

Enjoy horses, hills, hollows and hospitality at Crow Mountain Guest Ranch

By David Thornell

Just below Stevenson off of County Road 53, or via Highway 117 in Stevenson and County Road 55 (known as Low Gap) is Crow Mountain Guest Ranch. If you have a passion to ride horses in a vast and beautiful valley that is embraced by the foothills of the Appalachian mountain range, you don't have to go far to experience it. Here you will feel a touch of the Old West in what is known as Slipoff Hollow. Locals know they've arrived just as they cross the bridge at Big Coon Creek. Most come to enjoy the riding trails that wind throughout a 2,000 acre area. Of this acreage, about 320 of these represent the heart of the ranch, with approximately half in fenced pastures and the other half in natural hardwood forests. The ranch is bordered by a large spring-fed creek, but even better, it is surrounded by 22,000 acres of the Skyline Wildlife Management Area. This area is uninhabited by people, but has plenty of wildlife, wild flowers and natural scenery. In short, if you like wide open spaces, Crow Mountain Guest Ranch is the place to be. In the heart of the ranch is an antebellum home built by Jackson County's first probate judge in the mid 1800s. There is also an original log cabin on the property and burial sites dating back to 1826. As for horseback riding, if you are a beginner, or if it has been a long while since you've ridden, riding lessons are soon to be made available. Horse training and boarding are offered as well. Guests at the ranch can also enjoy fishing, camping, hiking, mountain biking, swimming, kayaking or canoeing. Modern lodging with a rustic appeal can be found in the newly



constructed guest quarters located inside the horse barns. Here you can "hit the hay next to your horse." The four barns include 52 horse stalls.

Ranch Stewards Carl & Kat Hubbard relocated here in February of 2009. In April of this year they completed renovations and additions to the property and developed a shared-ownership concept they believe presents a unique opportunity for fellow horse lovers. Shared ranches have been popular in the western states since the 1980s. They are designed for like-minded horse enthusiasts who want to maximize the experience and minimize the cost (as well as the labor) of owning and maintaining a horse ranch. The Hubbards have developed a shared ownership model that allows someone to acquire a horse and own a lifetime share of the ranch for less than \$25,000.

The 12 guest rooms can sleep 30 people at this time with plans

to expand this capacity in the future. If you want to sleep under the stars or in a tent, the ranch has 300 primitive campsites. The large pristine creek that borders the property is fed by artesian springs.

Two private not-for-profit organizations own the ranch. One of these has an animal rescue and educational focus. There are currently 22 rescued animals cared for on-site including horses, dogs and cats. The number varies due to adoptions and new rescues, with an emphasis being on the safety and healing of the animals. The search for the perfect site for a shared ranch concept and animal rescue-rehab facility actually began in July of 2007, when the Hubbards relocated from their previous home in Florida to Kat's hometown of Gadsden. One Sunday afternoon on a drive to look at some potential property, the two got lost, or perhaps it was fate that led them to the ranch owned by Jackson County native



Bill (Billy Gordon) Sanders. He had used the facilities to train champion-caliber trotter horses. Although Sanders traveled often, it happened that he was there to welcome them and so began a conversation that resulted in the creation of Crow Mountain Guest Ranch, LLC. This day is marked in the Hubbards minds as the beginning of a wonderful adventure and they credit Mr. Sanders for being overwhelmingly supportive of the goals of the ranch from day one.

There are currently several hook ups for horse trailers, with another short-term goal of expanding the number of hookups for horse trailers and RVs. Long-term goals include becoming an events location for rodeos and equestrian-related competitions including horse racing. The First Annual Country Classic Rodeo took place May 21-22 and was deemed a huge success. Plans also include hosting outdoor concerts for nationally known recording artists and bands, as the property can easily accommodate several thousand people.

So far, the biggest challenge that the Hubbards have encountered is marketing, or making this unknown paradise known. Since



the property has been under private ownership and not open for public use until now, few people have had the opportunity to find the gate, much less have the opportunity to enter in and discover the wonders of the place. Carl and Kat state that they believe God led them here so the land could be shared with others as a place to ride, relax and restore. They are encouraged each day they spend making the place more inviting for others and are especially bolstered by the positive comments of others and the support from those who have helped along the way. Their hope is that their guests will feel they have found a home-away-from-home in this beautiful land of nature, healing and peace. So cross



the bridge to Crow Mountain Guest Ranch and feel for yourself what many others have described as a place that draws you in and makes you want to “stay for a spell”.

Contact and location information for the Crow Mountain Guest Ranch can be found on their website at www.crowmountainranch.com. E-mail inquiries to info@crowmountainranch.com Telephone number: (256) 437-3096 Physical/Mailing Address: 518A County Road 564, Slipoff Hollow, AL 35772