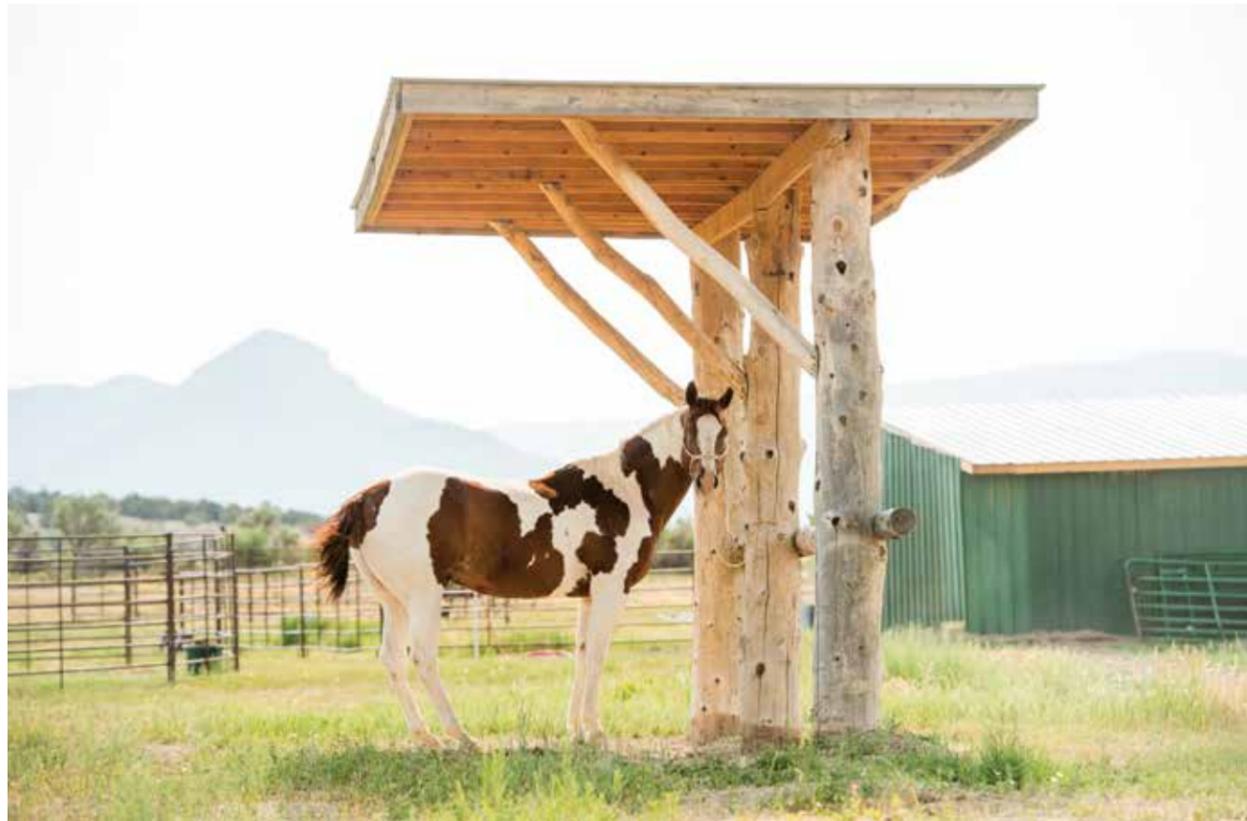


A group of five people are riding horses in a grassy field. In the background, a large, leafy tree stands prominently. The scene is set in a rural, hilly area with a green building visible in the distance. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and scenic.

HIGH TIME FOR HORSES

A Dude Ranch Experience at
The High Lonesome Ranch in Colorado,
as the Ranch says, will bring out
your whole family's inner cowboy.

BY JOE HEALY
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE HIGH LONESOME RANCH



OPENING SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISAIS MICHIU

Imagine learning to ride horses and beginning to master equestrian techniques, while learning to fly fish and enjoying shooting five-stand and sporting clays and also, in season, working with sporting dogs or hunting five species of gamebirds—in your very own national-park-size parcel.

Okay, technically, you'll have to share this Western wonderland with your own family and other guests. But it's just like having your very own national park for as long as you stay at The High Lonesome Ranch, outside DeBeque, Colorado. The working cattle ranch is situated on more than 408 square miles of deeded and permitted land—framed by alpine mesas, the North Dry Folk Valley, the Kimball Creek Valley, and Cow Mountain with elevations climbing from 4,000 to more than 9,000 feet. The Ranch offers endless recreational opportunities and is a place where bird hunters, fly fishermen, and equestrians can get their fix.

Let's start with the Dude Ranch Experience, a 6-night, 5-day package that brings you and your family to the Wild West, only with much better meals, much nicer accommodations, and exactly as wild as you want, as the Ranch says. Whether you have years of experience around horses, or mere hours on horseback, or none at all, the wranglers at the ranch (interns on summer break from Colorado State University) will get you (and your family) set up on a horse fitted to individual style

and disposition. Soon, you'll be fording streams, riding miles of mountain valleys and meadow trails, and taking part in a real-deal cattle drive.

"On the first day, our wranglers check out the abilities of our guests, how good they are in the saddle, and get them matched up with a faithful steed, with the aim that guests have the same horse all week. A big part of the program is horsemanship and getting to know the horse throughout the week and actually forming a relationship with the horse," said Chris Pipes, national account manager for The High Lonesome. Guests arrive on Sunday night and the horse work begins on Monday. Pipes says it's an action-packed time of activities, with memorable food in the all-inclusive package and several saddlebags' worth of western adventure.

"We are a working cattle ranch and every day will entertain you," Pipes says. "We value the importance of keeping the family together, we urge you to turn off and put down technology and enjoy evening activities," said Pipes. "We want families to be together."

Of course, every family needs a little break. Mom and Dad get an adult night with gourmet food in a relaxed setting, while the kids get their own night out with pizza and a movie. "We have a day designated for other experiences, too, usually Wednesday during the Ranch stay, which can include fly fishing, shooting sporting clays, wild-horse tours, wine tours, or cooking



GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR GIDDYAP

In addition to the Dude Ranch Experience, The High Lonesome's Tenderfoot Experience offers the same activities for guests, only with an abbreviated stay of 4 nights and 3 days, at a lower rate. The Ranch also offers a Women's Western Week, scheduled this year for mid-August.

The Ranch Rates: Packages include activities, Western elegant lodging, and contemporary Western meals. The season is generally Memorial Day to Labor Day, though horse packages continue until snowfall causes road closures.

Accommodations are available for more than 60 guests at one time and range from the Guest House, with 8 bedrooms and 8 baths and a game room; the Pond House, with 5 bedrooms and 5 baths; the Creekside Cabin, with 3 bedrooms and 3 baths; the Forshay Cabin, with 2 bedrooms and 2 baths; and the Homestead House, with 3 bedrooms and 3 baths. For other types of trips, Castle Rock Camp, which accommodates up to 10, is an option, as are the McKay Fork cowboy-style cabins.

Info and reservations: (970) 283-9420 or www.highlonesomeduderanch.com or www.thehighlonesomeranch.com



› **DUDE RANCH EXPERIENCE:** \$2,785 per adult; \$1,585 per child ages 4 to 15; no charge for day care for younger children.

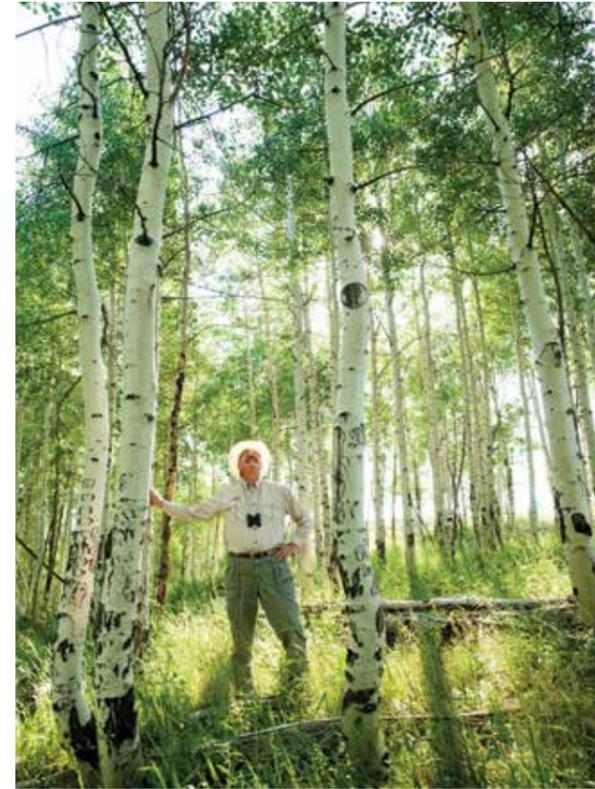
› **LITTLE POKES:** Children under 8 years old can attend Little Pokes, a special experience for youth featuring The High Lonesome Ranch activities including pony rides; arena games; nature walks; slumber sleepover with their wranglers for a special dinner and movies; bass, crappie, and bluegill fishing in the lower pools; horse painting (they paint their horse like the Native Americans did); wildlife tour; crafts and art projects; a cooking class on making the best s'mores under the stars; and Western dance fun. Please contact the Ranch for availability and pricing.

› **TENDERFOOT EXPERIENCE:** \$1,780 per adult; \$1,050, children ages 4 to 15.

› **WOMEN'S WESTERN WEEK:** Designed for sisters, moms and daughters, and women's groups; August 17 to 23, 2014. The same Dude Ranch activities as other weeks, plus yoga in the morning, one night "pajama party", optional local-winery tour, and cooking classes. Choice of stay, either 6 night/5 day or 4 night/3 day.



THIS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISAIS MICHIOU



classes,” says Pipes. “Or families can go mountain biking.”

In the summer, one night can bring a trip to the rodeo in Grand Junction, Colorado. “Guests get to see some of the sports like barrel racing and obstacle courses,” says Amé Longwell, equestrian director at The High Lonesome. “It helps Ranch guests become more engaged about working with their horse and getting the horse involved. It’s a lot of fun.” The rodeo activities such as introduction to barrel racing are available during the Dude Ranch Experience, too. Again, it’s up to the individual preferences of the guests.

“Sometimes we simply go on a trail ride that leads to fly fishing. We go from the orchard to the fly-fishing pools, it’s about five miles north from the headquarters to the upper and lower pools. You can enjoy the ride and then fly fish once you get there, or just stop and have lunch and watch people fish,” says Longwell. “Or you can tie up your horse and walk the fields. Other times, I’ll take guests to watch the dog trials. We have more than 50 kennel dogs—pointers, setters, retrievers, and spaniels—so it’s great to watch them work. Many people have never seen this before, it’s pretty amazing to watch.”

Longwell is a fifth-generation horse devotee whose grandfather trained military mounts and show horses. A Wyoming native, she grew up on a ranch with more than 165 horses and went to the University of Wyoming, where she rode and competed in barrel racing and other events. In fact, prize money

won with her horse provided a type of scholarship for Longwell in college. Later, she had an internship in Australia and “rode horses around the world,” she said, on five continents.

At The High Lonesome, Longwell enjoys exposing guests to a variety of recreational experiences. “We have a wild-horse tour in the summer where guests can watch some of the 124 wild horses,” she says. “You can also do equestrian training during the day, and then take a cooking class or do yoga at night. Or go on a wine tour in Palisades, west of the Ranch, where there are more than 24 wineries. We have more than 56 trail rides and families can do an overnight trip to stay in a teepee.” Longwell says families love the teepee option: They travel the Ute Indian trails and then stay in an Indian-style teepee in the very same locations where the Utes spread their animal-hide teepees.

“We had a family stay with us once from San Francisco. The father was a doctor and they had children ages 7, 9, and 11. The dad told me his dream was to be cowboy,” Longwell says. “On the last day (of their Dude Ranch Experience), we went on a cattle drive. They had never seen an elk before! So we sat on horseback for about an hour and watched a herd of elk. The father said ‘This is the memory of a lifetime for my family.’”

Let’s not move too fast past meals: they’re exquisite at The High Lonesome. “Food is emotionally connecting and powerful, we look very seriously at meals,” says General Manager Scott Stewart.

The chef worked at Canlis, one of the top restaurants in Seattle, before coming to the Ranch. The kitchen specializes in farm-to-table meals, sourcing the Ranch’s own greenhouses, orchards, and gardens and utilizing its own grass-fed and organically finished Angus beef, said Stewart. Other entrees such as pork and lamb come from local 4-H or FFA organizations, homemade potato chips and bread are part of the daily fare, and guests delight in Aunt Linda’s (you won’t forget her!) breakfasts, Stewart said.

One of the novel aspects of a High Lonesome stay is the immersion in science, particularly biology and ecology. Recently, the Ranch formed the High Lonesome Institute, which studies land-use practices and is exploring hosting higher-education teaching opportunities with western colleges and universities.

It could be said that this part of the Ranch’s mission is stewardship of ecologically and economically resilient compatible-use landscapes. According to the Ranch’s website, the Ranch embraces a model of sustainability using a unique public, private, and non-governmental organization partnership that helps provide stewardship of a large-scale, intact Western landscape; maintains biological diversity and ecological connectivity; restores degraded habitat; ensures long-term conservation of critical open space; and preserves Western

Colorado’s important ranching heritage while carefully balancing mixed land uses that economically support the Ranch’s long-term legacy goals.

Programs are studying how to care for this immense tract of land and how to pass it along generationally; and also fostering the relationship between neighboring public lands (the Ranch’s biggest neighbor is the federal Bureau of Land Management) and the Ranch’s private lands and corporate interests. This is a focus of the Ranch ownership partnership headed up by Chairman/CEO Paul R. Vahldiek, Jr. of Texas.

The bottom line to this approach by The High Lonesome Ranch is to keep the habitat and animal resources in the best possible condition for continued use, in perpetuity—to keep whole, healthy mountains, as Aldo Leopold wrote so compellingly about biodiversity, wildlife management, biotic communities, and wise conservation practices.

Let’s circle back to the Dude Ranch Experience. “Horse travel, in particular, is such an important mode of transportation in our area of Colorado. We wanted to provide a family-centric experience that really celebrates the land and gets you in tune with the landscape. Horses are great healers and the experiences create so many memories,” says Stewart. “When people leave us, there are usually tears not cheers, because they’re so emotional about their time here. It’s sad to go, but they can always come back—and many do!” 🐾



REAL SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The Ranch's High Lonesome Institute has a mission to "[c]reate, apply, and extend knowledge that inspires and engages people to practice a contemporary land ethic." Further, the Institute's vision statement empowers staff to make use of "science, scholarship, dialogue, education, and outreach" and to use the diverse Ranch landscape as a "laboratory for experiential learning." Recently, Hal Salwasser, professor of Forest Ecosystems and Society and former Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University, one of the nation's leading programs of forestry education, research, and outreach was named Director of the High Lonesome Institute.

"Institutions and NGOs can come together to talk about land-management challenges and planning and implementation based on science and on-the-ground observations," says the Ranch Chairman/CEO Paul R. Vahldiek, Jr. "We want to encourage discussion and coordination and have more focus on applied science and learning with less discord within the working lands and conservation communities. We want the Institute to be a forum where this common-ground discussion can take place."

The Institute has worked with such groups as the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, North American Grouse Partnership, Trout Unlimited, Western Aspen Alliance Partnership, Society for Conservation Biology, Wildlands Network, Mule Deer Foundation, and Western Landowners Alliance, among others. One project underway is research and baseline inventories on the Kimball Creek ecosystem prior to planned restoration of nearly 17 miles of a severely downcut stream and valley landscape resulting from historic land-use practices.



THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS SCHNITZER

WINGSHOOTING EXPECTATIONS

Wingshooting season runs from September 1 through February and bird-hunting guests at The High Lonesome will hunt wheat and rye fields, creek bottoms, and sage- and oakbrush flats for wild and early-release pheasant, chukar, Hungarian partridge, and quail.

After a Ranch breakfast, hunters usually head to the five-stand. Target presentation is mostly along the lines of what you'll see in the field, from right to left and left to right crossing shots, to those quartering away. There are a few fun variations to keep shooters on their toes, like the high incoming targets and the springing teal. A flurry was added to simulate a high-driven shoot, and the clays fly fast and furious.

There are two walking shooting courses, plus a Pheasant and a Quail Walk Up. If you're missing more clays than you'd care to, the guides are all NSCA Level 1 certified shooting instructors and give excellent assistance. The clays are addictive, and while some shooters would be happy burning through a case of shells (particularly on the flurry), guests get the choice to stay and break more clays or to go hunt birds. That's an easy choice . . . hunt 'em up!

A series of fields adjoin the creek bottom. On one side are wheat and rye fields, and across the road is a sage and oak-brush flat. They are two totally different types of cover, and let's say the guide decides to run a pointing lab. The dog casts back and forth, back and forth, and then locks up.

"What's under his nose?"

"I'd say a covey, from the way he's looking."

Sure enough, a covey of quail gets up and flushes in all directions. Unless you see a running bird, there is no telling what's under the dog's nose. It might be a pheasant, chukar, Hungarian partridge, or quail.

SHOOTING STANDS AND DOG: P. HOTOGRAPHY BY NANCY ANISFIELD; PHEASANT: PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSS SCHNITZER

