

Cowabunga, dude!



Arapahoe Park qualifier **Ultimate Wave** *clears the field in the Adequan Derby Challenge Championship*

Also in this issue:

- *Oregon Champs*
- *Challenge Championships*
- *Deniro, One Dashing Eagle win big*

And ...
Will tourism help save the Spring Mountain Herd of Las Vegas?



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“Stakes Winners” section of this issue.*

On the cover:

Top: Ultimate Wave defied the experts, but not the betting public, going to post at 6-to-5 and crushing the Adequan Derby Challenge field (photo by Jack Coady/Coady Photography). Story on page 19.

Bottom: The Spring Mountain herd may find protection in an unlikely place: the tourism industry (photo © Arlene Gawne). Story on page 4.



Saving the Spring Mountain herd

Thinking “outside the box” might keep wild horses outside BLM holding pens

Story by Karen Svea Johnson; photos © Arlene Gawne

Participants who arrived a day early for the second annual International Equine Conference on Equine Welfare, Preservation & Public Health in Las Vegas (see the November issue of **TRJ**) were invited to be part of a unique tour to the home of wild horses and burros not far from the center of the glittering gaming mecca.

The tour of the Spring Mountains on September 21 might have been unique, but the adventure could become a regular option among the many tours and outdoor explorations available to Las Vegas visitors and tourists.

Facing public outcry about the treatment of wild horses on public and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, in 2011 the Obama administration invited proposals to manage the wild herds. Interested parties were encouraged to think outside the box in arriving at remedies for real and perceived problems related to the wild herds. Here's how Arlene Gwane describes her group's reaction to the opportunity—

“After years of protesting roundups, members of the Las Vegas group America's Wild Horse Advocates (AWHA) felt it was time for positive change by working with the BLM. In early 2012, they created the Spring Mountain Alliance, an all-volunteer organization of concerned citizens, businesses, and professionals to answer then-BLM Director Bob Abbey's 2011 challenge to volunteer groups ‘to help manage and sustain wild horse herds.’”

Although Las Vegas now welcomes nearly 40 million visitors annually, the worldwide competition for gaming dollars might cut into those numbers if the local tourism industry does not diversify. Experts recommend that Las Vegas expand its entertainment offerings to create more tourism jobs. The Spring Mountain Alliance (SMA) proposal includes privately run safari-style tours that will cost the government little or nothing while demonstrating the value of our wild lands and the burros and horses that call them home.

The Spring Mountain Alliance understands that the best way to promote an idea is to get people personally involved. That's why the organization maintains such an info-rich and visually involving website: www.springmountainalliance.org. It's also why Gawne and Garnet Pasquale, president of the AWHA and



Just a few miles off Nevada state highway 95, and at this watering hole a few hundred yards from a paved road, visitors can enjoy watching intact families and natural social groups of wild horses. By working with the Bureau of Land Management, the Spring Mountain Alliance hopes to preserve the experience by promoting its tourism value.

SMA, coordinated the excursion for horse advocates from across the U.S. and Canada.

The bus rolled out of a casino parking lot and headed for state highway 95. Within 20 minutes, the view had changed from signage and buildings and traffic and people to open vistas across a desert floor ending at the foot of towering mountains on either side of the highway.

The compelling terrain is a draw in itself. Already, tour companies ferry groups out for active outdoor adventures and desert sightseeing, including destinations like the Hoover Dam, Grand Canyon, and Death Valley. More attractions are under development. In June 2012, U.S. Senator Harry Reid introduced federal legislation to create the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument on 22,650 acres on the east side of the highway. The area contains the single largest group of Ice Age fossils in the Southwest, spanning geological history from 7,000 to 200,000 years ago. Among the fossils at the site are those of ancient horses.

Our bus continued past the proposed national monument area and soon turned west off the highway along a paved road rising toward the Spring Mountain range. The road is well maintained but sparsely traveled, and leads to a small, isolated community of semi-retired professionals and a few weekenders.

The area is an ideal home for the wild herds of horses and burros. Unlike many areas, where cattle and ranchers compete with wild equines for forage on public lands, no livestock permits are issued east of Pahrump and west of Las Vegas. Commercial grazing considerations shouldn't hamper negotiations with the BLM or the U.S. Forest Service, the other federal land manager. Much of the area is wild, even more of it undisturbed. But the existing access road is safe and easy for tourists arriving in buses or cars.



Distinct markings on many horses within the Spring Mountain range have allowed volunteers to identify individuals in the herd. To date, more than 65% of the estimated population has been identified.

Not five miles from the highway, we saw the first band of wild horses. In a group of five, the pair on the roadway calmly stepped off to the side as the bus approached. Many in our group wanted to leave the bus to interact with the horses, but our guides reminded us that the horses are endangered when they become acclimated to humans. Even now, the ones that have become accustomed to sightseers—who often bring horse treats—are referred to as “moochers” by locals and by SMA volunteers.

Volunteers are a vital part of the SMA projects. An active, involved core of volunteers monitors and provides hands-on management of the herd in cooperation with the BLM. Volunteers are identifying individuals in the herd. To date, more than 65% of the estimated population has been identified. Volunteers assist with range improvements and protections, and have prioritized ways to enhance the herd-viewing experience while keeping observers physically separated from the animals.

The Spring Mountain Alliance works with the animals themselves on occasion. Volunteers are trained to assist in baiting and trapping horses when the BLM decides that round-ups are necessary. They also hope to work with the BLM to administer birth control via darts as part of an active management plan.

Current BLM/USFS plans call for a herd reduction that will severely impact the SMA proposal to help manage and sustain wild horse herds

Before the November U.S. elections, the BLM announced a planned roundup in the Spring Mountain Complex that would have reduced the estimated wild horse and burro population from an estimated 391 to 469 horses to fewer than 93 individuals. The SMA disagrees with both the science and politics behind that plan.

If the BLM and USFS are allowed cut the number of Spring Mountain's wild horses by 80%, millions of wildlife enthusiasts, photographers, tourists, and residents would

be denied the thrill of viewing them in their native habitat. The SMA contends that such opportunities should be encouraged, not eliminated—particularly when tourism is the major economic growth sector in the state and Nevada's Governor is actively trying to increase tourism.

As with many federal initiatives, the planned roundups may not happen in the near-term. The government would have to spend over \$300,000 on a helicopter roundup—and that's big taxpayer dollars in a time of huge deficits.

We observed perhaps five or six separate bands of horses as we traveled to the watering hole that was our destination. Many of the individual horses have been named by volunteers and others who observe the herd. They are distinct in their appearance and their habits, live in established families, and engage in sophisticated social dynamics. Our guides explained some of the relationships playing out in front of our enchanted tour audience.

Members of our tour soon picked out their personal favorites among the bands. This kind of quick emotional bonding bodes well for the project. When people “buy in” to an idea personally, they are more willing to offer backing and support. And the Spring Mountain Alliance is doing all it can to sell its idea and promote six well-defined objectives (see sidebar), all to protect this experience for future generations—of horses, and of people.

In late afternoon, our tour bus ran out of pavement and we made a leisurely walking descent to a watering hole at the brink of heaven (see photo on page 4). As range after range of mountains cascaded ahead of us, it was easy to forget the noisy, crowded, civilized world just a few miles and a few minutes away.

But some of the best of that world did follow us to this wild spot. A couple of pickup trucks drove down to meet us near the edge of the oasis. Throwing open the tailgates, our hosts pulled out baskets of Mediterranean delicacies and barrels of chilled juices. Perched on folding chairs or rock outcroppings, group members cemented new friendships while they discussed the day’s adventure over the gourmet offerings.

If ours was anything like the experience Spring Mountain tours will offer in the future, it looks like Las Vegas might have yet another world-class attraction to promote ...

Want to get involved?

Even if you only have time to sign an online petition, you can help preserve the Spring Mountain wild herd. Go to the website and click the Join Up! button. (You do not have to donate to join, but monetary contributions will also be put to good use.)

If you live in the southern Nevada region, or plan to visit there, contact the SMA to find out how you can be part of their area management program. And while you’re making those plans, please write to the BLM and to legislative representatives, letting them know that you support the protection and maintenance of this unique ecosystem and wild herd.

The Spring Mountain Alliance has requested that the BLM put a 3-year hold on wild horse and burro removals in the Spring Mountain Complex so they can develop the following programs at little or no cost to the government:

1. Reduce wild horse and burro birth rates while preserving stable family and bachelor bands that offer the most interesting behaviors for tourists.
2. Organize volunteer work parties to improve viewing and protect habitat.

3. Work with BLM to improve the tour application and operation process so that the Alliance proposal can become a reality more quickly.

4. Assist private business to develop tours for overseas visitors and American families.

5. Develop a state-of-the-art, multi-spectral camera census of the actual number of wild horses and burros.

6. Encourage regular, scientific analysis of the carrying capacity for all Spring Mountain wildlife including wild horses, burros, deer, elk, and bighorn sheep.

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