

By Cindy Card

Doug and Jody Lindgren have put out a brand new welcome mat for horse campers visiting the Black Hills in 2006. The couple opened Hay Creek Ranch located in the beautiful Nemo area of the Hills. Their secluded campground, surrounded by the Black Hills National Forest on three sides, offers not only genuine hospitality but also diverse riding terrain that fits everyone's riding tastes and levels.

This is the first year for their venture, which is sure to be a hit with not only horse people, but also with those wanting to escape back to nature and hit the trails by foot or bicycle.

"We're set up as a campground/horse camp, focusing on people who want to bring their horses to the Black Hills and ride Forest Service land," Doug said. We also welcome visitors that don't have horses and want to just relax. "We've got a couple coming here during the Sturgis Rally to get married."

He said he and his wife purchased the property in 2004 with the intention of building the campground. The two discovered the area five years ago as visitors while they were still living in northwest Iowa and fell in love with what they found.

"We started coming out here in 2001 and really enjoyed it," he said. "After that we came here every year at least once if not twice a year, in the spring and fall," he said. "The last year we lived in Iowa, I was out here six times that year and hauled horses with me all six times.

"I'm most familiar with the Nemo area and haven't done too much riding in the Southern Hills. The terrain here lends itself to a pretty broad range of abilities. It's pretty simple riding here. You can do a nice easy ride or go play Man from Snowy River if you want to. But you're not stuck in that terrain all day. It's a nice variety of terrain and levels of difficulty."

He said they also enjoy the weather the higher elevation brings. "Our elevation is about a mile high and our temperatures are really nice year round. The summertime is cooler here than in Rapid City – 15 to 20 degrees cooler usually. We're not continually fighting bugs and mosquitoes up here like in Minnesota and Iowa, which is nice for the horses and riders. Bugs are not an issue here."

The horse part of the operation will run from Memorial Day weekend through the end of October.

Back in Iowa, Doug farmed and worked for the Iowa Soybean Association as director of producer programs. "I guess we've been in business for ourselves over the years, but not anything like this," he said. "We just got through the permitting process this past December and have been building through the winter. We'll probably build through the rest of the summer."

Currently they have two complete cabins and a shower and bathroom house and are working on a third cabin. They will have cabins with full baths and shower and kitchenettes in them with porches on the front. "We'll offer a lot of creature comforts, if that's what they want," he said. They have RV sites with electricity and a dump station and can accommodate campers who prefer to rough it and pitch tents.

And of course, their facility caters to the horses with a variety of corral options. "We can accommodate anything from a 12-by-12 individual corral to corrals that will handle 10 horses or so," Doug said. "We can kind of set them up for whatever their needs are." The corrals are shaded.

And as with other horse facilities, Doug said they like to make sure the horses have proof of current Coggins testing and like to see them vaccinated for West Nile Virus as well. "It's probably not a big issue up here because of the lack of mosquitoes, but it's a really good practice.

"The National Forest requires certified weed-free hay, and we have certified hay available here, as well as a complete pellet that's a hay pellet along with trace minerals in it, which is certified as well. So if folks don't want to haul their own feed, we have that here. They just have to let us know."

In addition to word-of-mouth advertising and some local advertising, Doug said he has gone to the Minnesota Horse Expo and the Iowa Horse Expo to spread the word about their horse camp.

"At the horse expos, there's a lot of interest in people coming to the Black Hills to ride and folks who are either brand new at it or maybe have been coming here for a long time and want a new place to come," he said. "Hopefully we'll be able to provide that for them. A lot go to the Southern Hills. We are one of three in the Northern Hills that offer horse camp sites."

A great selling point for campers is they are surrounded by national forest with lots to do and with water access for the horses.

"Campers won't have to load up and haul their horses to ride. There's plenty to do here for a week with a variety of trails. The Forest Service trails around here are pretty much all grass and not graveled. Then there are lots of elk trails. It makes for some really fun rides with a variety of scenery and difficulty. We see a lot of deer, elk and turkey. Anytime we've been out we have always seen an abundance of wildlife.

"The trails cross water, too. Corral Creek runs just south of us here and there are also some tributaries of Hay Creek that run through here as well."

For the more adventurous riders, Doug said they are located dead center between the Centennial Trail and the Mickelson Trail. It is possible to ride to either one. "We can get to

Centennial Trail from a couple of different directions from here, but they'll be in the saddle for a while," Doug said.

Doug said they will provide campers with Forest Service maps that show the different forest service roads as well as the private property lines.

"We'll eventually have some kind of basic needs kind of shop, with milk and eggs, a sort of a general store kind of a thing."

But that's about as "urban" as they plan to be. Doug said they love the seclusion and know their guests will love it too.

"We're 3.5 miles back off the highway, through the National Forest so it's really secluded and quiet. If folks want to have city lights, concrete and lots of cars driving by, don't come here. Folks that are riding here will probably not see anybody other than their own group or people who are camped here. That's how far away from everything else we are."

For more information and for detailed directions to Hay Creek Ranch, visit [www.haycreekranch.com](http://www.haycreekranch.com).