

Back at the ranch: bonding time on trails

BY JANE MARSHALL, EDMONTON JOURNAL JUNE 23, 2011

No television, cellphones or radios. At Ride the Wind Ranch in Rocky Mountain House, family vacation time takes on a different texture.

It's a place where the dream of ranch life becomes tangible -from the mountainous horizon to the feel of running a brush over a horse's back to the smell of a crackling campfire under a night emblazoned with stars.

zoned with stars. For the past two years, Linda Baker and her daughters have travelled from their home in Ontario to Ride the Wind Ranch to spend their summer holidays together in a quiet, family-oriented environment. Sarah and Emma were 14 and 11 at the time of their first trip two years ago, and it made a big impression on the girls.

"We were looking for something specific when we sought out Ride the Wind," Linda explains during a phone interview.

"The riding was a priority and we wanted a challenge as we ride English (an equestrian discipline) back home," she says.

Owners Kathy and Marty Rissi "love their horses and are seasoned on the trails, and they offer a program for riders with experience.

"On our first morning, we had driven from Calgary. It was hot and sunny, and Kathy and her two sons met us and toured us around the ranch. The view is beautiful -it's like taking a deep breath. Very calming. We had a great feeling right away."

had a great feeling right away." What's neat about Ride the Wind is that guests are allowed to connect and care for the animals. Directly in front of the guest cabins is a large grass paddock where the horses are kept. Instead of being segregated from the animals and needing a professional around to spend time with the horses, guests are welcome to enter the paddock whenever they like. It's all about bonding with the animals.

animals. Ride the Wind provides more than a standard trail ride. Kathy and Marty teach their guests how to brush out the horses, and put on halters and saddles before the daily ride, and how to take off the riding gear and clean the animal when the trail ride is over.

ride is over. Kathy notes that by the time people's vacation is over they are confident in taking care of their animal themselves, which forms a connection between the horse and rider.

And keeping in mind the Baker family's riding experience, Kathy and Marty challenged them by

providing a graduated riding program. They were able herd Texas longhorns and learn barrel-racing patterns.

"Marty and I grew up in Switzerland," explains Kathy, who owns Ride the Wind with her husband and their two sons.

"Years ago, we wanted to move to Canada and set up a guest ranch. We found a farm in 1993 and then built the guest cabins and our house. Our opening season was in 1995."

Ride the Wind sees guests from Alberta and Saskatchewan, plus international guests who travel from Switzerland, England, Germany, Austria, Australia and the U.S.

Rides are done in the morning and range from 1-1/2 hours to three hours, and they cover varied terrain around Rocky Mountain House.

The Rissi family takes care of everything themselves -from the cooking to the trail rides -and they spend time with their guests during meals.

meals. "Our guests love the quiet of our location. Many live in towns or cities, so they see that difference. Some people notice that the nights are darker without the city lights, and that the stars show up better in the sky.

"They notice the quiet and relax right away. It's just a nice, quiet holiday in the country."

Linda works in the technology industry and loves the fact that she can unplug and spend time with her girls who absolutely love the animals.

"The whole thing was just fabulous. Since Kathy and Marty are from Europe, their guests are diverse. We ate all our meals together and got to talk to people from around the world.

"I look back at pictures of that view and I instantly feel calm. I highly recommend it.

"In fact, I think I've just talked myself into going back again this year."

If You Go

The minimum age for trail rides is 12 years, but families are welcome to stay at the ranch with younger children and opt out of the riding. Kathy Rissi notes it's a great way to get the country experience without all the gear that camping requires; meals are provided and it makes for an easy holiday.

Food: Kathy does all the cooking at the guest ranch and is happy to accommodate special meal requests.

For directions, maps and more information, go to:

ridethewindranch.com and albertacountryvacation.com

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