

santa fean

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| ADVENTURE |

Ride. Relax. Repeat.

an equestrian escape in Northern New Mexico

by Amanda Jackson photographs by James Pitman

SANTA FE AND NORTHERN NEW MEXICO are known worldwide as tourist destinations. However, for those desiring to travel and explore with their equine companions, finding a place to relax while also taking care of horses can present a challenge. North of Santa Fe, the small towns of La Madera and El Rito, NM, provide an option that allows both horse and rider to enjoy the best of the area and beauty of the landscape: Cliff River Springs casitas and the associated El Rito Horse Boarding facility.

As the sun rises above the cliffs surrounding Tecolote Peak and shines into your casita window, your day at Cliff River Springs begins. Each casita has a full kitchen, and a breakfast of farm-fresh eggs and homemade sourdough toast and jelly can be prepared from the supplies found in the lightly stocked refrigerator. These provisions also include a few fresh picked vegetables from Ancient Waters Farm, also located on the property. After an early breakfast, it's a short drive over to El Rito Horse Boarding to begin a day of riding.

Kardy Martinez, owner of El Rito Horse Boarding, provides care and boarding for a maximum of three horses. His services include 24-hour security, an on-site farrier, and two on-call veterinarians. The property is furnished with a small barn, two indoor stalls and two separate open-air stalls, a wash rack, a small round pen, and a larger riding arena. There is an additional area to lock and secure your tack and belongings, as well as bathrooms and a dressing area for rider convenience. Martinez does ask that you provide your own grain and other food, although he is happy to dish it up for your equine partner during your stay at Cliff River Springs. The Carson National Forest as well as New Mexico state lands are near the property, and provide awe-inspiring riding experiences with beautiful Southwest scenery and rich Western history. National Forest maps can be found at the nearby ranger station in El Rito; and Martinez, an area native, will show you the different trailheads and explain a bit of the area's history before you set out.

As you saddle up and ride out from El Rito Horse Boarding, your opportunities are endless, with direct access to hundreds of thousands of acres of public land in all directions. There are four main trail recommendations to choose from. An eastern trail wanders by the last remains of a Puebloan site, inhabited from 1350–1550 AD, which once stretched over 20 acres. The southern trail is equally unique, passing by the ruins of the El Rito mission church and the rock formations standing near the eroding walls of this 1800s-era adobe structure. The western trail takes you into the backcountry, heading towards Plaza Blanca and the Rio Chama. A fourth recommended trail to the north is a short trailer drive from El Rito Horse Boarding but provides high country riding with breathtaking mountain scenery. Each of these trails provides a unique experience, while also catering to riders of varying skill levels.

After a long day in the saddle, the oasis that is Cliff River Springs awaits. Numerous secluded benches, chairs, and hammocks are available for relaxing. Close to the casitas, a large pond complete with birds and bullfrogs is available for swimming or

canoeing. Cliff River Springs' 1,200-acre property is open for exploration—six different walking trails offer easy to advanced hikes, and there are plenty of places to simply rest and enjoy the glorious views. cliffroversprings.com



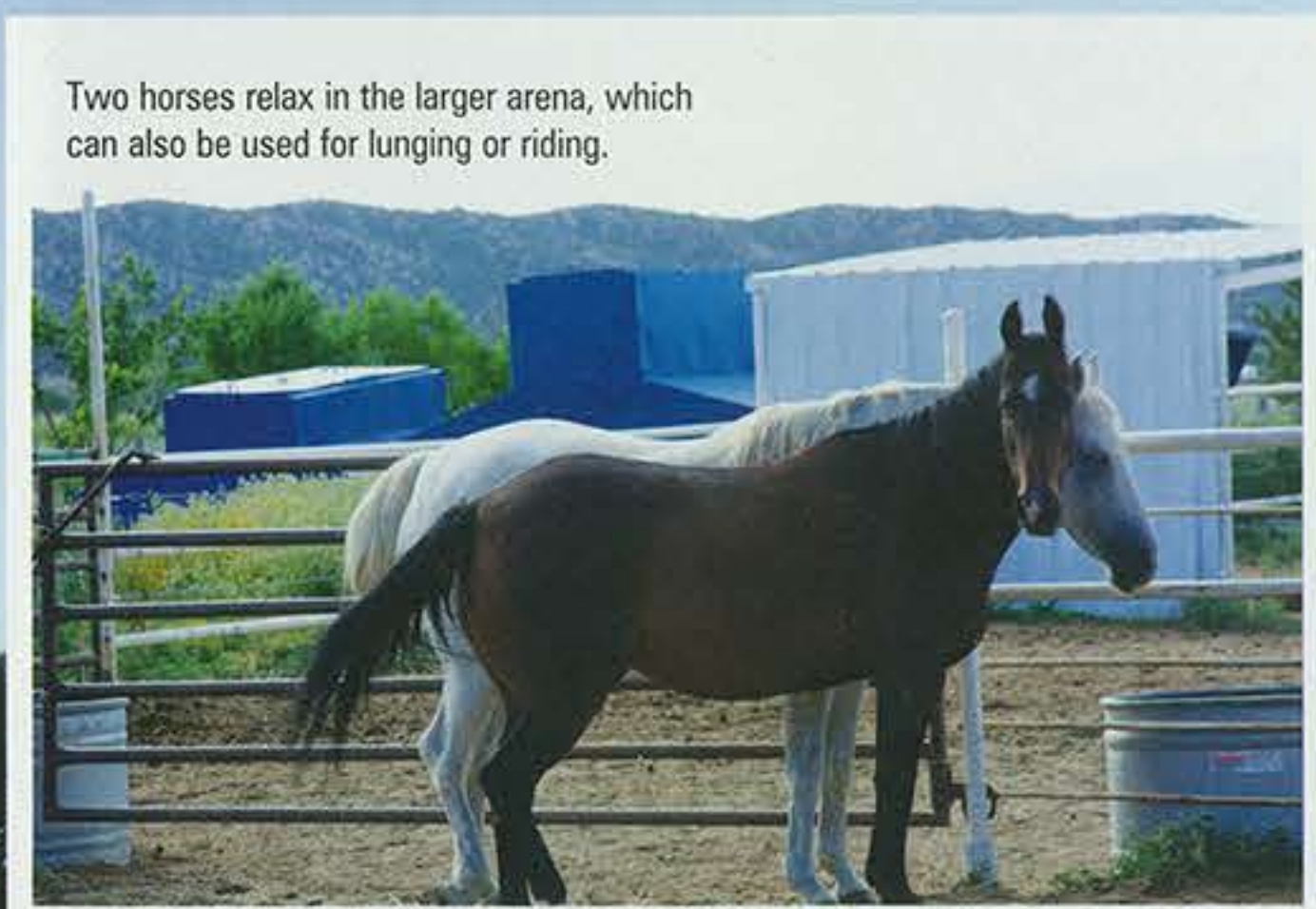
A small antique horse at Cliff River Springs. Cliff River Springs' owner, Hope Atterbury, has two of her own horses on the property.



El Rito Horse Boarding's barn, complete with weathervane and welcome horseshoe.



The boarding property has two arenas; the smaller (pictured) is a short distance from the barn.



Two horses relax in the larger arena, which can also be used for lunging or riding.



The western trail, with views of the mountains, is situated on Carson National Forest land.

The larger pond at Cliff River Springs is perfect for swimming, birdwatching, or simply relaxing.

