone reported seeing a suspicious woman alone on horseback. But she had her identification, and Rob Roy’s health records and the troopers kindly sent her on her way, she said.

She spent one night near a cave entrance, closing a gate in a fenced area for Rob Roy, but was awakened by the lights of late-night spelunkers who had come to explore the cave Saturday.

Rob Roy tried to follow them to the cave entrance, she said, and stepped on one person’s foot, which Murphy felt awful about.

Sunday morning, she came to the porch of Woodland Union Church to charge her phone when folks started arriving for services. Pastor David George invited her to join them, and she had breakfast and a day of rest she sorely needed after a damp, miserable night.

“Sometimes it’s just feast or famine doing this,” she laughed. “But it’s a cool way to see the world. It puts you in touch with humanity, and the kindness of strangers. I’ve had to learn how to accept help.”

She had also stayed with Jaime McArdle and spent Tuesday night with Bill and Lynn Limpert.

“I just believe in using my gifts to make the world a better place,” she said. “And I believe in the power of prayer. I’ve met so many people who pray for me. I feel blessed in meeting people I need to meet.”