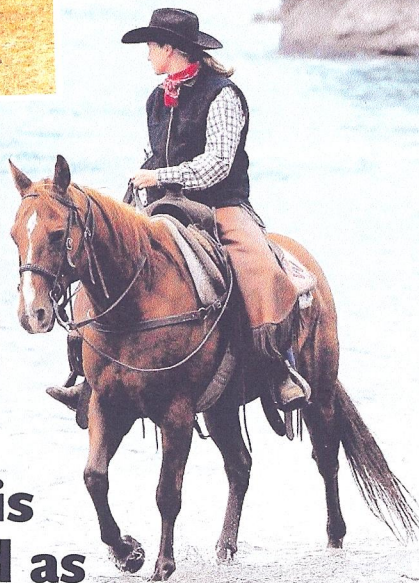


# FAIRYTRAIL



Siwash Lake ranch (inset bottom), a fine base from which to explore Cariboo Country on horseback



## Fiona Sands is in wonderland as she saddles up in British Columbia

**W**E headed out on horseback, my imaginary beau and I riding through British Columbia's glorious Cariboo Country, home to Siwash Lake Luxury Guest Ranch.

The region is filled with almost limitless trails, pine-laden paths and sun drenched aspen groves dotting the landscape.

After an initial instruction and introductory ride I decided to saddle up solo, a more intimate journey offered to guests who can demonstrate a basic understanding of equestrian skills.

There are also options for small groups of six to ride out with a guide, the owners featuring special excursions as part of the six-night stay. An ideal opportunity to see more of this untouched wilderness, guests can head off on horseback and venture down to the Bonaparte River for swimming, or a more challenging equine and hiking adventure to view the magnificent Crater Lake.

Accessed via a deep canyon, the rugged terrain is a breathtaking natural setting awaiting outdoor enthusiasts. Three cascading waterfalls flow over the steep rocks giving the secluded crater an almost mystical appeal, the breathtaking vista

undoubtedly laying claim to its status as one of Cariboo's best-kept secrets. A refreshing oasis after our off-the-beaten-track expedition, we were only too happy to swim under the falls, a pool of water forming a bubbling, natural Jacuzzi.

Around five hours from Vancouver (the nearest town is Prince George) the back-country surrounding 70 Mile House is a world away from the Canadian province's largest city, and yet the feeling of spaciousness is just as invigorating. More food for the soul than an adrenaline rush, the pristine rangeland reaches out across more than 80,000 acres of natural grasslands, forests, lakes and rivers.

A ranch stay doesn't fit "glove like" into the Mills and Boon honeymoon but Siwash Lake is genuinely alluring for romantics. In terms of its intimate appeal this boutique residence would be hard to beat. Taking a maximum of only 12 guests, the homestead is ideal for couples in search of added seclusion and it can be hired exclusively for one party.

The 6,000sq ft log ranch house is a luxury haven, its high-beamed ceilings and vintage fabrics extolling all the virtues of a country estate. Romance also figures in the ranch's dining experiences, couples choosing to sample gourmet cuisine by candlelight or going al fresco in the meadow. Even sipping freshly brewed

coffee from your own verandah has a dreamy feel to it, each of the property's premium rooms featuring French doors that open up onto the sparkling lake.

The ranch's lavish interiors are drenched in opulence, the hideaway showcased in Forbes Traveler's Collection of 10 Luxury Dude Ranches.

Not a honeymoon destination for the budget minded, this is one wilderness retreat where you can appreciate the finer things in life – the homestead offering pure, unadulterated indulgence as opposed to hair-shirt campfire camaraderie. Of course, there are countless opportunities to embrace the authentic cowboy culture of

British Columbia, but at Siwash Lake there are also additional touches of femininity – fine Egyptian linens, elegant antiques and vases of fresh flowers – proving that cowgirls are now a permanent fixture.

Despite the limitless extravagance, ethically minded couples won't have to compromise when it comes to their green stance as the ranch uses solar power – it has earned various accolades, the property recently being cited as one of Canada's most eco-friendly luxury destinations.

Guests don't have to be skilled equine enthusiasts to enjoy riding, and a major plus for any novice is the ranch's focus on natural horsemanship, a practice which builds closer bonds between mount and rider. This also extends to caring for your horse, our group being encouraged to saddle and groom our trusty steeds.

Off the trail couples can unwind on guided nature walks and thrilling mountain bike rides, or take an off-ranch excursion and experience world-class fishing at any one of the nearby lakes.

The ideal location for lovers who want to lose themselves out on the range, guests are welcome to tie up their horse at any point on the trail – perhaps kicking back on a hilltop and listening to the gentle hum of a gossamer-winged dragon fly carried on the wind. In fact, one of the most endearing qualities of Siwash Lake is the complete lack of any fixed schedule – all pursuits are geared towards the individual's abilities and desires.

Whether you decide to spend a few hours out on the trail or a whole day, the time passes seamlessly and romance is never too far away. Even the wild birds will serenade you from the pines as you sip your aperitif on the lodge's deck and contemplate your next adventure.

### TRAVEL INFORMATION

● Six nights with Ranch Rider costs from £2,539pp inclusive of gratuities. Flight and car hire on request from Ranch Rider (01509 618811; ranchrider.com; info@ranchrider.com)