

GRAND COUNTY, COLORADO

WHERE TRAILBLAZERS ROAM

BY DIANA LAMBDIN MEYER



A man walks in the valley after a horse ride.
Larry Pierce / Colorado Tourism Office

travel planner

The Dude Ranchers' Association of America (duderanch.org) represents 109 properties in 13 western states and two Canadian provinces, suited to all tastes, prices and lifestyles. While each has its unique qualities, the six in Grand County are among the most experienced and most accessible. For more information, visit or call:
Grand County Colorado: grand-county.com; 1-800-729-5821
Aspen Canyon Dude Ranch: aspencanyon.com; 970-725-3600
Bar Lazy J Ranch: barlazyj.com; 970-725-3437
C Lazy U Ranch: clazyu.com; 970-887-3344
Drowsy Water Ranch: drowsywater.com; 1-800-845-2292
King Mountain Ranch: kingmountainranch.com; 1-800-476-5464
Latigo Ranch: latigotrails.com; 1-800-227-9655

IN A PIE-SHAPED WEDGE OF THE EARTH IN NORTH CENTRAL COLORADO, JUST WEST OF THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE, THE QUINTESSENTIAL FAMILY VACATION IS ALIVE AND WELL.

It's certainly not the one led by Chevy Chase in *National Lampoon's Family Vacation*; rather it's more like Billy Crystal and pals in *City Slickers*. This is home of the dude ranch vacation, and Grand County, Colorado, located on the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park, has been in the business of hosting dream vacations for more than 120 years.

City slickers welcome

At one point, Grand County, Colorado had 17 operating dude ranches, more than any county in the United States. Today, six continue to open their gates to city slickers, and those not so slick, for a week filled with horseback riding, hayrides, campfire cookouts and evenings of square dancing.

We chose the Drowsy Water Ranch, one of the oldest North American dude ranches in continuous operation. The Drowsy

Water has been inviting city slickers and flatlanders to participate in this rugged, laid-back lifestyle since the 1920s. Since the 1970s, owners Ken and Randi Sue Fosha and their two sons have perfected the art of down-home fun for families, couples, singles and anyone else willing to join in.

About 100 head of horses, primarily quarter horses and paints, make their home at the Drowsy Water. Beginning the first week of June, about 25 staffers join the Foshas to provide services for up to 50 guests weekly from around the world. Nine individual cabins snuggled beside the creek offer lodging for families, while the Horse Thief Den Lodge accommodates singles or others travelling alone.

Wranglers, those staff members who work with the horses and lead the trail rides, are all college-educated, equine professionals. Each guest, or "dude," at the ranch is assigned a horse at the beginning of the week and rides the same animal all week long. "Dude" is a term of respect, we learned, for those experiencing a lifestyle they don't live otherwise.

The Drowsy Water welcomes children of all ages, including infants, to the 2.5-square-kilometre ranch. The children's program is unstructured, but comprehensive, and children five and under in the "buckaroos" program are led on smaller horses in a pen. ■