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JOURNEY BEYOND FIRST CLASS

AUGUST 2005

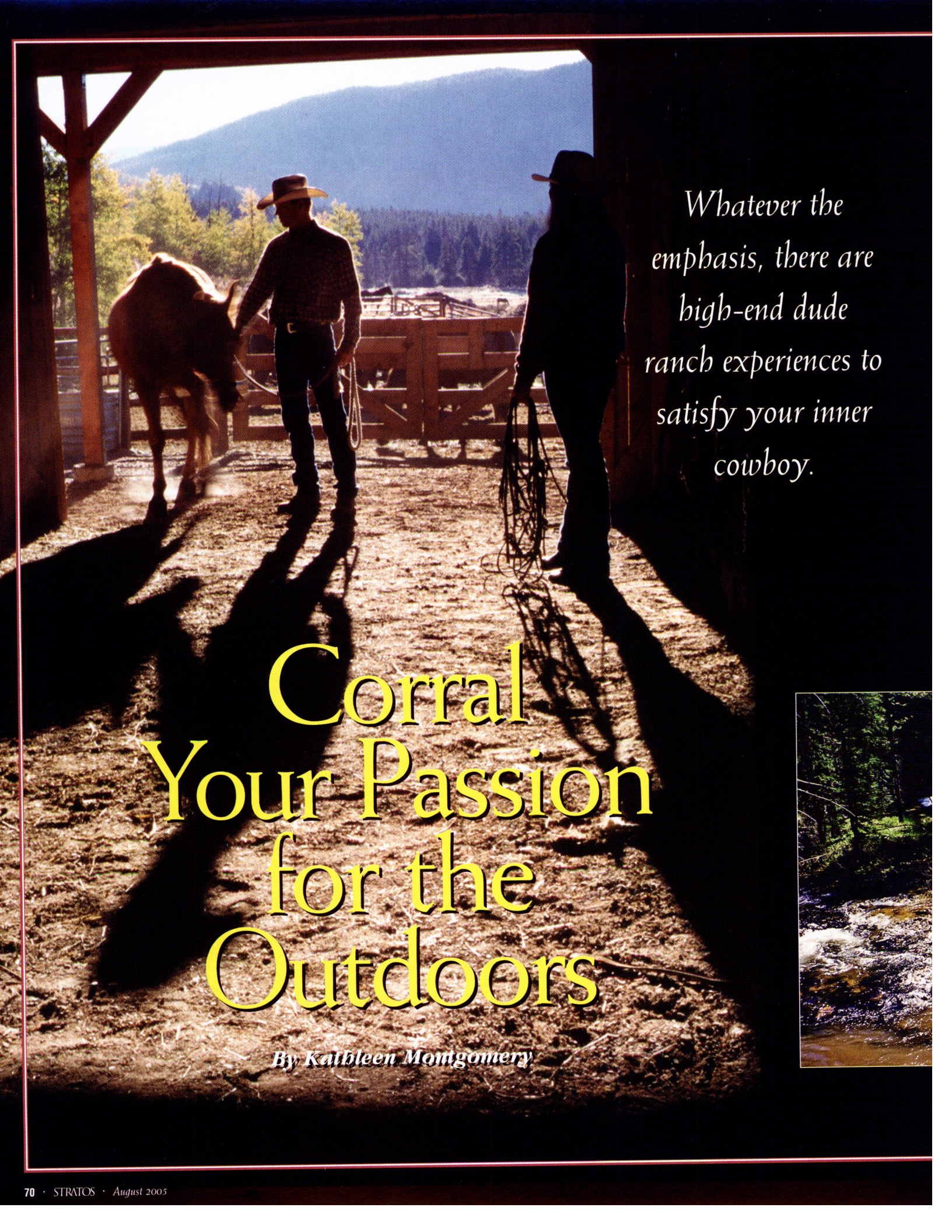
CORRAL YOUR OUTDOOR PASSION

Dude Ranches to Satisfy
Every Inner Cowboy



Plus, Modern
Muscle Cars

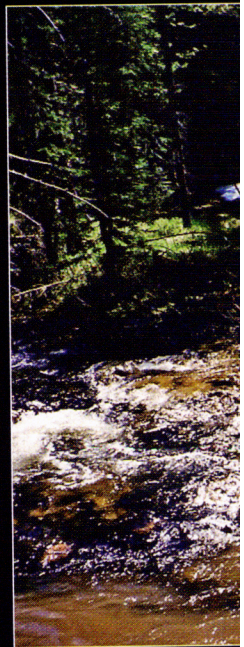




*Whatever the
emphasis, there are
high-end dude
ranch experiences to
satisfy your inner
cowboy.*

Corral Your Passion for the Outdoors

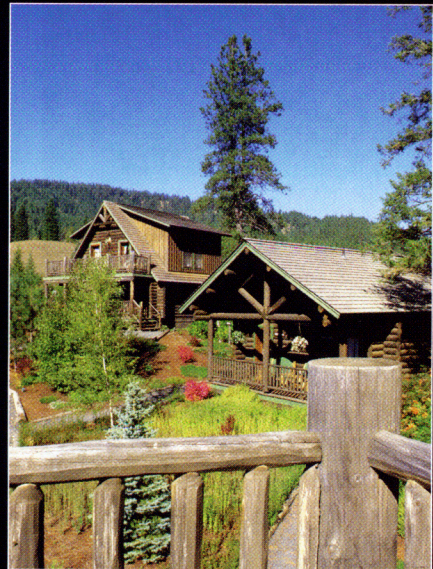
By Kathleen Montgomery



As our small group of riders winds its way up the foothills of Southern Arizona's Tucson Mountains, my husband spots a red tailed hawk perched atop a saguaro cactus. Our wrangler, Gry, halts our procession just long enough for us

to watch it launch itself into a sky as clear and still as a swimming pool.

The momentary distraction allows us to take in the scene: Craggy, volcanic Panther Peak, sharp against the sky, looks as though it had cut itself free from the surrounding limestone, brushy with fragrant creosote. A forest of tall, multi-armed saguaros spikes the hillside, and the pale green branches of palo verde trees are thick



The accommodations at Hidden Creek Ranch enforce the dude ranching experience.

and soft with tiny yellow flowers, making the scene look as though it had been dusted with gold. It all seems unreal, as if we've stumbled on the set of a Western. And, in fact, we have.

These very hills provided the setting for the 1960s television show, "High Chaparral," as well as a number of movies.

It was the appeal of those old Westerns that drew my husband and me to the hacienda-style White Stallion Ranch in Tucson. And with four equestrian activities each day, we had plenty of opportunity to ride the ground that Hollywood burned into our imaginations as kids. We crossed trails with Longhorns on a slow ride through the mountains, loped through washes after a breakfast in the desert, watched a rodeo and competed in team penning. At night, we learned about owls and falcons, sang around a campfire, and laughed our way through a comic show of rope tricks and gun twirling.

But while we immersed ourselves in the lore of the Old West, other guests found more modern entertainment. They played tennis, shot hoops, took guided hikes, dipped in the pool, and soaked in the hot tub. Kids fed llamas in the petting zoo, while their parents learned that "ranch hands" took on a whole new meaning when applied to the on-call masseuse.

In many ways, the White Stallion is typical of guest ranches, which have evolved beyond sweat-and-toil vacations. While horses are still central, most offer a wide variety of activities. Their menus range beyond beef and beans, some aspiring to gourmet with the help of institute-trained chefs. The result is part resort, part riding school, part New Age retreat, with all-inclusive pricing including packaging, lodging, three meals, and most activities.

Programs generally run Sunday to Sunday. Some offer three or four night options. But stay the week. A weeklong stay at a



With all dude ranches, horseback riding serves as a core activity, including at Wapiti Meadow Ranch.



Hone your shooting skills at Hidden Creek Ranch in Idaho.



Guides instruct the finer points of fly-fishing at Wapiti Meadow Ranch.



good guest ranch can transcend a vacation to become a life-changing experience. The trick is finding the right one. Fortunately, the choices are as varied as an Arizona sunset. No matter what your passions, there's almost certainly a ranch that can corral them. Here are a few of the best, organized by a featured activity.

STRATOS Details

- **WHITE STALLION RANCH**(888) 977-2624), (520) 297-0252
www.wsranch.com
FBO INFO.: TUCSON INTERNATIONAL
TRAJEN FBO NETWORK (800) 889-0593
PREMIER AVIATION(800) 274-8451
BOMBARDIER AVIATION(888) 227-1887

- **HIDEOUT AT FLITNER RANCH**(800) 354-8637
www.thehideout.com
FBO INFO.: GREYBULL/SOUTH BIG HORN COUNTY AIRPORT
HAWKINS & POWERS(307) 765-4482

- **WAPITI MEADOW RANCH**(208) 633-3217
www.wapitimeadowranch.com
FBO INFO.: CASCADE AIRPORT
ARNOLD AVIATION (208) 382-4844

- **HIDDEN CREEK RANCH**(800) 446-3833, (208) 689-3209
www.hiddencreek.com
FBO INFO.: COEUR D'ALENE AIR TERMINAL
RESORT AVIATION SERVICES(208) 772-3731

- **VISTA VERDE RANCH**(970) 879-3858
www.vistaverde.com
FBO INFO.: STEAMBOAT SPRINGS/BOB ADAMS FIELD
STEAMBOAT SPRINGS AIRPORT (970) 879-1204



Hidden Creek Ranch guests are encouraged to forge a bond with nature via horseback riding excursions.

For Pampered Cowboys Hideout at Flitner Ranch, Shell, Wyoming

If your enthusiasm for a genuine cowboy experience is bridled only by the dread of sleeping on a cold, hard bedroll, hoof it on over to the Hideout at Flitner Ranch. The 300,000-acre working cattle ranch at the foot of Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains has been owned by the Flitner family for a century.

There's no nose to tail riding here. Guests work side-by-side with experienced ranch hands to manage 1,200 head of Black Angus. They mend fences and tend watering holes, move cattle and ride herd. Fall means cattle round-ups and spring means branding. Guests don't have to be accomplished equestrians when they come, but Flitner's Kathy McLane says they will be by the time they leave.

The cowboy work hasn't changed much in the past 100 years, but the amenities have improved considerably. Guests retire to duplex cabins equipped with satellite TV and high-speed Internet. But few sit inside when comfortable chairs on the porch look out over forested red mountains.

The best part is that cowboy work is optional. So, if you wake up saddle sore and cured of your cowboy fantasies, there are plenty of other things to do. And your horse will still respect you in the morning.



Guests sample bareback riding at Vista Verde Ranch near Steamboat Springs in Colorado.



Bringing them home at Vista Verde Ranch. Guests participate in cattle drives.

For Fishing Enthusiasts Wapiti Meadow Ranch, Cascade, Idaho

Aspiring fly fishermen and women need cast no farther than Wapiti Meadow for the ideal vacation. The ranch is located an hour and a half from the nearest town, so host Barry Bryant often picks up guests at the Boise airport in his Cessna. The remote location is a plus, but it's the fishing that lures them.

One of about 100 fishing resorts in the world endorsed by Orvis, Wapiti Meadow is located in the central Idaho Salmon River Mountains. Guests travel by foot, horse, or plane each day to fish from some 50 miles of trout-swimming water, including high-mountain lakes, the Middle Fork and South Fork of the Salmon River, and a number of tributaries in between.

A highlight is the weekly plane trip into the River of No Return Wilderness. There, guests fish and camp in the largest wilderness area in the lower 48 states.

If your biggest dreams are on the line, head for Wapiti Meadows and let them fly.

For Naturalists Hidden Creek Ranch, Harrison, Idaho

Nineteenth century naturalist John Muir founded the Sierra Club to help protect the land he loved. Today, a descendant of Muir's, and his namesake, continues that tradition at Hidden Creek Ranch. This modern-day John Muir and his wife Iris Behr use their pristine Rocky Mountain wilderness and horse sense to help guests connect with the earth. They call it "Earth Philosophy," and it's grounded in Native American traditions and practices.

Guests can learn about those traditions through a pipe and sweat lodge ceremony. A Medicine Trail Hike that highlights the edible and medicinal properties of native plants is also available by request.

The ranch offers three levels of fitness hikes, plus instruction in breathing, yoga, and meditation. A classically-trained chef uses organic fresh fruits from the ranch's orchard. And the guest rooms are stocked with green cotton towels and environmentally friendly products.

The Earth Philosophy also extends to the riding program with a technique called centered riding. Certified instructors use the method to help people forge bonds with their horses, which they believe embody the spirit of nature.

You can lose your cares in the wilderness, and find yourself in the process.

For Foodies Vista Verde Ranch, Lyons, Colorado

At Vista Verde, guests usually find the greens on their plates as magnificent as the greens in the surrounding Rocky Mountain wilderness.

It's what *Bon Appetit* called "haute ranch grub," and it's thanks to the work of chef Jonathon Gillespie.

Gillespie prepares a new menu nightly, and guests can choose from among three or four dinner entrees. These might include maple seared Muscovy duck breast, sliced and served with a wild rice croquette or sautéed halibut with roasted red pepper pesto over rosemary whipped potatoes.

Gillespie also teaches hands-on cooking classes to a limited number of guests. Students don aprons and help prepare dishes like rosemary flatbread; roasted beet, goat cheese, and red grape salad with hazelnut vinaigrette; and tequila cured salmon. If not devoured in the kitchen, class projects are apt to appear on the dinner menu.

A self-proclaimed wine geek, Gillespie also conducts weekly wine tastings that are popular with oenophiles and neophytes alike. It's his way of giving patrons a taste of the good life. ☺