

Saddle Score

EIGHT YEARS AND 17,000 MILES IN THE SADDLE – A LADY LONG RIDER SHARES HER HARD-EARNED HORSEBACK WISDOM.



Bernice Ende used to teach classical ballet and fitness. But in her 50s, she found her real calling: long riding.

In 2005, Ende had retired, sold her dance studio, and was training horses when the idea of long riding popped into her head and wouldn't go away. Since then she's logged some 17,000 miles. A member of the Long Rider's Guild (membership requires more than 1,000 continuous miles on a single equestrian journey), Ende is currently on a 2,000-mile six-month trek into Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada, from her winter

camp in Forsyth, Montana. If all goes according to plan, she'll be back in time to vote in November. Next up? A long ride back east, maybe Maine or Appalachia, and a documentary about her that is in the works.

Ride résumé: 2005: 2,000 miles from home base in Trego, Montana, to Edgewood, New Mexico. 2006–07: 5,000-mile western loop from Trego. 2008: 3,000 miles from Needles, California, to Trego. 2009–11: 6,000-mile, two-and-a-half-year loop through the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and Southwest. 2011: 600-mile "vacation ride." 2012: 2,000 miles through the Canadian Rockies.

Average speed: 4 mph.

Gear: Tucker trail saddle: "That saddle is my chair, my backdrop. I live in it and with it. It's intimate. Memories are etched in its scratches, and stains." Also a "britchen" — a rear-end version of a breast collar.

Companions: Hart, an APHA (Paint) gelding, age 15. "He's not built for this, but he's proven himself." Essie Pearl, a 9-year-old Norwegian Fjord mare. "They have amazing minds, they're sturdy, and their thicker skin and heavier hair are built for this." Claire, a now-10-year-old dog Ende found as a puppy in a ditch; she rides in a pannier with doggie

box rigged on Essie Pearl. Latest addition: a 4-year-old Norwegian Fjord-Percheron mix named Montana Spirit.

Must-haves: Jeans, wide-brimmed classic Gus sun hat, Ariat boots. Horseshoeing and veterinary supplies. Pot, spoon, knife, tin cup, small propane canister, plastic water bottles, and water bladder.

Food: Rice, beans, quinoa, peanut butter, dandelion greens, prickly nettles, wild onions, oatmeal, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, carrots, apples, cabbage, cucumbers, tortillas, green or black tea.

Routes: Ditches, because of speeding vehicles on the road. "We ride tight, and when honking semis go by at 80 mph, I can touch them." Mountain passes when they're open. And Indian reservations, where "I've learned lessons in grace, resilience, determination, and survival."

Respects: "Weather. Long riding is all about the weather."

Inspiration: Her mother, Cornelia Ende, who said, "Live your life to inspire others and you, too, shall be inspired."

Philosophy: "Life is a long ride and we're all long riders."

Why she lives in the saddle: "I was born riding. It's about freedom."

The meaning: "We all miss that base line element of freedom — in fact, we are starved for it. We wrap ourselves in security, insurance, planning, and retirement that goes on and on. Inside, we are suffocating. Our hearts are just begging for freedom to ride." U

— Stephanie Stephens

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