

# RIDE ROUNDUP

A collection of your on-trail stories and photos.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

### Mackenzie Highland Ranch, Dubois, Wyoming

BY ROBERT J. BAKER, PHD

Some of you may remember me. I submitted a story about my experiences riding in Montana a while back ("Montana Adventure," *Ride Roundup*, November/December '05.) Much of that story was devoted to the preparations necessary for traveling long distances with your horse. Since that time, *The Trail Rider* devoted an issue to this topic and it was very well done. Also, how about the two part series by Kent and Charlene Krone on packing in remote Yellowstone? I really enjoy their writing style; I almost feel like I'm riding alongside them.

This time, I'd like to share my riding experiences just outside the very Western little town of Dubois, Wyoming. Dubois is located on the Wind River, approximately an hour from the south gate of Yellowstone and about 1½ hours from the tourist center of Jackson.

Even though this location is near two famous summer tourist destinations, the Wind River Valley is still a little off the beaten path. So don't worry that you will be caught in the summer migration of vans, SUVs, and campers.

#### The Ranch

If you read my last story, you may remember that I started in northern Mon-



Beaver Pond, near the author's cabin at Mackenzie Highland Ranch.

rather rustic one-bedroom cabin that may be torn down soon. The other three are called pioneer cabins.

tana and wasn't happy with my location. I then moved south to Torrey Mountain Log Cabin Rentals and had a great time. I also spent the entire month of June in Montana.

This year was different on several levels. First, I couldn't stay as long. I had to fit 17 days of horse vacation for Buddy and me into the month of July. Buddy is my 6-year-old buckskin traveling partner. He's a seasoned traveler and never asks, "Are we there yet?"

I chose Wyoming rather than Montana for the sake of variety, and because it's a bit closer to my barn in Indiana (1,460 miles vs. well over 1,600). While that may not seem like much difference, it meant that I could make this trip with only one night layover each way. They were two long travel days to be sure!

This time, headquarters was a place called Mackenzie Highland Ranch. I've really wrestled with my conscience about sharing this information. It's a really nice, quiet place. I do plan on revisiting the ranch, and I fear if I let the cat out of the bag, they won't have room for Buddy and me. Nevertheless, if you're looking for an ideal place for riding in Wyoming, I highly recommend you check out Mackenzie Highland Ranch!

The ranch has six cabins available for rent. One is a large duplex. Another is a

They were originally built in Yellowstone and were moved to the ranch in the 1930s. Likely, they're more than 100 years old! They are called pioneer cabins, because they are only one room and they don't have bath facilities. They do have a refrigerator, and a bathhouse is very near.

The ranch also has recreational-vehicle hookups that include water and electric. All guests receive a corral for their horses at no extra charge. The corrals don't have any shelter, but this isn't a problem during the summer.

I reserved the rustic one-bedroom cabin the January before my summer trip. However, a couple of weeks before I was to leave on my trip, I received an e-mail from Ruth, the ranch manager, stating that the cabin I'd reserved wouldn't be available. But she assured me I'd get an "upgrade" at no extra charge. My upgrade was the duplex cabin that sleeps 10 people, is on two levels, and has two bathrooms and laundry facilities. Truly an upgrade!

David Mackenzie and his family purchased the ranch about 12 years ago, and it's been operated as a guest ranch since. Mr. Mackenzie and his wife actually live in Pennsylvania, but he does visit on occasion. The ranch managers are a husband-and-wife team, Tom and Ruth Verheil. If you visit the ranch, you'll enjoy meeting Tom and Ruth.

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## A Slight Change of Plans

I usually travel alone. I've found that I get along with myself better than anyone else, except Buddy! I'd planned to make his trip alone. The only exception was that my wife and granddaughter were flying out near the end of my stay so that we could take Meagan, our 10-year-old granddaughter, to see Yellowstone National Park. They'd then make the trip home with Buddy and me in the truck.

My mother is 78 years young. The Sunday before I was to leave, my wife, Nancy, mentioned that I was staying in large place and suggested that my mother ride out with me. At first, my mother protested, saying she was too old for such a trip, even though she's healthy and extremely active. I finally talked her into it.

As I look back on the trip, having my mother along for the ride was one of the highlights. Mom and I had 1,460 miles to talk and visit. She had a great time, and I know she treasures the memories of her adventure.

## Endless Riding

I think a vacation with your horse is a lot like a recipe. There are many ingredients that come together to make it delicious. A pinch of this or a pinch of that can be left out or changed and there's no noticeable difference. However, there are certain ingredients that if omitted the whole flavor falls flat. I rate safety as the number-one ingredient!

Other important ingredients are the places you choose for layovers, the people you meet along the way or at your destination, and the riding territory. After all, riding is the purpose of the trip. I had only one layover, in Lexington, Nebraska.

The people, well, I think of ranch managers Tom and Ruth. I also think of Johnny Lyle. Johnny is the ranch wrangler. He's retired after more than 30 years with the U.S. Forest Service. One of his jobs with the forest service required packing into this region and estimating wildlife populations. What a resource about the places to ride in the valley!



Lunchtime for Robert Baker's gelding, Buddy, at a trailhead a two-hour ride from Mackenzie Highland Ranch.

I like to day ride from my cabin, always ending my rides back "home" for the night. I'm willing to trailer some, but I don't want to have to trailer long distances or every time I ride. There is absolutely endless riding straight out from the ranch. I never once trailered Buddy to a trailhead.

One of my favorite rides started along Sheridan Creek. I discovered this trail quite by accident one day. I was riding along a forest road and noticed a place that had been used for camping. Through the campsites were trails. I started on one and within minutes I was hundreds of feet above Sheridan Creek. I hadn't ridden far when a ruckus developed below me, and out of a willow break charged a cow elk!

It was late in the evening when I found this trail, so I couldn't complete it, but was certain to be back. When back in camp, I was telling Johnny about the trail I'd discovered. He told me that if I'd continued, I'd find the headwaters of the creek and would cross the Continental Divide. Now, how cool is that?

Another ride that I enjoyed was to the top of Elk Ridge. Elk Ridge is across the valley from the ranch and, once on the top, you have a beautiful panorama of the valley. One caution, getting to the top of Elk Ridge requires a fit, surefooted mount. I have to admit that there were a couple of places that I chose to focus on Buddy's ears.

There are three trailheads within five miles of the ranch. One is the Pinnacles Trail, and the other two will take you to mountain lakes. I wasn't able to ride these trails, but maybe next year.

As to wildlife, twice I saw elk. The one I saw along Sheridan Creek and several in a mountain meadow that I rode through. I also found grizzly bear tracks. Wolves have been reintroduced in Elk Ridge. Locals told me they haven't seen or heard the wolves, but they know they're there.

## Sharing Stories

Traveling with your horse to faraway places is an awesome experience, if you love riding like I do. One reason I'm writing another story is because of the countless e-mails I received regarding my previous story on Montana. Some were complimentary. One was about how I'd broken Montana's fishing regulations when I told about my experience catching rainbow trout. FYI, I didn't fish in Wyoming, and, as far as I know, there aren't any outstanding warrants on me in Montana. That's not why I chose to go to Wyoming instead!

However, most correspondence was from those asking questions about how to take such a trip. This told me that there are a lot of fellow riders with the same dream. They just need a little push to go and do it.

In Wyoming, a couple from Missouri was also doing some mountain riding. One day, while Buddy and I were out on the trail, they asked my mother if I might be the guy that had written a story about riding in Montana. When mom acknowledged that I was that guy, they said we just knew it when they heard him call his horse "Buddy."

Now I know that Kent Krone also rides a buckskin named Buddy. So this puts me and my Buddy in real good company.

For more information on Mackenzie Highland Ranch, call (307) 455-3415, or visit [www.mackenziehighlandranch.com](http://www.mackenziehighlandranch.com).

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