

Arizona Horse Connection

U-Trail

Experience the Gila Wilderness On Horseback!

As the August sun sears the sidewalks of the Southwest, horsemen and women can run away from the heat of the day to taste the life of the early cowboys by joining pack trips in the cool high country of the Gila Wilderness area, where daytime temperatures are mild, the evenings crisp and brisk and the scenery spectacular.

The Gila Wilderness is a 1,000 square mile forest of indescribable beauty and majesty located in Southwest New Mexico. The area claims five eco-zones that include alpine meadows, clear streams, breathtaking sunsets and a widely diverse collection of flora and fauna. Groups will see plenty of wildlife along the way. Bear deer, eagles and elk have all been sighted from the trail.

When Jim Mater began exploring the high country of the Gila Wilderness area, more than a decade ago, he and his mule traversed the forest and wilderness alone on extended solitary voyages. He was so inspired by what he saw that he decided to find a way to share the splendor of the wilderness with others. He created U-Trail to be a wilderness showcase -- not a city slicker or cowboy-ing attraction -- but a once in a lifetime riding experience through one of America's most spectacular forest areas.

Until recently, this area was known only to most rugged trappers and explorers of yesteryear and out of reach to all but the hardest adventures of modern times. Now, Mater and his horseback adventure company have solved the complex logistics of guided pack trips and even brought a team of National Geographic writers and photographers in to capture the Middle Fork of the Gila River, a deep canyon in the heart of the forest -- the birthplace of Geronimo himself.

U-Trail The Gila Wilderness is a personalized guiding company, The types of pack trips Mater offers are as varied as the terrain covered along the way. Novice or intermediate riders and family groups may enjoy the "Base Camp Ride-Outs," a leisurely-paced trip orchestrated from a permanent base camp established in the heart of the wilderness. Different rides are taken each day, through canyons and meadows, stopping to swim or fish in clear creeks, and each day holds the promise of a new adventure. Evenings are spent back in

the base camp for a hearty meal and conversation around the campfire.

Customized rides are available to cater to the preferences of each group. Or, U-Trail standards include: "Progressive Pack Trips" that move the base camp three times during a six day journey. Intermediate or advanced riders may choose the "High Adventure Wilderness Ride" or Mater's "Wild Wilderness Safari Ride", both rides involve packing light and traveling swift and hard, and sleeping under the stars the way the early trappers and cowboys explored the old West.

The Middle Fork of the Gila River is the crown jewel of the enchanted forest. Mater has trademarked this ride "America's Hallmark Horseback Adventure -- The Middle Fork." Embarking from Snow Lake, riders traverse meadows and climb gentle canyon slopes, pass massive caves, rock spirals and 1,500-foot cinnamon-colored canyon bluffs. On the fifth day, the group climbs 1,000 feet out of the canyon to experience some of the most exquisite scenery in the world and explore ancient Indian Cliff Dwellings before descending back into the canyon.