

## K Diamond K Ranch

Steve Konz, the 72-year old patriarch of K Diamond K Ranch, teases that he has a pair of leather workin' gloves with your name on them just in case you want to help out with ranch chores. He's not kidding. This family-owned, working cattle ranch in the beautiful but forgot-ten corner of Washington offers a friendly, unpretentious vacation where you can learn ranching firsthand. Participate, observe, or just kick back and do nothing at all—it's all up to you.

K Diamond K Ranch sprawls over 45,000 acres of privately owned and leased land 4 miles south of Republic, Washington. Heavily forested hills meet sweeping valleys; lakes and rivers are tucked in private corners. Nearby Sherman Pass tops out at 5575 feet.

The transformation from cattle ranch to guest ranch began five years ago, but K Diamond K Ranch has been in the Konz family for more than three decades. In the early 1960s, two newly married college kids Steve and June Konz set out to make their dream come true.

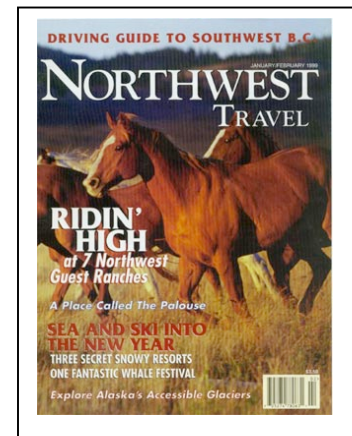
June had a veterinary degree and a hankering to put down solid roots; Steve was a city kid turned cowboy. He'd grown up in a Chicago suburb but had worked his way through his teens and 20s with a variety of jobs on dude ranches and cattle ranches in Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and Michigan.

Steve and June raised five children on their spread. They are grown now but haven't strayed far from the ranch, and each shares a role in its present-day metamorphoses. More than half of the ranches in the United States have disappeared taking with them a lifestyle that epitomizes the American West. As Steve and June saw ranch profits declining, they broached the idea of becoming a guest ranch to their adult children. Independently, without parental pressure, they each agreed to open their homes and land to visitors. It's a ranch that's been open to strangers for years as the warm and out-going Konz family welcomed ranch hands, friends, friends-of-friends and foreign exchange students. Adding city slickers to the mix was a natural.

Each grown Konz has a job that keeps the ranch operating on its dual mission. Eldest son Dave, the general manager, handles timber harvest and guest services. Wayne is the horseshoer and heavy equipment operator. Kristy runs the lodge, overseeing housekeeping and meals. Kathy is the family newlywed and, although she's left the ranch, is still involved in acquiring and training horses for guest use. Karen is following her mother's footsteps and is a third year vet student at Washington State University.

K Diamond K guests stay in a rambling log lodge that Steve and June built 18 years ago as a family home. Four spacious sleeping rooms have a queen and a twin bed. Everyone gets to know each other during family-style meals at the huge round table in the dining room.

A typical day at K Diamond K begins with a rib-sticking breakfast. Then you're fitted to a horse based on your experience, and riding lessons ensure that everyone knows, as Steve says, where the gas pedal and the brake are. A morning trail ride takes you through



pristine meadows and thickly wooded forests. Experienced riders can join the round-ups in May, June, and October.

After lunch, it's time for the ranch hands to go to work and you can help or explore on your own. Fish or pan for gold in the San Poil River, which runs through the ranch, or check out the fishing at nearby Curlew Lake. Hike or mountain bike over backcountry trails. You're bound to see wildlife—deer, wild turkeys, and a coyote roam the ranch. Or you can pick up those workin' gloves and get a feel for the real cowboy life. Mend a fence, peel logs, load a hay truck, help build the barn, groom a horse, earn a callus, make some memories.

*K Diamond K Ranch, 404 Highway 21 South, Republic, WA 99166 (509 775-3536) [www.kdiamondk.com](http://www.kdiamondk.com).*

*Packages: Minimum stay two days (three to seven days recommended). Families with children welcome. Winter snow-mobiling and cross-country skiing.*

*Cost \$105 per person, per night. All meals, use of ranch facilities included.*  
— Linda Miller