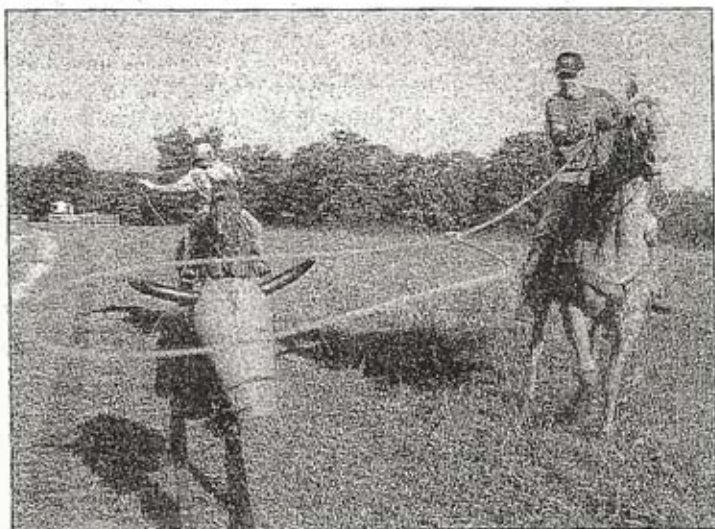


ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

TRAVEL & LEISURE

OZARK *oddities*



Guests at Meadow View Ranch practice roping.

RIGHT: Ranch owner Heidi MacQueen rents her guesthouse for \$60 a night.



A sold-out state park, a B&B in a former laundry, a glassware shop in a chicken coop, and a "horse motel" are among the highlights on a drive through rural Missouri.



The smiling steer

Meadow View Ranch near Lebanon was my final stop, and I arrived to find owner Heidi MacQueen bottle-feeding nearly a dozen newborn calves. She explained that dairy cows don't make good mothers, so their babies are removed shortly after birth.

"They all have German names," MacQueen said of the black-and-white calves in her nursery. "We have Gunter, Olga, Michelle, Lotte, Berthold..."

MacQueen is from Germany, where she was working as a translator in 1992 when she met and wed her husband, Craig MacQueen, an aircraft instruc-

tor. When the couple visited Craig's brother in Lebanon, they found the 200-acre ranch and decided it would be perfect for Craig's retirement in a few years.

While her husband continues to work overseas, MacQueen, who is 39 and had no previous experience as a cowgirl, runs the ranch.

"I'm a city girl. I had a bunny rabbit when growing up, and it lived in my bedroom," she said. "Now we have 29 cows, nine cats, four dogs, 10 horses and one donkey, and we're getting one more horse tomorrow."

The majority of the animals are "adopted," meaning they needed homes. The donkey's former owner was convicted of dragging it with a rope behind a Jeep. He got 45 days in jail, and the donkey got some tender loving care at the ranch.

The MacQueens built a guesthouse overlooking a meadow and an apartment above the steel storage barn and now run a "horse motel." They are among the businesses listed under www.horsemotel.com, which is used by traveling horse owners

who need a bed for themselves and a stall for their steeds.

But you don't need a horse to rent the guesthouse, which has a front porch with a pastoral view of cows in the meadow and the forest beyond. That evening, the only sound was the wind rustling the leaves and tinkling the chimes. At night, there were no lights visible to mar the glow of the passing satellites and a single shooting star.

The apartment rents for \$50 a night, and the guesthouse for \$60, with a charge of \$8 per additional guest. The neat-as-a-pin guesthouse has a bedroom on the first floor and two single beds in the loft.

"I want people to have a good time and not have to pay a fortune," MacQueen said. "Whatever money I make I use to support my animals."

Guests are welcome to help out with the chores. The next morning, I grabbed a milk bottle and a calf named Ingo.

Which brings us to the galloping cowboys with whirling lariats.

Mike Smith, a horse owner from Harrisonville, Mo., and

Jamie McNail, manager of the ranch, were practicing for a roping competition. Smith hooked up a mechanical steer to the back of his pickup, and he and McNail raced behind as the rig bounced along a pasture. I bounced along in the truck's bed to observe the action.

The cowboys proved deadly, snaring the steer, which Smith named Buford, with nearly every toss. Perhaps to improve his aim, Smith drew a friendly face on his quarry. Thus, Buford flashed a toothy grin as he was towed behind the truck.

Although she's far from home, MacQueen said she enjoys her new life as the head wrangler of a horse motel in Missouri. Even when hungry calves start bawling at 4 a.m.

"When Craig and I came up this hill, looked at the setting and all, I saw in his eyes that this was it," she said. "And everyone here is really friendly. That's not hard to get used to."

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