

JULY 2022

Horse & Rider's

TRAIL RIDING

MONTHLY

In this issue...

**RUGGED TRAILS
AND BREATHTAKING
SCENERY**

ON THE OPEN TRAIL

**GUIDE TO GUEST
RANCHES**

PHOTO BY KENT AND CHARLENE KRONE

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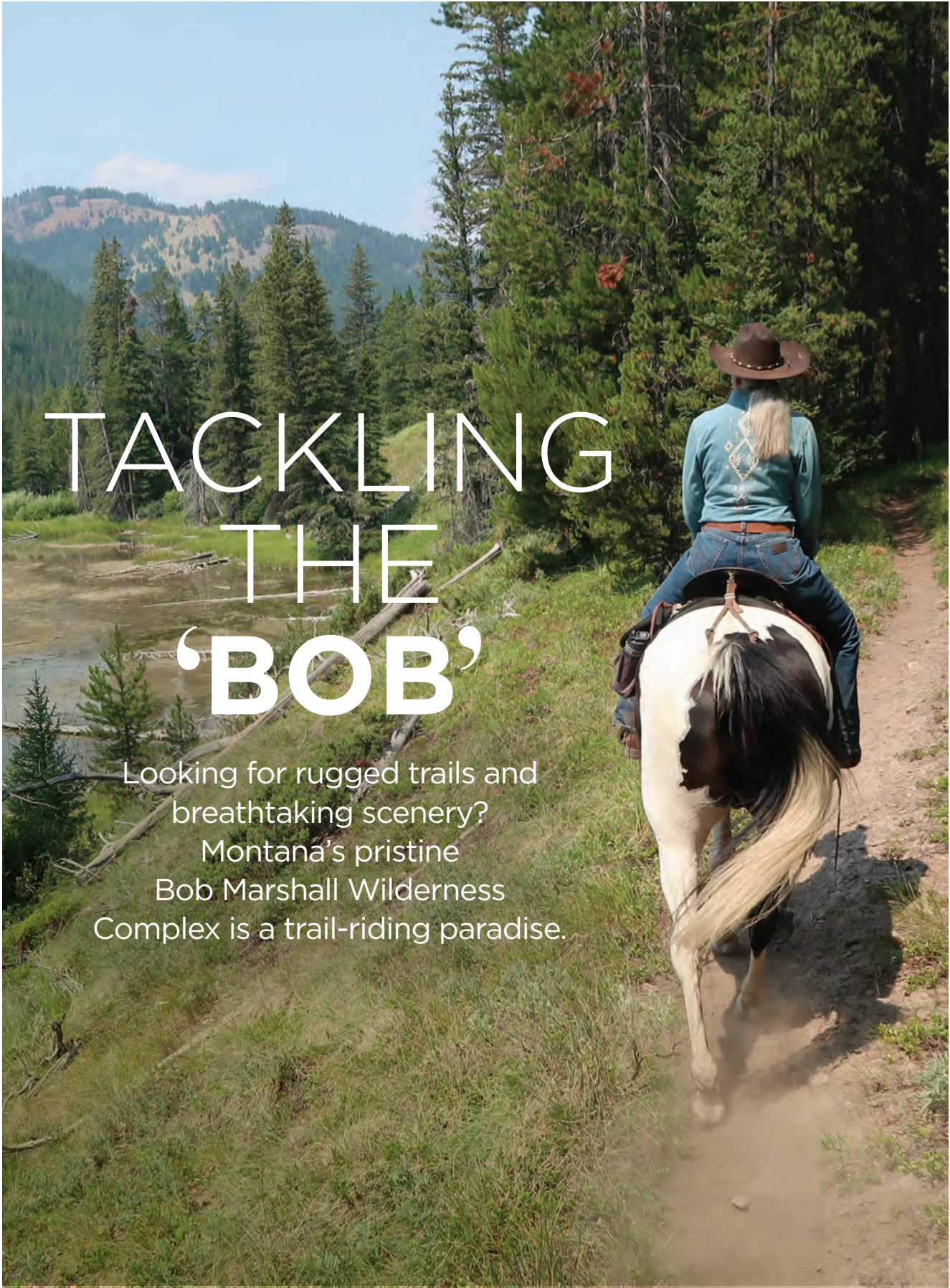
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A person wearing a cowboy hat and a blue shirt with a diamond pattern on the back is riding a white horse with a black mane and tail on a dirt trail. The trail is surrounded by tall evergreen trees and a river is visible in the background. The text 'TACKLING THE 'BOB'' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

TACKLING THE 'BOB'

Looking for rugged trails and
breathtaking scenery?
Montana's pristine
Bob Marshall Wilderness
Complex is a trail-riding paradise.

Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, known as the "crown jewel" of American wilderness, is a trail-riding paradise. This wilderness area—which ranges in elevation between 4,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level—is interwoven with tumbling waterfalls, rushing rivers, and clear, frigid lakes. Mountain peaks pierce the sky, and lush meadows blanket open areas, while thick patches of old-growth forest provide shelter for wolves, grizzly bears, black bears, cougars, lynx, moose, elk, and deer. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep can often be seen near mountain trails.

Affectionately called the "Bob," this vast wilderness area runs along both sides of the Continental Divide approximately 60 miles west of Great Falls.

The 1.5-million-acre complex is actually made up of the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, Great Bear wildernesses. Four hundred miles of road circumvent the wilderness. Only trail riders, hikers, and animals can travel within this land where silence may be broken only by bird calls, howling wolves, and your horse's footfalls.

Bob Marshall, the man whose legacy was the preservation of this grand wilderness, was born in New York City in 1901. A scientist with a PhD degree in plant physiology, he was forester, writer, and wilderness activist. He was a principal founder of the Wilderness Society, formed in 1935 to protect large tracts of wilderness from road development and exploitation. He died when he was just 38 years old.

Marshall felt passionately that experiencing wilderness was important for all of us. As he once wrote, "In a civilization which requires most lives to be passed amid inordinate dissonance, pressure, and intrusion, the chance of retiring now and then to the quietude and privacy of sylvan haunts becomes for some people a psychic necessity."

A Taste of the Bob

For a taste of the Bob, an excellent choice is Benchmark, which is situated on the eastern side of the wilderness complex. Here, you'll camp and ride in a wilderness setting adjacent to the Bob Marshall Wilderness boundary.

To reach this camping area and trailhead, you must travel 32 miles of dirt road from Augusta, Montana. A major



1. Cody and Jake, Kent and Charlene's equine partners, are ready to go on another adventure.
2. "The South Fork Sun River Campground [at Benchmark] in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex offers feed bunks with hitching rails, but no corrals," note the Krones. "We brought a portable corral so the horses could move around and rest after a ride."
3. The Krones' collapsible fence and 65-gallon water tank for horses fit between the cab of their pickup and their living-quarters trailer.
4. Cody enters the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex trails.



The bridge over the South Fork of the Sun River. After crossing the bridge, the trail divides into the Continental Divide Trail South #202 and North #202.

wilderness access, this road is usually in good condition. It took us about an hour and a half to pull our living-quarters trailer down the road to Benchmark.

Shortly after Benchmark Wilderness Ranch, you'll see the road to Benchmark Campground and Straight Creek Trail on the left. This is the most spacious campground; however, to water your horse, you'll need to pump water by hand, and the two pumps are located some distance from the feed bunks. Also, they're not threaded, so you can't connect a hose and turn on the water. You must pump the water out.

Continue on the main road and you'll see an overflow camp on the right. Next to it is an outfitter's corral and a stream. This is the trailhead for Trail #256. A little farther down is the South Fork Sun River Campground and the end of the road. We camped here and had close access to several trails.

This camp offers feed bunks with hitching rails, but no corrals. We brought a portable corral so the horses could move around and rest after a ride. The camp also has one unthreaded hand pump for water. To save work and time, plan on bringing all the horse water you can. We had a 65-gallon tank

in the back of the truck and a 25-gallon tank in the trailer.

Wilderness Rides

There were five rides in the vicinity of our camp. For our first ride, we chose Fairview Creek Trail #204, which was farthest from camp. One can ride on a connecting trail that follows the road to the trailhead. We elected to trailer our horses down and park across from the Benchmark Wilderness Ranch. The trailhead is just north of the ranch.

The beginning of the ride follows a good trail for about 4 miles through a forested valley with an 800-foot elevation gain to a junction. We rode through forests of lodgepole pine, fir, and spruce. One may continue left at the junction and ride about 2½ miles to the small Renshaw Lake. We chose to turn right and rode onto Fairview Plateau with rippling meadows and towering mountains rising more than 8,000 feet in elevation. This was a good trail, but the farther we rode, the more brushed-in it became. Finally, we decided to call it quits and turned around.

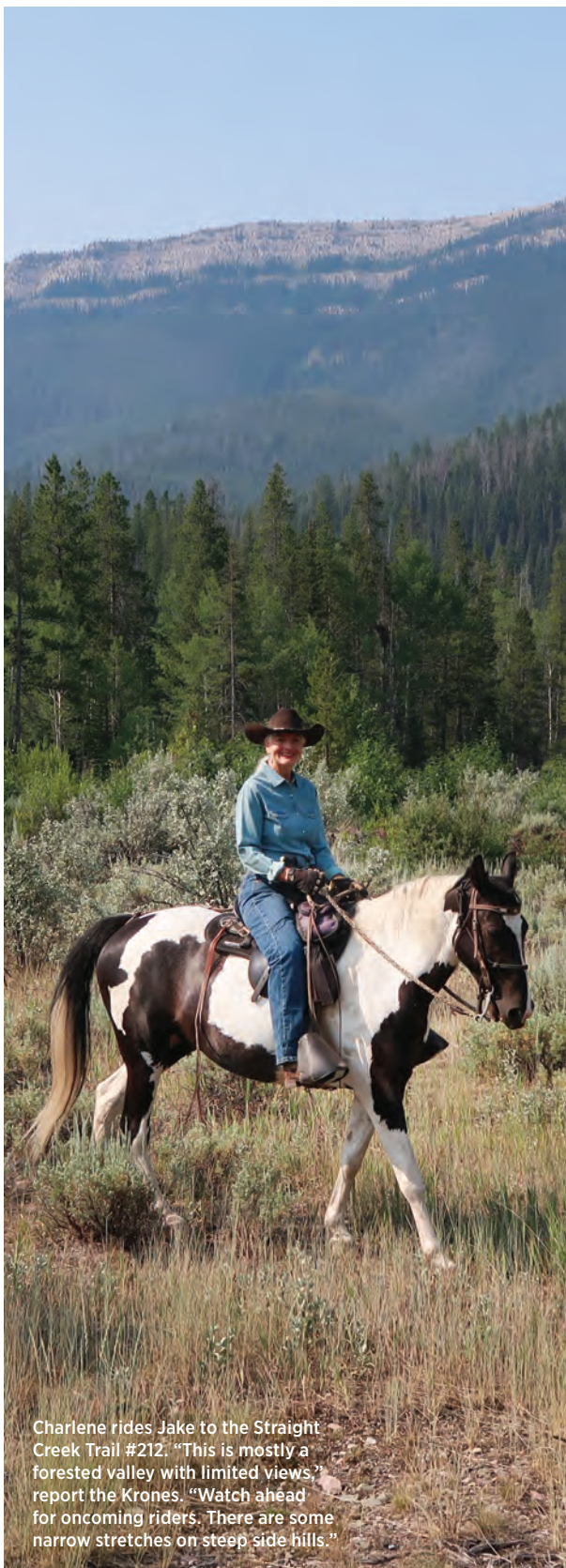
Our remaining rides were all from camp. Next, we rode the Straight Creek Trail #212. To access this trailhead, we

rode on the Administration Trail out of the southeast portion of camp, across the road, past the outfitter corrals. We followed the road about a quarter of a mile to the turnoff for Benchmark Campground and Straight Creek Trailhead. The campground is to the left; continue straight to the trailhead.

Straight Creek lives up to its name following the valley southeast in a fairly straight fashion. This is mostly a forested valley with limited views. Watch ahead for oncoming riders. There are some narrow stretches on steep side hills. As luck would have it, we met outfitters riding in as we were riding out. The first group of riders were the outfitters and their guests. They told us the pack string was coming behind them. There wasn't room to pass other horses on the steep side hill, so we waited 30 minutes for the pack string to come along. After they passed, we hurriedly crossed that skinny portion of trail.

Our third ride was on the famed Continental Divide Trail South #202 along the South Fork of the Sun River.

The trailhead is at the north end of the South Fork of Sun River Campground at the end of the road. After a half mile, a wooden bridge crosses the



Charlene rides Jake to the Straight Creek Trail #212. "This is mostly a forested valley with limited views," report the Krones. "Watch ahead for oncoming riders. There are some narrow stretches on steep side hills."

frothy, swirling South Fork of Sun River that runs in a canyon far below. This makes for an exciting entrance into the wilderness. After crossing the bridge, turn left on the Continental Divide Trail South.

Before crossing the river, one point of interest is a short side trail to the right going to Dr. Kenck's Cabin. This is worth a short visit. The cabin was built in 1924 on a bank overlooking the valley. You can rent this cabin overnight. However, there's no electricity, and you can't keep horses here.

After turning left and following the Continental Divide Trail South, we found it was much like the Straight Creek Trail; that is, mostly forested with limited views. This would be a cool trail on a hot summer day.

On this ride, we met an outfitter with a string of horses and riders from the Benchmark Wilderness Ranch. They were traveling 20 miles to Big Prairie.

We met some interesting folks doing their own pack trips into the Bob. We met a father-daughter team where the dad was passing on his love and knowledge of horse packing to an enthusiastic teenage daughter. Then there were the Baby Boomer gals! One of these women was in her 60s; the other two were in their mid-70s. They were long time packers, and unwilling to let age and aches keep them from doing what they love.

Whether they were seasoned veteran packers or newbies, they all had one thing in common: an aura of happy expectation and excitement.

We didn't do the fourth ride, but it merits mentioning because our friends tell us it's quite pretty. That is Trail #256 located behind the overflow area. Be aware that in the first 4 or 5 miles of this ride, the trail gains 2,100 feet.

For us, the premier ride was to Pretty Prairie Ranger Station, a 13.2-mile round trip from the South Fork Sun River Campground. You ride the same trail as before, going north from camp and across the bridge over the river. However, once across, turn right instead of left for Continental Divide Trail North #202.

If you only have time for one ride, this is it. Below 9,000-foot mountain peaks supporting a cobalt-blue sky, you'll wend through cool forests, with only the sound of crystal streams and bird calls breaking the silence.

About 4 miles in, you'll come to a "low-water route" junction to Pretty Prairie Ranger Station. We took this route because we knew the water was low. But be careful. High-water crossings can be dangerous. A friend crossed this same area earlier in the season, and his mule was swept sideways into the river. Our friend broke a leg and had to be airlifted out. If there's any concern, you may turn left for a longer route that has a bridge crossing over the West Fork. After the bridge crossing, turn right.

We encountered three water crossings after which we came into the western end of the extensive grass-and-flower-filled Pretty Prairie. There's no marked trail to the ranger station. Shortly after entering the prairie, look to the southwest corner of the prairie. Work your way in that direction, and you should find it.

The historic ranger station is snuggled in a picturesque setting

and even has a hitching rail. You can't camp here, but what a great place for lunch with a view! You can camp anywhere else in the valley.

Packing In

If you're an intrepid trail rider looking for adventure, then taking a pack trip into the Bob Marshall wilderness may be your dream come true. You can use a reputable outfitter, or you can do it yourself.

We've gone on several pack trips here. Our favorite one was from the Benchmark Trailhead around the famed China Wall, a distinctive 22-mile-long escarpment that rises 1,000 feet and can be seen for miles.

We each had our saddle horse and one pack horse. Our trip was 11 days in the wilderness, so we packed light. We left the Benchmark Trailhead and headed up the West Fork of the Sun River, then north along the China Wall to Larch Hill Pass. The view of the wall takes your breath away!

From Larch Hill Pass, we rode down the White River to the South Fork of the Flathead River to White River Park. Here was a stately grove of more than 100-year-old white pine trees surrounded by deep, green grass. Next, we went over White River Pass and back to our starting point.

Before you tackle the Bob on your own, consider getting to know the area with an experienced outfitter. Here are two we recommend.

The Benchmark Wilderness Ranch (benchmarkwildernessranch.com), located at the start of the Benchmark camping area, is surrounded by the majesty of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Situated at 5,300-foot elevation, the ranch can accommodate 35 guests. It's open from June to November with a two-night minimum stay.

Their business is helping people to enjoy the Bob; they have this down to a fine art. The ranch's pack trips are typically five to seven days long and explore different areas of the Bob, depending on the guests' interests. A guide, camp

cook, and a couple of horse wranglers accompany the guests. They do all the work so guests can have a memorable time riding the Bob.

Cheff Legacy Outfitters (chefflegacyoutfittersmt.com) will take you on a pack trip on the western side of the Bob. Like the Benchmark Wilderness Ranch, this is a multigenerational, family-run outfit. They know what they're doing. You'll need only a sleeping bag, your personal items, and seven days. Pack

trips take groups of five to seven riders and are a week long.

We asked Ashtin Courville with Legacy Outfitters to share his thoughts on what it was like going into the wilderness. "Life is a lot more simple 30 miles back in the wilderness," he answered with a smile. "To me, packing and guiding has been the best thing I've ever had the opportunity of doing. I encourage everyone to experience the Bob Marshall at least once in their lifetime." ★



TOP: "For us, the premier ride was to Pretty Prairie Ranger Station, a 13.2-mile round trip from the South Fork Sun River Campground," enthuse the Krones. "If you only have time for one ride, this is it." BOTTOM: Kent Krone catching cutthroat trout in the South Fork of the Sun River.

It's not easy being a
COW *girl*
But a little
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Helps



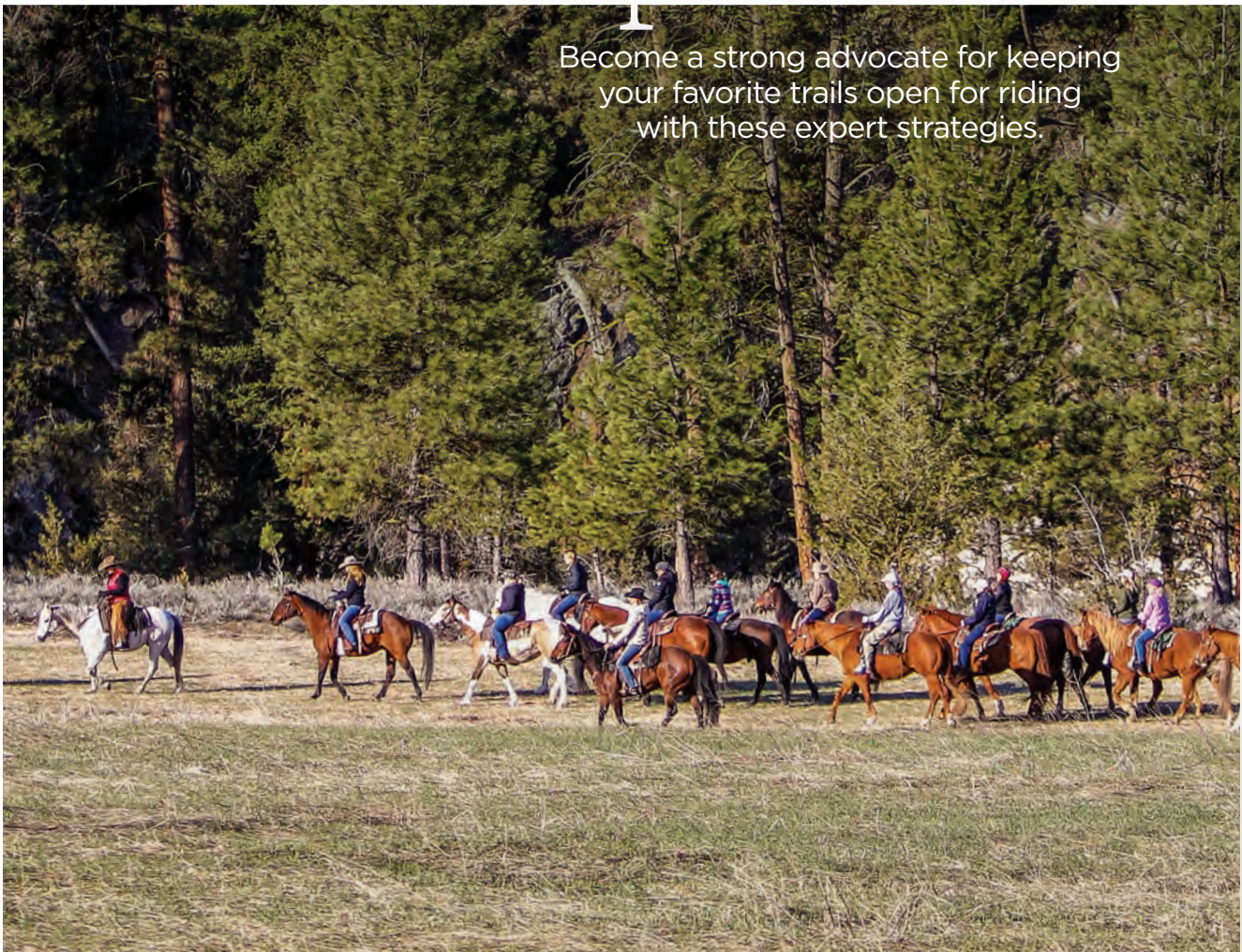
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**For hands,
neck & face**

On the Open Trail

Become a strong advocate for keeping your favorite trails open for riding with these expert strategies.



You've watched open fields become busy suburban neighborhoods. Constant growth can limit outdoor-recreation space for all activities and potentially close access to horses on desirable trails. You've heard that federal budget cuts are impacting land- and wildlife-management programs, and you wonder whether your favorite trails will stay open to equestrians. Your local trails are further limited by large tracts of private property with "No Trespassing" signs.

Don't fret—take action! As an active trail rider, you're perfectly positioned to be a strong advocate for keeping your favorite trails open, whether you ride in a city, in the suburbs, or in the backcountry.

Here we'll give you three scenarios, each describing a different type of trail at risk. For each one, we'll explain the related pressing issue and how you can push back. We'll also give you tips on how you can be a considerate trail user.

Sharing the Suburbs

The scenario: You live 30 minutes from downtown, but far enough from the city to keep your horses at home on a small acreage. Smaller properties surround you. An apartment complex isn't far away. Your suburb caters to outdoor enthusiasts and maintains a multiuse trail system in a county-maintained, multiuse, open-space park. You can open your gate and leave for a relaxing ride without hauling your horse to a distant trailhead.

One Saturday morning, you mount up and meet your friends for a ride. As you ride through the trailhead, you see that the parking lot is full of SUVs sporting bike racks. As you start down the busy trail, a group of cyclists cautiously passes you.

Soon an unusual buzzing spooks your friend's horse. A drone. Startled by the noise above his head, your friend's horse turns and bolts. You know that as prey animals, horses can interpret threaten-

ing sounds from above as a mountain lion ready to pounce. Your friend barely stays on as she works to control her usually placid mount.

Your seasoned trail horse looks up toward the unfamiliar sound and tenses as he watches the drone cross his path. He stops in his tracks and snorts, refusing to budge. The drone flies off, and you resume your calm ride.

The drone was flying high, and it didn't appear that the pilot was attempting to cause harm. Still, your friend is shaken and ready to head home. It seems too crowded today; this isn't the relaxing ride you'd planned.

Pressing issue: Population is on the rise in suburban areas, squeezing out open space for trail riding. Census data has shown that while city growth has stalled, population expansion is accelerating in the suburbs around America's biggest cities. This population boost means more people sharing already-busy "front country" trails and open spaces—that is, trails that interface with developed areas.

Trail rider Lisa St. Pierre Sowell has ridden around Colorado's Front Range for more than 40 years. "I began trail riding as a teenager in the early 1970s, long before mountain bikes were even a 'thing,'" she says. "Now we have the drone issue, too. I've witnessed people of all activity types break the rules and be inconsiderate to others. This includes my fellow horse persons, cyclists, hikers, and drone pilots.

How to push back: Join an association that monitors trail access, educates other users about horses, and advocates for equestrian safety. Such groups work to help keep equestrians safe as they access trails in populated—and all—areas, says Denise O'Meara, director of education for Equestrian Land Conservation Resource (elcr.org).

Rather than demanding that other users stay off a trail, she says, find out how you can work together. As a horse

BE LIGHT ON THE LAND

How can you help keep trails open for equestrian use? Ensure that your horse's presence won't adversely impact the environment or others' use of the trail. Follow these tips to help keep trails in tip-top shape.

Report wet trails. Horse hooves can be hard on wet trails. If you find a slick or muddy area, promptly report the issue to trail officials so it can be repaired.

Stay the course. Stay on designated trails. It's tempting to meander off the beaten track, but your horse may tread on new vegetation or add to erosion in tender habitats.

Pick up, pack out. Don't drop trash or leave behind anything. Pitch in and clean up others' trash when it's safe to dismount.

Manage manure. Be aware that some non-riders associate horse manure with dog feces and complain about "road apples." If your horse passes manure on the trail, it's usually fine to just keep going. But if manure is of particular concern, and it's safe, dismount and kick the manure off the trail. Do clean up after your horse at trailheads and horse-camping sites. (For more about light trail use, visit lnt.org and treadlightly.org.)



Be a courteous and well prepared for all situations and land users when you're out on the trails. Find fellow trail riders who you can work with to the benefit of all trail users.

owner, you share trails with other outdoor enthusiasts. Non-equestrian trail users have equal rights on the trail, as long as they follow trail advisories and yield to horses as advised. Well-organized groups representing mountain bikers, all-terrain-vehicle riders, drone pilots, and more can actually be allies in your effort to keep the trails open and available for all uses.

"We're all out here together," points out Mark Himmel of the Back Country Horsemen of America (bcha.org), which represents all trail riders, whether they ride in the front country or the back-country. If anyone gets hurt on a trail, it doesn't matter what sport you were participating in, Himmel points out. It stops everyone's recreation when all on scene become first responders.

O'Meara also recommends joining a

local riding club, and appoint someone to follow town growth plans. "Gather forces, and show up at the town level, the city level, and the county level."

Sowell agrees. "We horse people need to stick together—even when we don't agree on a specific topic," she notes. "I've seen too many trails closed to horses over the years, so I'd be careful about demanding anything."

While equestrian groups aren't as big as organizations for mountain bikers and even drone pilots, they have a presence. Growing the number of equestrian-association members can ensure that horse owners have a voice before trails are built—or closed.

ELCR provides fact sheets to help you talk to your local planners about the benefits of horses. When you establish relationships and learn about new trails

and parks, you can help ensure that horses will have access and educate other trail users about how to recreate with horses present.

Public-Land Concerns

The scenario: Your favorite trail winds along a creek bottom that's home to cutthroat trout. Area biologists are worried about the fish population. Gravel loosened by horse hooves has caused sediment in the water, and trout eggs won't hatch when they're covered. The trail is to be closed to help the fish population recover after anglers reported the decline. But this trail is the perfect training ground for horses new to the trail. With 18 water crossings, green horses can learn to cross water on the otherwise easy trail. You want to help keep the trail open to horses, but you

understand that the fish population is important, too.

Your local BCHA representatives talk with the United States Forest Service to form a plan. They'll reconstruct the approaches to the waterways and install steps down to the water to eliminate gravel slides and stop further erosion. Once installed, the new paths and steps eliminate the sedimentation. But the work isn't slated to be completed for at least two years.

Pressing issue: Shrinking public-land resources. The Forest Service manages 154 national forests and 20 grasslands. It's charged with maintaining trails with a consistently smaller budget. In 2018, the budget was to be cut by another 10 percent. While many public lands are open to trail riding and Forest Service personnel want to keep trails open, the trails must be cleared and maintained to be safe for all users.

"In Montana's Lewis and Clark National Forest, we used to have 24 Forest Service workers in an area to keep trails maintained," says Himmel. "Now there are six."

"We get along great with the local workers but they're having to do more with less budget," Himmel continues.

"That's how the BCHA got started. The Forest Service was going to stop doing maintenance on some trails, and riders in the area stepped up to carry the load. We have a strong partnership and friendship with the Forest Service members. I see more people retiring and not being replaced. I think that's going to put more pressure on the volunteers in the years to come."

Today, the BCHA's 20,000 members work with local Forest Service personnel and land managers to clear trail obstacles and improve the tread on trails. They also help educate other trail users about horses and teach horse owners how to ride safely with others on the trail.

How to push back: Join a local riding group, and keep tabs on trail conditions.

Set up social-media groups so riders can report poor footing or a downed tree. (Facebook's Town Hall shortcut can help you find your representatives with one click to "follow all." Search for "town hall" in the search bar.) Select an advocate from your group to contact the Forest Service or your local BCHA chapter. Find out who your local and national government representatives are, and let them know Forest Service funding is important to you. Set up times your riding group can volunteer to help maintain trails. Consider applying for a grant from the American Quarter Horse Association's Stewards for Trails, Education & Partnerships program (or STEP; aqha.com/step), which provides grants to help volunteers maintain and develop trails on public and private lands.

Private-Land Crunch

The scenario: A local family's farm borders a national forest. The trail from the national forest land crosses over a small portion of the family's pasture, then connects to another national forest trail. Over the years, the family started worrying about trail users. What if someone were to fall off on that stretch of privately owned trail? Will riders know that they're on private land and respect the fencing? The family's worry has now turned to fear of being sued—even if the law is on their side. They decide to close the trail.

Pressing issue: Disappearing private lands for equestrian use. ELCR reports that privately owned land is the most at-risk for trail riders. As development increases, more families are selling off

big farms to be subdivided. If the land isn't sold, change in ownership from one generation to the next may trigger questions of liability and whether the public should be able to access private land.

How to push back: Attorney Julie R. Fershtman specializes in equine law. She

suggests trail riders help reluctant land owners to understand how they can limit their liability while allowing access. She notes that riders can be asked to sign a release before accessing private property. Riders can also purchase liability insurance, called "personal horse owner's liability,"

and show the land owner that they have coverage.

Fershtman also points out that each state has recreational-land-use laws to protect land owners from liability (except in cases of extreme negligence). Find out what your state allows, and present it to the land owners. Land owners can then post the act's language to notify riders of the details of land owners' limited liability.

A conservation easement is another option. Conservation easements are legally binding agreements that limit the future use of a section of property and of the land itself. The land in an easement must benefit the public, such as allowing a trail to pass through. Under the easement, the land owner can continue to farm the land as long as the activities align with what the land is being conserved for.

Finally, be a courteous and well-prepared rider. Reach out to local land owners in your area to get permission to ride on their property instead of asking for forgiveness later. Sign any waivers and abide by the land owner's wishes. ★

Reach out to local land owners in your area to get permission to ride on their property instead of asking for forgiveness later.

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REAL RIDING:

GUEST RANCHES CATERING TO EQUESTRIANS

If you imagine slow, nose-to-tail rides when you hear the term 'guest ranch,' think again. We've tracked down six top ranch resorts with programs designed for experienced riders.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEROKEE PARK RANCH

If your ideal vacation spot includes beautiful scenery, lively action, and fine horses, consider visiting a guest ranch. In the past, guest—or *dude*—ranches were known for their sedate trail rides tailored to city slickers in brand-new boots.

Today, however, many ranches are adapting to include rides that will keep savvy riders active and interested.

Here, we've put together our pick of riding-vacation destinations where you can ride fast, traverse serious terrain, learn to work cattle, or even participate in a real cattle drive. These ranches, recommended by the Dude Ranchers' Association and as a result of our editors' own travel experiences, have horses to match your riding level.

While most ranches don't allow you to bring your own horse (for their herd's safety), they work to keep their horses tuned up and ready to do more than simply follow.

Read on to find out where you can do some *real* horseback riding at guest ranches.

BONANZA CREEK COUNTRY

This 25,000-acre Martinsdale, Montana, ranch is home to a herd of 1,500 cattle—plus all the horses necessary to take care

of them. Eight to 12 guests per week are invited to join in on the family's ranch work. The Voldseth family has owned the ranch since 1877, and the current owners are direct descendants.

Riding requirements: Because the challenging terrain around the ranch requires riders to have genuine know-how, this ranch accepts *only* intermediate-level and above riders.

"Good riders like to ride with other good riders," says owner June Voldseth. She adds that many of the ranch's guests are horse owners.

Riders must be able to canter outside an arena to help gather and move cattle. Most rides offer some fast-paced riding, but speed can be limited due to the mountainous terrain.

"We always ride in the arena on Monday mornings to check each guest's riding ability and make sure everyone is well matched to their horse," says Voldseth. "Then every rider gets to work with the cattle a couple times each week."

The horses: The ranch continuously purchases new Quarter Horses and Paints from other Montana ranches to make sure the mounts are fresh and agile. The wranglers work with all horses to keep them responsive and mannerly.

The horses are turned out on 360 acres

to run or relax as they please. Doing work they love and having the freedom to live naturally makes for happy horses, says Voldseth.

Special events: The ranch offers cowgirl retreats with ride time plus life-coaching sessions. Each scheduled retreat is unique; instructors are varied. Check out bonanzacreekcountry.com/retreats.

Ranch amenities: Each of the four cabins has a view, and though spread out for privacy, they're all within walking distance of each other, the main lodge, and the stables. Cabins include a refrigerator and coffeepot, though the ranch provides three meals per day.

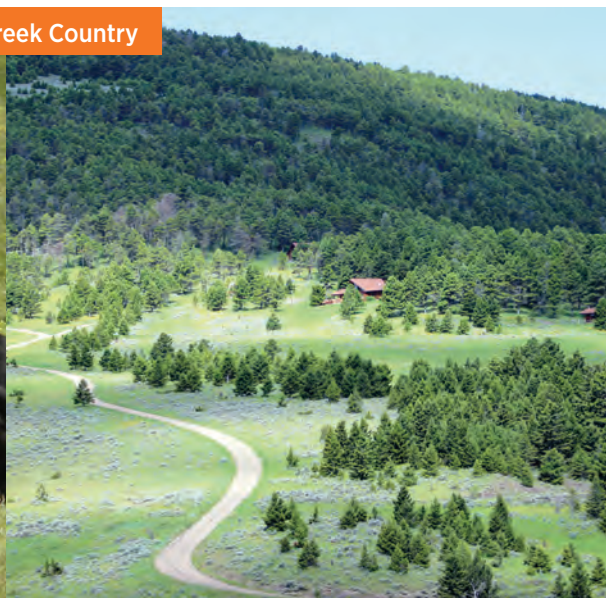
Get there: Fly into Bozeman; the ranch is almost in the middle of (and two hours from) Bozeman, Billings, and Great Falls. 523 Bonanza Creek Road, Martinsdale, MT 59053; (406) 572-3366; bonanzacreekcountry.com.

CHEROKEE PARK RANCH

Colorado owner Christine Prince says her family's dedication to natural horsemanship means this ranch's horses are well trained and ready for any type of ride. The ranch offers team penning and fast rides as well as slower ones for youth or inexperienced family members.



Bonanza Creek Country



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BONANZA CREEK COUNTRY

The historic ranch was built in the late 1880s as a stagecoach stop between Fort Collins, Colorado, and Laramie, Wyoming. Much of the original wood furniture and antique horse equipment is still on display. The Prince family purchased the ranch in 1996 after vacationing there for four years in a row.

Riding requirements: There's a horse for every level of rider. Each day, the head wrangler asks each group what kind of ride and speed of travel they desire. The options are morning, afternoon, or all-day ride. Participants are then grouped by ability.

"Our guests are able to ride the same horse all week long and develop that special bond," Prince says, adding that auxiliary activities like team penning are fun and boost horsemanship.

"But nothing can compare with venturing out into the forest to maneuver river crossings, climbing up vistas, or loping through Aspen groves," she says. Cherokee Park's diverse trails provide fun for riders from beginner to advanced.

The horses: The ranch is home to over 140 mounts of all types (and none are leased). Prince says a good guest ranch must have plenty of horses to allow them to rest well between work sessions. The ranch also has an indoor arena for training and inclement weather.

Cherokee Park Ranch horses—most foaled on the ranch—are "cared for like family," Prince says. "With our ranch open for only four months, they have eight months to just be horses."

The Princes' youngest son, Townsend, trains and tunes up all mounts. "He's an avid follower of Buck Brannaman's training and attends clinics throughout the year," says Prince.

Special events: The ranch hosts weekly rodeos and team pennings for guests. The rodeos include barrel racing, keyhole racing, and pole bending as well as hilarious egg-toss games and clowns' goofy antics.

Ranch amenities: The mountain setting provides views all around. Stay in a suite within the 120-year-old lodge or opt for a



Cherokee Park Ranch



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHEROKEE PARK RANCH

cabin. Activities include square dances, a hot tub, a fire pit, a petting zoo, and more. Guests can relax with a massage or swim in the pool.

Get there: Fly into Denver and head northwest (past Fort Collins) for an hour and forty-five minutes. 436 Cherokee Hills Drive, Livermore, CO 80536; (970) 493-6522; cherokeeparkranch.com.

C LAZY U

This Granby, Colorado, ranch offers historic grounds, mountain views, and high-end amenities. Younger children have assigned counselors to help with swimming-pool activities, archery, and even nap time, if needed. Teens can participate in overnight camping, white-water rafting, or visiting a rodeo. For you,

it's ride the many trails, enjoy the indoor arena, or take a horsemanship clinic, then relax with the amenities.

Riding requirements: All riders are interviewed and paired with mounts based on ability. Wranglers choose a slow pace on Monday-morning rides to assess horsemanship and ensure each rider has the right mount for the week.

Because rides are designed to accommodate the least experienced rider, ranch managers encourage relative novices to start with an easy ride. This allows groups with advanced riders to move at the pace they want without leaving anyone behind.

"Our 'fast rides' are geared toward avid equestrians," says ranch spokesman Brady Johnson. "We typically have sever-



C Lazy U

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAZY U

al guests every week who ride competitively and enjoy the fast pace of these rides. We cover a lot of terrain that offers wonderful views and long lopes.”

The summer fast rides are typically three hours in the morning and about two hours in the afternoon. The ranch also offers an all-day ride for advanced riders and horsemanship clinics every afternoon in the summer for less experienced riders.

The horses: The ranch has mounts geared toward all riding levels. More advanced riders are paired with soft, responsive horses often ridden by wranglers.

Special events: Visit clazyu.com/specials-events for a full list of equine-clinician visits, yoga retreats, health and wellness sessions, holiday specials, and more. At select clinics and events, you may bring your own horse.

Ranch amenities: Aiming for luxury, the ranch offers a full-service spa, hot tub, pool, zip line, ropes course, basketball, tennis, fly fishing, archery, and more.

Choose a lodge room or a cabin within walking distance of the main lodge, dining room, and amenities. A full-time chef and sommelier prepare meals.

Get there: Fly into Denver and travel west to Granby. 3640 Colorado Hwy. 125, Granby, CO 80446; (970) 887-3344; clazyu.com.

THE HIDEOUT

An hour and a half east of Cody, Wyoming, and Yellowstone National Park, the upscale Hideout neighbors the Bighorn National Forest. The Shell, Wyoming, ranch is steeped in horsemanship training and is committed to the ongoing learning of all staff and riders.

The ranch's 650,000 acres are diverse; elevation ranges from 4,200 to 13,100 feet above sea level. This means plenty of trail riding and stellar Western views for the ranch's 25 weekly guests.

Riding requirements: Depending on the season, guests can choose two half-day rides, all-day scenic rides, and on some days authentic cattle work lasting all day.

“Each week of our season we have advanced, even professional riders visiting our ranch,” says spokesperson Rebecca Bercher. “They’re always happy with the level of riding and quality of our horses.”

When advanced riders arrive, the staff takes time to evaluate whether they can, for example, move their hands softly while controlling the horses. The ranch also hosts a riding and safety orientation each Monday morning.

“Because of our terrain, we don’t do rides at a ‘breakneck’ pace,” Bercher says. “We do trot and lope where it’s safe and the terrain allows, but riding as you would on a beach or across open plains is not what we do.”

Find out more about The Hideout’s

horsemanship philosophy at thehideout.com.

The horses: The Hideout’s 130-horse string consists of Quarter Horses, Paints, and Mustangs. The ranch owns most of the horses; a few are leased long term and are therefore known well. The ranch works to keep different levels of horses for different levels of riders.

“Some horses in our herd are so finely tuned that only our wranglers and very experienced guests ride them,” says Bercher.

The Hideout’s 25 Mustangs are part of their specialized training program. “We always have a few young Mustangs in training,” Bercher explains. “This program attracts many experienced riders, as most of our Mustangs are suitable for intermediate and advanced riders. Some guests have loved riding their Mustangs so much that they went on to adopt their own.”

Special events: Though the ranch doesn’t host special weeks for advanced riders, many experienced horsemen visit in the early spring or late fall seasons when there are fewer guests.

The ranch works with and co-operates Trapper Creek Ranch, where clinician Farrah Green hosts several week-long intense horsemanship clinics throughout the season. During these clinics, guests are welcome to bring their own horses to work with



Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SYLVAN DALE GUEST RANCH

them and take them out on trails. Find out more at wyoming-horse-riding.com.

Ranch amenities: The Hideout's handsome cabins and full-size homes boast views of Shell Canyon and the Bighorn Mountains.

The ranch offers a pool, shooting lessons, archery, fly fishing, 4x4 driving tours, hiking, and more.

Get there: The ranch is close to Wyoming's northern border. 3170 County Road 40½, Shell, WY 82441; (307) 765-2080; thehideout.com.

SYLVAN DALE GUEST RANCH

Just over an hour from Denver's airport, Colorado's 3,200-acre Sylvan Dale Ranch offers Rocky Mountain views and the sounds of the Big Thompson River. Begun as a private cattle ranch in the early 1900s, it grew into a guest ranch when wealthy doctors wanted a place to stay and hunt with their families.

The ranch still owns cattle and hosts two "cattle weeks," when guests can help move the herd to and from its summer range. The ranch also offers riding lessons for all ages.

Riding requirements: Riders are evaluated in the arena before heading out on trails. "Once we've approved riders to jog and lope, we designate rides that will do just that," says instructor Karen Burbank.

If you want to work cattle and ride at a faster pace, the ranch's team-sorting competitions may be a good fit. "We set the riders up in pairs, and work with a small herd of 10 to 12 cattle," Burbank explains.

The horses: Many of the ranch's horses are bred and raised at Sylvan Dale; these mounts—well trained, tuned up, and sensitive—often work out well for advanced riders, who help season them and expose them to various ranch activities.

Special events: Sylvan Dale hosts Cowgirl Roundups (sylvandale.com/cowgirl-roundup) and Great Grownup Getaways (sylvandale.com/great-grownup-getaway), both of which draw experienced riders. The five-night cowgirl retreats allow for lots of horse time. The grown-up-only week offers opportunities for roping and team sorting, plus an overnight pack trip into the back country.

Ranch amenities: Each cozy Sylvan Dale cabin is different; some include fireplaces and full kitchens. You can walk to the main lodge and main recreation area.

Besides riding, the ranch offers tennis courts, pickle ball, shuffleboard, basketball, volleyball, horse shoes, and a heated pool.

Get there: 2939 N. County Rd. 31D, Loveland, CO 80538; (970) 667-3915; sylvandale.com.

WHITE STALLION RANCH

Ride in the Arizona sunshine at this Tucson ranch, home to the True family and their ranch-raised cattle. Brothers Russell and Michael True were raised on the ranch and now own it together with their families. White Stallion has also been the backdrop for Hollywood movies and popular TV shows.

Riding requirements: The ranch offers fast rides and team penning—after a riding test and an initial slow ride. Guests lope behind a wrangler to demonstrate they can sit well, pace their horses, and stop on their own. The test time helps wranglers know they’ve matched horses and riders well.

“Riders really enjoy a brisk lope through the desert,” says Russell True, noting that fast rides are available in both mornings and afternoons. Team penning, offered three days a week, can be presented as competitive for the more skilled riders or toned down for the less experienced.

“Our cattle-sorting game is slower but requires more finesse,” says Russell. “We also have all-day and half-day rides, meaning guests can enjoy up to 6 or 7 hours total in the saddle if they so choose.”

The horses: The White Stallion horses enjoy the trail rides and working cattle, and doing both enables them to stay fresh.

“Our more responsive horses will rotate between guests and wranglers to keep their talents sharpened,” Russell says. “Plus our horses look good and are fit—always a plus.”

Special events: The ranch hosts four “Cactus Cowgirl” events each year. Participants ride and have access to all ranch amenities while bonding with a private group. The gals’ trip offers a riding lesson, yoga, wine-and-cheese ride, line dancing, and time to hang out with new friends (whitestallion.com/specials).

Ranch amenities: Guest rooms are private, and in the style of a cabin. A full-house “hacienda” is available for family reunions and large parties.

Guests find a hot tub and heated pool welcome after a long day in the saddle. Also available are spa services, a sports court, and a fitness center.

Get there: Fly into Tucson; the ranch is close to town and shopping. 9251 W. Twin Peaks Rd., Tucson, AZ 85743; (520) 297-0252; whitestallion.com. ★



White Stallion Ranch



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WHITE STALLION RANCH