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review



THE WOODLANDS

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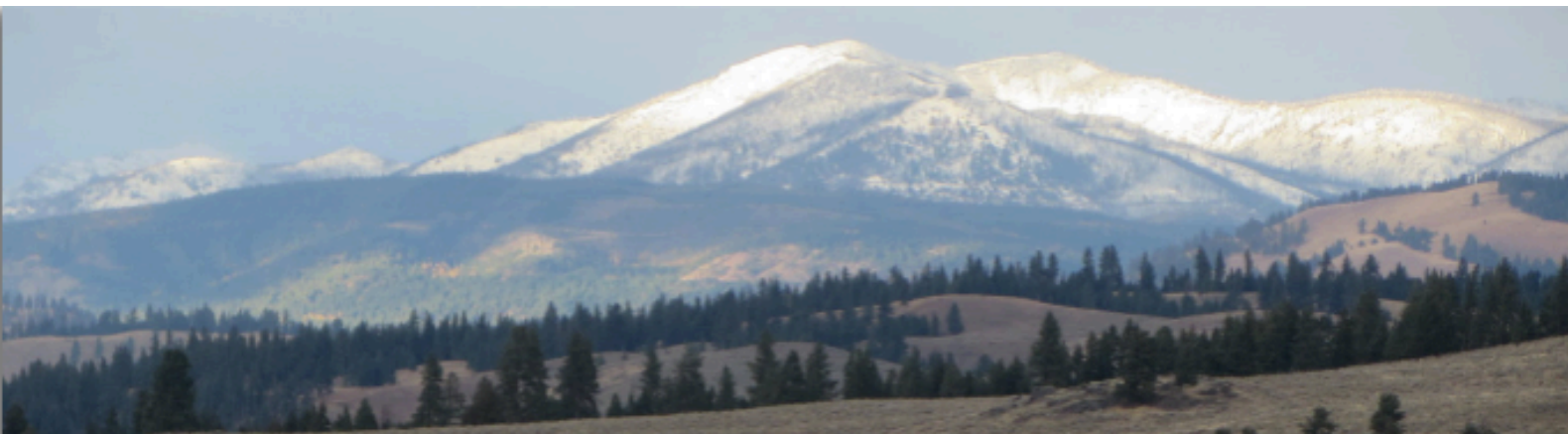
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POSTMASTER—Requested in-home delivery date: MARCH 2-6, 2018

MARCH 2018 ISSUE 163



paws up!

Story and photos by Linda Bauer, author of Capitol Hill Cooks

Texans love ranches and I am no exception. With stays at eighteen of them under my belt, I was intrigued by the prospect of four days at the Paws Up Ranch, a 37,000-acre working Montana ranch just outside of Missoula. With three hundred head of elk, and several hundred stunning Black Angus, plus one Longhorn roaming the rolling pastures of the Ranch, it is a feast for the eyes with majestic snow capped mountains in the distance and peppered with numerous activity sites.

Various forms of lodging are found here from six star glamping (glamorous camping) in beautifully appointed huge tents with gorgeous bathrooms and plenty of space and many overlooking the rushing river to Wilderness Estate homes, similar to homes in The Woodlands. They have a place to stay that suits any variation in taste.

The drivers greet each guest at the airport and are a wealth of information and fun, treating each person's interests and needs throughout their visit. This ranch is so different than any other I had visited, as you need transportation to go from one place to another via a call to the drivers or shared use of each residence's lime green Kia to take you to your destination. I think that Council Bluffs House in Wilderness Estates, where I spent three nights, has the most amazing view of the snow topped and sun kissed mountains with superb baths, walk in closets, and a beautiful fireplace with full loft and living quarters, plenty of fine kitchen facilities and tasty treats. The turn down service is superb. My only concern was that the estate home was not at all soundproof when anyone above talks or walks. It would be superb for a family however and the entire ranch is often rented for corporations as well as glamping areas for birthdays and family reunions.

The property offers a plethora of Montana dude ranch activities, such as cattle drives, trail rides and chuck wagon dinners. They take pride in the many wilderness adventures, such as fly-fishing with excellent guides on the Blackfoot River, where ten miles actually flow through the ranch. The unique rope challenge offers a strength test, then and you

can rappel down cliffs explored by Lewis & Clark to test your mettle, then take an individual ATV on a stunning trip for those seeking an adrenaline rush and memory of a lifetime.

My favorite was the sixteen station sporting clays shooting venue where three hours of instruction by friendly young teachers was superb with eye popping views of Montana at her finest. The instructors were so excellent that none of us had any pain from the kickback after our session. They also have an Old West .22 rifle range for those six years and older.

Chef Ben Jones, the Executive Chef at the ranch held a two hour workshop during the specialty weekend which occurs twice a year and his culinary skills are only exceeded by his passion and knowledge of sourcing the finest ingredients and inspiring others to return home and do the same. He makes Kambucha and charcuterie for the ranch which is served at the Trough and other restaurants. His halibut class was amazing, peppered with wisdom, personal quips and fun for all. Throughout the year he has famous chefs come for various specialty events. Those glamping, have a totally different experience with breakfast and dinner in your area with special cooks and all ranch guests have lunch at the Trough each day which I find totally intriguing. Up to 250 (if at full capacity) guests would eat there to share food and stories. Room service is also available. Pomp, the fine dining restaurant, is perfect in every way. My personal favorite was the family style dinner with the chef of Plonk in Missoula making magical food.

The huge Wilderness Outpost, ranch store is not to be missed with such things as the "Don't Even Think About It! signature wooden - do not disturb signs - for sale. "Don't Squat with your Spurs on" is another great gift from the bookstore! Upscale clothing, gear and Western items are completely unique with the owner's wife personally choosing much of the merchandise, and in expertly decorating each of the homes and camps.

The Kids Corps of Discovery offers full and half day sessions

of kayaking, crafts, feeding the animals at the Cowpokes' Corral and enjoying the rifle range are all part of the Western fun. Paintball and archery are also available. The concierge service offered to each guest upon booking gives personal attention to the experience each person desires beforehand, so you arrive with a planned schedule which is different from any ranch that I had ever visited before. It must be noted that the charge for canceling less than 24 hours will be made and some of the activities are quite expensive but just something to know in advance, especially as it is tough to know about the weather. If you wish to reschedule you have the app on your phone, and you need to contact your concierge.

The history of the land dates back to when the Blackfoot River served as a transportation corridor for Nez Perce, Flathead and Blackfoot Indians and later for loggers, fur trappers, and miners. The Indians called the river "Cokalahishkit," which means "the river of the road to the buffalo." The ranch began in the late 1800's.

Captain Meriwether Lewis, one of the first explorers to follow the well-worn Indian trail along the Blackfoot, arrived in July 1806, thus the names of the Western Estate homes all pay tribute to this team.

For seven decades, the Ranch hosted eight diverse owners. Later the Lindbergh Cattle Company took over the Ranch in 1965, with sons of the celebrated aviator, owning the property. In 1997 the Lipson family brought with them a herd of superior horses, the desire to build a first-class Black Angus seed stock operation and their beloved ranch name. "Paws Up" was originally inspired by those friendly, wriggling dogs who greet visitors by putting their paws up in the air while their tails thump the floor.

The Morris Ranch House in the winter season is the home of the spa and the director is well versed in the latest spa products, techniques and also a fantastic masseuse. She simply exudes joy and prides herself on encouraging guests to make the most of their treatments. In the summertime the spa is located in white tents with Spa Town being a favorite for pampering after long trail rides to soothe aching muscles.

Paws Up boasts a world-class Saddle Club that was built with amazing facilities to train, breed and care for horses. The staff is renowned for their expertise in breeding and training horses including a superb horse arena.

With over six species of game fish, the "Big Blackie" has much more variety for the avid angler than most trout streams. The Blackfoot is known worldwide due to its prominence in the best-selling novel, *A River Runs Through It*.

"May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds," by Edward Abbey, summed up the spirit of Paws Up Ranch on a lovely pillow card, I would add, "may your pockets be deep!"