

Saddle up, pardner

Horse lovers have plenty of travel options in N.C.

Hay, do you have horse, will travel?

Or is it you don't have horses but love to ride and love to travel? Either way, horse lovers have intriguing travel options in North Carolina. Here are a few:

Love Valley

Pardners ride horses downtown in this unique, western-themed town about 17 miles northwest of Statesville. Folks can board their horses or rent 'em at Love Valley, which boasts a saloon, general store, wooden sidewalks, hitching posts and rodeos. Located in the Brushy Mountains of Iredell County, the rustic town's creation in 1954 marked the fulfillment of a dream for its founder, Andy Barker, who wanted to be a cowboy. Barker's Christian-oriented, utopian vision continues to delight visitors today.

Paul Dishman, board chairman of the Love Valley Horseman's Association, lives in Eden but has been driving roughly 110 miles one way to Love Valley for more than 20 years. Although most businesses there are only open Friday through Sunday, he points out one of the great things about Love Valley is you can ride horses there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Dishman is organizing the trail ride for July 4 and other public events in July are planned. Love Valley accommodations range from campgrounds to rooms at Miss Kitty's. Phone numbers vary by activity—you can call Love Valley Riding Stables and Country Store at (704) 592-2132 or if no answer, try (919) 963-3776. There's an events calendar with phone numbers on www.lovevalley.com.

Yeeee Haaww! Guest ranches

Clear Creek Ranch, nestled within the Smoky Mountains outside Burnsville, has a string of horses ready for riding. Surrounded by Pisgah National Forest with views of the Black Mountains, this ranch rustles up family-style meals

and activities such as horsedrawn carriage rides and line dancing. (800) 651-4510 or www.clearcreekranch.com.

Cataloochee Ranch in Maggie Valley offers horseback riding, including pack trips, three homecooked meals daily, rooms and cabins and more amid mile-high vistas. It has facilities

for conferences, and its land adjoins Great Smoky Mountains National Park. (800) 868-1401 or www.cataloocheeranch.com.

Pisgah View Ranch Located 16 miles from Asheville in Candler, this homey ranch offers horseback riding, wilderness rides, campfires, a swimming pool, fishing pond, accommodations in cottages and cabins and three, hearty home-style meals daily. (866) 252-8361 or www.pisgahviewranch.net.



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B&Bs that'll board your steed

They include **Pilot Knob Inn Bed & Breakfast** in Pinnacle, roughly 20 minutes from Winston-Salem. Sitting in a wooded landscape on the eastern slope of Pilot Mountain, the trails of Pilot Mountain and Sauratown Mountain run through its property. Accommodations include tobacco barn-style cabins and honeymoon suites with hot tubs, whirlpools, jacuzzis and fireplaces. If you want to rent horses, there is at least one stable nearby. (336) 325-2502 or www.pilotknobinn.com.

Close by, **Scenic Overlook Bed & Breakfast** is also in Pinnacle and adjoins Pilot Mountain State Park. It offers suites with whirlpool tubs and fireplaces and a view of its lake and Pilot Mountain. (336) 368-9591 or www.scenicoverlook.com.

Carambola Inn is an 85-acre working farm south of Raleigh in Fuquay-Varina (pronounced few-kway vah-REE-na). Its acreage, as well as the 70-acre adjacent farm, offers trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. A riding academy is down the street. (919) 552-3091 or www.bbonline.com/nc/carambola/index.html.

Editor's note: Places that offer horseback riding tend to operate spring through fall. Check on a destination's schedule as you make plans.