

There's a cook who rustles up gourmet meals, unlimited stars in the skies and a scenic ride back to the trailhead. Some outfitters have remote lodges or cabins that you can stay in and offer horse camping, fishing and guided hunting there as well as at their tent-based camps.

"Nature expeditions" are a growing component of local horse-packer offerings. These themed deluxe trips include food and lodging as well as a scientist, naturalist or artist who provides extra guidance in understanding the landscape's wildflowers, wildlife and/or geology.

If you want to pack your own gear, but don't want to haul a heavy load up into the mountains or down into the canyon, horse packers offer drop camps. The packer (or, more accurately the packer's mules and horses) hauls your gear to a predetermined location. You hike in. When you're ready to leave, they pack up your stuff on a predetermined date and carry it back to the trailhead. If you wish, you can ride along one or both directions.

Outfitters also offer wilderness and backcountry fishing and hunting camps and guided hunts during deer, elk, bear, bighorn sheep, mountain goat and other seasons. Each packer has a designated hunting unit or units where he can guide hunts or pick up the results of a successful hunt and bring it back for the hunter.

Several licensed horsepacking outfitters serve the Wallowas and Hells Canyon. They include Wes Gorbett's Eagle Cap Wilderness Pack Station, Barry and Shirley Cox's Del Sol Wilderness Adventures, Dub Darnell's Ninebark Outfitters and Brice and Barry Barnes Hells Canyon Outfitters.

These outfitters and their wranglers know the country and their animals. Many have multi-generational roots here. Nora Hawkins, who wrangles for Del Sol Wilderness Adventures, is a fourth-generation rancher who is also a Duluth Trading Company real woman model. Nora raises goats and pigs, makes goat cheese, is a certified midwife and keeps her feet in the wilderness.

Barry Cox, who runs Del Sol, for most of his life has trained horses, including Spanish mustangs. Wes Gorbett, who owns and guides for Eagle Cap Wilderness Pack Station, grew up on a Wallowa County ranch and helped herd his family's sheep in Hells Canyon and in the Eagle Caps beginning at age 6.

Gorbett's coming fall trips that are already booked include both backpacking



Wes and his favorite mule Wyatt.

and hunting groups. Like other outfitters, he packs mostly into the Eagle Cap's high country in summer, and lower elevations — Hells Canyon and the Chesnimus area (Zumwalt Prairie, Buckhorn, Cherry Creek, Jim Creek and Joseph Creek north and east of Enterprise) — in fall and spring.

"I've got six bowhunter camps in September, a guided goat camp and three drop camps for bighorns and goats," he said. "There's also a drop camp for hikers who are going into the high country in

September. Might snow on them — or it might be perfect weather."

Gorbett recently packed a drop camp to Mirror Lake in the Eagle Cap Wilderness for 10 backpackers who planned to stay in the wilderness for eight days. His pack-train consisted of four sure-footed mules and one horse. The hikers, mostly from the Seattle area, turned their packs and other gear over to Gorbett at the Two-Pan Trailhead at 8 a.m. He collected

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