

## September in Colorado!

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, I joined friends for a four day excursion to Horse Ranch Park. Horse Ranch Park is located 12 miles west of Crested Butte. The word “Park” is a misnomer. It is a campground where camping quarters can be rather close. Having noted that, it is worth the riding! My friends, self included, used to be branded the Iron Butt Riders. Now, we are the Double Nickel Riders!



Horse Ranch Park is located 12 miles west of Crested Butte, on the west side of Kebler Pass. The campground is dedicated to equestrian riders. Although there are no horse corrals, there are options for high-lining if you are camped on the parameter of the camp. However, you probably need to arrive on a Monday or Tuesday to capture these spots, especially during high use season, which is August and September. My preference is in the open area where the sun shines, which is perfect in the morning with a cup of coffee and at sunset the sun shines it's glow on the colors of the Aspen leaves, with a nice glass of Merlot.

Most riders electric fence their horses. I choose to put my horse on a Spring Tie, which is an extended “arm” from my trailer. Of course after 20 miles on the trail, he is happy to hang out at the trailer.

Horse Ranch Park is a favorite for out-of-state riders who visit Colorado as well as the Colorado rider. I discovered Horse Ranch Park in 2005 on a MSFTA sponsored ride. Both this trip and the '05 ride were at the time of premier leaf turning colors. The Aspens do turn red and orange, as well as the usual yellows and greens.

The riding is superb! Forever in my mind is the ride to “Oh Be Joyful Pass” which is 12,410'. It is a difficult ride, especially the last 2 miles of a 9 mile ride to the pass. The Missouri Fox Trotter, being sure footed and trail savvy makes the trip worthwhile. Horse shoes a must and need to be solidly attached! The ride is not for the faint hearted, but a glorious event. You can't get much closer to heaven on your horse than this ride! You can see Crested Butte ski runs carved out on the mountains to the east, the back side of the Maroon Bells and the Ruby Range. Bring a coat, as the winds can be cold at this altitude. One other tip, get a weather report, because if thunder storms are forecast, you must pay attention and be off the mountain before it starts to thunder.

Day two was a morning ride to Lake Irwin. This is about a 12 mile round trip ride, thus late lunch was back at camp. The trail goes through the Aspen groves that we view from camp, but a steady ride around the mountain, over the top, to Lake Irwin. This is a pleasant easy ride for the Double Nickle Riders.

Day three was a ride to Dark Canyon, which is NW of camp. Actually Dark Canyon was 3 miles beyond our destination, which was a great lunch spot at the junction of the Middle Anthracite Creek and the Anthracite Creek. This is about 10 miles from camp. Coming down out of Devil's Stair Case leads into an Oasis, not Palm Trees, but long grass and running water.

Devil's Stair Case was not without incidence. There was a huge downed tree that yellow jackets had declared their home. Of course being the Trail Boss, this did no impact me (first past the tree, the bees missed me), but by the 6<sup>th</sup> rider passing the dead tree, the bees were agitated and attacking. Several horses were stung thus creating a “moment”. The trail is narrow and many switch backs, so escaping was somewhat limited. All riders, with horses taking the brunt of the bee attack, made it through. However, this caused concern getting back, as there was no way around that tree. Going back, two separate groups, there were few bee stings and no mishaps. *(Continued Next Page)*

# Mountain States Fox Trotter Association

October 21, 2008

*On the Trail! On the Rail! On the Ranch! The Missouri Fox Trotter!*

Weather was not on our side as we returned to camp. It was stormy with thunder, lightening, hail, and sleet. All riders arrived in camp safe. Afternoon rides in the high country can be challenging with afternoon thunderstorms. A good day ride, in spite of the weather and bees.

Off to the South of camp, there are great trails. Although we did not do these trails this year, I did ride them in 2005. The rides spin out of Cliff Creek Trail Head to Lost Lake, Beckwith Mountain, Swampy Pass and a view of The Castles. These rides certainly warrant your consideration. Other rides include Anthracite Trail, but you really need a vehicle and trailer parked at Ruby Anthracite Trail Head to get you back to camp.

Horse Ranch Park is a must if you are an avid Colorado mountain trail rider. The Trail Illustrated Map (#133) is a good map of the area. Some of the trails are not well marked, so take your map and GPS if you have one. What is great about his area is the variation of rides whether it is 5 miles to 30 miles plus. Yes, you and your mount must be in shape for the extended rides in rugged terrain. For Rocky Mountain Leaf Peaking on your steed, this is a Class Act!  
*Submitted by Peggy Sandbak*



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