

Wyoming High Country Ride: my favorite '07 horse vacation.

by Teresa Kangas

The highlight of my 2007 horse vacations was The Wyoming High Country Ride in the Big Horn National Forest, Wyoming, 12 miles south of the Montana border. Flo Calkins has been organizing this camp and ride for 12 years and her experience shines. The number of repeat riders is proof of that. I talked to a few regulars that have been doing this ride for nine years. The location rotates in and out of favorite Big Horn camp spots via a forest service lottery system. Flo averages the same spot about every 3-4 years. It's scheduled the first week in August – give or take – this year from July 29th to August 4th.

First and foremost, the riding was fantastic. Lots of scenic loops, overlooks, forest covered sections and destinations such as the medicine wheel spiritual grounds. We rode to our hearts content. It was especially sweet to go from 100 plus degrees in Sheridan to beautiful mountain weather hovering around the mid 70's that held for most of the week. Our Thursday rain day was an opportunity to explore Sheridan or Cody. By that time, it was o.k. to take a ride break. Some went to Sheridan and told of a known historic saddle collection at the local tack shop. We headed to Cody to wander, eat and window shop. My favorite part was experiencing Cody's classic western feel and the galleries full of impressive western art.

The camp food was truly something to write home about. Flo has it all figured out. The big yellow circus tent was the hub of dining and social activities. Bear Lodge Resort down the road catered mouth watering meals. Breakfast was expressed in first and included hot choices, cold cereals and fresh fruits. These folks know how to start the day. Hot grits and bacon, french toast, eggs and steaming coffee. You get the idea here that it was delicious and something for everyone's taste. Lunch was pack and go following breakfast with efficient catering staff on hand to make up your mile high sandwich. Choice of breads, cold cuts, cheeses, a sweet snack, fruit, juice and water. Then dinner was something else after a day on the trail. Promptly served on schedule each evening with a variety of offerings: hearty lasagna – meat or veggie, roasted chicken, beef roast, a traditional turkey feast and the grand finale a fancy prime rib dinner complete with cloth table coverings and a show of sincere appreciation by Beaver Lodge that ended with give-away prizes. These were good prizes too - a homemade quilt, unique horse related momentos and a warm thank you for serving us! Wow – thank you to them.

To boot scoot dinner into high heaven there was nightly entertainment with live singing and country dancing. The latter part of the week, a talent show gave everybody willing and able a chance to contribute to the weeks entertainment. Cowboy poetry, a sing along song or two and even a skit with costumes. Had to appreciate the sense of humor in this group for their efforts.

Camping was the gammett of live-in quarters, campers, and tents. The popular choice for horses tended towards electric or portable fencing as well as high-lines. I studied some curious high-line set-ups amongst the regulars. A home-made pole attached to the truck

hitch that looked like a back yard clothes line connected from truck to trailer. I kinda liked the idea and it was practical since the camping was open with out access to tree's for the usual high line technique.

Weed free hay was required, but no worries, the ride included horse rations for the week. Upon check in you picked up your allotment of cubed alfalfa that met the national forest regulations. In addition, you could buy certified hay off the truck if you wanted to supplement with the real thing and didn't want to haul your own. Plenty of fresh water was always available in a community tank as well as potable people water. Bottled water and juices were always included when packing your daily lunch.

Don't have a horse – no problem – Flo has local connections to rent a horse for the week. They even have gaited horses. You make arrangements in advance and they'll deliver your mount with all the tack to go with it. One rider flew in from Washington state, rented a car and had a grand time riding all week. I asked him how he liked his flashy gray flecked foxtrotter and he said – “yep... this one doesn't mind goin, and goin, and goin...” Sounded like that suited him just fine.

The ride allows for 100 reservations and I was surprised at the extent to which folks traveled to get there: Minnesota, Missouri, Alabama, California, Arizona, Colorado and Canada to name a few. To support safety, human and animal Docs joined each daily ride and were available at camp. As far as I know, altitude was the biggest medical concern with all arriving and leaving safe and sound.

If you have \$425 to spend for a one week horse vacation, this is one ride that I would personally recommend. I loved not having to cook, settling in to a week of base camp without having to pull a rig out and about, and meeting a lot of nice people there to enjoy their horses, eat good food and ride the high country with fellow cowboys and cowgirls. I'll be back next year. Waiting to sign up in January once Flo gets her '08 spot and is ready for riders.