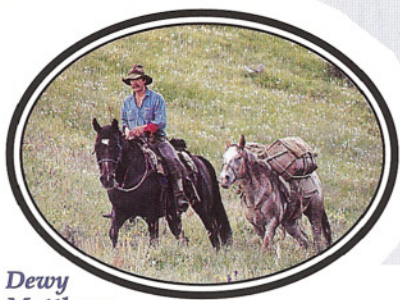


Experience THE REAL WEST...



**Dewy
Matthews**
with lunch in tow

*... the pony's drive to reach the shore,
when fording rolling streams,
the thinning air of high up hills
these are the things of dreams...*

*Excerpt from "Backtrail Dreams"
by Fred Miller*

Writing for a travel magazine has many perks, not the least of which (obviously) is the trips I take. The down side is the good-natured kvetching directed my way by the rest of the magazine staff. (What! Another trip! Just when do you work?) You get the picture.

This time, I was taking them with me.

We took an office vote, and unanimously decided on the definitive Alberta trip: a day-long trail ride through the rugged mountains of Kananaskis Country. Lying on the Eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, this area was named to honor Kananaskis, a Cree Native legendary for his bravery.

Literally a stone's throw away from the boundary is the Anchor D Ranch. Starting with little more than a dream, over the last twelve years Jan and Dewy Matthews have carved out an outfitter's paradise, replete with horse-drawn equipment—used daily in the operation of the ranch and their renowned guiding and outfitting business. The Anchor D Ranch consists of eighty acres owned outright with another quarter section leased for pasture. However, it's their backyard of the Rocky Mountains that draws so many sighs of envy.

"Ours is a horse outfit, not a guest ranch," Dewy explained as he dropped the latch over the corral gate. "The main difference is, at a guest ranch visitors may go for an hour ride, then come back and play a game of tennis. Here, we take riders deep into the backcountry." Dewy paused, looking up at the seamless blue sky. "We provide a way for folks to see the country the way it should be seen—from the back of a good horse."

There were twenty-three people in our group; some were seasoned riders, while others had only been riding once or twice in their lives. Since we were going for an all day ride, Dewy and Jan had loaded up the horses early in the morning and trucked them off to the trailhead. "That way, you swing onto your horse and you're on the trail," said Dewy. "We cover a lot of country in a day." At the trailhead, everyone was quickly matched up with their horses, and with one last yank on the diamond-hitch securing our lunch, Dewy picked up the shank of the packhorse and we were off.



"The Wild Bunch"

Most of us were mounted on Appaloosa's, the spotted breed developed by the Nez Perce Natives whose territory included the Palouse River. Mounted on these colourful 'Palouse's, the Nez Perce were uncatchable, spurring the US Cavalry to mount a campaign to exterminate these tremendous horses. Fortunately, a few survived, and their spotted rumps or blankets are now often seen in an outfitter's string.

"Over twelve years we've tried out darn near every breed of horse there is, and the Appaloosa's proved they're the toughest mountain horses around—there's no quit in 'em," Dewy bluntly asserts. "It seems the best ones are the ugliest," he continued, his eyes twinkling. "You know, a big roman nose and feet the size of pie plates."

With Dewy acting as guide and historian, we headed out on the Indian Oils trail—an area where the First Nations people collected ochre, a red-brown mixture of iron oxide and clay used to paint pictographs and in other ritual contexts. Archaeologists have discovered what outfitters like Dewy and Jan have known for a long time—First Nations people lived in this area for eons. Encampments in Kananaskis Country have recently been carbon-dated, with the earliest inhabitants dating back some 15,000 years.

The higher we climbed, the quieter it got, the chatter dropping off as each of us drank in the vista stretching out before us. Our horses dropped their heads and settled into a comfortable pace, each rhythmic hoof-beat leaving the 'city-worries' further and further behind.

Soon, the only man-made noise was the jingling of the snaffle bits and the creak of well-oiled saddle leather.

The trail dropped down into the deciduous coolness of Gorge Creek, eventually winding its way over the south shoulder of Blue Rock Mountain. At various spots along the trail, Dewy would point out the wildflowers—the startling orange-red of the Indian Paintbrush waving above the grasses, and the fragile Mountain Lilies hiding in the cool, shaded undergrowth.

Experience the Real West in The Canadian Rockies



Anchor D Guiding & Outfitting

Dewy & Jan Matthews

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Mountain Horseback Vacations



Riding behind Dewy, I delighted in his dry wit and cowboy humour. "My basic philosophy in life is; 'when temptation rears its ugly head, just give in and get it over with,' he laughed.

Dewy glanced over his shoulder, sizing up the bunch strung out behind him—and winking at his wife. "I couldn't do it without Jan," he smiled. "She's my right-hand man."

An outfitter in her own right, Jan is as handy on the lines of a team as she is with a saddle horse. They have a true partnership, one that has had the kinks worked out over years of pack trips, wagon trails and children. Plus, somehow in between loading, saddling, and getting everyone mounted, she managed to pack so much fresh food for lunch they needed a separate packhorse to bring it all with us!

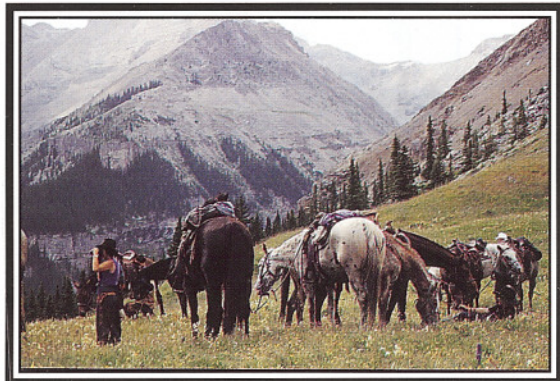
Thick slices of homemade bread, sandwich fixin's to suit the fussiest eater, fresh fruits bursting with juice, and a bottomless jug of iced tea were quickly devoured as we stopped for lunch, seemingly on top of the world. All that fresh air and exercise creates a raging, voracious appetite. After lunch, the

whole "wild bunch" sprawled out across the mountain meadow, resting up for the ride home.

As we crossed the Blue Rock Creek, Jan tactfully suggested splitting the riders up. Some were obviously fatigued, while others were still rarin' to go. About half of us opted to go with Jan, and we took off down the trail, jumping logs and splashing through creeks.

What a ride! We were still giving play-by-play comparisons of our dash through the bush when the others riders sauntered down to the trailhead.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch... (you knew I had to say it sometime), the barbecue pit was fired up and the steaks were starting to sizzle. As the refreshments were passed around and balanced on tender knees, plans were already underway for another trip to the Anchor D. ☺



On Top of the World

Anchor D Guiding & Outfitting offers numerous packages for small groups—however, accommodations can be made for larger groups on request (as we did in our case.) Riding experience is not necessary, but they do recommend some "seasoning" before tackling a full day ride in the mountains. The Anchor D offers trips ranging from a 2-hour ride, all the way up to a special 7-Day "Great Divide" pack trip.

For rates and brochures,
please phone Anchor D Ranch
at (403) 933-2867.

Tell 'em the
"Wild Bunch" sent ya...