

Wind River Adventures

Mayo

Started: 1987

Contact: Jack and Bonnie Smith

Wind River Adventures offers saddle and pack horse trips. For a number of years, the primary focus of the business was running extended trips for young offenders. However, tourists are now the main target for the business. Staff are hired on a trip by trip basis.



Getting started: In 1987, Jack and Bonnie started up what was then called Wind River Wilderness. Jack had successfully proposed to a local social worker the idea of taking young offenders into the back country to teach them bush skills and build self confidence. Wind River Wilderness took 8-11 young offenders into the bush for two months every summer. Other trips with tourists helped extend their operating season.

Key to success: The good meals, gentle horses and beautiful country have brought one group of Austrians back for five trips since the business started. The young offenders program provided an ongoing income for the business. Other jobs in the winters helped add to the family's income and build the backcountry business.

Lessons learned: In 1998, the Yukon government changed the youth program requirements and Wind River lost what had been the meat of their business. Jack has realized that having so many eggs in the government basket made the summer business very vulnerable. Since then the Smiths have been seeking more tourist bookings. This year they had one tourist oriented trip and a six week youth trip contracted by the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation.

Future of business: Before winter sets in, the Smiths need to decide whether they will keep all of their 30 horses. However, before making this decision they may look into what other marketing programs or approaches could help Wind River get more bookings next summer.