



Galen Chandler.
Photo by Julie Smiley.

By Julie Smiley

Spring is the season when many students frantically search and interview for that once-in-lifetime summer job. Ever dream of a job in the mountains, riding horses and playing cowboy — just a little?

Galen Chandler's job may sound ideal.

Horse wrangling in Yellowstone National Park for the past three summers and headquartered in Canyon Village, the grand canyon of Yellowstone, Chandler said he hopes to go back.

A senior animal science major at Texas A&M University from Irving, Chandler said he got the job by knowing who to contact. He met a ranger while on a fishing trip with his grandparents and learned about the

job. The summer following high school graduation, Chandler went to work with six other wranglers.

Each day starts about 6:30 a.m., feeding 60 horses and saddling 30 for the six rides of the day. Four, one-hour trail rides and two, two-hour rides keep wranglers on a horse five hours a day and working around the barn and corrals when they're not riding.

Tourists pay \$6.75 for a one-hour ride and \$11.50 for the two-hour version. "They all think they know what they're doing, but maybe 10 of the 30 people per ride have touched a horse," Chandler said. "They come from everywhere — New York, California, Pennsylvania — lots of people from the East."

Most of the dude horses are older, 12-17 years old, docile, follow-the-leader type. "None of them can stop or rein, and one horse, Butterball, won't move unless he has a horse to follow."

Yellowstone Park owns half the horses and winters them in Bozeman, Mont. The remainder are owned by a man from Cody, Wyo., who

Wrangling horses more than just summer work for Aggie

uses them for hunting and packing through the winter.

Even though horses and riders are carefully evaluated and matched before a rider mounts, Chandler said at least three dudes fall off every week. "Nine times out of ten, it's not the horses' fault. Most of the time the rider loses balance, starts to yell, scares the horse and it's all over. Horses in that country go to a meat packer if they can't be ridden, so they're pretty gentle."

Broken arms, collarbones and fingers are the worst injuries any dude has suffered since Chandler has worked for the park. Even though riders are aware of a park release for damages and a not-responsible-for-injury policy before they mount, Chandler said three or four law suits every summer are inevitable. "If someone falls off, they want to sue."

He said if problems arise on a trail ride, usually it's from people who say they know how to ride, but don't. They hold back their horse in the line and then run up on the horses ahead.

One time, he said, a man lengthened his saddle stirrups to fit the length of his legs, and then mounted with such a leg swing that he through himself over the horse's back and landed in the dirt on the other side. "That was one rider off before the ride even started!"

Chandler cited another incident

when a man came dressed in chaps, spurs and a gun in a holster. He was about 50 and wanted to rent a horse for the day. Chandler said the park's policy is to rent horses for organized trail rides. The man agreed to go on the ride, but was reluctant to take off his gear even when Chandler told him his flapping chaps and thick rowels would spook his mount.

He worked from June 1 (with the last snow falling in mid June) through the first of September at \$3.45 an hour in 1979. Each wrangler is given his own horse to ride, which is a little better animal than a dude horse, and a string of seven to nine head to care for and feed.

For \$5.75 a day, they can live in a bunkhouse, next to the horse corrals, and are fed three meals a day. Rides are conducted seven days a week, but the wranglers take turns getting two days off a week.

On his days off, Chandler said his idea of relaxation is a ride to Hayden Valley, in the park, to see herds of buffalo and elk. He said at times he has seen 300 buffalo at once and a bear or two. However, most of the bear have been moved out of the park for tourist safety.

Chandler said recruiting extra workers is important about four times a summer — when the hay truck comes to be unloaded. "We went into Canyon and told guys who didn't know better that the wrang-

lers were having a hay party at the bunkhouse. We'd get them out there, unload the truck, drink a little beer during and after and get it all done."

The people he works with, said Chandler, are the part about his job he likes the most. One wrangler works full-time for the park, driving a snow coach and conducting tours in the winter and wrangling in the summer. The head wrangler, 26, attends the University of Montana at Missoula part-time and works with the horses in the summer. Another wrangler, "a drifter too," find a good job for the nine months he is not working at the park. Chandler said the perfect job would give him leave of absence every year to be back in the park for the summer to work.

Chandler was a finalist in the Texas High School Rodeo Finals as a member of the Irving High School Rodeo Team. He placed fifteenth out of 300 bareback riders in 1976. While living in Irving, he said he showed horses, mostly western pleasure classes, and "playdayed" whenever possible.

Chandler, 22 and a member of Squadron 12 in the Corps of Cadets, said he reports for work June 1, after graduating in May, and will stay in Canyon Village until September 6. After wrangling, he said he wants to work in feedlot management in Montana or Texas.

THE STARS ARE SHINING IN AGGIELAND

