



Sarah Hill, a sophomore at Bowdoin College in Maine, signs out a horse for a guest to ride for the day. Hill works as a wrangler.

seemed to be heavily influenced by exposure to the simulated "wilds" of someplace like Walt Disney World—Burluson, a senior at the University of Wyoming and a second-year staffer at Triangle X Ranch, would later sigh, "It's unbelievable what people think wilderness is all about."

Burluson is one of around 45 much-needed college students employed for the summer by the ranch, which is located near Jackson, Wyoming. He's what's known as a floater, a guide who takes people in large rubber rafts down a 10-mile flat-water stretch of river to enjoy the scenery. The job is just one of a dozen or so open to the young and temporarily employable. Other positions include those for cooks, waiters, cleaning staff, and maintenance people, as well as wranglers (experienced horse-handlers) and pack-mule guides, who take ranch guests on multiday horseback-riding trips, using mules to haul everyone's gear and supplies.

It's not the work alone, though, that brings folks here: What better place to spend the summer than in the shadow of the Grand Tetons? Or what better way to earn your keep than exploring the sun-drenched prairies of Montana, Colorado, or Idaho? There are dozens of ranches in spectacular locations throughout the West, and employment opportunities are great. Don't worry about the amount of experience—or lack of it—on your resume. All many of the jobs require is a friendly, positive attitude, a willingness

to do taxing work, a sense of adventure, and the ability to answer politely the occasional inane question.

Dude (or guest) ranches started in the early 1900s as a way for greenhorn Easterners to experience the "authentic" Western lifestyle. "A dude," as someone once said, "is a person who comes in for weeks or months, stays at a dude ranch or something like it, dresses more like a cowhand than a cowhand does, rides horses, and in a simpleminded way tries to fit into the country." Nowadays *dude* is more a blanket term for a guest of any sort, since most dude and guest ranches aren't real working ranches anymore (although Triangle X does raise horses and produce hay). At the ranch, then, work revolves mostly around making visitors happy. And that requires quite a few hands.

"We'd be in big trouble if it weren't for college help," says Harold Turner, one of three brothers who jointly own and operate Triangle X. College students make up roughly 60 percent of the total staff of 80 people on the Turners' ranch. That makes working there a lot like being at school away from school—staffers live together in dorm-type quarters on the ranch and see one another constantly. The difference is they're in wide-open Wyoming.

On the 1,300-acre, 300-horse ranch, jobs range from the mundane to the relatively romantic. Being a cabin girl (as the job is called here) and making 80 beds and washing load after load of towels each day can be pretty tedious, but it has its pluses, too.

"We're done by noon most days," says Michele Sullivan, a senior at Princeton University, "although Sundays are busy because the guests from one week leave and new ones arrive several hours later."



Ty Roy (left) and fellow University of Wyoming sophomore Carl Roth grill steaks for the ranch guests' dinner. The summer chefs' workday starts at 6 a.m. on those mornings when they prepare breakfast for float-trip passengers.