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Horse & Rider's

TRAIL RIDING

MONTHLY

In this issue...

TAMING
TOUGH **TRAILS**
UTAH'S **CRIMSON**
CANYONS
FALL
RIDING SEASON

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Source: Survey conducted among equine veterinarians who recommended oral joint health supplements.
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A person wearing a light-colored cowboy hat, a bright pink long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and a large silver belt buckle is riding a brown horse. The horse is standing on a rocky, uneven trail surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The person is holding the reins and looking down at the horse. The title "TAMING TOUGH TRAILS" is overlaid in large white letters.

TAMING TOUGH TRAILS

Here's obstacle work to prepare you for rugged trail rides and 'extreme' challenges. *Bonus:* It's loads of fun!

Do you and your horse enjoy rugged trail rides?

Or competitions that feature “extreme” trail challenges? If so, you’ll benefit from the tips and exercises on these pages. I use them to prepare for the Appaloosa Horse Club’s Chief Joseph Trail Ride, a formidable multiple-day journey that retraces the 1877 “flight to freedom” of the Nez Perce Indians. Over the years, as the ride works its way from Oregon through Idaho and Wyoming to northern Montana, riders face the challenges of varying terrain and obstacles. Steep hills, narrow trails, water crossings, and deadfalls are all common.

Using a little creativity and working mostly at home, you can ready your horse for these types of obstacles; I’ll show you how. And, even if tough trails aren’t for you, this work is terrific training for your horse. It’ll strengthen the connection between the two of you, plus it’s a lot of fun.

Ready? Let’s go.

make a splash

Trail challenge: Water crossings. The very words can send chills up your spine if you don’t frequently ride your horse through streams and rivers. But, if you want to go on major trail rides, you will cross water, so get ready for it.

Tame it: By getting your horse’s feet (and more!) wet, a little at a time.

Here’s how: The most logical practice involves natural creeks or streams near you. Enlist the help of a friend with trail experience, as the easiest approach is to follow the lead of a horse that doesn’t hesitate at water. If a stream isn’t available, a lake or pond can substitute. If you don’t have a seasoned horse to follow, ride back and forth at the water’s edge, with turns that get you closer and closer to the water until your horse’s feet start touching it. Let your horse sniff the water, then keep urging him through it.

Make-it-work tips: Be patient and give your horse time to discover the water won’t hurt him. You can even start this work right at home, using a 4-by-4-foot water box (see photo). Build one of 2-by-6-inch pressure-treated planks, with a 1-inch plywood bottom; caulk all seams, then add water just before use. Take the time that’s needed to get your horse to step into and through the water box calmly. Your goal is to make water no big deal.



If possible, practice water crossings on real streams (top), giving your horse time to learn the water won’t hurt him. (Following an experienced trail horse is a huge help here, if need be.) You can also begin your water work at home, with an easy-to-build water box (above).

Get Fit and Ready for the Trail

You and your horse require hours of riding to get physically fit for a multi-day trail ride, especially if that trip will be in higher elevations than where you normally ride. Even though my horses are ridden five days a week for lessons and regular trail rides—with some competitions thrown in as well—I start my extra endurance conditioning six weeks ahead of my departure for a weeklong ride. I build up my riding time gradually.

To best target your preparation, contact the trail-ride coordinator for details of the trip you'll be taking: Terrain? Obstacles? Elevations? Likely temperatures?

Also ask the trail coordinator for the necessities you'll need to bring. These may include a knife (or multi-tool such as a Leatherman), hoof pick, vet wrap, and other first-aid items, as well as water for you and your horse (I use camelback water containers—one over the top of my saddle bag and the other in front of my saddle horn).

Check your gear before your trip as well. Make sure there's no loose stitching or screws, and that the leather is strong enough for the task at hand. Your saddle should fit your horse's back well to prevent saddle sores and hot spots.



Create “deadfalls” using logs or railroad ties (left), gradually making the step-overs higher and more complicated. Hill work (right) should include both up and down slopes; don't let your horse rush.

step over and through

Trail challenge: Deadfalls. Consisting of logs and fallen tree branches that cover the trail, deadfalls are common on real-world rides. I've ridden over several that were belly-high to my horse.

Tame it: By practicing on deadfalls you create yourself.

Here's how: Build your practice deadfall using railroad ties and/or downed tree limbs, staggering their positioning. Start with the pieces all lying flat on the ground; then, as your horse becomes accustomed to picking his way through, gradually raise some of the pieces on top of others (see photo). Your horse must learn to figure out how to navigate a deadfall, so encourage him to drop his head and examine it, giving him time to think things through.

Make-it-work tips: If your horse is really hesitant, start with just a few ties or small logs spaced out as on a trail-class course, then gradually bring them closer together and start crossing them and building them up. Remember, trees come in all sizes, so you must accustom your horse to picking up his feet higher than he must for a simple log crossing.

dig in, climb up, inch down

Trail challenge: Steep hills. Horses typically handle moderate hills easily, but trail blockages can sometimes require even steeper ascents—and descents, which can be more daunting.

Tame it: By finding and mastering some real hills.

Here's how: Drawing again on that trail-veteran friend, haul with him or her to a locale that offers different-size hills to practice on. Horses often want to hurry up and down slopes, so insist that your horse go slowly and pick his way carefully right from the start. Following your trail-veteran friend should make this doable. Going downhill on steeper slopes, zigzag initially to lessen the angle, gradually asking for a more direct descent—one step at a time, if need be. Once your horse is comfortable on hills of various height and slope, ask for a few back-up steps as well, going both up and down. You never know when backing up a few paces will be your only option to avoid an impassable obstacle or get around a horse that freezes on a narrow trail.

Make-it-work tips: Be sure to check that your cinch is snug before any hill

More Trail-Taming Success Tips

- **Don't neglect arena work.** Your horse must be willing to yield his body and mind to you with 100-percent trust. Forehand turns, hindquarter turns, leg yields, back-ups, and stops will all be required on the trail, so school your horse in each well in advance of your ride.
- **Practice with saddlebags.** I've seen people put saddlebags on their horses for the first time at the beginning of a ride—then watched as the rodeo began. Prepare ahead of time by longeing your horse with empty saddlebags, then gradually add weight equally to both sides up to the total of what you'll be bringing on the trip (lunch, water/sports-drink bottles, incidentals, etc.). Make sure you know how to keep the saddlebags balanced and securely tied.
- **Trash-proof your horse.** Unfortunately, you will come across trash on county roads during a long ride. To prepare for this, longe your horse over tarps and empty shavings bags, then hang shavings bags and plastic grocery bags off the saddle while longeing in the arena. Progress to riding your horse over tarps and bags. Also, hang plastic bags on the trees and posts outside your horse's pen or near feeders to further desensitize him to their sound and movement (they're notoriously "scary").
- **Be mindful of your horse's burden.** He'll be carrying you plus extra weight up and down hills and for long miles every day. Practice mounting and dismounting smoothly from the ground for those times when a tree stump isn't handy. Practice from both sides, too, as you never know when the needs of the trail will require you to mount or dismount from the off side of your horse.



Prepare your horse for the sinking, unstable feeling of a bog by riding over a pile of dry manure. Allow ample time for him to check it out as he steps in, then practice riding back and forth until he'll do so without fear or hesitation (left). Practice riding slowly through narrow passages, training your horse to wait for your signal to ease through.

work (and outfit your horse in a breast collar, if necessary, to keep your saddle in place). If your horse tries to rush either up or down, make him stop and wait—repeatedly, if need be—until he learns to proceed rhythmically and deliberately at the pace you choose.

slog through it

Trail challenge: Bogs. Though not common, marshy areas will eventually turn up on real-world trails. Even horses willing to cross clear water often balk at mud and moist ground that sinks beneath them.

Tame it: By practicing on variable footing that mimics a bog.

Here's how: A handy substitute for a bog is your manure pile (see photos). As with all obstacles, proceed slowly, allowing your horse to pick his way carefully, one step at a time.

Make-it-work tips: Go back and forth through the pile, giving your horse ample time to accustom to the feel of unstable ground. Eventually, ask him to stop and turn around in the middle of the pile rather than simply crossing to the other side. Keep practicing until he no longer

hesitates to step into and walk through the pile.

control each step

Trail challenge: Tight spaces (as between trees or boulders), narrow trails, and trailside drop-offs that require your horse to stay calm and proceed carefully.

Tame it: With practice going through tight spaces and standing quietly next to drop-offs.

Here's how: Make use of a narrow passageway you have available or can create at your barn. Your horse must learn that when space is tight, he waits for your signal to ease his way through, so his default is to pause rather than rush. For "cliff practice," find a place that has some sort of drop, such as a raised step or a dirt mound or the side of a hill. Move your horse slowly into position next to the drop-off, then ask him to stand calmly next to it for increasing periods of time, up to a few minutes.

Make-it-work tips: With narrow spaces, proceed one step at a time at first, pausing for a moment between each step. With drop-offs, start low and work up if possible to greater heights. ★

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Source: Survey conducted among equine veterinarians who recommended oral joint health supplements.
Pellets not actual size. Color may vary.

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A photograph of two people riding horses through a forest. The person in the foreground is wearing a brown jacket, blue jeans, and a green cap, riding a brown horse. The person in the background is wearing a green jacket, blue jeans, and a tan cap, riding a brown horse. They are riding on a dirt path through a dense forest with tall trees and green foliage. The text "FALL: THE BEST TRAIL RIDING SEASON" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

FALL: THE BEST TRAIL RIDING SEASON

Fall is the best time of the year to enjoy trail rides. Horses are spirited on trail rides, their riders energetic, the trails more inviting than ever. But trail riding during this beautiful season of the year presents some challenges for the trail rider.

PHOTO BY LANA2011/GETTY

October in Montana: The summer heat has been put to sleep, the insects have been quelled by nightly frosts, and the woods are aflame with color. For those of us who take trail rides in the northern Rockies, fall means brilliant yellow aspens threading groves of dark spruce.

Creeks are clear and cold, and the air is freshened by a trace of bite. The warmth rising from your horse after

climbing the grade is now welcome. A down vest feels good. It's the best time of the year to enjoy trail rides.

Everything comes alive in the fall, as nature enjoys a shot of adrenalin, a final bloom, before the onset of winter. Horses are spirited on trail rides, their riders energetic, and the trails more inviting than ever.

In my area, there's an added bonus: trail use, by both riders and hikers,

drops drastically after Labor Day. Indeed, I avoid one of my favorite trailheads, one that's both beautiful and heavily used, until September. Then, particularly midweek, I often have it to myself.

Thoughts of backcountry trips invoke memories of the scent of pine smoke curling from the woodstove of my wall tent, mingling with the aroma of campfire coffee while I watch my



Be aware of wildlife on the trails like elk, moose, and bears.

PHOTO BY STREKOZAZ/GETTY

horses graze on their picket lines.

But this beautiful season of the year presents some challenges for the trail rider. Indeed, autumn seems to be the time in which many trail riders, ill-prepared, run into serious difficulties. Use these trail-riding tips to stay safe while enjoying the season.

Prepare for Weather

Far and away the most formidable challenge is to ride properly prepared for weather that may take a 180-degree turn. Fall weather is inherently fickle. Throw in the effects of high altitude, and it can go from balmy to dangerous in an hour's travel on a fast-walking horse.

You might embark on a fall ride in the warm sun. But within a few hours, especially if you gain altitude, you may quickly become wet from an icy drizzle, and even in an early snowfall. You may think your ride will be a short one. Then you find a trail closure that requires a long detour. Or, far worse, you or a companion, human or equine, gets sick or hurt.

Suddenly, everything has changed. You may be involved in a waiting game that will test your clothing and preparedness to the ultimate. Most outdoor survival situations occur relatively close to trailheads or other accouterments of civilization, and people who have been through them stress how quickly they can occur.

Cold rain can be dangerous since soaked skin at chilly temperatures can bring on hypothermia. A slicker alone won't do it; rain will find its way in, and something warm underneath is essential.

Among mountaineers and outdoor guides, two words say it all: Cotton kills! Yes, you sometimes see a cotton layer touted for wicking ability. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Cotton gets wet, stays wet, and loses all insulating capacity. Seasoned outdoor people who challenge difficult conditions get rid of it completely.

If you're tackling high-altitude trails in autumn, consider underwear made from a silk/wool blend, layers of fleece, and, best of all, wool.

Down is wonderful when dry, but turns to mush when wet. When the drizzle starts, I stuff my down vest into a saddlebag and replace it with something that retains insulating properties.

pose any real danger, but stay out of their space.

A cow moose with a calf can be extremely protective, and you don't want to get between a bear and her cubs. If you ride in grizzly country, as I do, you learn to be particularly watchful.

None of this should intimidate or discourage you from riding in the year's



PHOTO BY WILDROSE/GETTY

Instead of clipping your horse's ears and keeping their coat short, let their winter hair do its job and keep them warm.

Watch for Wildlife

Be aware, too, that wildlife activity kicks up during the fall. I think of this as a bonus, not a worry. During fall, moose, bears, and elk spend less time-fighting flies in the deep shadows, than they do during the heat of summer, and migratory birds are on the move.

Most animals are intent on feeding, acquiring that layer of fat that will nourish them during winter. Seeing them, camera in hand is a great thrill. But it's important to note that wild animals are just that wild. Very few

most beautiful season. It's just that autumn is a transition season, and you must be prepared for instances when the transition occurs more suddenly than anticipated.

Consider Your Horse

Our horses, too, are in transition. If your summer season has been active, your horse is likely to be in fine condition, much better than he was on those first spring rides. Hooves tend to harden and slow in growth as winter approaches, and that's all to the good.

The year's first frost points toward

greater attention to traction on the trail. I frequent trails that alternate from mud to gravel to terribly jagged granite ledges blasted out of the sides of cliffs. While I may be happy with rim shoes during midsummer, the possibility of such footing being overlaid with frost and snow nudges me toward shoes with toe and heel caulks during fall.

It's usually on a chilly morning in late September or early October, when clear sky promises balmy temperatures later in the day, that I notice something different about my black gelding as he stands by the gate waiting for a palm-full of oats. There's a new sheen to his coat, a velvet overlay, and I realize that his winter hair is coming.

The last thing the wise trail rider who lives in northern climates wants

And, if rugged trail duty lies ahead, I'm not quick to trim fetlock hair or to scalp my horse's ears with an electric clipper. Why trim away the horse's natural protection against cold, against trail abrasions, against that first crusted snow through which you'll ride?

Enjoy the Ride!

Okay, enough with the warnings, the cautions, the tips—let's enjoy. I head this late-September morning toward that favorite trailhead, the one I avoid during summer, knowing that on a Tuesday in the fall, I'll have it to myself.

The highway threads through Montana foothills bedecked with buck brush now turned scarlet, toward blue mountains capped on their very tops with new snow. I turn off the truck's

I back Partner out of the two-horse trailer, curry him, and saddle up. I'm going alone, so I double-check my pommel packs for the usual necessities: a first-aid kit; extra food; water; map; compass; global positioning system; cell phone (turned off to save battery and sanity); and fire-making supplies. I wrap a wool vest in my rain jacket, roll them together, and tie them behind the cantle.

Then, with a final check of my cinch, I'm up and we're off at a swift single-foot, Partner's rein chains jingling. We cruise past the trailhead signs and ascend the ledge trail along the frothy river, now somewhat tamed by the lower water level of the season.

Pretty little birds called water ouzels flit and dart above the emerald pools sandwiched between runs of white water. The fresh breeze that meets me on the trail is scented with pine.

On top of the gorge, we find the river gentled now, a series of deep blue pools. I wave back to a fly fisherman who's edging his way toward deeper water. (He ends up being the only person I see on this day ride.) Then it's up a grade, away from the river, through aspen groves whose signature golden leaves quiver in the morning breeze.

We cross a trail bridge over a small tributary creek, then, five minutes later, we ford another. I stop so that Partner can drink.

We ride for another hour, finally topping a ridge for the view I've come to see, the valley opening to the south, the river emerging from a wall of granite. Over these mountains, traversed by a high pass, lie streams that run down into Yellowstone Park. I've crossed these mountains, but today my purpose is to merely ride a good horse in beautiful surroundings in cool sunshine.

Far below me in a meadow, scarcely larger than dots at this distance, graze a cow moose and her calf. They're the icing on the cake. I can now turn toward home, my spirit renewed by a ride of the best possible sort, an autumn ride. ★



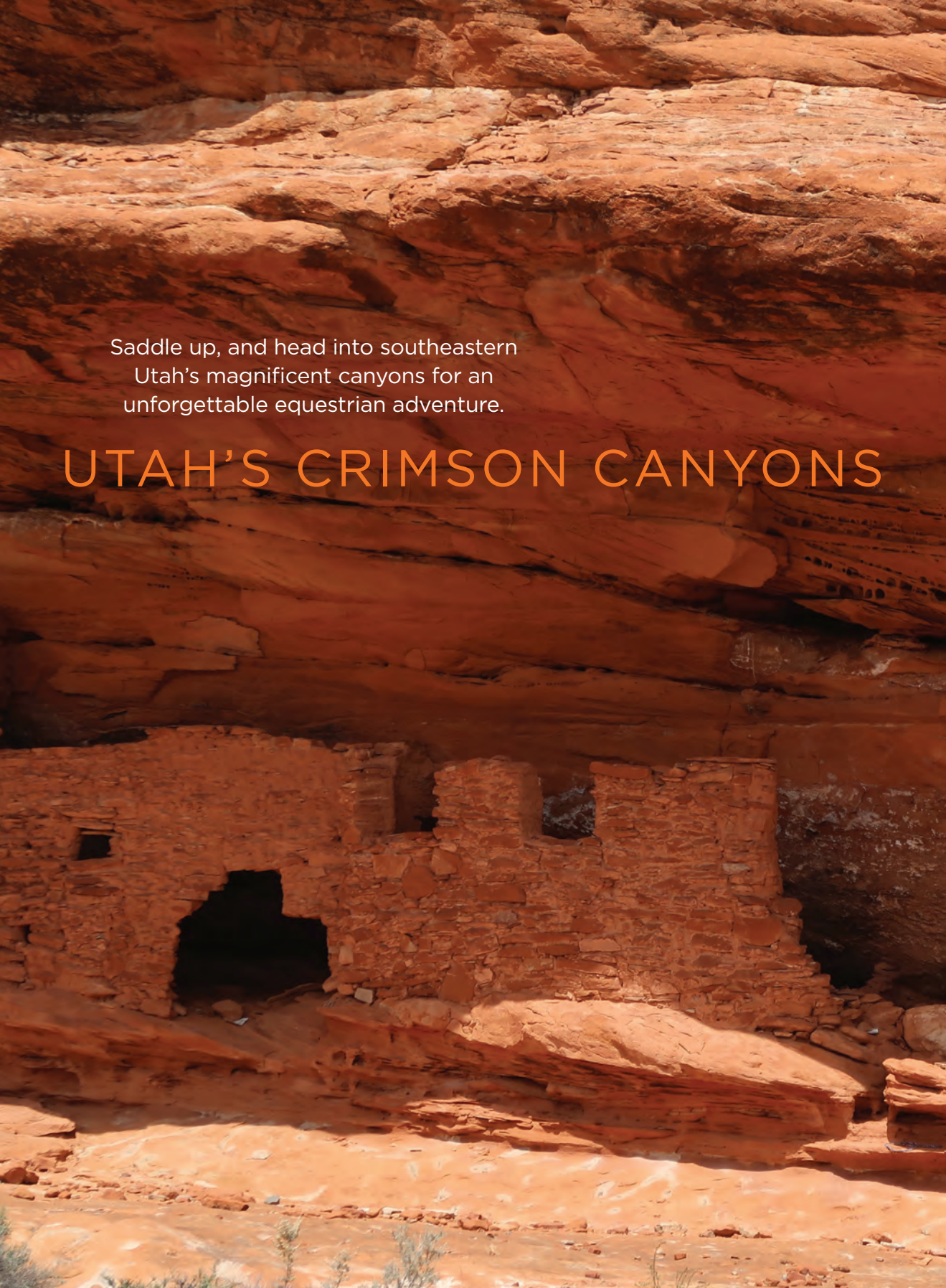
Partner and Dan Aadland enjoying the beautiful Fall weather.

H&R FILE PHOTO

to do at this point is to put a protective blanket on that wonderful seasonal coat. Blanketing horses to prevent the growth of winter hair is a show ring anomaly that has no place in managing the trail horse. He needs that hair. Why prevent its growth and then attempt to supply the same amount of insulation artificially, with a blanket?

air conditioner and open the driver's window.

The trailhead parking lot is nearly empty of vehicles, only a car or two, a pickup of Forest Service green, and the gooseneck trailer of an outfitter I know, who's probably guiding her hunter on a pack trip for moose. They'll be far up the drainage, farther than I'll ride today.

A full-page photograph of a desert canyon. The upper portion shows the rugged, layered walls of a red rock canyon. In the lower portion, a large, ancient stone ruin, possibly a Navajo dwelling, is built into the rock face. The ruin has several rectangular openings and is constructed from stacked stones. The ground in the foreground is sandy and rocky, with some sparse desert vegetation.

Saddle up, and head into southeastern Utah's magnificent canyons for an unforgettable equestrian adventure.

UTAH'S CRIMSON CANYONS



1. Lynn and Lynnette Stevens, owners and operators of Blanding Bunkhouse. They say southeastern Utah is a wonderful place to ride year-around.

2. Blanding Bunkhouse, an Airbnb near the town of Blanding, is a hidden jewel for equestrian adventurers wishing to explore southeast Utah. Shown is the Krones' camp.

3. The Bunkhouse, a private, beautifully decorated three-bedroom house with a full kitchen and large deck with a view, is ideal for folks traveling without horses or for those who don't have a living-quarters trailer, suggest the Krones.

Southeastern Utah is a tapestry of rich hues and a staggering assortment of textures. To the north, Manti-La Sal National Forest (fs.usda.gov/mantilasal) is a lush green of Ponderosa pines hugging mountains that stretch to 11,000 feet elevation. Farther south, the land contorts into ridges, plains, and canyons bordered by stern, towering rock walls pockmarked with caves and alcoves. In the bottom land, muddy creeks nurture necklaces of greenery and cottonwood trees.

HIDDEN JEWEL

Blanding Bunkhouse (blandingbunkhouse.weebly.com), an Airbnb near the town of Blanding, is a hidden jewel for equestrian adventurers wishing to explore southeastern Utah. The facility is owned and operated by Lynn and Lynnette Stevens. Lynn is a retired two-star general. He and Lynnette specifically designed the facility for

horse enthusiasts to enjoy. They say southeastern Utah is a wonderful place to stay year-round.

Blanding Bunkhouse offers five sites with hookups for living-quarters trailers/recreational vehicles, as well as The Bunkhouse, a private, beautifully decorated three-bedroom house with a full kitchen and large deck with a view. The Bunkhouse is ideal for folks traveling without horses or for those who don't have a living-quarters trailer.

The facility sports a full-size arena and corrals. The corrals are spaced far apart so that your horse has no contact with other horses. Our campsite was near a corral with several shade trees and views of the northern mountains.

Lynette provides a guiding service; she'll take you trail riding on your horse or hers. She gives riding lessons based on Buck Brannaman's teachings and conducts a yoga class twice per week. The Stevenses have a herd of fine Mis-

souri Fox Trotters from Alma DeMille, a Utah breeder of calm gaited horses.

Getting to know Lynette was a real highlight for both of us. After years of riding in this area, she's still full of enthusiasm and eager to discover what might be around the next bend or in the next canyon.

When asked what she enjoys the most about riding, the soft-spoken Lynette said the West is in her heart. She admits to a wanderlust for outdoor exploration. She loves meeting people from all over the United States and showing them magnificent scenery they've only imagined in their dreams.

ANCESTRAL PUEBLOANS

Riding the canyons of southeastern Utah, you'll see signs of the Ancestral Puebloans (also referred to as Anasazi), whose rock dwellings were hidden in alcoves and ledges or perched on promontories. In roughly 700 to 1200 AD,



around 100,000 Pueblos flourished in the Four Corners region.

Before riding these canyons, we strongly suggest that you visit the Edge of Cedars State Park in Blanding. The information on the ancient Pueblos that you'll learn will enrich your canyon-riding experiences. It's mind-boggling what this early civilization created and accomplished using only tools and materials from their surroundings.

ARCH CANYON

For our first ride, we trailered to Arch Canyon Trail #002. To reach the trail-head, take State Rte. 95 west. After you reach the junction of State Rte. 95 and U.S. Rte. 191, go 14.3 miles and look for the right-hand turn to Arch Canyon. Take this good gravel road 2.4 miles until you see a small sign for Arch Canyon. Turn left, and travel about a quarter of a mile to a parking space. This last quarter of a mile is a rough road and not recommended for living-quarters trailers. Drive through the gate, and you'll be on Bureau of Land Management land.

The ride up Arch Canyon was a visual delight, with rock walls on both sides of us stretching several hundred feet high. Scattered rock towers grabbed for the sky. Golden eagles with six-foot wingspans floated lazily on air currents, waiting patiently for a careless hare or scurrying rodent. Pinyon pines, juniper trees, and stately Ponderosa pines added random dashes of green to the reddish-brown cliffs. We kept an eye out for ruins, which are usually found on south-facing slopes to catch the morning sun.

The route follows an old rough road. We didn't see any motorized vehicles, but did see several hikers. Early in the ride, we came across a fairly large ruin that was fenced off to provide protection from roaming cows. This is an interesting stop! Tie your horse, and explore the ruins and petroglyphs on the walls.

Outside the fence, you'll notice a large boulder. On top of this boulder you'll find a number of grinding holes called



1. Charlene Krone in the secret ruin. Its location remains hidden to preserve its integrity.

2. Pieces of ancient pottery bowls at the secret ruin.

3. Kent Krone and Cody working their way up Arch Canyon.

4. Charlene Krone and Lynnette Stevens have lunch before descending into canyon depths to visit a ruin that dates back to the time of the Ancestral Pueblos.



Charlene and Kent Krone ride in Recapture Canyon. "This is a tranquil, nonmotorized trail through a mystical canyon," they note.

morteros. These were used by the ancient ones for grinding plant products, such as corn and beans. Imagine the time and energy it would take to hand grind holes into rock!

RECAPTURE CANYON

Our second ride was to Recapture Canyon, which is close to town. This is a tranquil, nonmotorized trail through a mystical canyon. The trailhead is unmarked, and the trail is unclear in many places.

It would be best to have Lynette guide you on this ride. Not only will she guide you through the canyon, she'll also have a trailer waiting on the other end, providing a point-to-point ride.

Lynette led the way across an open flat on her 14-year-old Missouri Fox Trotter named July. After the flat, we descended into the main canyon via a small side canyon that had tiny ruins tucked under its rim. This canyon has a fair amount of water with a number of water crossings and several beaver dams.

As we rode along, Lynette pointed out several ruins that are easier to see during south-to-north travel. She also showed us an old cowboy corral left over from an early attempt at cattle ranching. After a picnic lunch, we scrambled up a hillside to a cliffside ruin hidden under a rock overhang and sheltered by juniper trees.

One fascinating feature of this region is cryptobiotic soil. From horseback, it'll look like large, dirty clumps of popcorn. This soil is composed of living organisms, such as fungi and lichen, which serve to stabilize the soil. Cryptobiotic soil takes two years to form and can live for many decades.

FISH CREEK

Our next ride was to the Fish Creek Canyon Wilderness Study Area. This nonmotorized ride provided a real wilderness experience. To get there, take State Rte. 95 as you did to go to Arch Canyon. Just before the Arch Canyon turnoff, turn left to Fish Creek. The trailhead for

Fish Creek is about 9 miles down. This is a good gravel road, but it's not suitable for long living-quarters trailers. Stay on the road; don't drive off the roadway. The surrounding sand can be soft and deep; many vehicles have gotten stuck.

After about 9 miles, the turnoff for Fish Creek comes in view. The turnoff is marked by a sign and kiosk where you pay a \$5 per day per person use fee. You can park here or continue down the side road for a half mile to a turnaround and set of corrals. You'll see a trailhead sign here. Here, we saw a driver who had illegally driven a pickup in and was stuck in deep sand. A wrecker was trying to pull him out, but the operator doubted he would succeed.

The trail up the canyon is in fairly good condition, running level with the canyon and at times following the creek bed. The first ruin we saw was on the right and looked like a small castle with windows. Access to this ruin was difficult because of brush and a steep-banked creek. →

Shortly after the first ruin, we came upon a fairly large ruin on the right. This is a worthwhile ruin to explore out of the saddle. The ruin is made of several compartments under a large alcove. It's a ruin with a view. Unfortunately, while we were at the ruin, we didn't notice the handprints on the wall above us. Later, when we zoomed in on our photos, we could clearly see the handprints. It appears that ancient people held their hands on the wall and splattered something like wet white clay around them, leaving outlines. Be sure to see them close up; they are quite unique.

Continuing up the canyon for about another 5 miles, we spotted small ruins, rock towers, and more than our daily quota of outdoor beauty. During our off-trail explorations, we found pictographs and petroglyphs on rock walls. A storm appeared to be coming in, so we hurried back to the trailhead. It isn't advisable to drive these dirt roads in rain as some of them can quickly become impassable.

SECRET RUIN

Our last ride was a memorable one to a secret ruin few people know exist. Once again, Lynette guided the way. We cannot disclose the location of this site to preserve its unique integrity. Some places may never be seen, but knowing they still exist can give us great satisfaction.

Lynette's secret ride was an equestrian treat. She led us down into a canyon and cross-country. During lunch, Lynette talked about a sense of peace she gets from horses and how riding makes her feel connected to the earth.

Near the ruin, we could see shards of pottery on the ground. Even though the Ancestral Puebloans had to work very hard to survive, Lynette felt that they expressed joy in creating uniquely beautiful pottery and artifacts.

After lunch, we explored the well-hidden ruin. Above the doorway, there were small corn cobs pressed into mud mortar for decoration. On one wall, we saw two footprints and swirling lines. These ancient home builders wanted

their rock houses to be personalized and decorated. We felt fortunate that Lynette shared this with us.

of the few permits for a special piece of BLM property adjacent to their ranch. They can give guided tours to little-seen,



"This is a fairly large ruin near the start of Arch Canyon," explain the Krones. "Take time to walk through the ancient remains and check the petroglyphs on the rock wall behind the ruin."

CANYON TRAILS RANCH

If you enjoy riding the canyons of southeastern Utah and exploring glimpses of long-ago civilizations, then you might also be interested in the 250-acre Canyon Trails Ranch (canyontrailsranch.com) in McElmo Canyon approximately 60 miles east of Blanding and 11 miles from Cortez, Colorado.

The ranch's campground is described as a place of solitude. And that's true! It has corrals, water, electricity, and a bathhouse. You can even sleep in an authentic shepherd camp wagon that has a full bed, Dutch doors, and windows.

The folks at Canyon Trails have one

fairly pristine ruins.

From here, you can ride in Canyon of the Ancient National Monument (blm.gov/visit/canyons-ancient-national-monument), which encompasses more than 174,000 acres of federal land administered by the BLM. The trailhead to three separate rides is about a half mile from Canyon Trails Ranch.

We rode two of these trails; during those two days, we counted around 20 ruins and saw one large rock arch. These were some of our most favorite rides, and we're sure they'll provide you with lifelong memories that will make you smile. ★