

TRAVEL

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Giddyap, city slickers, dude the ranch thing

Area residents saddle up in Wyoming

Julie Candler of Birmingham joined other local travelers recently in Laramie, Wyoming.

By Julie Candler
special writer

You may be met by Butch Cassidy

and the Sundance Kid if you visit the Wyoming dude ranch known as the Vee Bar. The sturdy pair of Belgian horses will provide an old-fashioned Western-style welcome by hauling a hay wagon to meet the train from Laramie.

The railroad line is the Wyoming/Colorado, built in 1887 to run to the tiny gold-mining town of Centennial, just a couple of miles beyond the Vee Bar.

As our group leaves the train and climbs aboard the wagon where baled hay perfumes the air, we are greeted by a handsome man in a cowboy hat. He is Duane Harm, formerly seen in Michigan doing commentaries on WJMT-TV in Flint, which he managed in the mid-'60s.

After Harm signals a giddyap to Butch and Sundance, the two horses bounce us through tall yellow prairie grass. We clomp across lands where the Sioux and Cheyenne once rode, near a marker that says, "Overland Trail, 1862-1868."

A CAREFUL observer sees ruts left by pioneer wagon wheels. Everywhere we look, the horizon is lined with mountain ranges. If we watch closely, we can see antelope, deer and elk on nearby hills.

Butch and Sundance slow to cross a narrow wooden bridge. The rippling, rock-bottomed river below is the Little Laramie, well-known to local trout fishermen. Just beyond, a huge log structure is the barn where horses were stabled when the Vee Bar was a stage coach stop. Alongside is a corral filled with beautiful saddle horses.

After a turn, we see the lodge, built 114 years ago and once a guest house for weary overland travelers. Inside, the walls seem to emit the ghostly figures of hardy homesteaders and settlers who once stayed here.

Harm retired last year from a career in TV management and bought the 870-acre Vee Bar. He and his



Photo by Julie Candler

Duane and Susan Harm turned the Vee Bar in Laramie, Wyo., into a dude ranch.

partner, wife Susan, turned it into a dude ranch because "we wanted to be with people, as well as horses."

Now people come to ride horseback over 26,000 acres of plains and mountain trails. They also fish, hike, eat good food, shoot trap, go tubing on the river, play horseshoes and volleyball.

THE HARMS have renovated the lodge and added a roomy area where people can relax, around a big stone fireplace. Susan used her talent as a professional decorator to add color and coziness to the three cabins and 10 guest rooms, each with a bath.

Among recent guests in these rooms were sportscaster Curt Gowdy, his wife and daughter. Wyoming Governor Michael Sullivan stopped by the Vee Bar recently for a quiet getaway. Vicki Lange of Birmingham and Dutton Morehouse of Bingham Farms are here for a tour and outdoor barbecue with our group.

In winter, skiers using the nearby Snowy Range's 33 runs stay at the Vee Bar. Corporations and groups

move in for secluded seminars and conferences.

But the Vee Bar's biggest attraction is 30 beautiful riding horses. "We work hard to pick the right horses," says Harm. "We look for gentle, well-trained horses that know how to be ridden."

Horseback-riding and all other ranch activities, plus three meals a day, are included in the Vee Bar's daily rates ranging from \$95 a day for one person to \$432 for five people.

IF YOU come to the Vee Bar for a week, your riding skills will be assessed and a horse that suits you (with Western saddle) will be yours for your entire stay. You and your

horse can go on breakfast, lunch or dinner rides, where guides stop along the trail and prepare food flavored by delicious mountain air. Or you can choose to ride to a picturesque spot in the hills for tenting overnight.

Guests say they prefer the down-to-earth atmosphere at the Vee Bar to what they call "yuppy ranches" with condos and golf courses. Other dude ranches in the area are also serious about horseback riding and outdoor living.

Contact Vee Bar Guest Ranch, on Highway 287, 27 miles south of Laramie, by calling (307) 742-8072. Contact Laramie Area Chamber of Commerce, 800 S. Third St., Ste 200, Laramie, Wyo. 82070 or telephone toll-free (800) 445-5305.

view from the top was worth the struggle."



Birmingham writer Julie Candler catches her breath on the mountain top looking down on Mirror Lake.

3 Michigan travelers reach mountain top

Three Michigan travelers climbed the three miles from Lake Marie, at 10,000 feet elevation, to the highest peak in the Medicine Bow National Forest, at 12,013 feet, for a great mountain-top view of Laramie. In the group with writer Julie Candler of Birmingham was Vicki Lange of Birmingham and Dutton Morehouse of Bingham Farms.

About two miles up, the trail turned into piles of huge boulders to scramble up. Leading the group on was Shirley Nielsen, an experienced climber. Another seasoned mountain person, Sandra Rardin, was assigned to the rear, to help the stragglers.

"I seldom saw Shirley," Candler said. "I nearly caught up to her when she stopped for a breather once, but then she moved ahead. But I saw a lot of Sandra. I kept asking her, 'Are we almost there?'"

"With lungs that wouldn't adjust to the altitude, I was the last of the group to huff and puff to the top. Without the helping hands of Sandra and another veteran climber named Dick Reddeck who carried my pack, I never would have made it. The

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