



On the Trail with the Arizona Appaloosa Association



STORY SUBMITTED BY SONJA BERRY

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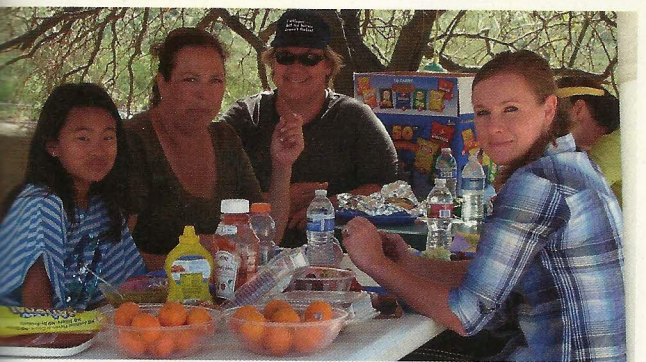
SPRING IS HERE and the weather is gorgeous in the Arizona desert, most notably the 3-million-acre Tonto National Forest. In 1905, the U.S. Forest Service established the Tonto National Forest—the fifth-largest forest in the United States—to protect the crucial watershed that makes Arizona's desert agriculture communities possible.

One such community is the Spur Cross Ranch conservation area bordering the National Forest, site of the Arizona Appaloosa Association's (AAA) 2013 Spring Trail Ride held March 23.

Members of the AAA are avid trail riders that look forward to the club's bi-annual rides. Shannon Wilson, an AAA board member and Trail Riding Committee volunteer, investigated the site after hearing about the trail riding's famed beauty. The combination of desert springs and mountains sold Wilson on this new riding opportunity. Linda Gilgosh, the Trail Riding Committee leader, worked with Lee Anderson of Spur Cross Stables on logistics, including \$50 mounts for non-horse-owners (AAA trail rides are open to any riders and equines).

Upon arriving at Spur Cross, the fourteen-member group was met by guide Penny Benson, who rode a mule born from an Appaloosa dam. Riders mounted at 10 a.m. and immediately entered the park's unique beauty.

Water crossings are not something that Arizona desert trail riders normally get to experience, however, recent rains and snow melt provided various-depth water crossings as the group wound back and forth along the creek. Riders and horses grati-



flyingly progressed from uncertainty to confidence after about the third crossing, at which point horses and riders—such as Shannon Wilson, riding Chromeplated Dream—splashed through the water and into the greenery of the desert with little encouragement. The washes from this precipitation awed participants as the trail meandered. One of the most difficult water crossings had the horses jump up from the water. Going up was easy, coming down was a different matter, especially for mother-daughter team Lisa and Katie Hefner riding She's All Dolled Up and Cowboy, respectively.

The trail elevation climbed and riders were treated to spectacular views of grandiose mountains and wildflowers that garnished the picturesque scenery. When time came to ford the last water crossing, all the horses were pros and crossed the water with no hesitation. Marilyn Van De Graaf was a big help on the ride, and all the riders appreciated her skill.

After the ride, Kathy Turner outdid herself, providing a wonderful grilled lunch for famished riders, including the Hefners, Wilson, Van De Graaf and Victoria Hunter. Anderson took time from managing the stables to pose with Turner, who also serves as trail committee volunteer and announcer for AAA shows. AAA's next trail ride will be held in November, time and date TBD. For information, visit www.arizonaappaloosa.com 🐾