

experience, the women are likely to end up working as what are called kiddie wranglers, taking children out on the trail. Men who can handle horses, on the other hand, are given the enviable wrangler jobs that involve guiding only adults. Like it or not, women ranch hands may have to accept a certain amount of sexism. This is the West, after all, and it has more than a touch of regional machismo.

Hill, a sophomore at Bowdoin College in Maine, says, "The other wranglers think I'm a flag-waving radical feminist, but back at school I'd be considered normal." She makes her opinion about the wrangler system clear: "I think it's unfair that a woman wrangler can usually be a kiddie wrangler only. And the only way she can be a mule-packer is by marrying into it [marrying another packer]. But I've finally learned that confrontation isn't the way—it just gets people's hackles up." Instead, she approaches her co-workers diplomatically. "They know I can do anything they can, and that's enough."

Ranch work's most appealing aspects have to do with time off the job. It's a chance to explore the rural areas and, in doing so, to explore your own interests and talents. Carl Roth, 19, a cookout chef and a sophomore at the University of Wyoming, says days off are the number-one thing student workers are sure to take advantage of at Triangle X. "Don't get me wrong, I've enjoyed the summer as a cookout chef," he says. "But my best experience all summer was when I climbed Grand Teton."

Roth trained for his first ascent by going with the head cook, Steve Desautels, to Black Tail Butte nearby. The sheer rock face, rising 7,688 feet from the ground, is more difficult than any part of the

Grand Teton. By the time Roth had learned the ropes there, he was ready for anything. When he reached the top of Grand Teton, he signaled his co-workers back at the ranch with a mirror. "It was neat to see the flashes from the top of the mountain," says Evan Hanby, a junior at Auburn University in Alabama. And Roth felt that he'd accomplished something important in his life.

Personal achievements aside, ranch hands can get a new perspective on life by meeting lots of unusual people. "You get people from all over the U.S., Europe, Japan," Roth says. "One night at the cookout fire, for example, I sat and talked to this doctor for a long time. It was really neat. You just sit and ask them all kinds of questions, and they all say, 'I wish I'd done

this when I was a kid.' It's made me realize that it's important not to waste time."

People can take only so much lone exploring and philosophizing, though. Often, staffers just want to have fun. And mayhem reigns.

"At the full moon in July," begins Hanby, "we'd all gone to town"—meaning hit the saloons—"and we didn't get back until after 1 a.m. Then Rob Caesar, the head boatman, instigated a midnight float trip. So we snuck two rafts and two vans off the ranch. The river was spooky, covered with log."

Even though floating down the river after dark is against park rules, people noisily laughed, sang, and jumped from boat to boat. Hanby recalls, "One guy, Steve, tried to switch boats and ended up doing a face plant into the water. He was bummed, not because he was wet and cold, but because he lost his cowboy hat."

The revelers reached the take-out point with just enough time to get back to the ranch before the sunrise float trips were due to leave. "It was great," Hanby says, "because everyone was on the trip, we didn't get caught, and we found Steve's hat a couple of days later."

Hanging out, whether on the Snake River late one foggy July night or between chores, is the key to a great summer working at a dude ranch. "We came from the four corners of the country, as different as can be," Hanby says, "but the connecting thread was a love of life."

"It was one of the best career moves I could make," adds the journalism major. "It taught me to get along with people who are different from me. I learned how to live life there." ●

VIRGINIA HOSIETTER, the editor of this magazine, wishes she could be a cowgirl and sleep out under the Western sky.



Matt Turner (left) and Bounty Hunter, both packers, load their gear onto a mule. The mule will carry the supplies to a cabin used for overnight horseback-riding trips.

Mike Burlison, a senior at the University of Wyoming, takes guests on a sunrise trip down a lazy stretch of the Snake River. This is his second summer spent working at the ranch.

