

Q

L  
I  
F  
E  
S  
T  
Y  
L  
E  
S

# MONTANA WELCOME

*Meet Dave and Nadine Lipson at Paws Up Ranch.*

---

**By Christine Hamilton**

Paws Up Ranch along the Blackfoot River as seen from "The Big Rock." The ranch includes 37,000 acres of both deeded and leased land.

COURTESY OF THE RESORT AT PAWS UP

WHAT DO WESTERN PLEASURE SIRE ZIPPO A WARD, CAPT. Meriwether Lewis and 37,000 acres have in common?

Paws Up Ranch in Greenough, Montana.

The gray stallion (whose get include 2006 Sooner Trailer All-Around Amateur horse Zippos Ace Of Spades) lives there. Lewis stopped there in 1806 on his way back from his trek to the Pacific Ocean. And that's how big it is, sprawled between Montana's Garnet Range and the vast Bob Marshall Wilderness.

It's also home to Quarter Horse breeders and ranch owners Dave and Nadine Lipson. They purchased the ranch in 1997, looking for a place with "room to breathe," as Nadine put it. Since then it has become a repository for everything the Lipsons hold dear: wilderness, American Quarter Horses, ranching and having guests over to visit.

### Finding Home

OF COURSE, MOST SHOW INDUSTRY INSIDERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH Paws Up Quarter Horses in Purcell, Oklahoma. Dave and Nadine established the breeding farm when they purchased the former Oklahoma Stud facility in 1998. The stallions they

stood included Barpassers Image and Zippo A Ward. AQHA Professional Horseman Gil Galyean made it his training base for several years.

Dave and Nadine stumbled into an interest in western pleasure horses while looking for "some really nice trail horses" for their cattle ranch in Colorado. Through John and Linda Hancock, their ranch managers at the time, the Lipsons ended up meeting Gil. Shortly after, Nadine bought her first show mare, a daughter of My Sugar Bars named Bars Amber Miss.

"I showed a little bit," Nadine said. "But I'm not competitive enough to feel like I really need to be out there (in the ring). But I love the whole business side of (raising horses), and the breeding fascinates me.

"Dave and I would get the *Journal* and try to figure out pedigrees and breeding percentages," she continued. "We fell in love with Barpassers Image on paper."

They purchased "Image" in 1997.

That was the same year Dave and Nadine established Paws Up Ranch in Montana, looking for a place far from the development encroaching on their property in Colorado. They built a first-class horse facility there, complete with a



breeding shed and indoor arena and hospitality area. In 2004, they moved “Ward” to Montana to stand alongside cutting stallion Nu Bars Million.

Though they sold the Oklahoma farm to Paul and Christine Gonya in January 2006, Image still lives there along with a select group of the Lipson’s broodmares.

And Montana has become the sole home of the Paws Up name.

## Ranch and Resort

ALTHOUGH DAVE IS ORIGINALLY FROM CHICAGO AND NADINE grew up in Massachusetts and California, they fell in love with the American West a long time ago, primarily through work travels. The two met when Dave’s merchant banking corporation bought a company in which Nadine was a senior vice president of operations.

The Montana property was a dream-come-true for them.

“The ranch has everything from a land perspective,” Nadine said.

Snow-capped peaks appear in every direction; horses and cattle graze the valley pastures; and the foothill forests are full of wildlife from deer to mountain lion. The property extends for seven miles along both banks of the Blackfoot River.

It’s also steeped in history. Two hundred years ago, the land was a passing-through spot for Native Americans following the “Big Blackie” to buffalo hunts. In 1806, Lewis noted a rock landmark on the ranch in his journal. Decades later, gold-miners and loggers carved a living there.

When the Lipsons bought the property, it had been a cattle and/or sheep ranch since 1915; previous owners included Jon and Land Lindbergh, sons of aviator Charles Lindbergh. Dave and Nadine followed suit, moving cattle in from their Colorado ranch and setting out to produce registered Black Angus stock. They upgraded the ranch’s improvements and added a sale barn and reception area for cattle buyers.

But when they decided to get out of the registered cattle business in 2003, they didn’t know what to do with the ranch. It was a business, so it had to make money. But Dave and Nadine also saw it as a natural resource they needed to protect: They didn’t want to see it carved up in development.

“It came to us with a lot of soul-searching that we love to entertain,” Nadine said.

That is evident in the Paws Up name and logo: a happy dog’s paws up in the air welcoming you home.

“And we found that a lot of our personal friends would like to be here over places in Europe,” she continued. “From that standpoint, wouldn’t it be great to open this up and try to appeal to that clientele?”



The Paws Up riding stock at winter pasture. The resort takes back country pack and float trips into the Bob Marshall Wilderness seen here in the background.



COURTESY OF THE LIPSON FAMILY

Nadine Lipson and Zippo A Ward. From 15 crops the stallion has sired the earners of 8,366.5 points, all divisions, for an average of 70.9 points per performer.

With that, The Resort at Paws Up was formed. The Lipsons took everything they liked about traveling, visiting friends and the West, and set out to offer that to guests. The ranch afforded them a unique opportunity to do that.

They converted the sale barn and reception area into two upscale restaurants and built family-style luxury guest cabins in the woods. Nadine furnished the cabins herself, including snapshots of friends and family to give them a personal feel. They built a Wilderness Outpost for snowmobile and trail riding outings, and they hired an outfitter to handle back-country wilderness trips, hunting and fishing along the South Fork of the Flathead River. The horse facility afforded room for riding clinics and lessons. And in 2006, they added spa facilities.

“One of the reasons we did this was because we felt we could do something special,” Dave said. “We intend to create what we call a ‘wow’ experience. It can be through the food, the service, the views, whatever.”

It means that meals are gourmet, even on the back-country trips. Trail rides are led by a horsewoman who’s also a local naturalist and can explain flora and fauna to guests. And snowmobile tours include a stop in Garnet, a genuine miners’ ghost town in the hills.

“We still run about 400-450 head of commercial cattle, and we still have a breeding program for our Quarter Horses,” Nadine added.

## Quarter Horses Everywhere

IT’S DIFFICULT TO GO ANYWHERE ON THE RANCH AND NOT FIND Quarter Horses.

“The reason is their versatility,” Nadine said. “We use their working aspects on the ranch with the cattle, we use them for the recreation and trail riding, and we have our lesson horses and show horses. For us, the Quarter Horse works.”

Each job on the ranch requires a different skill set in a horse. Dale Voightlander set up the resort’s horse program as horse ranch manager its first two seasons. He has more than 20 years in the guest ranch business and supervised all the stock buying for the ranch, from pack mules to riding stock.

“With the ranch horse, you’re going to lope and move cattle, and you want more of a handle on your horse,” he explained.

"For the back country, if a horse will neck rein a little, ride several miles a day and not care a whole lot about bears, that's a good employee."

Picking out horses for a guest ranch is a learned art in Dale's opinion. He buys horses for the ranch all over the western states, but mostly in Colorado.

"The first thing you don't do is pick out a really good-looking horse," he said with a smile. "Everyone does that. I make myself start at the feet and work my way up: Is their conformation good enough to hold up?"

He also watches them in a herd setting, avoiding overly aggressive individuals. They must be able to get along in a group.

"Then I see how they do with people," he continued. "For the outfitting, we go into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and there's not a fence in sight. If I can't catch that horse in a pen, I know I'm not going to catch him in the 'Bob.'"

Once they get home, it becomes a process of the staff getting to know each horse and deciding which job it can do best. The ranch keeps the trail horses, the lesson horses, the outfitting horses and the ranch horses all separate, with their own wranglers. That way the horses know their jobs and the wranglers know the horses.

"You have five variables with guests and horses," he said. "You can control three: your staff, your horses and your environment. You can't control the other two: your guest and his/her riding ability. If I know my three, I am ahead of the game and can manage the other two."

## Looking Ahead

DAVE AND NADINE ARE HAPPY WITH THEIR FIRST TWO successful seasons, winter and summer. Nadine is looking forward to repeat guests so she can put framed vacation snapshots of them in their favorite cabins before they come back.


As for the horses, the Lipsons keep breeding stock in Montana and Oklahoma, and Nadine regularly keeps horses in training with Gil.

"When my life can slow down a little bit, and I can commit to it, I'd like to get into a cutting ring," Nadine said. "And Gil would be my trainer."

Gil won the reserve world championship in 2-year-old western pleasure and third in junior cutting at the 2006 AQHA World

Championship Show.

Nadine's passion is still breeding. The Lipson broodmare band includes Intangible Asset (dam of 2002 junior western riding world champion Investing Wisely); Zippos Brandy (now deceased, dam of 1999 amateur and junior western pleasure world champion In Zippos Image); and Prettiest Jet Yet, a full sister to leading sire Blazing Hot.

"It's really very satisfying to breed, see them born, keep them healthy up to 2, and then put them in the hands of a trainer and see them do really well in the show ring," she said. "What a huge accomplishment that is." 

*Christine Hamilton is a field editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to [chamilton@aqha.org](mailto:chamilton@aqha.org).*

# BACK COUNTRY STOCK

**John Way is head outfitter for The Resort at Paws Up. He has a degree in fisheries and wildlife biology and the equivalent of a "CPA" in Montana outfitting licenses. He's in charge of planning and leading week-long guest trips into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The resort calls the trips "roughing it, redefined," and the staff packs in everything from chef-prepared meals to leather bedrolls.**

**John knows a few things about the kind of stock he wants in that country.**

**"Mountain horses are just as valuable as good rope horses,"**

**John said. "And guest horses are a rare breed. They've got to be super docile yet able to think on their feet — most of the time they know more than the guest.**

**"They need to be able to go off trail, and be rounded up and stay in a rope corral," he continued. "And have someone plopped onto their back for 15 miles a day. They need a smooth gait on them and big bones and feet. I like them about 15.2 hands."**

**John can't pack horse feed for these trips; it's too much extra weight, and it attracts bears.**

**"The horses have to graze at night and be self-sufficient," he said. "Not all horses can do that and maintain weight. We want a little more 'rugged' to them."**



The Resort at Paws Up offers several miles of trails for riding, custom-guided.

**In John's opinion, a stout Quarter Horse is a good breed for what the resort needs.**

**"Probably half to two-thirds of the stock we use are registered Quarter Horses," he said, with much of the remainder being Quarter-crosses.**

**"Dave and Nadine were very specific that they wanted, as much as we could, to stick with registered stock," he added. "They love the breed."**



The Paws Up Saddle Club has a heated, 50-plus stall barn, indoor arena and hospitality area.



Dave and Nadine Lipson, through the Paws Up Foundation, contribute to charitable organizations in Montana and nationwide, including the American Quarter Horse Foundation. Nadine serves on the Foundation Committee.