

Guiding the Way

High country takes like this trail at 11,000-plus feet add to the appeal of the Flat Tops Wilderness Area.

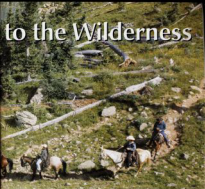
Winterhawk Outfitters can pack you into Colorado's Flat Tops or teach you to do it yourself.

Article and Photographs by
Fran Donovan Smith

A "TRADITIONAL high-country camp," says Larry Arnes of Winterhawk Outfitters Inc., Mt. Cole. "That's how I've always tried to keep things. We use traditional park equipment—cans, ropes, and leather—and practice the old ways of raising this type of cattle. There is a little different than some businesses because we totally depend on horses every day. But that's what I think people expect when they come here."

There is about 250 square miles in western Colorado ranging in elevation from 9,000 to more than 13,000 feet. Arneson doesn't begin to describe Larry's place of business. No photograph can cause that spirit to take of lands created when visiting the Flat Tops Wilderness Area firsthand. However, to Larry, 250 square miles is not "a very big piece of ground at all. But it is big country with lots of canyons. Stretched out in a flat way," he jokes, "it would run from here to New York."

to the Wilderness



The Annual Routine

Classes in *Montezuma's Castles, Chaco & Pecos* School are scheduled throughout the season from May, when the Indian Creek base camp opens, through October. In addition, summer guests can visit and enjoy trail-riding, pack trips, wildlife photography, fishing expeditions, and quality family time. Later in the season hewhewers, muskshovers, and other hunters arrive in search of elk, deer, fish, and bear.

The Indian Creek base camps are on U.S. Forest Service land at 8,000 feet and only a quarter mile from the Flat Tops Wilderness Area. "The Forest Service has been very good for me to work with," says Lacey. "We're the first ones to leave in the spring and always the last ones out at the end of the season."

With the exception of the creek and stream flows, all structures — canvas walls, tents, tent house, employees,

panels, tools, and equipment — must be dismantled and packed out each spring. Then dismantled and packed out each fall. "All together," Lacey adds, "we have 13 to 15 wilderness camps that we service with horses from 2 base camps. That's packing in and out a lot of gear."

"The Indian Lake camp, for instance, usually takes 30 to 35 truck loads," he comments. "But we use that camp all summer and add another tent for hunting season. Once we set the camp, we take in three to five loads of groceries."

Each fall, about high-country camps that can be used only two of the three hunting seasons are dismantled first and packed to the base camp. When the final season is over, Lacey explains, "We pack the other out-camps into base. Then we're through with the livestock, and I spend several days hauling horses and mules." The livestock and Lacey and his family winter at 8K, about a 1-hour drive away. "It's usually



Loray Ames and top hands, daughters Jessica (left) and Janna (right) enjoy the view. Ames' 1998 is also her competition year. Ames and daughter riding horses country style.



There's nothing like riding a week-long sled over the snow — especially in August. Janna Ames and guest Brett Reid of Boulder, Colo., walk their horses as Jessica Ames leads downhill.



Jessica Ames, originally from Longview, Wash., takes just the right hitch to secure the sled.

hens, or ranchhands and her elk, deer, bear, and mountain lion. The school curriculum also addresses the business of owning, everything from following U.S. Forest Service regulations to local service and trophy care and pricing.

Generally a certified professional instructor each phase of the program, and Winterhawk instructors have a combined 140 years of experience. A veterinarian, for example, teaches livestock care out on the trail, and an Orvis[®]-endorsed fly-fishing guide makes the most of the high-country streams and lakes in the Five Taps. An Orvis-endorsed expert, Winterhawk's fishing and its hunting and riding have also been featured on television programs for outdoorers.

Other Winterhawk Options

For those who want a high-country horseback vacation without a guide-school education, Winterhawk provides several options each June through September. Most begin at the Indian Circle base camp, where accommodations include well-appointed wood-framing stores, cottages, and shower houses. A generator lights the dining hall, where early family-style meals are served.

Any guest, of course, is welcome



Winterhawk guide school students learn by doing — weighing and packing the loads, then guiding the string through the wilderness.

the week before Thanksgiving before we get out of here," he comments, "and it's getting cold."

The remainder of the year, Larry, with Larry, and Winterhawk staff travel to trade and recreational shows, promoting the guide school, recreational riding, and hunting at Winterhawk. Although Larry guides the Flat Tops to the trade-show circuit, he admits, "That is what has built my business."

Learning the Lifestyle

Those who find the lifestyle appealing can make it their own, as either vacation or profession, by attending Winterhawk's Outfitters, Guides & Packers School. Approved by the Colorado Department of Higher Education as a licensed vocational school and accredited by the Veterans Administration and Pikes Peak Community College's outdoor program, the Winterhawk school stresses "the work ethic and responsibility required to establish a successful career as a guide, packer, or outfitter."

A 2-week course in backcountry horsemanSHIP, core to the school's longer 4- and 6-week programs for professionals, begins every 2 weeks throughout the season. The backcountry horsemanSHIP course often appeals to the recreational rider who has no interest in outfitting as a profession.

"He might just want to spend 2 weeks horseback here and learn some things as he can be safe in the mountains," Larry explains. "He needs to watch for things here that he really doesn't have to watch for in low country. He can see that a horse here, stable on those big pine trees with out-thin-knee bushes, and dropped can be a problem."

"Another person, who wants to do the 30-day course, for example, might be able to get away for only 2 weeks this year. So he can do that, and then next year pick up the last few weeks of the course. We can split things up with the different school programs," Larry notes, "and make them work however somebody wants to do things."

"But," he explains, "we don't finish the 30-day course



Justin Melnick, Colorado City, Tex., left, and guiding instructor Bob Shaffner weigh a load. Roger Bels, William minutes of the fall weighing the loaded sleds. 30 minutes on the trail repacking the loads — and a lot of enthusiasm when guests are excited to get into camp."

until fall because that course basically teaches guys who want to learn how to hunt and guide trails. You simply can't teach students how to go out in the field, guide hunters, and harvest game if it isn't hunting season. So those classes run from August through October when students can get hands-on experience and learn the how-to by doing things." Larry also notes his two eight-to-ten-day hunting and guiding courses scheduled for next September and October.

Winterhawk instructors teach horse- and mountaineering, equine health care, horsemanship, packing, wilderness camping, first aid, CPR, and survival. Classes also focus on outdoor recreation, such as fly-fishing, all trapping, wildlife photography, and hunting with rifle,

VACATION IN COLORADO



Top: The Flat Tops Wilderness Area is, as Larry Jones says, "big country with lots of scenery" and places that go on forever. **Above left:** Seasoned guides Troy Smith (left) and Bob Shelton balance a three-foot square a male's back. "We can," Troy grins, "pack 30 eggs and have 30 eggs when we get them." **Above right:** Rudy Manno, New June, Utah, has visited White-Horn for the past 15 years and always packs a fishing rod when he rides out of camp.



Stock, steady, and to Winterbank horses and riders follow a high level of care as they enjoy the expertly maintained grass, which is used daily and stored nightly in well-built.

to spend a leisurely day around camp, according to Larry. "We try to accommodate anything anyone wants to do." Some prefer a fully guided, daylong ride that loops back to camp in time for dinner. One guest, however, might prefer to ride only to the nearest trout stream, then spend his day fishing. Another might ride only far enough to snap that perfect photograph.

Winterbank also provides high-country pack-in camps. The Island Lake Basin camp, about a 4-hour pack trip up Middle Derby Creek at an elevation of about 11,000 feet, offers most of the amenities found at Indian Cliffs. There, too, vacationers can take day rides from camp, hike, or photograph the abundant wildflowers and breathtaking alpine scenery. A ride up another 2,000 feet in elevation to Deer Lake Lookout yields magnificent views of the wilderness.

Summer drop-camps are popular with those already comfortable in the backcountry. These quiet, stocked camps are accessible only by horse or mule. Guests are guided to the camp, equipped with a radio for 24-hour communication with the base camp, and then packed out at a predetermined time.

Larry comments, "We usually run from 60 to 80 head of horses and riders. It's taken me 12 to 20 years to put my string together because I'm picky about what I buy."

A Winterbank horse or rider must be made of the "right stuff" to suit Larry, or at least have right-stuff potential. "That young horse I just brought in, for instance," he explains, "will make a good horse with some genetics, time, and mileage. This country can be a little harsh, and you can do too much with a young horse too quick and vain him. All he needs is good grain and good hay to get good muscle and bone under him — and time."

Time seems to be something Larry has in abundance. Realistically that probably isn't so, but that's the impression he leaves with Winterbank guests. Perhaps Larry Amos only seems to have all the time and patience in the world because he's spent so much of his time in the backcountry, where he has learned how to wait on nature or wildlife to make a change in its own time and season. 🐾

Larry Amos

A Pennsylvania native, Larry began showing horses at an early age, professionally at 15, taught a college showing course, and also coached the rodeo circuit. When he first hunted in the West at age 17, Larry worked for an outfit, where he learned how to pack and hunt in the West.

He moved west in '78 and raised most of his stock here in two outfitting seasons. Daughter Lori and her husband, Ted ride and show Don Brack, now their 8th, Colts, and work full-time for Winterbank. Son Jeff worked with Larry full time, and he started his own career coaching business recently. Larry's daughter, Jennie lives in Pueblo, Colo., with her husband.

Younger daughters Jennie and Janice, 12 and 9 respectively, love horses. "we all have been in the high country," says Larry, and knowledgeable about horses, wildlife, and native plants. Jennie is, in fact, golden opportunity never connected trails to phase horses by riding again, and Jennie often leads the way for trail rides. And Larry and wife Lori's son, enjoying 1-year-old Lauren. "There," comments Larry, "is great, great place to raise a family."

"I like everything about the outfitting business—the horses and it and, for sure, the people I meet. I see people from all over the world. Back Winterbank has offered 19 programs here. And 88 percent of the people come here for the same reasons. They love the mountains and the rural life."

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