

Retired equines find heaven on Challis Creek Ranch



An aerial view of Challis Creek Ranch shows a herd of retired horses grazing in lush green pastures along the banks of Challis Creek. *Photo courtesy Jack Challis*

BY TODD ADAMS

Keeping horses started out as a retirement hobby for Jack Challis, but it evolved into a business of boarding retired horses that now has him working harder than he did during his construction career.

As the entrance sign indicates at his 200-acre Challis Creek Ranch, Jack offers R and R for Horses, in a scenic valley setting that might be described as horse heaven on earth.

Jack flood irrigates about 100 acres of pasture, so his pampered horses only have to eat hay during the depths of winter. They can roam wherever they want on the pasture bottomlands and sagebrush uplands of the ranch.

Jack didn't start boarding horses until after Bob, a friend in Phoenix, passed away. Bob's widow told him there was no way she could sell her husband's horses and said, "If you'll take them up there, I'll pay you to keep them."

"I just told her there was no way she'd pay me to board Bob's horses, but on the way to Phoenix it gave me the idea that there are other people that will not put their horse down. So, I put the website up and that's how it all started."

Besides retirement boarding for old or injured horses for a fee, Jack breeds and sells a few of his own and does "tune-ups" or minor horse training. He keeps owners up-to-date on the



The entrance sign to Challis Creek Ranch.

Photo courtesy Jack Challis

health and overall well-being of their horses with stable notes, photos and invoices posted and updated at least twice a month on their own private section of his website, <http://horseboardingretirement.com>

Roam free

Jack believes in letting his herd of horses roam as freely as possible, because that's how the social animals evolved and how they thrive.

Many of the horses spent most of their lives in confined stalls, corrals or smaller pastures. Some experience agoraphobia when turned out into wide-open spaces to run with the herd.

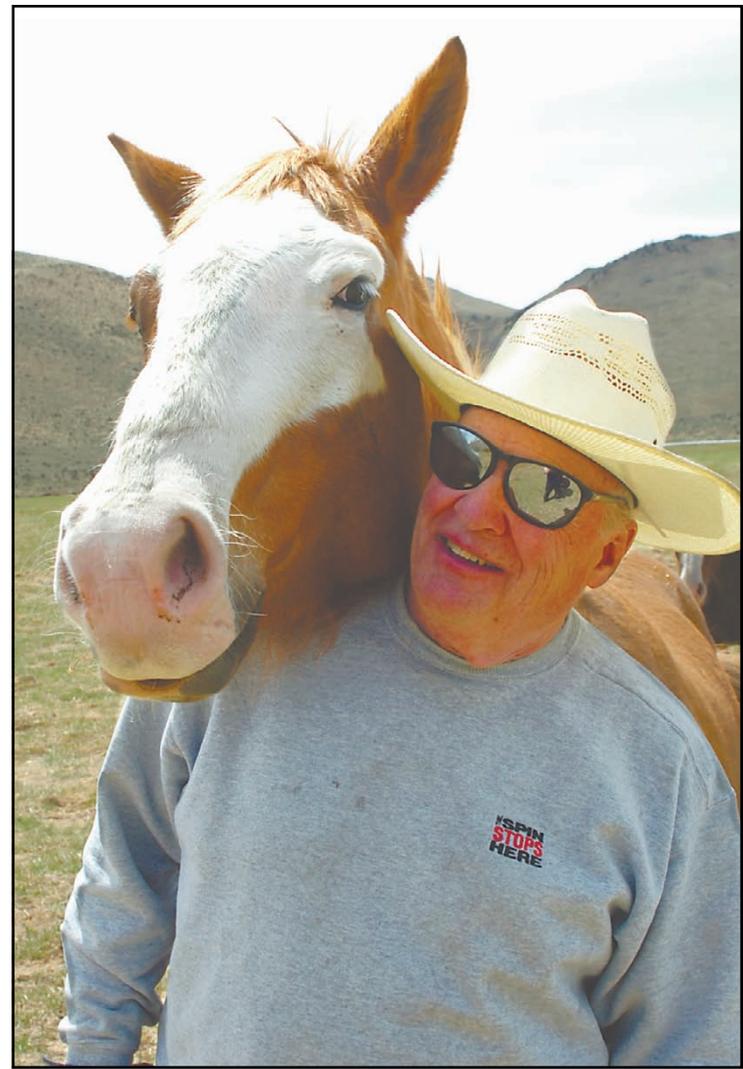
"You have to actually train them what a larger pasture is,"

Jack said. "You take them and put them in a small pasture, increase it, add a few horses... until finally they're used to the spaciousness. Otherwise, they get out there and will run right into a fence. They just are not used to it."

"I push the herd environment aspect, because horses came from a herd out in the middle of nowhere, and I'm basically returning them to their roots."

All the horses run to him when Jack whistles or just walks into the pasture. Each has a unique personality. One character, Geoffrey, had to learn more than most.

"I led [Geoffrey] out into the middle of the creek. I would stand there with him for half an hour and he still wouldn't drink." So Jack took a water trough for Geoffrey and laid it on its side in the irrigation ditch, where water could flow through. "And he would go out and drink out of that trough, but he wouldn't drink anyplace else in that ditch. I left it there for about three days and I moved it. And he went, 'Oh, I bet I can still drink there.'" Geoffrey's owner thought it was hilarious that I had to teach



Latté the friendly horse rests his head on Jack's shoulder.

Todd Adams photo



Jack Challis gives Apache a "tune up" or minor training session.

Todd Adams photo

him to drink out of the creek."

All new horses are quarantined. After their shots are current, Jack gradually introduces them to the great outdoors and herd life. They get used to the single-strand electric fences around the ranch's periphery.

"I hate barbed wire because of injuries," Jack said. "Electric fence, once they know what it is they don't go through it, they don't even touch it. They just stay away from it and that's a

safety factor that I definitely enjoy."

Jack uses electric fencing to rotate horses from pasture to pasture and can keep his horses on pasture into December most years.

The fence exists more to keep free-ranging cows out than horses in. Herds of elk and deer manage to jump over the fence to poach grass.

Boarding retired horses

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— R&R for horses by Challis

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turned out to be considerably more than a hobby. “I didn’t work this hard when I worked for a living,” said Jack. “It’s definitely more a passion than a job. The satisfaction I get out of it is the fact that the people who don’t want to put their horses down, once they come here, see this place, see how the animals are treated, they know that their horse is going to be taken care of.”

Some people visit their horses once or twice a year; others he’s never met in person. Horses come to Challis Creek Ranch from all over the country.

Testimonial

“Jack’s valley is the most beautiful peaceful place I have ever had the privilege to be in,” writes Kathy R. of La Canada, California in a website testimonial. “Jack babied our baby (Tiara was only 4 at the time) and slowly eased her into the herd, onto the pasture grass and through the first cold winter. He followed every overprotective motherly suggestion I had about her care and never made me feel stupid about it.

“He posted stable notes about the weather, her feet, the pasture, her place in the herd (still at the bottom)...all the little things that I wanted to know about, that any loving horse owner needs to know about to feel secure about their horse’s well being...and he posted the most beautiful photos of her in this natural herd environment...”

“So I still feel very connected to her even after not seeing her or touching her or breathing her breath for three years. When she loaded the trailer bound for Idaho I thought I would never see her again, but this connection that Jack facilitates on his website has actually drawn me closer to Tiara. I flew to Idaho last month to visit her. I have never flown to visit a horse before and would of told you it was crazy to do so. But I did. Jack let me just hang out in the pasture with her for two days. It was the most amazing horse experience. I highly recommend it...”

“Oh, and about the cost, what I pay Jack for Tiara’s care, including everything, is about the same as what I pay for one horse’s timothy hay in southern California. You can’t beat that!”

Background

Jack grew up near Chicago and spent most of his summers at his uncle’s farm. Jack’s kids had horses while growing up in Arizona.

Jack was in the construc-



All Jack Challis has to do is whistle or walk into the pasture and the herd comes running to greet him.

Todd Adams photo

tion machinery business, designing, selling and setting up operations all over the world.

He discovered the Challis area on a backcountry hunting trip, bought his property in 1990, moved here in 1991 and finished building his house in 1993.

His great-uncle, Alva P. Challis, founded the nearby town that carries his name.

Jack runs his ranch with a

hired hand and occasionally hires a local high school student to help with flood irrigation.

Most of what Jack knows about horse training he credits to local horse trainer Dave Oerke, and he prefers to say he does “tune ups” rather than horse training.

“You’ve got to love horses and have the patience to work with them. It’s as simple as that.”