

ROAMING ECOTOURISM ON FOUR LEGS

Allure of wild horses draw tourists on a global scale

By Bonnie Matton
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Ecotourism isn't a word one hears often in reference to Lyon County, but a significant number of people are willing to travel thousands of miles to visit the area in search of wild horses.

I recently had the privilege of taking two groups of tourists out to see wild horses that roam the Stagecoach area.

As president of Wild Horse Preservation League, I receive many calls, emails and letters from people, not only from Nevada, but other states and other countries. They all ask the same question: "Where can we go to see wild horses?"

Several years ago the league established a Wild Horse Adventure Program, with the goal providing tourists the opportunity to see the wild ones, while bringing ecotourism dollars into rural Nevada communities. The tourists seeking a glimpse of the wild horses hires tour guides, stays in hotels or motels, eat in our restaurants and take in attractions.

On this particular April Saturday a group of nine people in search of wild horses gathered at the Carson Plains Casino restaurant to plan the morning's activities and eat a hearty breakfast.

The group included Reno's KTVN Channel 2 News producer Samantha Szesciorka and cameraman Jeff Foss. Szesciorka did a two-part series on Nevada's wild horses, which was recently aired.

Jeremy Davidson a new league member from Dayton came along for the adventure, and plans to compile a PowerPoint presentation on the plight of the wild horses, which he plans to make available to the public.

Tina Broderick, owner of Sonny Boys Wild Horse Tours in Reno joined the group to expand her knowledge of west-central Lyon County and where to find our wild horses. Though she has been taking people out on tours of Nevada's backcountry for some time, she only recently began giving wild horse sighting tours in the Hidden Valley area near Reno.

Lucas, Carla and Carl Passero were visiting from California and came specifically to see the horses. Carl's wife recently passed away and though she never got to see wild horses roaming free, she stipulated in her will that she wanted to donate money to help a wild horse organization to help the horses. The Passero family made a donation to the league in her memory.

Deniz Bolbol who represents In Defense of Animals, a non-profit based in California, travels to many states to help protect wild horses across the nation. She came on the trek to check out our wild horse bands and learn about threats to their freedom.

Leading the group was Willis Lamm, president of the Least Resistance Training Concepts non-profit based in Stagecoach. His LRTC organization is active in putting on training clinics for people who plan to adopt a wild horse, or who already own one and want to learn successful training techniques. His group also is a strong voice for wild horses here in Nevada and across the nation.

The following day I took out a second group, which included Mark DeSautel, an art gallery owner out of Lake Tahoe. DeSautel put on a fund-raiser last year to help Lacy J. Dalton's organization, Let 'em Run. Accompanying him on the tour were Eddie Almeyda and Andy Horstmanshoff, a photographer from the Reno area who had never taken pictures of wild horses. He was so thrilled at the sight of these beautiful animals, he reminded me of a kid in a toy store, not knowing what to look at next.

Willis Lamm met up with us on the backroads of Stagecoach. He brought along Willy Klaeson from Sweden. Klaeson is a writer and television producer who is making a documentary film that follows wild horses recently captured and recruited into the Warm Springs Prison Training Program through to their eventual adoption.

The prison program is good for both horses and inmates. Program managers say the animals teach the inmates patience, understanding, respect and caring of another living creature, which greatly helps them deal with the outside world when they are eventually released.

The recidivism of an inmate who trains horses in the program is 20 percent, opposed to inmates in the general prison population who have a return rate of 80 percent.

Klaeson has fallen in love with this part of the world, and is seriously thinking of purchasing property in the area so he can live here part of each year.

Lamm also brought along two visitors from California who own a wild horse, but had never had the opportunity to see wild horses living in the wild.

Both days provided the visitors with many hours of observing a number of different wild horse bands. Another tour a few weeks later included a couple from the Netherlands, who came to the area specifically to see the wild horses on the open range. Wout Overbeeke owns and operates Overbeeke Horseprofessionals, which specializes in taking groups out for inclusive trips far from their every day world. He will be teaching his clients who are predominantly professional people how teamwork helps reach goals. He'll use what he learned from the wild horse bands to apply to the humans in his training sessions. Tours of this type can infuse tourism dollars into rural communities only as long as the horses are on the range to observe. It is one small way to diversify the economy by highlighting the natural beauty of the high mountain desert and the wildlife -including horses that roam free.

To learn more about this local ecotourism visit www.WildHorseAdventure.net or call 775-220-6806.

Spending a few hours in Stagecoach, NV, a tour group braved Nevada's high mountain desert chill in April to see wild horse bands living in the wild. Among those on the tour were (left) Samantha Szesciorka, KTVN Reno Channel 2 news producer; Jeremy Davidson of Dayton and Wild Horse Preservation League member; Tina Broderick of Sonny Boys Wild Horse Tours in Reno; Willis Lamm, Least Resistance Training Concepts, Stagecoach; Lucas, Carla and Carl Passero, visitors from California; Bonnie Matton, Wild Horse Preservation League member; Deniz Bobol of In Defense of Animals out of California; and Jeff Foss, cameraman for KTVN Channel 2 News.

During the last several years it seems a greater number of people are planning excursions around the opportunity to visit Lyon County to observe wild horse bands. Pictured here are Reno photographer Andy Horstmanshoff (left), Eddie Almeyda and Mark DeSautel both from the Lake Tahoe area, who spent part of their day quietly taking in the experience.