

Riding Here, There & Everywhere!

E q u e s t r i a n V a c a t i o n s

BY JUDY WARDROPE

It is said that you can learn something new every day. Assuming that is true, I can't think of a better classroom than the back of a horse. The United States is dotted with places for you and your four-legged classroom to experience, explore, observe and learn.

There are wonderful camps, clinics and courses, but what if you are interested in a less structured vacation? Options abound. Finding a place to ride is really not that difficult, as horseback riding is truly a universal activity.

As with so many other things in the world today, the Internet provides a wealth of information and can actually help narrow your search for places to ride or park and ride, as the case may be. You can go to your favorite search engine and type "your own horse" + your destination state in quotes and an extensive list will appear.

Another good source for finding riding venues in advance of your visit is the area's tourism board. Most travel agents can provide contact information for them if you can't find the appropriate contacts on the Internet.

Country Get-Away

There are options for those who would like to bring along the families own horses.

DH Resorts was the Business of the Year for Fleming County (about 1-1/2 hours east of Lexington, KY) in 2001 and is located on 1,500 acres of mountain ridges and lush valleys where you can camp out, stay in one of the cabins, or treat yourself to the Mountain Lake Manor, a tranquil bed and breakfast.

Owners Steve Dobson, a former chemical engineer, and his wife, Charlotte Harris, a practicing orthopedic surgeon, started DH Resorts on what was, in 1988, a 400-acre farm. "Then we got this wild idea," says Steve. They started with a horse campground in the summer of 1990, which included RV parking and a place for people to stable their horses.

The original idea of "camping cabins" where people could bring their own

gear resulted in the construction of five barren cabins, and things just kept expanding. There is a swimming pool that is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, a hall for family reunions and group functions (capable of handling 100 guests and roasting 2 full pigs), a 17-stall

barn, about 30 rental horses, plus a heated and air-conditioned dormitory over the barn. Plans are in the works for a complete western village capable of presenting theater productions.

Bridle paths crisscross the entire riding area, providing enough diversity for



at least a week's worth of riding. On a recent visit, a two-hour ride crossed a creek, then wound up the side of a ridge and through brilliant trees and across open meadows before circling around and descending back to camp.

Steve is proud of the fact that most customers are repeat visitors, campers in particular and he hears from his visitors that the magnetism of the resort lends itself to return visits.

For diversion, Eagle Trace golf course is a short jaunt down the road. The picturesque 18-hole course has hosted several state tournaments and should provide adequate appeasement for the golfers in the group.

To learn more about DH Resorts, contact them at (800) 737-RIDE or www.dhresorts.com.

Pacific Pleasures

If the Pacific Coast is your liking, you may want to check out Pacific Dunes Ranch at Pismo Beach, CA. It offers RV parking, stabling for your horses, rental horses and guided trail rides. Visions of cantering through the pounding surf fill the imagination.

The stable offers three different guided rides—a walking ride, a walk/trot/canter ride, and a two-hour twilight ride. Our visit included the one-hour walk/trot/canter ride along the beach, through the trees and through the dunes. Our guide informed us of the indigenous plant and wildlife of the area and of the Snowy Plover's endangered species status, pointing out the protected nesting areas. These awkward little birds lay their eggs in the sand, which makes them highly vulnerable to beach traffic—vehicles, animals and humans.

We also encountered huge mounds of discarded shells, called middens, left by the Chumash Indians as they migrated along the coast some 200 to 300 years ago. It was like riding through history. "The Chumash also took advantage of the abundance of edible plants," explained the guide. "For example, they ate blue elderberry, parts of the California wild rose, and California blackberries." The red-legged frog, another protected species, resides along a portion of the ride and the treed area on the return portion houses poison oak and stinging nettles—all of which are to be avoided.

The hour passed quickly on what was a very enjoyable and educational ride. Judging by the experience, the news that the Sierra Club was attempting to have the beach closed was a surprise. Best of luck to stable owner, Sarah Williams, and her associates in their

fight to keep the beach open and protected. Learn more about Pacific Dunes Ranch at (805) 489-8100 or www.encorrv.com/unique_rvresorts/california.

Working Western

If a touch of the West tickles your fancy, then Terry Bison Ranch is for you. It is a working guest ranch that encompasses 2,400 square miles and is located just south of Cheyenne, WY. With the close proximity to the border, riders can easily ride from the ranch into Colorado

bison herd, cowboy poetry, hayrides and pony rides round out the activities. On site accommodations are available in the form of cabins or a bunkhouse, and there is a large RV park plus ample stabling for personal horses. Contact Terry Bison Ranch at (307) 634-4171.

Rental Properties

Nearly every state in the union has the option of rental properties suitable for horses. Here are only a few of the many facilities.



Rich Hood

for lunch and then return. That is one of the most requested rides; another is a five-day cowboy-style buffalo drive that coincides with a real ranch operation, moving the herds to new pastures.

Our ride went diagonally across a mesa and up a short incline where we were met with a remarkable panoramic view that seemed to stretch forever. The flat appearance of most of the countryside hides the fact that the elevation reaches some 7,800 feet above sea level. From there we crossed the mesa at a slightly different angle, stopping at a marker placed by surveyors when the boundaries of the states were established—incredible when you consider that Wyoming became a state in 1890, Colorado in 1875 and Nebraska in 1867.

Fishing, motorized tours of the

Above All Else in Maryland boasts a house, private entrance and corral. It also allows you to bring up to four horses and care for them yourself in your own front yard paddock area. You can watch them graze as you sit on the porch, or if you prefer, stall board your horse or additional horses on the premises with Windsong Arabians (dependent on stall availability). Contact them at

(301) 831-5083 or www.windsongarabians.com.

Big Bear Lake in California advertises as a four-season resort community surrounded by the San Bernardino National Forest. It is approximately 100 miles northeast of Los Angeles and your options include a fully equipped home with pipe corrals for your horses or boarding them at local facilities. Maps are available from the Discovery Center and the rest is up to you. According to their advertisement, "You can enjoy the village

Above: Hauling-in to a scenic trail riding spot can be a one-day vacation option, or another way to see the larger area surrounding your vacation rental.

with its unique shops and restaurant, the zoo, hiking, biking, boating, jet skiing, parasailing and more." Contact them at (800) 524-6600 or www.bigbearvacations.com.

Bed, Bales and Breakfast

The ad for Firefly Bed & Breakfast in Bristol, VT, reads, "We offer pasture, shelter, horse trailer parking and detailed maps that feature marked trails and country roads." Contact them at (802) 453-2223 or www.bbonline.com/vt/firefly/horse.html.

Garst Farm Resort in Coon Rapids, IA, offers more than an historic bed and breakfast. Other accommodations include cottages, campsites and a family reunion farmhouse, all set in a 4,500 acres of river valley. Contact them at (712) 684-2964 or www.farmresort.com.

The Beddin' Down Bed, Breakfast

Questions

One of the best ways to help ensure a good time on a vacation is to ask lots of questions beforehand.

Are the trails marked?

Do they provide maps of the trails?

Are you free to explore or are you required to use a guide?

What is the terrain?

Does my horse need to be shod?

Are there veterinarians and farriers in the area?

Do they have horse pens available or do you need to have your own enclosure?

Do they supply feed, or should I bring my own?

What is the best way to get there with a horse trailer?

What vaccinations or tests are required?

Do I need to bring the horses' veterinary records?

Are there age restrictions for horses or humans?

Do they have electric and water hookups?

What weather conditions should I be prepared for?

Are reservations required?

Is the facility open all year or is it seasonal?

Are there any additional fees?



Arnd Bronkhorst

and Horse Hotel is located in historic Salida, CO. They offer a lodge-style log cabin with facilities for pets and horses and a spectacular view of the Rocky Mountains. Call for reservations at (800) 470-1888 or visit www.beddin-down.com.

All the Great Guest Ranches

The number of guest ranches in this country—in the world, for that matter—is astounding, and many of them allow you to bring your own horses.

New Mexico's BYOH Outfitters in Mimbres specialize in preparing you and your horse to have a fun, safe, minimum-impact camping trip in the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico or the Shoshone National Forest on Wyoming. The BYOH stands for "bring your own horse." Contact them at (888) 884-2964 or e-mail them at byohoutfitters@gilanet.com.

Colorado's Elkhead Ranch in Hayden is a historically designated cattle ranch founded in 1883. They offer

Western and English "bring your own horse" riding vacations on 10,000 acres. Contact (970) 276-3920 or visit www.ranchweb.com/elkhead/glance.htm.

Virginia's Fort Valley Stable in Fort Valley is surrounded by the George Washington National Forest which has over 80 miles of trails that are accessible from camp and many

more miles that are "just a short haul down the road." Contact (888) 754-5771.

The Lone Star State offers Friday Ranch in Uvalde,

TX, which offers trails throughout the 7,000 acres of hill country, and they furnish a map. Contact (877) 374 3298 or e-mail them at friday@rionet.cc.

Pennsylvania offers the Flying W Ranch in Tionesta, which offers a variety of guided rides during the spring, summer and fall months as well as annual organized rides. Contact them at (814) 463-7663 or e-mail them at info@theflyingwrench.com.

Sunny California hosts the Slide Mountain Guest Ranch, located out-

Above: A guided trail ride in a new or exotic locale is one good way to enjoy a vacation with your horse.

Helpful Websites

www.dude-ranches.gordonsguide.com	www.horsebackridingstables.com
www.floridastateparks.org	www.horse-riding-guide.com
www.hiddentrails.com	www.horse-talk.com
www.picktnproducts.org	www.horseweb.com
www.accommodationsusa.com	www.reserveamerica.com
www.americanhorsenetwork.com	www.searchthewesternweb.com
www.collegenews.com	www.travelinghorses.com
www.countryroadscampground.com	www.usaranches.com
www.cowboy.com	www.vacationrentals.com
www.equinejournal.com	www.vallesmines.com
www.georgiahorsecouncil.com	www.wildhorsetours.com
www.globalranch.com	www.horserentals.com
www.horseandmuletrails.com	www.rusticvacations.com
www.horseandrider.ca	



Ann Pringle

side Tuolumne, near Yosemite National Park, and offers trail riding, cattle drives, cutting horses, arena riding, campfires and accommodations. Contact them at (209) 928-4287 or visit www.slidemountain.com.

The Midwest has plenty to offer, too. The Tickled Pink Ranch in Smithville, OK, has accommodations for your horse and will furnish a map of the 250 miles of marked equestrian trails that are found on the 725,000 acres Department of Wildlife land and the 1,437 acres of public land. Contact

them at (580) 244-3729 or visit www.agonline.com/tickledpink/riding.htm.

So Many Parks to Explore

Many local, state and federal parks allow access to equine enthusiasts. Accommodations and regulations vary from site to site, so make sure to check beforehand.

New England's Acadia National Park's Wildwood Stable near Seal Harbor, ME, is advertised as "America's premier destination for riding and driving vacations," and it boasts a 57-mile carriage road system. Contact them at (207) 276-3622 from June to October and (859) 356-7139 in the "off season" or visit www.acadia.net/wildwood.

Brown County State Park near Nashville, IN, invites you to bring your own horse to explore the some 70 miles of bridle trails through the steep, forested hills. Day-use parking spots, as well as two different types of campsites are available at the Horsemen's Campground, which caters to horse riding enthusiasts. Contact them at (812) 988-6406 or visit www.browncountystatepark.net.

Tennessee's Chickasaw State Park near Henderson, has 100 miles of trails in the state forest, 55 RV sites and the Wrangler Campground where there are 36 sites with electricity and water.

Stalls are also available. Contact them at (731) 989-5141 or www.picktnproducts.org/horses/state.html.

The Northwest can't be forgotten with its Gifford Pinchot National Forest boasting several horse camps, including those near Trout Lake, WA, which hosted the Endurance competition for the 2003 Pan American Games. Contact them at (877) 444-6777 or visit or www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/recreation2003/campgrounds/index.shtml.

Start Planning That Trip!

Now that your head is spinning from the endless list of choices—start doing more research! This is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it comes to vacation choices where horses are welcome. Whether you are wanting a quiet getaway or a family-filled adventure for ages 8 to 80, there is definitely something for everyone when it comes to an equestrian vacation.

Now all you have to do is pack up the gear and choose! ■

Left: Some travel destinations, such as Maine's Acadia National Park, will welcome you and your horse and, if you're so inclined, your carriage.

Judy has been involved with horses in a hands-on capacity for 35 years. About 10 years ago she became a freelance writer, specializing in equine subjects, breeding, pedigrees and genetics. Under the penname, JW Equine, she writes for numerous magazines internationally and provides pedigree information for TV commentators.