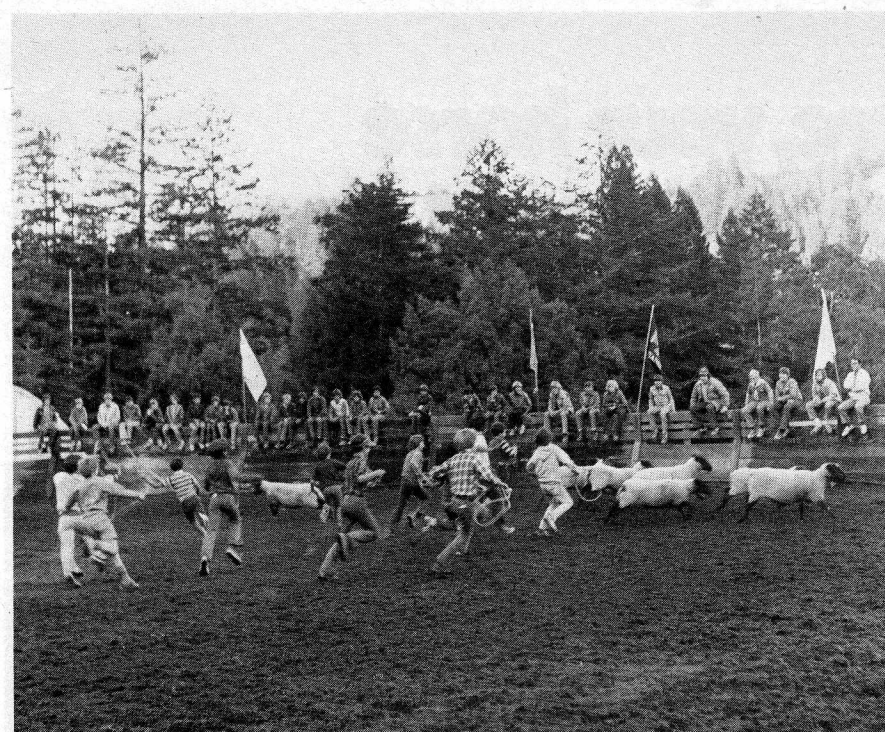


SECOND-growth redwood trees thrive in the mountain air and the coastal fog and sun of Cazadero, California. And so do young city boys. Scouts from 11 to 18 years of age come to this small lumber town's Camp Royaneh every summer from late June to mid-August. They stay in the 500-acre camp along Austin Creek, some 90 miles north of San Francisco for one or two weeks.

Camp Royaneh, owned by the San Francisco Bay Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, is in its 51st year of operation. Other Scout camps are located throughout America, but Camp Royaneh is the only one in California, and one of the few in the nation that currently conducts a horsemanship program and owns the stock.

The horsemanship program began 23 years ago when Arizonan Jim Wilkins, an old hand with horses, joined the camp's staff. He leveled land for the hilltop arena, built fences, and designed the barn and corrals that comprise the Diamond R Stable. He's the camp caretaker in the winter, when the Scouts are all back in school and when the horses are farmed out with local families; he's also the resident horse breaker. Most of

• The Diamond R barn, focal point of activity at Camp Royaneh.



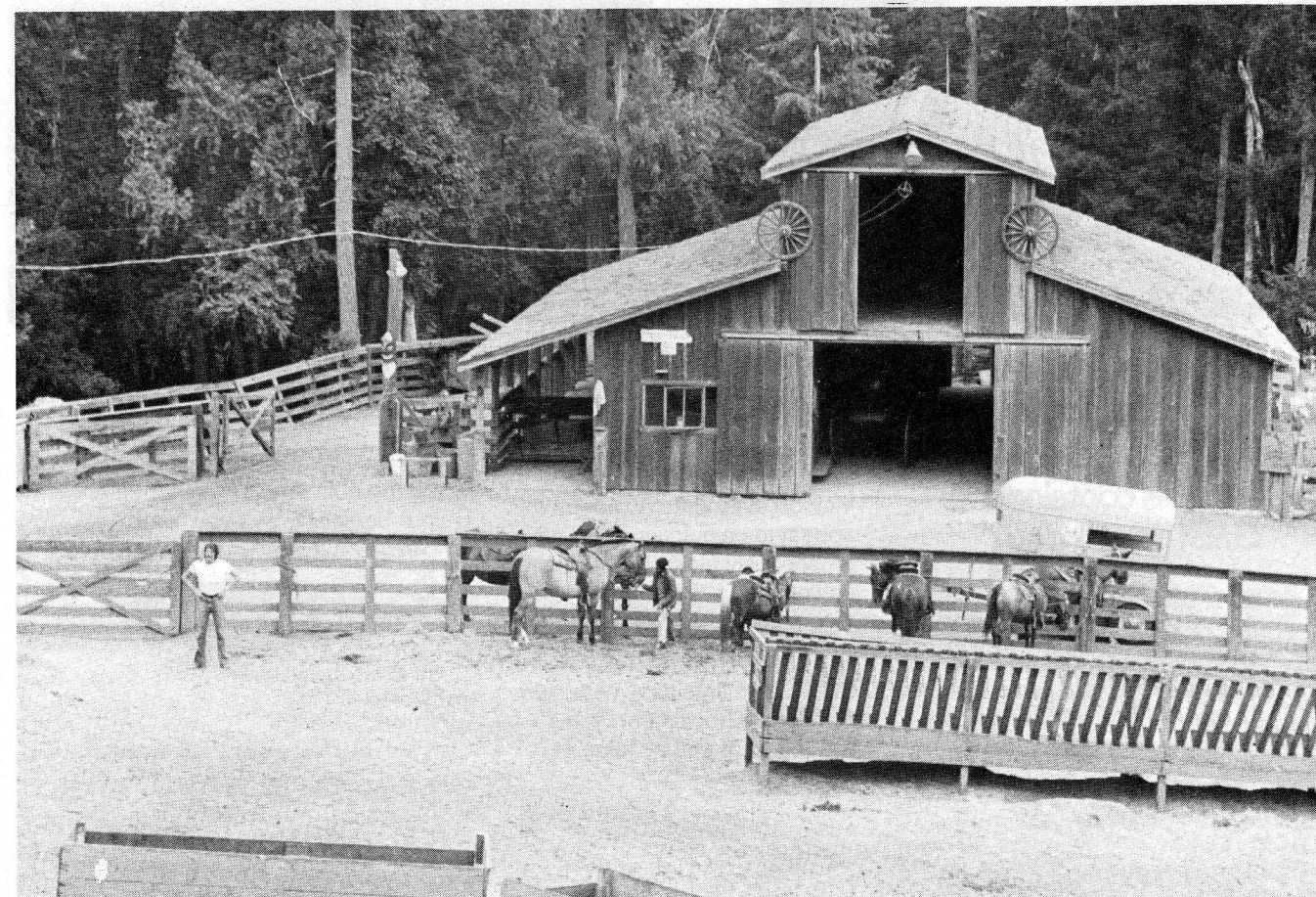
• Eleven-year-old Scouts mix it up during the sheep scramble.

Photos by Janet Herring

Camp Royaneh

Boy Scouts invade this California camp every summer for a taste of western living at the hands of experienced horseman Jim Wilkins.

By JANET HERRING



the camp's 22 head of horses and mules were trained entirely by Jim.

Occasionally, people in the community will donate a horse to the camp. Jim, ambling toward the barn, explains that in most cases the horses are old or have something wrong with them. When horses are accepted as donations, it's always agreed no strings are attached, and Jim is guaranteed the option of not retaining a horse if it won't work into his program safely. "Everything is geared for the kids," says Jim as he mounts a young buckskin mare.

The Scouts decide which merit badge they want to aim for, then spend most of their camp stay working for one. The program is designed to expose the young Scouts to many different career choices; earning a badge requires passing both written and performance tests.

It's difficult to learn how to ride and care for a horse in a week, especially when the week at Camp Royaneh is the only time all year most of these boys are near horses. About two out of the twenty-five Scouts concentrating on horsemanship achieve their badges in one session. Jim and his staff spend time with the remaining Scouts, explaining what they're doing wrong, and how they can improve. And it isn't necessary for the Scouts to wait until their next Cazadero summer to try again. They can take their written and/or riding tests during the year, under the guidance of qualified horsemen.

Each season there are always more than enough of the older Scouts hoping to be chosen as one of Jim's three or four assistants. They want to work at the dusty Diamond R because, in the words of a first-year staffer (after five years as a Royaneh camper), George Hartwick, a 16-year-old from San Francisco: "I have a good time and responsibility. It's my only chance to learn from Jim." Dave West, a second-year staffer from Livermore, admits that he's learned everything he knows about horses and mules from Jim.

These assistants need to know more than handling horses in their job. They need to have the knack of working with others, Scouts and

leaders alike; it's tough work.

The corral campers (as the horsemanship students are called) get a chance to show their new skills on Friday nights, during the camp's weekly Little Powder River Joe Rodeo (Powder River Joe worked the corral with Jim for 10 years). Scouts who aren't working for horsemanship badges can participate in the rodeo, too.

Partway through the events, Jim and his sheep dog gather a band of sheep, herd them into the arena, and settle them for the sheep scramble—an event strictly for the 11-year-olds. Jim says, "I started the scramble exclusively for them. It's important they have something to do that others can't. It's become very popular."

After the wild scramble for sheep, the Scouts get to see the corral staff fall off—in bucking contests. The rodeo is complete with western music, a grand entry, the National Anthem, and an announcer who keeps things moving. Seldom is there a vacant spot along the arena fence when the 200-300 Scouts and the 40 staff members take their ringside seats.

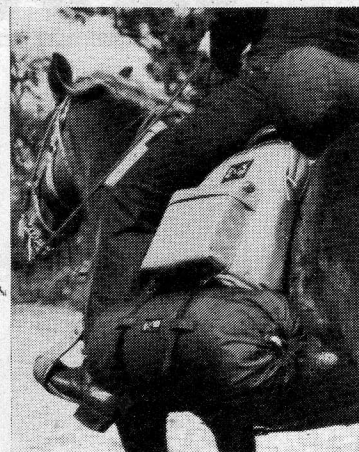
After the rodeo, there's the usual chute talk reviewing who bucked off and who rode. As the fog rolls in with dusk, the crowd moves in a slow wave from the arena to the farewell campfire.

Camp Royaneh and Jim Wilkins leave a lasting mark on nearly every Scout. Shawn Mott, who with Jim's recommendations has gone on to train mules, is anxious to speak up in favor of Royaneh and Jim. Straddling a fence rail while around him Scouts of varying sizes try to rope the wooden practice steer, Shawn begins with a nod, "I haven't had anyone influence my life in a better way than Jim. I got new views on my goals from him. He inspires you to work here. He makes you smile, and makes the kids happy."

Hundreds of Scouts have passed through Camp Royaneh since Jim arrived with his family in 1953. Jim reflects, "A lot of boys come back to visit as professional men, doctors and lawyers, and bring their families with them. Some have their kids coming here now."

A founder of the Scouting program years ago said, "Teach boys to do dangerous things in a safe way." Jim does just that. 🐾

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