

HORSES FOR LIFE

After years of being a truck driver, Rick Haug decided to make a living doing something he loves



Rick Haug, owner of Back Country Wilderness Outfitters, drives the free wagons rides at SummerFest, sponsored by the city of Long Beach.

"You put a kid with a horse and it's magic, what happens." So says Rick Haug, owner of Back Country Wilderness Outfitters. While the company (which is the Haug family, mostly) does wilderness outfitting, on the Long Beach Peninsula it's best known for providing beach horse rides and horse and buggy tours.

Haug and his family have had the business for 22 years. For 18 of those years Haug handled both horse rides and buggies. Now past normal retirement age, he contents himself with driving the free wagons rides at the summer-long SummerFest sponsored by the city of Long Beach.

It was a long and often painful journey that brought Rick Haug to where he sits now, 6 feet up and holding the reins. He grew up in the Tri-Cities area of Washington, he says, "where we always had horses, and I've had horses ever since. I had 12 or 15 horses around, or I felt like I was afoot."

At the age of 13, Haug got a job as a feedlot cowboy. "I rode the pens taking care of cattle. There was nothing I enjoyed more, and there's nothing you can do that will starve you faster," he says. Although living and working in Tri-Cities, he vacationed with his mother and aunts, all schoolteachers, on the Long Beach Peninsula — a place he came to love.

Then Vietnam came along, where he spent three-and-a-half years as a combat infantryman, followed by 21 months in hospital. "When I was well enough to work," Haug says, "they put me in the hospital's Welfare and Recreation Department to find activities that would make the men feel good about themselves." He set up charter fishing, hunting and other outdoor activities for the men, who learned they could still contribute despite their disabilities.

After his discharge, Haug moved with his wife, Kathy, to Kansas, where they started two businesses. "She ran the meat packing from her desk, and I ran the trucking from my desk across the room," he says. The trucks, which Haug drove for years, hauled hazardous materials: "What we carried could scald you or blow you up or asphyxiate you, or hurt you somehow, but it paid well."

For 25 years they took no vacations, and 4-H with their kids was what they did for fun. Then, one day, Haug was watching TV, and what he saw changed his life. It was a show called "The Great Inns of America," and he saw a man picking up tourists at an inn for a surrey ride on the beach. He watched it more carefully, and he realized that the show was about the Shelburne Inn. "I've been to that place," he said to his wife. "It's in Seaview, Washington," the scene of so many fond memories.

"That planted the seed," says Haug. "We worked 24/7,

and we were ready for something different. I thought, how neat would it be to make a living doing something I really loved doing." He took a preliminary trip to Long Beach to get a feel for the community and talk to locals, and then moved his horses, carriages and wagons ("They've always been my interest.") to Washington. "I was ready to sell, and what I didn't sell I walked away from," he says. Soon he was managing Back Country and shortly thereafter bought the company.

"The little girls gravitate toward you because they love horses, and the little boys because they want to be cowboys," Haug says, and he has stories of local kids that came to work for him and "learned some responsibility," and of those who learned something about life while riding a horse.

Like the minister who wanted to arrange an overnight horseback experience for a group of inner city kids, Haug took them up above Fort Columbia, and after they learned they couldn't mount a horse with the crotches of their low-slung shorts around their knees ("It's just physics," says Haug), he could begin to teach them. About camping so they left no trace. About cooking dinner and a cobbler in a Dutch oven. About the Chinooks, Capt. Gray and the Russian fur traders, with the locales spread out below. "It was kind of sneaking up on them," he says. "They were learning something without knowing it."

Back Country isn't just about kids. People of all ages enjoy themselves, and the ultimate Back Country experience is the Beard's Hollow barbecue the company puts on for groups. There's a bonfire, a 16-ounce rib-eye steak dinner cooked on a grill, and four hours of horse or buggy riding that ends as the sun is setting. Romantic. Magic. Even educational. It may be the perfect Long Beach adventure.

As for Rick Haug, he has 50 horses now. "They're like people; they're all different," he says. "They're the pleasure part of my whole life."

The Back Country corral is located at 409 Sid Snyder Drive in Long Beach, Washington. Pick-up and drop-off for the free Summerfest carriage rides is on the southwest corner of Third Street and Ocean Beach Blvd. (Hwy 103). For further information, call 360-642-2576.



After working as a truck driver in Kansas for 25 years, Rick Haug decided to move to Long Beach, Washington, where he had vacationed as a child, to run a horse and wagon ride business.



Back Country Wilderness Outfitters in Long Beach, Washington, offers beach horse rides and horse and buggy tours to all ages.

Coastal Life

Story and photos by DWIGHT CASWELL