



Celebrating the lure of the West is Lost Creek Ranch, a 100-acre guest resort in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The ranch, which occupies land once settled by pioneers, is open from June through September. ABOVE: Activities director Ginger Lynn schools her horse Jet in the riding arena.

ABOVE: Trail riders head out across sagebrush-covered landscape. The fences are buck rail, crafted aboveground just as they were by the early settlers. The ranch is bordered by Grand Teton National Park (Grand Teton towers 13,766 feet in the distance) and Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Saddling Up at Lost Creek

Jackson Hole's Premier Guest Ranch Embraces the Cowboy Life

INTERIOR DESIGN BY TONY SUTTON OF EST EST TEXT BY MICHAEL ENNIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN VAUGHAN

"YOU CAN'T SEE the mountains like this in Aspen," remarks a visitor to Lost Creek Ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The view from the lodge deck is indeed a unique geological drama: The horizon-spanning massif of the Grand Tetons, rising more than a mile straight up from sagebrush flats, unmarred by gondola cables or ski runs, looks just as it did millions of years ago. The sun has already dis-

appeared behind the sharp-toothed peaks, but light floods through the ridges, settling like a golden mist onto the valley floor. Here life exceeds art; even Thomas Moran's transcendental mountain panoramas pale before a Tetons sunset. It is the mythic American vista, the West before it was won, beckoning to its conquerors.

The desire to recapture that basic American myth underlies the appeal

OPPOSITE AND COVER: The accoutrements of ranch life—a pair of boots, a hat, a canteen and leather chaps—are set on the porch of one of the ten guest cabins. The chair seats were made of rawhide webbing. Surrounded by stands of lodgepole pine and aspen, the cabins range in size from one bedroom to two bedrooms, a living room and a complete kitchen.



In Jackson Hole, city slickers can explore a still-wild West. But no ranch manages the balance of rusticity and refinement better than Lost Creek.



ABOVE: Set on a hill at about 7,000 feet, the lodge, built in around 1926, is now a gathering place for guests. The lodgepole pine logs and the stone chimney are original. "We tried to retain and enhance the true flavor of the history and romance of the region," says Tony Sutton, the interior designer for the renovation. BELOW: Steps lead from the lodge to the guest cabins.



of Jackson Hole's twenty or so guest ranches, where city slickers can explore a still-wild West without straying from the comforts of civilization. Each ranch offers a distinct personality, but none manages the tricky balance of rusticity and refinement better than Lost Creek Ranch, which has quietly earned a reputation as the best operation of its kind in Jackson Hole. Despite a doggedly low profile, word has spread among the cognoscenti, and Lost Creek's guests comprise an intriguing mix of the well known, the accomplished and the discreetly powerful. Close to three-quarters of them are repeaters who faithfully plunk down deposits for the coming year almost on the heels of their departure.

Lost Creek owes its success in part to the stubbornness of the ranch's original owner, San Francisco finan-



ABOVE: Riding is a way of life at Lost Creek Ranch: Each guest is given a horse and a saddle for the week as well as instruction by the ten staff wranglers and the chance to try roping and barrel racing. Equestrians and nonequestrians alike can also enjoy trips along the Snake River, fishing, tennis and even western swing dancing. BELOW: A greenhorn cowboy prepares for a pack trip.

ier Albert Schwabacher, who built the log cabin lodge as a vacation retreat in around 1926. A few years later the Rockefeller family bought up almost all of the surrounding acreage and donated it to the United States government for a national park and game preserve. Schwabacher resisted the Rockefellers' attempts to buy him out, and as a consequence his ranch, now owned by Virginia developer Gerald Halpin, remains a relative liver of private land wedged in between two vast, pristine public domains—Grand Teton National Park is literally at Lost Creek's front door, while Bridger-Teton National Forest is its backyard. In this neighborhood,



hikers and riders routinely encounter antelope, deer, elk, moose and buffalo, along with the occasional bear.

The season at Lost Creek runs from June through September, during which the ten guest cabins—six are constructed of logs, four of wood planks—are occupied by the roughly forty-five guests who arrive each Sunday for a week-long stay. The cabins are all furnished in a casual western style, with complete kitchens or refrigerators and daily laundry service and housekeeping. Guests are offered a slate of activities ranging from float trips down the nearby Snake River to tennis to instruction in western swing dancing. But they come back year af-



The lodge's log construction is visible in the living room, where plain walls and large picture windows accentuate the sweeping views of the Tetons. "We took great care to maintain the integrity of the original details—extensive research was required to blend the old and the new," explains Sutton, who worked with Wyoming-based log cabin builder Jim Singleton on the project.



ABOVE: Exposed log walls and pole ceiling beams underscore the western feel in one of the guest cabins. BELOW: Guests take a break for lunch on a daylong ride to nearby Shadow Mountain, which offers panoramic vistas of Jackson Hole. Named for trapper Davey Jackson, the valley was once the summer hunting grounds of the Blackfoot, Crow, Shoshoni and Arapaho Indians.

ter year for the opportunity to sit tall in the saddle; Lost Creek can transform novices into competent riders as well as offer challenges for expert equestrians. "I'd never been on a horse in my life," says a seventy-year-old Florida grandfather. "By the second day I was confident enough to ride up a trail so steep I would've been afraid to get off and walk."

Early Monday morning each guest meets the horse and saddle that will be his or hers for the week, the custom fit based on the rider's height, weight and experience. Lessons start right away, broken down into beginning, intermediate and advanced categories. The ten staff wranglers work painstakingly to make beginners com-

fortable in the saddle, but there's also a resident massage therapist to deal with any resulting trauma.

For the rest of the week, guests have a variety of wrangler-escorted options: pack trips into the mountains, photo-shooting excursions, kidney-jarring romps for small groups of advanced riders. On Fridays everyone heads off on an all-day ride into the Bridger-Teton National Forest, pausing for a lunch of beef stew, biscuits and stewed apples served on tin plates. Saturdays offer action at Lost Creek's regulation barrel-racing and roping arena, where guests can compete in a festive, authentically dusty and often hilarious gymkhana featuring obstacle courses and relays.

Lost Creek's wranglers may carry radio handsets on the trail and be certified to perform CPR, but they're also the real article. The Lost Creek Ranch Rodeo Team is a mainstay of Jackson Hole's weekly Saturday night rodeo; it's not unusual for a wrangler to spend a few days in the hospital as a result of being stomped by a bull or to show up for work in a cast after breaking an arm. They represent a tradition that remains ingrained in the local culture. As Lost Creek wrangler and bull-rider Mason Tibbs, a nephew of rodeo legend Casey Tibbs, puts it, "In some places kids grow up doin' basketball or tennis. Here you grow up rodeoin'."

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