

# "OUR MAIN GOAL ISN'T TO GET RICH OFF OF ANY OF THIS, BUT TO BE ABLE TO STAY ON THE RANCH."



Patsy Scherar is a longtime Steamboat rancher. To help keep her ranch going, she started helping hunters set up drop camps, and a few years ago she and her husband, Bill, started winter sleigh rides.

After our first interview, we went on a 16-mile horse pack trip to see how Patsy works her drop camps. We rode through rain, hail, snow and even a little sunny weather. We got to her property about 7:30 a.m. First we helped get all the horses ready and helped Carl get all his things packed on the horses. Carl is a hunter who has been coming from Texas to hunt with Patsy for the last 17 years. He is 70 years old and is in great physical condition.

We left to go up Mad Creek about 9 a.m. Along the way, Patsy showed us landmarks that have existed since the trail was constructed. There were man-made walls of rock below the trail that must have taken months to build by hand. It was a 2 1/2 hour trip up to Carl's camp. We helped him set up his camp by chopping firewood, setting up his tent and unpacking his equipment.

## Patsy Scherar by Kevin Whitmore and Scott Smith

After we left Carl's camp, we went to the next camp, which was about three-quarters of a mile away. We just stopped there to see if we needed to pack any game out for the hunters. From there, we went to another camp and did the same. We then started our trip back, which took another 2 1/2 hours. When we got back to the ranch, we realized the work for Patsy was not over. She still had to unsaddle all the horses and feed and water them.

Patsy has lived in Steamboat almost her entire life. "I was born in Julesburg in northeastern Colorado. My parents moved to Steamboat within the first few months of my life. I consider myself a native of Steamboat. Times were a lot more relaxed when I was young. Everyone knew everyone. One of the places my parents ranched first was what is now the base of the ski mountain. We used to walk to town to see movies. I don't think little kids do that now."

Patsy then told us about her father, Lloyd Truax, and his outfitting business. "My dad started the business in 1943, so I grew up as his second son and helped him with the horses and chores. We had a small outfitting operation back then. The elk were protected in Colorado until about 1930 because they were so scarce. The outfitting was just a sideline; he was also a full-time rancher. It didn't cost to be an outfitter then, like it does now. It was just a good fall income for him. He loved to hunt and fish, and he loved the horses. It was a feasible sideline for him."

Patsy got started for good in the outfitting business when her brother died in June 1970. "He had the hunters booked for the fall, so it was either refund the money paid on deposits and disappoint the hunters or get one of us licensed to be an outfitter. So I was licensed for just that year. I thought I knew a lot, but I have learned a lot since. In most ways it was probably easier for me. I acquired the clients that my father and brother had dealt with and the hunters came back. We have hunters yet that came with my dad, who died in 1961.

"If you are doing a good job, you don't have to solicit new hunters every year like with a summer trip. Summer people come here one year, and the next



**"MY BROTHER, JERRALD, NAMED THE RANCH SUNSET RANCH IN THE 1960'S BECAUSE HE ENJOYED THE SUNSETS ON THE 'SLEEPING GIANT.' WE STILL USE THAT NAME."**

year they go to Disneyland. But hunters, if they like what they are doing and where they are, they come back. So for me it was probably, business-wise, easier than most and maybe knowledge-wise because I've kind of grown up with it. But young people-- I'm including myself-- think they know enough. Not necessarily all of it, but enough, until you have to do it on your own!

"The first two years we did it differently. My brother, Jerrald, and my father did what is called a full-service camp. That is where you go in and set up a tent city and you have a cook, guides, wrangler and lots of horses. So that's what we did the first two years. Mostly, I was really involved on the sidelines with the people who had worked for my brother. Willie Stender did the work. Then I told the hunters that I just didn't want to do that anymore. I had a family and a job. They didn't want to lose their area and their outfitter, so what we agreed upon is what we call a drop camp.

"We take them in and leave them and just check on them every day or two, and then pack them back out. Sometimes we go in and set up the camp and cut the firewood, but it is still a drop camp. We're not there cooking for them or guiding them every day. So that's what we do almost exclusively during hunting season. There is a market for drop camps because it is the working man's way to afford a hunt. We have one

group from New York that comes the farthest. They drive their motor home, and the group members take turns driving."

We asked Patsy what her first-year hunters thought of a woman guide and outfitter. "Some of them have wondered what it would be like to have a woman outfitter. The Colorado Guides and Outfitters Association puts out a list of the licensed outfitters in Colorado. For several years I signed my things 'Pat' as opposed to 'Patsy' because Pat could be a guy's name. I think a few hunters came just to see what this was all about! I think that they really thought I just sat in the kitchen and talked to them on the phone and did the paperwork and that it would be a guy taking them out to hunt, or that if I did, that I was a King Kong.

"My mom brought one group to the trailhead one morning. I was standing up on the back of one of our big pack horses because I was too short to pack the top load from the ground. I was standing on his butt pulling the top straps on. Mom said all five of the guys turned to her at once and said, 'THAT'S Patsy?' You know this wasn't what they had pictured!

"As we started up the trail, Carl stopped in front of me, and he turned around and said, 'I want to tell you now, that if I never see an elk, you've made my trip.' I said, 'How's that?' and he said, 'I haven't missed a chance all summer to tell the guys at work that Patsy said this and Patsy said that, and the guys are



**"WE DON'T MIND PACKING IT IN. BUT WE DON'T LIKE PACKING IT OUT."**

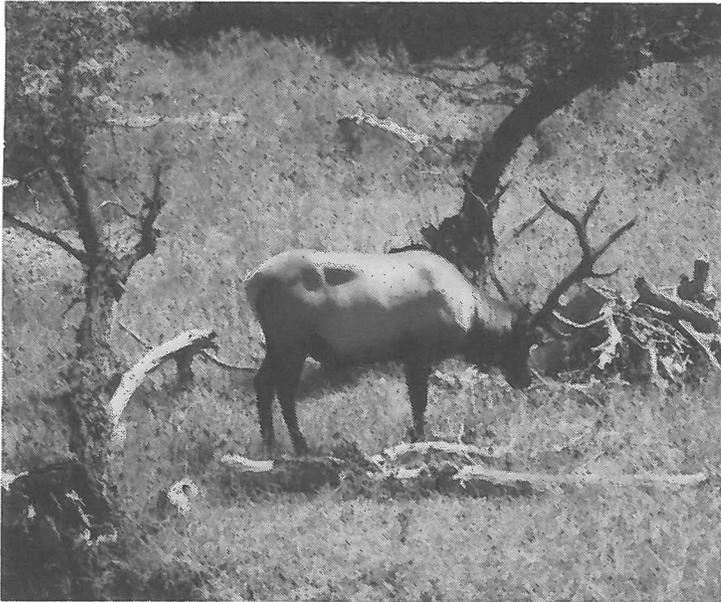


Photo by Bill McKelvie

saying: 'Oh come on now, where are you really going?' He had to take a picture of Patsy back to work.

"Seventeen years later he gets out of his little car and comes over to me and pulls out his chew -- he chews Red Man -- and he will say, 'Chew, Patsy?' He knows I won't take it, but it's just part of his ritual because he just has to tell the guys at work about his big, tough packer.

"Most Coloradoans don't pay people to pack them. Once in a while we get one though. Our clients are from all parts of the United States, and each has his own style. Carl likes to hunt alone. He brings his own camp and carries a little spike camp on his back. If he gets out where the elk are grazing, he will stay. We always take him in on a Wednesday before the season and pick him up two weeks later. I have gone in to check on him, and he isn't there. I finally told him, 'Carl, you have to let me know if you are all right, or else we'll look for you for two weeks.' So one day I rode into his camp and here sitting on his table was a plate with a note on it. It said, 'Patsy, I'm fine,' but it had no date on it! It could have been written a week before. He just likes to hunt alone, and I guess that's really his business. He's been coming here for 17 years.

"Carl decides each year what he's going to hunt. He'll settle for a four-point, or he won't settle for less than a six-point. He's not here to kill an animal; he's here to hunt. I really think it would take a huge elk to get him to shoot one early in the season because he is there for his two weeks, and he couldn't justify staying if he'd killed his elk early. He is a neat man. He starts walking early in the summer to get himself in shape, and he'll call and say, 'I'm up to walking six miles a day.'"

We then asked Patsy what advice she gives her new hunters. "We really ask them to plan their food supplies. We don't mind packing it in, but we don't like packing excess out. It's just too hard. It doesn't make sense to pack in hundreds of pounds of food, so we ask them to plan their menus. We also suggest they bring enough clothing to wear layers. They can always take clothing off as it gets warmer.

"We always make sure we spend some time with new hunters after we get to camp. When they have seen the landmarks and a good map, we explain to them how to get out if they get lost. One thing we always stress about this country is if you go downhill, you'll get out, and don't keep trying to get back to camp if you're lost until you are in trouble. We would rather take them back in. In the summer I spend a lot of time on the phone answering questions and trying to prepare the trips.

"Our camps are eight miles in; that's about 2 1/2 to 3 hours with the horses fully packed. We go through a little edge of the Zirkel Wilderness Area, which prohibits any motorized vehicles. Our camps aren't actually in the wilderness, but most of them are right on the edge. We don't set up our camps early and we don't like to leave them set up there. There was a time, going back to old Steamboat, when my dad would take a camp up and leave it up all summer for us to fish out of. We would leave a bedroll and our pans. Here a few years back, there was quite a rash of stealing. People would leave their camp for the day and come back to find their pack saddles gone.

"We hunt in area 14N, which is north of Buffalo Pass Road. We try to keep all of our camps on Ditch Creek and Mad Creek. That just makes sense for us mile-wise.



**"I WAS TOO SHORT TO PACK THE TOP LOAD FROM THE GROUND."**



**"THE PERSON WHO GOES  
THROUGH THAT MUCH EFFORT  
IS THE SERIOUS HUNTER."**

"I can't compare the hunting pressure in our area to any other area because I don't see other areas during hunting season. The type of person who goes through that much effort to pack in that far is basically a more serious hunter than the guy who goes to the bars at night and drives the road hunting during the day-time.

"A satisfying season for me is when everyone has seen an elk, not necessarily gotten one. When they don't get them, they only have themselves to blame. You don't want to call it blame, but if they have seen an elk and they know they are there, it usually satisfies them. They know that next year they'll get one."

We asked Patsy about the difficulties in getting her camps set up. "We usually start about two weeks before. We'll start setting up camps we are renting to people, cutting firewood and getting everything packed in. We go for a weekend, and we can usually get three camps set up. It takes a day gathering everything up, loading, getting the horses hauled to the trailhead and unloading. Then you spend another day setting up camps and getting firewood.

"We can use chainsaws where our camps are. We can't pack the chainsaw through the wilderness; we have to go around it. You know you don't want to run the chainsaw right up to the season, so we try to get our work done at least a week ahead of season. We provide everything for our hunters except their food and personal gear.

"After hunting season is over we get our gear out of there as soon as possible. Again, it's because of things getting stolen and because of the weather. Usually, within a day or so, we get it down. That depends on how many elk we're bringing out. If we go in to get someone, we usually take in enough horses to pack elk if they have gotten some. If there's no elk, we can bring our gear. Obviously, if there's elk, we don't get our gear out as soon."

Patsy talked about getting ready for hunting season. "I get excited about the season starting and the hunters coming. It's also a lot of work. You know what's coming, and you hope for good weather when you have to be out in it 12 hours a day. In our operation, our newest hunter this year has been coming with us for seven years. So you have to understand, it is kind of like 'old home week' for us. We've had some of them up to 30 years. So these are people we see once a year and who have gotten to be really kind of friends. I've never met their families, but I know all about them,

"It's really kind of neat to say, 'Well, how's the wife this year, and what are the kids doing?' To go from camp to camp and have coffee with them and say, 'What's going on with you this year?', is enjoyable. I usually try not to talk on the trail; it's kind of hard to yell back there through 15 squeaking saddles. They'll usually start asking where the elk are and how the summer was. It's pretty hard work to be heard while you're on the trail.

"We charge to pack them and their gear in and out. Then if they get game -- deer or elk -- we charge them extra to pack that. If they rent one of our camps, we charge them for rent on that. Because we go through the wilderness, we are limited to 15 horses and people per group, so we try to limit our groups to about seven to nine. We try not to take less than three per group because three people basically use the same equipment (stove, tent, lantern) as one person."

We asked Patsy if there has ever been a year when all of the clients filled their licenses. "We've come close, and that's the year you really turn grey! The closest probably was in 1978, and that was the year my first husband, Willy Wilhelm, passed away. His funeral was the day before we started packing. Another girl, who is smaller than me, and I packed 32 hunters in and out and 20 some elk. Just the two of us. That was a big year. I ran on nervous energy or shock in 1978. Those things don't really catch up with you as long as you are that busy, but I did foolish things. Your mind's just not working right. My horse ran me into a tree and dumped me off, and that wouldn't have happened if I had been thinking. You think you are doing all right, but you are not.



Photo by Bill McKelvie

**"I CAN'T COMPARE THE HUNTING  
PRESSURE IN OUR AREA  
TO ANY OTHER AREA."**

"Our hunters have all come to us because their brother-in-law worked with someone who had gone with us or something of the sort. So most of our hunters know what they are coming to, and we know basically what we are getting. We did have one bunch of hunters who were a really bad experience for us. These people knew the brother of someone here in Steamboat, and the brother called and the person here referred them to us. They called and asked questions and, as I look back over it, every time they called there were two of them talking. But I tend to trust people and I hope I always will. I would rather get taken a few times than to mistrust everyone I talk to.

"We packed them into one of our camps that we had set up the week before. During the night we stayed in the camp while we were setting it, we had to run elk out of camp because they were spooking the horses, but these hunters decided there were no elk in the country. On the way out, one of them claimed he was thrown from his horse which had 'spooked.' My son, Rick, was guiding them. When he got back to where the incident had occurred, the horse was still standing in the trail. A horse that has spooked

would have been gone. When they got to the bottom of the trail, I met them, and they said they would really like to come out the next day and pay what they owed. I said that would be fine, but they never came out.

"Soon after, we got a letter from their lawyer saying they were not only not going to pay us, but they were going to sue us for all the pain and trauma from falling off the horse. He said he had amnesia for several days, that we had packed them into an area with no elk, and that we had made promises we hadn't fulfilled. The person in Steamboat felt really bad, so he called his brother and did some checking around, and basically he found that that's how these people got cheap hunts. They played me for a sucker.

"They didn't sue me, but I didn't get the money they owed and it cost me lawyer's fees. The argument my lawyer used was that we've been in this business for 40 years, and we've never promised these things to anyone else, so why would we do them? What I learned from that experience is, after I talk with a prospective client on the phone, to sit down and write them a letter saying this is what we talked about.

"But once in 17 or 18 years isn't bad. Like I said, I still would rather assume that everyone is all right than to assume that they are not. It was a learning experience for me. I didn't realize that there were people around who did those things."

For our last interview, Patsy treated us and our teacher, Mr. McKelvie, to a free sleigh ride. It was a clear, cold winter night, and before the steak dinner was served we got Patsy talking about her business. We started by asking Patsy how her hunting season ended this past fall.

"It was great weather. We didn't have good hunting, though. The first season was pretty good and then the elk figured out that it wasn't going to snow, and they scattered and went high again. Most of the hunters have been coming long enough that they know there's going to be years like that."

We asked her about the problems of being an outfitter. Patsy replied, "When I took over the outfitting business in 1970, I could get liability insurance as part of our ranch policy for about \$100 a year. Now the outfitting liability is \$5,200 a year. We add the sleigh rides for a little more. The only thing that keeps us outfitting right now is that the sleigh rides make the insurance fee possible. Another problem we have is that we came to the end of a 50-year forest use plan and, of course, the forest use costs have caught up with the times.

"You have to say the outfitters have had some losses lately. The Colorado Division of Wildlife used to



**"IT TOOK MORE THAN I THOUGHT TO  
GET THE BUSINESS GOING."**

license us. Now it's a regular licensing board, and the cost of our license is \$425. It used to be \$25. These are the things that have happened to us in the last five years. Because the costs of being a legal outfitter are getting higher, illegal outfitters figure it's cheaper to outfit without the permits and licenses and pay the fines if they get caught. We see a lot more of that now. I guess I am an optimist. I keep thinking they'll get some of this under control.

"Our main goal isn't to get rich off of any of this, but to keep the ranch. My parents moved to the ranch in 1942, and it's a way of life. We just kind of keep looking for ways to justify being ranchers or farmers. I drove a city bus one year and just looked at the numbers of people in town in the winter. I thought we were missing out on a big market here. Three winters ago, we started the sleigh rides. Our business has really grown.

"It took more than I thought to get the business going. It was quite an education! We have a little Honda generator that is about as big as a lunch box which is up at our tent, and because we put three light bulbs in the tent we had to have a county electrical inspection. That's the education we got. Things like that we didn't anticipate. I thought we could just harness the horses and go to work, but you can't. You have to have special use permits to use your land that way; you have to have the sanitation permits, but I expected that.

"This winter, business is up, but our goal is to stay small enough so we're mostly handling it without

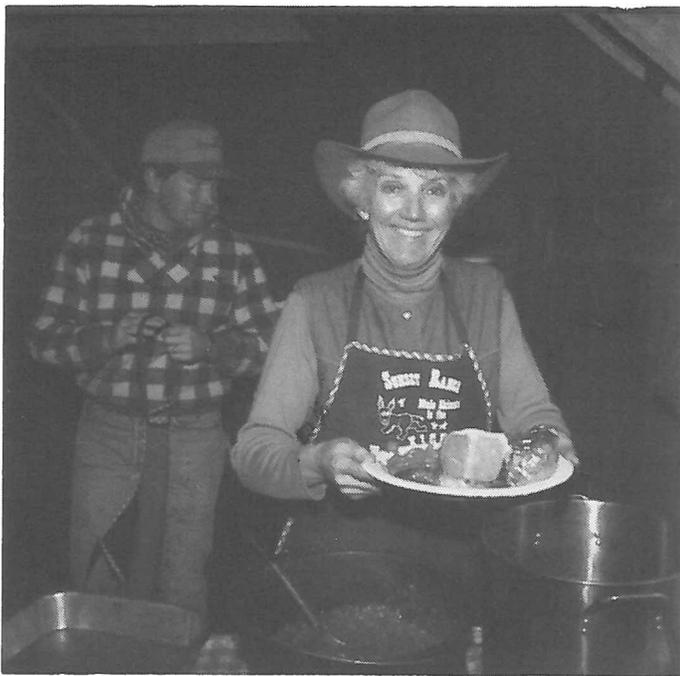
hired help. It is hard to come by hired help that will treat it like their own business. The tourists really get a kick out of coming with us, and hearing about a family that is still here and all together on the land and that has been on the land for the third generation. That's a big selling point for our business. My four children, Lynn, Rick, Dave and Kim have all helped. They've done everything from building the sleighs to putting the tent back up every time it blows down. Joe Pierce is our only full-time employee, and, of course, he grew up with my kids. I grew up with his parents. So he is really like part of our family.

"The first year we leased a bus because we thought we would keep our investment as low as possible until we got a feel for how we were doing. The lease was really expensive, and it was a really old bus. We got the opportunity to buy a bus last year. The first year we drove it, it paid for itself. That makes this year free! We built the sleds ourselves as well as the frame for the tent. It took a lot of work besides the monetary investment.

"We didn't advertise a whole lot the first year. We felt we wanted to start small and not get into more than what we were capable of handling. We basically used rack cards and local advertising the first year. This year we did a video on Channel 10, and that's the biggest outlay on advertising we've had so far. I still wonder if that many dollars are justified.



**"WITH MORE SNOW, WE SPEND MORE  
TIME GROOMING THE TRAIL, AND SHOVELING  
SNOW FROM AROUND THE TENT."**



**"IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY -- WE ALL  
KNOW ABOUT HORSES AND  
WE SURE CAN COOK."**

"What we're finding each year as we go along is return business -- ski clubs, travel agents and families that come every year and tell others about us on the ski hill. That seems to be our very best advertisement. People like to come to a place where they have heard it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

"When we started thinking about our combined talents, we felt like we had what was necessary all in the family. I was already a bus driver and Bill is a mechanic to keep the bus in repair. We all knew about horses and we sure can cook, and Bill plays the electric keyboard for entertainment. This is without the cost of hired help, and it's working."

We asked Patsy about some of the biggest groups that have come out. "We did 90 once in the summertime on wagons, which was easy. The canvas sides of the tent roll up and the folks can get out to play volleyball and horseshoes. The most we have had in the winter at one sitting was 77. On Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve we do two full rides, which is usually 50 each ride. We have one coming up that is worrying us. We have a large ski club, and it wants all its members at the tent at one time. We told them we would do our best and we'll see if they come back next year!"

The second year of Patsy's sleigh business was a very light snow year. This year we have made up for the lack of snow, and it is a true three-wire winter. We asked Patsy whether the snow depth has made a difference in her business.

"Our numbers are up a little from last year, but in a different period of time. It was still slow starting because of little snow. We have wagons we can use, but you would be surprised the number of people who don't come when we tell them we are using wagons rather than sleighs. We won't sell them a 'sleigh ride' and then bring them out and put them on wagons. We tell them when they call if we are using wagons.

"Last year, we couldn't use sleighs until January 3rd and we had to go back to wagons on March 6th. The year before, we used sleighs from November 26th through March 26th. The only thing that saved our season last year was repeat customers through March, groups that had come with us the year before and didn't care if it was wagons as long as it was with us. We're doing better this season. It may be because of the advertising we've done or because we've gotten more snow. I don't think it's because there are more skiers in town.

"With more snow, we all spend more time grooming the trail, shoveling snow from around the tents, seeing to snow removal from the driveway and parking area, and getting feed to the animals.

"This year we will just go until we don't have snow on our sled trail. March is just a really good month for us. I think a lot of people wait to come skiing until it is warmer. They're like me, fair weather people. During January, there are a lot of college kids in town, and college kids eat at Arby's and Taco Bell.



**"PEOPLE LIKE TO COME TO A PLACE  
WHERE THEY HAVE HEARD IT  
FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH."**



**KEVIN AND SCOTT FINISH  
THE STORY WITH A STEAK DINNER.  
THEY FOUND OUT IT WAS A  
LOT MORE WORK THAN THEY  
THOUGHT IT WOULD BE.**

"Not many of them go on sleigh rides. In February and March we get groups and families. Our business is almost as good through February and March as it is during Christmas and New Year's week."

We asked Patsy what she does in the off-season. "Well, in the spring we fix fences, and in the summer we need to irrigate and put up the hay. We do some fishing and sightseeing trips also. We're hoping the sleigh rides will enhance our business just from the exposure. We keep our summer brochure at the tent and encourage people to see Steamboat in the summer."

"We bought a video camera and have started a tape for the summer. We hope to put about a twenty-minute video in the tent on a little television to be shown while they are eating dinner, and hopefully keep growing a little."

"We have a small summer business. We want just enough to get by because we enjoy the summer too, and we are busy with the irrigating and haying. If we could do a couple of trips a month, that would be enough to help us a lot. We don't take many vacations. It's hard to find someone to baby-sit 80 head of livestock and do all the necessary chores around the ranch."

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