

MAY 2022

Horse & Rider's TRAIL RIDING

MONTHLY

In this issue...
**TUNE UP A
TRAIL-BALKER**
**RIDING THE
OREGON COAST**
**CANTER THE
CALIFORNIA
COAST**

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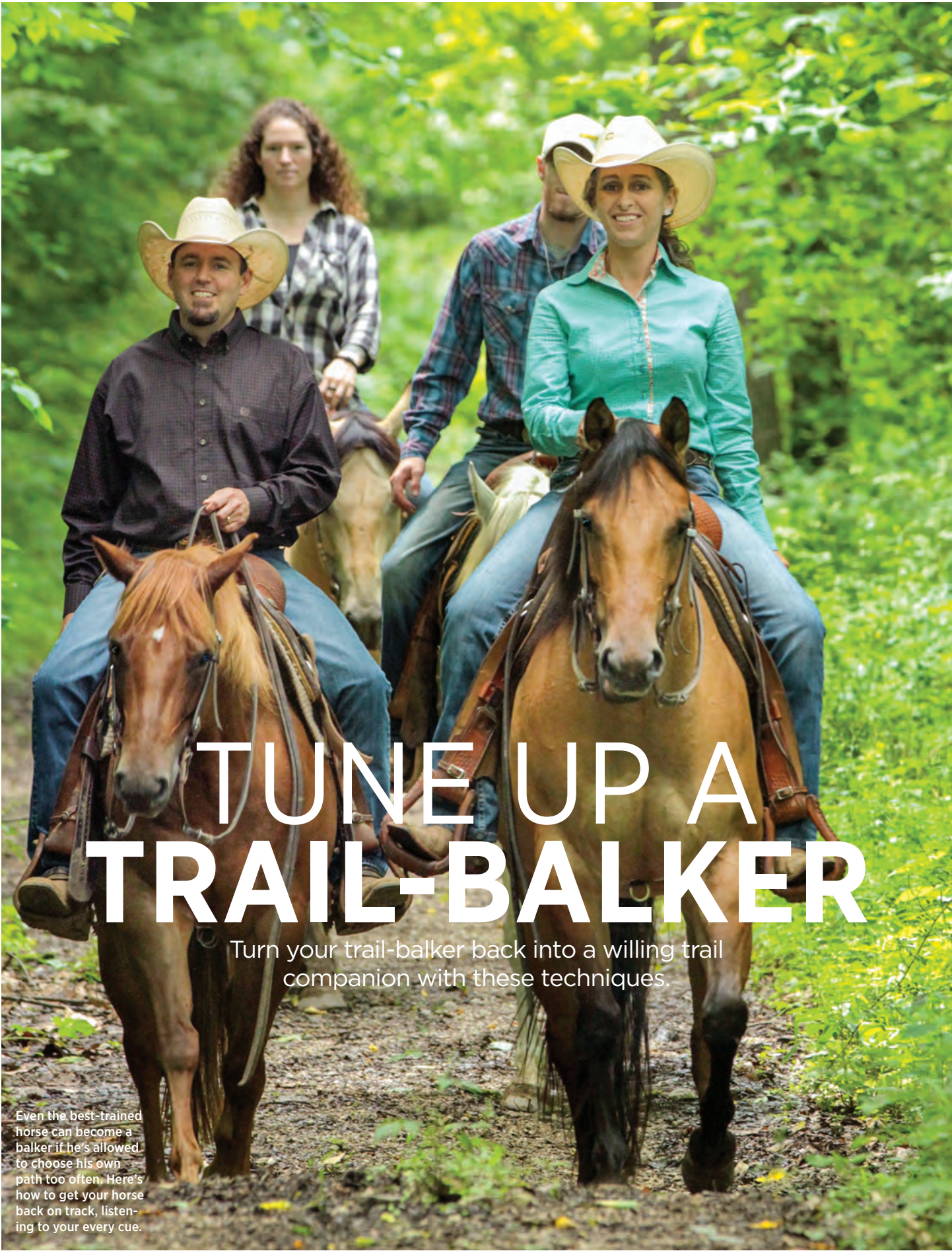
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A group of four people, two men and two women, are riding horses on a dirt trail through a lush green forest. They are all wearing cowboy hats and casual riding attire. The horses are brown and appear to be trail horses. The scene is bright and sunny, with sunlight filtering through the trees.

TUNE UP A TRAIL-BALKER

Turn your trail-balker back into a willing trail companion with these techniques.

Even the best-trained horse can become a balker if he's allowed to choose his own path too often. Here's how to get your horse back on track, listening to your every cue.



If you allow your horse to make his own decisions on the trail without a clear cue from you, you'll create "holes" in his training that can lead to balks, disrupting the ride for everyone in the group.

A wild storm blows in but clears up quickly. You decide to saddle up for a relaxing trail ride with your buddies. You all ride willing, well-trained trail horses. You fall into a lively conversation as you lead your friends down the trail. You hardly notice when your horse decides to walk around a puddle, rather than go through it. The other horses follow suit.

You continue along the trail, still talking with your trail buddies. You approach a small fallen log blown across the trail by the storm. Your horse knows this trail but the fallen log is new to him. You gather the reins and ask him to step across it. Instead, he turns away, tosses his head, and fights your rein pressure. You fight to keep him moving forward, pointed toward the log. Your ride has gone from relaxing to stressful for the whole group. What happened to your usually willing trail partner?

Here, I'll first help you understand how "holes" (such as this seemingly sudden disobedience) can develop in your horse's training. Then I'll explain how to avoid creating these holes by being consistent, being aware, and giving clear cues. Finally, I'll give you an easy shoulder-control exercise to get your horse back on track, listening to your every cue.

Creating 'Holes'

I often hear this complaint: "My once-perfect trail horse was doing great on our weekly rides, but 'suddenly' won't go where I want." The horse's disobedient behavior most likely escalated over time, but was allowed or unnoticed—until the problem grew out of control.

Even the best-trained horse can become "untrained" if he's allowed to choose his own path too often. In the early stages of the problem, you might've pointed your reins to cue your horse to walk straight through a puddle. Instead of taking your cues, he chose to walk around. You thought he made an understandable decision to stay out of the mud, and you didn't correct him. You relinquished your authority, and he claimed a bit of independence. The hole in his training begins with this seemingly benign snag. Over time, he'll gain more and more control.

When your horse no longer thinks he needs to check in with you for direction about where to place his feet, it creates a "hole" in his training. Even if he was once trained to step where directed, you're teaching him that you'll allow him to take charge. Without consistent reinforcement and corrections, he can learn that he doesn't have to respond to your cues.

In fact, your horse will eventually start to resent your cues, which can quickly lead to balking. By *balking*, I mean that he'll turn in the direction *he* wants to go—not necessarily bolting, but making his choice of direction known. He'll toss his head in defiance and turn away, because he doesn't agree with your choice and thinks he should choose the path.

To avoid creating such holes in your horse's training, be aware of your horsemanship, give clear cues, and consis-

tently reinforce every cue you give to him—or give him an explicit cue to let him know that you're giving him permission to use his own judgment.

Be Aware

Trail riding with friends can be distracting. It's easy to relax and talk while on the trail—and allow your horse to follow the path or horse in front of him without offering your input about direction and speed. Riding in a relaxed fashion isn't all bad. But you should stay focused on his training. Be aware of any sign of disobedience when you give him a cue.

Pay attention to how often you give in to your horse's will. Would you allow your child to manipulate you the same way? Imagine telling your child that you won't buy candy as you enter a store, but she puts a chocolate bar in your basket anyway. When you say no, she proceeds to cry and roll on the floor. If you give in, you know you'll teach her she can get her own way any time she throws a fit.

There are times you can treat your child to candy, but you must be careful not to reward unacceptable behavior. The same concept is true for you and your horse. There are times you want him to pick the path, but not after you've given a clear directive.

For instance, if you cue him forward over a log, and it appears he can do so safely, he should move forward willingly. Don't allow him to step to the side or circle back to find a way around. If you do, you're creating a hole in his training that'll get bigger over time.

Give Clear Cues

Training a horse for the trail differs from riding *only* in an arena on good footing. On challenging terrain, you sometimes want your horse to use his own judgment to pick the best path. And on steep, downhill trails, you sometimes need to give him his head for balance and so he can pick his way down the hill on the surest footing. You can and should allow your horse to help choose his footing over loose rocks that will put him at risk for a slip and in other dicey circumstances. He'll appreciate your trust in him to choose the safest way through.

Stay attuned to your trail horse. Keep an eye on his ears and body language, and tune in to his tension level even as you talk to your friends or grab a snack from the

saddlebag. Pay attention if he tenses up or reacts to a trail obstacle with suspicion. He might see or sense a danger you do not, such as a rattlesnake in the rocks or water that's deeper than it appears.

You may *occasionally* allow your horse to choose a different path if you agree that there's a safety concern, but be mindful of how often you allow this to happen. Know that there's still a big difference between purposefully giving your horse permission to choose the path and allowing him to make a move that goes against your request. If there's no safety reason that he should step differently, make sure he follows through with your command.

When you do decide to give your horse permission to use his own judgment, you still need to remain in charge. To make this distinction, develop a clear cue to communicate to him that you're explicitly giving him permission to choose the path. One good cue is to deliberately put your rein hand (or hands) on his neck while giving him his head on a loose rein.

Gain Shoulder Control

When your horse balks at an obstacle, your first reaction might be to steer his head back toward it. But with this move, he still has control. You've turned his head to the left, but he wants to go to the right. He pulls his shoulders to the right and can move to the right—no matter where you point his nose. You continue to pull on the reins and feel as though you're in a tug-of-war.

To get out of the fight and correctly control a balk, you must have control of your horse's entire body. You need to be able to control his forward motion and his shoulders. When he knows that you can control his shoulders—and you remind him of this fact with frequent practice—he'll be less likely to struggle with you and more willing to pay attention to your on-trail cues.

Here, I'll give you a spiral-in, spiral-out exercise to gain shoulder control. You'll develop rein aids that'll help you direct your horse's nose *and* shoulders, so he won't be able to easily balk at a trail obstacle.

You'll first master this exercise in an arena; the controlled environment offers good footing and fewer distractions. Then you'll head out on the trail.

Before you begin: Outfit your horse in his usual trail tack. This exercise works well



TOP: Start riding with two hands as you circle to the left around a cone. Ask your horse to bend his nose in to the left while moving his shoulder out with your right hand. BOTTOM: Note my exaggerated hand positions. My horse's right shoulder and right front leg move to the position my right hand directs.

when riding in a snaffle bit and is possible in a shank (curb) bit if your horse understands leverage cues. Place a cone in the middle of the arena as a visual cue. Lead your horse to the arena, close the gate, mount up, and warm up your horse on the rail.

Step 1. Circle to the left. Ask your horse to walk. Riding with two hands, cue your horse to circle left around the cone. Keep the circle small—about 6 feet from the cone for

an average-size horse. Make sure he can bend consistently without losing forward motion.

Step 2. Spiral in. To ask your horse to walk around the cone, hover your inside (left) hand above your left knee. Your inside rein tells him which direction to bend. When you apply this rein aid alone, he'll spiral in, follow his nose, and move closer to the cone.

Step 3. Coordinate leg and rein. Keep even leg pressure on your horse to encourage constant forward motion; don't apply inside-leg cues to turn his body. Teach him to respond to your rein aids. If you use your inside leg to push out his shoulder instead of drawing it out with the right rein, you'll cue him for a move similar to a sidepass.

Also, if you use your leg, you'll be tempted to use less right rein. A flopping right rein will allow him to move his head, and you won't fix your horse's balk-related head-tossing. Pressure on both reins not only communicates your request for shoulder movement, but also signals for a steady head position.

Step 4. Spiral out. Increase your distance from the cone by moving your horse's shoulder to the right. To move just his shoulder out (instead of just his nose), use your right rein to cue him. Imagine the saddle horn is the center of a clock and your horse's neck crest points toward 12:00. Reach your right hand forward and point it toward 2:00. Look in the direction you want your horse's shoulder to go. That may feel awkward because you're used to looking at his head.

Step 5. Release. When you feel your horse move his shoulder out, lower your right hand slightly, but keep it in position. This gives him a release and lets him know he did the right thing. You'll know he understands the exercise when you pick up your right hand and he doesn't try to move his

head. Instead, he moves his shoulder willingly and independently.

Step 6. Repeat. Circle your horse to the left until he bends well and moves his shoulder on command.

Step 7. Circle to the right. Walk or trot a few laps around the arena, then repeat this circling exercise to the right.

Step 8. Practice. Practice this exercise for a few minutes each time you ride until you feel that your horse fully understands your cues.

Hit the Trail

Now you have the control needed to master almost any trail situation. When you apply your shoulder-control exercise, your horse will know how to respond. If your horse willingly goes where you ask on your home trails, you can trust that he'll step over challenging obstacles on unknown trails. But don't wait for the unexpected! Practice your ability to cue your horse on every ride, over any obstacle *before* he balks. Let others in your riding group know your training plan. After some arena guidance, suggest that they participate, too.

Find open, grassy areas or wide areas of level trail to work your horse. Circle him and remind him of his shoulder movements. Ask him to cross logs, go around trees, and walk through mud puddles using your shoulder-control skills to guide him. Walk to the left of a rock when your riding buddies walk to the right.

There are hundreds of chances to choose a more challenging path. Look for opportunities to improve your communication, and make sure your horse is tuning in to your cues.

With consistent repetition, you'll remind your horse that you have control of almost any situation. When you're proactive, you'll prevent an on-trail fight and avoid adding any holes to his training. ★



TOP: Hit the trail. On every ride, ask your horse to cross logs, go around trees, and walk through mud puddles using your shoulder-control skills to guide him. MIDDLE: This horse is bending willingly to his left while responding to the right-rein cue, which helps him move his shoulder out. BOTTOM: This horse is relaxing into the rein pressure as he moves his nose and shoulder, as requested.



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RIDING THE OREGON COAST

This summer, hitch up your trailer, load up your horse, and drive down Highway 101 along the Oregon coast for spectacular beach riding.

Do you dream of riding your horse along the ocean beach with waves thundering, hooves flying, and a sinking sun casting a jeweled net of color? Hitch up your trailer, and head to the Oregon coast. Here you'll find six excellent horse camps, with beach trails, headlands, and nearby hills. (If you'd rather leave your horse at home, you can go with an outfitter.)

An added treat to your Oregon adventure is driving down U.S. Highway 101 as you make your way down the coast from camp to camp. Known as "the road through paradise," this 364-mile journey winds through one of America's great wonderlands: pristine beaches; rugged headlands; wind-sculpted coastlines; historic lighthouses; quaint, wind-battered coastal towns—and the largest expanse of coastal sand dunes in North America.

Up north, on the Columbia River, Highway 101 passes through Astoria, the oldest town this side of the Rocky Mountains; about mid-state, near Florence, don't miss the Sea Lion Caves, one of the world's great sea grottos.

We recently took this spectacular trip down the Oregon coast with our new equine trail partners. Charlene's horse, Jake, is a 5-year-old, double-registered Tennessee Walking Horse/Spotted Saddle Horse. Kent's 9-year-old mount, Cody, is registered with the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors Association, the Spotted Saddle Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, and the National Spotted Saddle Horse Association.

NEHALEM BAY HORSE CAMP

Nehalem Bay State Park ([\[parks.org\]\(http://parks.org\)\), located between Cannon Beach and Tillamook, offers the only horse camp on the north Oregon coast. The park is situated at the beginning of a 4-mile sand spit between Nehalem Bay and the Pacific Ocean.](http://oregonstate</p>
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Nehalem Bay Horse Camp has 17 sites; each one has a two-horse corral. Amenities include drinking water, picnic tables, fire rings, and toilets. From here you can ride on the wide sandy beach, which runs 4 miles from the town of Nehalem to the North Jetty south of camp. Access this beach by taking the trail next to Site 15.

You can also ride on the Spit Trail; to reach it, take the trail next to Site 12. This 2-mile trail follows the peninsula between Nehalem and the ocean on a mostly straight dirt road edged with Scotch broom and wind-stunted shore pines.



LEFT: From Wild Mare Horse Camp you can ride directly out to the beach on Wild Mare Trail. MIDDLE: Trail sign at Wild Mare Horse Camp. RIGHT: Kent and Charlene Krone enjoy a campfire at Bullards Beach State Park. BOTTOM: Highway 101 on the Oregon Coast is known as "the road through paradise." It runs through 364 miles of wind-sculpted coastlines, crashing waves, historic lighthouses, and quaint seaside towns.



The Sea Lion Caves on the Oregon Coast are some of the world's largest sea caves.

BAKER BEACH HORSE CAMP

Head south on Highway 101, and you'll come to Baker Beach Horse Camp (fs.usda.gov/siuslaw), located in Siuslaw National Forest near Florence. From here, you can ride on stretches of the beach that extend more than three miles. The campground is open year-round; note that western snowy plover restrictions are in place from March 15 to September 15. This state- and federally threatened bird nests along Oregon's shores. You can also ride on the Baker Beach dunes trail, which offers incredible views of the largest coastal dune system in North America.

HORSE CREEK CAMPGROUND

Baker Beach Horse Camp is the only coastal camp without corrals. If you don't want to highline your horses and prefer corrals, take the Herman Cape Road east off Highway 101 and drive 5 miles to Horse Creek Campground (fs.usda.gov/siuslaw), located on the slopes of Cape Mountain.

It's a little challenging to get to Horse Creek Campground with your loaded rig; the first 3 miles of Herman Cape Road are steep. At one point, we had to pull over and wait for our truck's transmission fluid to cool down before continuing on.

Once you reach Horse Creek Campground, you'll find a delightful place to spend a few days. The trees here are stately and beautiful. There are 11 campsites, each with two to four corrals. Bring your own horse water. Water is supposed to be in a trough located one-third-mile down a trail, but it was empty when we were there.

The highlight of this camp is a 50-mile network of trails around Cape Mountain. The trails follow side hills, ridges, and steep mountain slopes. You can easily create your own loops since trail junctions are clearly signed. From the top of Cape Mountain, there's a magnificent view of the sapphire-blue ocean with white frothy waves pounding the beach. On the way back, we experienced unwelcome excite-

ment in the form of ground bees resulting in a fast ride back!

WILD MARE HORSE CAMP

Continuing south, be sure to stop at Wild Mare Horse Camp (fs.usda.gov/siuslaw). Wild Mare is part of the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, known for its wind-sculpted sand dunes towering up to 500 feet above sea level. This region is in the southern tip of Siuslaw National Forest, hugging the Pacific Ocean.

The lovely campground—set among shore pine, alders, Douglas fir, and huckleberry—is named after a wild horse that lived here from 1957 to 1984. There are 12 campsites; each has corrals for two to four horses.

The main access to the dunes and beach is the Wild Mare Trail, which leaves camp from Site #7. You'll find miles of trails to explore. You can ride north on the beach 15 miles one way to the mouth of the Umpqua River or 7 miles south to Coos Bay. The dunes north of camp are designated as an

ATV play area, so plan on riding in this area during the week when there's less recreational traffic.

BULLARD'S BEACH STATE PARK

Our next stop was at Bullard's Beach State Park (oregonstateparks.org) near Bandon. The campground is pleasantly situated among shore pines, which offer protection against the blustery ocean breezes. There are eight sites; each site has two to four corrals. During our stay the park was installing a high center pole in the corral area. Now, when it rains, you can stretch a tarp over the pole to cover the entire set of corrals at your campsite.

There are three signed trails leaving the camp. The center trail is the direct trail to the beach, about a half-mile away. The Cut Creek Trail leads from the north end of camp; the trail to the lighthouse leaves from the south end. The Cut Creek Trail is a good first choice for breaking horses into ocean riding. There are a variety of sandy trails looping through dunes covered in varied vegetation, from dune grasses to shore pines. Horses can hear and smell the ocean on the left, but can't see it. After this

exposure, you can ride over to the ocean and along the beach.

The ride to the lighthouse is only two miles, but this trail is also a good place to introduce your horse to the ocean. After leaving camp, ride on the east side of the road. Here horses can hear and smell the ocean but can't see it. From the lighthouse, you may return following the beach and make a loop. Be sure to stop at the lighthouse, which was built in 1896. Volunteer staffers will give you an informative, enjoyable tour.

CAPE BLANCO STATE PARK

Our last stop on the southern Oregon Coast was Cape Blanco State Park (oregonstateparks.org). This campground rings a circular meadow set among trees; each site has one or two corrals. For an interesting side trip, take a short drive to the Cape Blanco Lighthouse and the historic Hughes House. The tours offer interesting glimpses into bygone days and what life was like for a lighthouse keeper in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

For two rides from camp, take the trail across from Site 7. Ride to the gravel road, turn right, and follow the horse-trail signs.

Eventually you'll come to a locked gate. Ride around the gate, and you'll come to a trail junction. Turn left to reach the Forest Loop Trail; turn right to ride to the beach. You can enjoy both trails in one ride; the loop trail isn't long. The loop trail goes up and down small ridges and is mostly sheltered from wind.

A favorite ride we had in this area was to Blacklock Point and Flora Lake. We trail-ered north on Highway 101 about 3 miles to Airport Road and turned left. We followed this road about 2.7 miles to the trailhead, which is next to an airport hangar. The trailhead is gated with a potentially unsafe, narrow way around. However, we discovered that if you go a short distance to the left, you'll find a narrow trail through dense brush leading back to the main trail.

Ride to a junction for Blacklock Point to the left and Floras Lake to the right. Blacklock Point provides a fantastic view of cliffs and the ocean. When riding to Floras Lake, avoid the hikers-only Coastal Trail; stay on the Floras Lake Trail. It's a total of 9.5 miles to get to both locations and back to the trailhead, providing an invigorating day of coastal riding. ★

Jake and Cody enjoying the corrals at Bullard's Beach State Park. Each of the eight sites has two to four corrals. Shore pines protect the sites from blustery ocean breezes.





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A full-page photograph of a person riding a dark horse along a sandy beach at sunset. The rider is wearing a red shirt and a helmet, and is seen from behind. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The beach is wide and sandy, with some driftwood in the foreground. The ocean is visible to the right, and distant hills are on the left.

CANTER THE CALIFORNIA COAST

We take you to Ricochet Ridge Ranch on Mendocino, California's magnificent coast, where distance rider Lari Shea offers rides through redwood forests and on the beach.

Ricochet Ridge Ranch owner Lari Shea goes on a late-afternoon ride along the beach. She offers guests a choice of well-trained horses to ride. Or, you can bring your own horse, camp nearby, and join guided rides.

The sound of the waves crashing against the rocks competed with the pounding of our horses' hooves on the wet sand as Ricochet

Ridge Ranch owner Lari Shea cantered along beside me on her Arabian Horse gelding, Rascal.

The golden sunset lit the ocean aglow, while the full moon rose above the bluffs.

Valley. Enormous redwood trees appeared to be growing out of the sides of the road.

Less than an hour later, a clearing offered a vista of the quiet Pacific Ocean. A young buck, silhouetted by the near-full moon, glanced my way as though in welcome.

Rolling down the window to take in the view, the brisk salty air brought me momentarily back to my eastern Canadian roots.

ical shape. Her smile lit up the room, and her vibrant energy radiated around her.

After breakfast, I followed Lari on the 10-mile drive to the ranch through the quaint town of Fort Bragg, bursting with art galleries and gift shops.

We arrived at the ranch, strategically situated next to the main road and just across the street from the coastal park. There, I met fellow riders Fernando and his wife, Susan, returning guests from Miami.

Joining us would be Stephanie, a ranch guide, for her last ride before heading back to her hometown of Bottrop, Germany.

An orientation held in the 24-stall barn's arena was followed by a video focusing not only on riding safety, but also on the health and well-being of the horse.

Due to a last-minute decision to come to Ricochet Ridge, I'd missed the first day's warm-up ride on the beach; I'd be joining Fernando and Susan on their last two days of a four-day ride.

First, we'd ride on Lari's other property, Simcha, which means "a joyous or blessed occasion" in Hebrew. Simcha's 315 acres, combined with the surrounding private property, make up more than 25,000 acres of trails.

As we hauled the horses up to Simcha, Lari recollected the story of how she and her husband, Harvey, whom she met on a ride in Nairobi, had their first date here, a ride to the crest of the hill.

A Special Spot

We mounted up and started our ascent. The trail was a little slippery from the previous day's rain, but my horse, Rioja, a 10-year-old Arabian Horse gelding, felt pretty sure on his feet.

Arabians and other endurance-savvy breeds such as Russian Orlov and Akhal-Teke crosses make up about half of the Ricochet Ridge Ranch herd, as endurance riding is Lari's favorite pastime.

Winner of the Tevis Cup in 1989, Lari is not only a successful endurance competitor, but also a wealth of information on keeping horses fit and healthy. The other half is everything from Quarter Horses to Clydesdales to accommodate a gamut of clients, who also have their choice of tack.

A little canter to get to the top of the hill rewarded us with a spectacular view of the beach below, followed by a descent into the



Lari Shea went from a struggling single mom to a successful business owner doing what she loves.

My Tennessee Walking Horse cross, Poncho, stretched his long legs and floated me along the retreating tide of Ten Mile Beach in Mendocino County's MacKerricher State Park.

It was the end of a full-day ride at Ricochet Ridge Ranch, in Fort Bragg, California, and what a perfect one it was.

Midnight Arrival

Only two days before, I'd driven from the Oakland airport on the dark, twisted Highway 128 through the vineyards of Anderson

I meandered through the historical town of Mendocino in search of the Hill House Inn, where I'd be staying. What a joy to find a lit fire place and an enormous bed awaiting me.

It was just after midnight.

Ranch Welcome

The next morning, over breakfast in the hotel restaurant, Lari explained the itinerary for the next two days. The gray-haired 66-year-old sporting red cowboy boots and black jodhpurs appeared to be in great phys-

cool, musty forest valley.

Enormous redwood trees, some more than 1,500 years old, towered above us, shadowing the midday sun. Rioja leapt over a creek, thrusting me out of the saddle. We cantered our way back up the steep ridge. The fit horses were unaffected by the climb.

After winding along the trail, we came to Lari and Harvey's new house perched on the top of the ridge.

"This was our picnic spot that day of our first date," Lari exclaimed. "And where we fell in love. Years later, we watched the sunset from this very spot and decided to build our dream home here."

We lunched on the picnic table that now sits on the spot, sharing a bottle of wine and taking in the vista. Lari showed me the beach where we would ride that afternoon.

A Beach Gallop

We trailered back to the ranch, but were soon back in the saddle, riding through a small wooded area that headed to the beach trail.

A deer crossed our path. The vibrant colors of the ice plant came into view and I could hear the ocean. A few seals slithered off the rocks and dipped into the water. A heron flew past us and landed just a few yards away.

With not a person in sight we had the entire beach to ourselves. Rioja's quickening pace told me that we were in for a gallop down the beach shortly.

"Is everyone ready?" shouted Lari.

The next thing I knew, Rioja, ears forward, was galloping along the sand. The salty air touched my tongue and I could see the huge smiles on Fernando and Susan's faces as our mounts carried us through the waves.

Wow, I thought. This is fun!

It had been years since I'd felt the exuberance of riding on the beach. There's just something magical about being on a horse cantering along the sand, as the waves roll in at their feet.



Ricochet Ridge Ranch offers access to more than 25,000 acres of trails.

The trail back to the ranch passed a few park campgrounds. I asked Lari if they allow horses in the campsites. "No," she replied.

"But some of my clients camp here and keep their horses at Ricochet Ridge Ranch. Then they join our guided rides throughout the week."

"If I ever get my dream to throw my horse on the trailer and venture across North America, this will indeed be one of my top destinations," I told her.

Her Path to Here

Over a bottle of wine during a nice dinner at the Cliff House Restaurant in Fort Bragg, I learned of Lari's interesting path to the successful businesswoman she is now.

In 1979, after a divorce leaving her a single mom with two young kids, Lari was living on her land in Mendocino while teaching Horsemastership at the College of the Redwoods in Fort Bragg.

Using her savings, Lari purchased a dressage/endurance prospect, a 2-year-old Russian Orlov/Arabian cross named Tzar, and started her journey. Lari purchased Tzar from Kerry Ridgway, a world-renowned endurance-riding veterinarian.

Three years later, when Tzar was 5 years old and winning first-level dressage competitions, Dr. Ridgway helped Lari acquire Tzar's sire, Natures Ballet.

It was financially impossible for Lari to acquire the Russian Orlov stallion, priced at \$70,000. So Lari decided she'd ask the owner, Sonny Ferriss, if she could train and compete with the stallion, who'd proven his endurance potential in a few races.

Lari valued her time at \$1,000 dollars

per month. She figured that after three years, she'd have \$36,000 or 51 percent interest in the horse.

With Tzar's success in competition as a résumé, Dr. Ridgway hand-delivered Lari's offer, accompanied by photos of Tzar sporting

saddlebags loaded with a chainsaw and diapers, with

both of her children on his back.

Sonny wanted what was best for the horse, and, with some of Natures Ballet offspring already on the ground, he agreed to the offer to promote the bloodline.

Nine months later, Sonny showed up at Lari's farm with five of Natures Ballet's offspring, ranging from 6 months to 5 years old. It was a dream-come-true for Lari. But this was just the beginning.

Six months later, busy training horses and continuing her teaching, Lari was approached by neighbors down the road requesting to go on a trail ride with their friends.

With six riders total, Lari managed to put one rider on Natures Ballet, one on Tzar, and the other four on the greenbroke horses. She rode her daughter's Welsh pony.

After a lovely hour's ride, the pleased guests asked Lari how much they owed her.

Figuring she made \$10 an hour teaching, that's what she asked for. To her surprise, they gave her \$10 each! Lari instantly recognized the possibility of a viable business doing what she loved, and Ricochet Ridge Ranch was born.

Now, 30 years later, the successful business holds as many as 60 short rides per day and at least six week-long riding vacations per year.

Lari no longer teaches in the classroom, but she still shares her knowledge and wisdom about all things horse from the saddle.

Into the Forest

The next morning, we started at 10 a.m.—so civilized compared to my usual up-with-the-sun ventures when moving camp each day. →



We were trailering to one of the private properties Lari has permission to ride on—a beautiful 3,000 acres with the Ten Mile River and Seaside Creek meandering through it.

Another trailer pulled up. It was Lari's friend, Beanie, joining us today on her stunning palomino Quarter Horse, Fancy.

Lari's husband, Harvey, would join us on Poncho, a 17-hand Tennessee Walking Horse cross. Lari mounted up on her Arabian gelding, Rascal, with no bridle, just a neck loop.

After a short jaunt through the lush green valley, we headed into the forest and began our uphill canter. It was the longest uphill canter I'd ever done, but Rioja was unaffected.

The wide, twisted trail, carpeted with rust-colored redwood needles, was bordered by Douglas firs, redwoods, and huge clumps of swaying pampas grass backlit by the morning light.

The sun's light found small cracks between the trees, illuminating the green moss hanging from them.

At the top, the horses drank from a small puddle, while we gazed at the ocean far below through a small opening in the trees.

I could see why Lari calls this the Spectacular Trail. We got off the horses to stretch our legs, and Harvey pointed out mountain lion tracks.

Fancy had been fed a few carrots before our ride and was coughing a little on the canter up. Lari got out her stethoscope and listened to Fancy's heart rate. The mare seemed fine.

On the ride down, Lari got off her horse to walk. I joined her to stretch my legs. As we hiked down the path, she related some of her endurance-competition experiences. We finished the ride back to the trailers through an old orchard, where we let the horses graze.

Back to the Beach

Lari had errands to run, so I joined another ranch guide, James, and a Canadian couple on a short ride on the beach. I chose to ride Poncho, the gentle giant Harvey had ridden that morning.

Off we went! The waves, twice the size than they'd been the previous day, rolled in strong. Poncho, keen to get his legs wet,

walked right in up to his hocks. The waves' retreat made me feel as though I was in motion when, in fact, I was stationary.

We then headed to the packed sand and asked our horses to canter. Poncho was amazing; his huge stride just floated me along the wet sand. The Canadian couple grinned like kids.

After a late lunch, I met Lari for a sunset ride, where she hoped we could see our full mirror image in the wet sand during low tide. Once again, I chose Poncho. She was aboard Rascal.

The sun had already started its descent when the beach came into view. We trotted to the packed wet sand, then allowed the horses to stretch out, cantering in unison side by side.

The sun turned the sky golden, and a full moon rose above the bluffs—a spectacular moment in time, enjoying a ride in all of nature's glory. I couldn't think of a better way to end my adventure.

As Lari often says, "What unites us all is a love of the out-of-doors, a spirit of adventure, and a passion for horses!" ★