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By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

Kyle

Nothing, not even 100-degree heat, could dampen the enthusiasm of brothers Derek and Jacob Prins.

Derek is 18, and Jacob is 24. They grew up in the Netherlands reading about, thinking about and dreaming about American Indians and the American West. And last month on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, they found themselves living their dream.

“We can ride horses here; the lands are beautiful ... we both are interested in Indian culture. Also the animals ...” Derek says in rapid-fire English, pausing to take a breath and find the words to describe what he’s seen and done since arriving on the reservation. “The teepee, the air; the sky is great.”

Adds Jacob, “Everything you expect for this place, it is there.”

The Prins brothers were staying at the Singing Horse Trading Post B&B and Campground near Manderson. The Singing Horse, owned by Howard and Rosie Olson, is one of the newest tourism businesses on the reservation.

European tourists on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation are nothing new. They’ve been venturing out on the reservation for years. (See related story.) What’s new is the number of campgrounds, bed-and-breakfast inns, souvenir shops, tour companies and restaurants that are popping up all over the reservation.

Near Manderson, there’s a homespun luncheonette called Bette’s Kitchen. Just south of Interior, there’s an elaborate resort with a swimming pool, motel, recreational vehicle camping and a big lodge called the Badlands Ranch Resort. Near Kyle, the UPO Resort B&B is downright elegant.

“We believe there’s an untapped market that really has potential,” said Ivan Sorbel of the 85-member Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce. “Tourism’s always been here. It’s just more of a cooperative effort. ... Now we’re starting to see the results.”

The chamber has been printing brochures, buying ads in visitor magazines and persuading the Bureau of Indian Affairs highway department to improve road signage. The chamber also hopes to tap the biker market. The group and Prairie Winds Casino near Oglala are also organizing a Sturgis Rally poker run and buffalo feed for Monday, Aug. 5.

The Chamber of Commerce hopes to market the Pine Ridge Reservation as a visitor destination for U.S. tourists. Because ironically, more visitors today travel to the reservation from across the Atlantic Ocean than from across the Missouri River. American tourists have yet to discover Pine Ridge.

Mark St. Pierre, executive director of the Pine Ridge Chamber, said one of the biggest challenges is to dispel the perception among American non-Indians that the Pine Ridge Reservation is a dangerous, unfriendly place.

Sometimes South Dakotans outside the reservation aren’t much help, he said. A recent group from Michigan en route to the reservation stopped for gas at a small West

River town. The gas station attendant told them to be sure they were off the reservation by nightfall, St. Pierre was told.

For the record, there are paved roads and gas stations. You can find a place to eat lunch. And people are friendly and helpful.

And the Pine Ridge Reservation has some of the most varied and scenic landscapes in western South Dakota. The land combines rolling hills, rocky bluffs, pine-covered hills and shady river bottoms.

Here's what we found on a recent tour.

BETTE'S KITCHEN

Keith Titus, a big man with a ponytail and sandals, is leading a group of 48 people to a lunch stop at Bette's Kitchen, an out-of-the-way restaurant near Manderson. It's run by Bette O'Rourke.

Titus, of Grand Haven, Mich., lives on the reservation six months a year. He's involved in a group called Re-Member, a community outreach program. Re-Member brings in church groups to help build bunk beds for needy children, meet the people and see the sights.

Today's lunch crowd is a large group, and Bette and her family are flying around the kitchen getting the last meals put together. In the shade of a plastic tarp, Kay Herp, her daughter Jackie, Erica Wuis and Donnie Eden dine together at a picnic table. For the younger people, the trip's been more an adventure than a church mission.

"We watched the sun go down last night, and we got to watch it come up again this morning," said Erica Wuis, one of the teen-agers on the trip.

For Bette, the site has special significance. She was raised here by Ben Black Elk, and this is where the 1932 book "Black Elk Speaks" was written.

A retiree, she started Bette's Kitchen three years ago, selling Indian tacos from her home. "I got bored," she explains. The business has expanded into a full-blown luncheonette and catering business.

But the atmosphere is still more like a home than a restaurant. "The chow mien is good, Bette," Titus said, finishing his plate. "There's a lot if you want more," she answers from the kitchen.

SINGING HORSE TRADING POST AND B&B

The Singing Horse Trading Post and B&B is a work in progress. It's centered around a two-story log cabin on the shoulder of a grassy bluff. One room is filled with crafts, T-shirts, jewelry and paintings. There are also showers for guests, and it will someday be bedrooms for the B&B. For now, guests stay in teepees.

Howard Olson, an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and his German wife Rosie Olson, have been out here three years – 2 1/2 of them without water. "They say that water is life – this thing (Singing Horse) truly sprang to life when we got water," he said.

"This summer I actually have the feeling that we're starting to see the reality of our dreams," Olson said.

Today the guest list included two people from Austria, the Prins brothers from the Netherlands, and four Germans. Guest Robert Surtmann, an Austrian with a deep tan and

a broad smile, said this is his first trip to America. “Howard and Rosie are making a paradise here,” he said. “I would like to come back.”

SINTE TIOSPAYE

Eli Tail and his wife Carolyn live in a mobile home on the edge of a wooded draw. Down among the trees, they’ve set up seven teepees in clusters of one or two. They rent the teepees out to tourists who want a very authentic Native American experience.

Sinte Tiospaye offers few modern amenities. But that’s exactly how their guests want it. Carolyn estimated that 80 percent of their guests are European.

Sinte Tiospaye offers hiking, horseshack riding and a little bit of Lakota language. Eli has 55 acres of land and he leases another 450 adjacent acres from a relative. Visitors can roam the countryside on foot or on horseback, sleep outside a teepee and imagine they are living more than 100 years in the past.

“I guess that’s what people want, peace and quiet,” Tail said. “Europeans have been studying us for a long time ... I thought I’d study them.”

UNIQUE PERSONAL OPTIONS (UPO) RESORT

The sprawling, clover-leaf-shaped house eight miles south of Kyle is a true bed-and-breakfast inn. It has well-appointed bedrooms, a big kitchen, large dining room.

UPO is owned by Lamoine and Ulrike Frie Pulliam. Lamoine, a tribal member who grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, works as a counselor in Kyle. Ulrike grew up in Germany. She’s a teacher in Kyle.

UPO hosts a mix of U.S. residents with family ties to the reservation, academic and government groups holding retreats, and European tourists. Past visitors include actor James Cromwell, whose work includes “Babe” and the upcoming “The Sum of All Fears,” and Gojko Mitic, an East German actor who made a film and stage career of portraying Indians.

When they first opened UPO, the Pulliams cooked a full breakfast for the guests. But they soon realized that lodgers were more interested in light breakfasts and long talks. Now Lamoine and Ulrike sit down at the table and share cereal, toast, coffee and conversation. Breakfast topics range from religion to politics to world affairs.

“We have interesting guests; we don’t have to go out in the world. The world comes to us,” said Lamoine with a smile.

LITTLE WARRIOR TIPI CAMPGROUND B&B

Tonya Loafer and her mother Viola Loafer run the campground near Wanblee.

Set among the box elder trees along American Horse Creek, it’s a bit more upscale than a standard teepee campground. Amenities include concrete floors, beds, and electric lights. Nearby is a concrete basketball court, a new air-conditioned building that houses showers, restrooms, a kitchen and dining room.

It’s been seven years in the making; one piece at a time.

Little Warrior is named for Tanya’s great-grandfather, Johnson Little Warrior.

BADLANDS RANCH RESORT

It's one of most ambitious of the reservation resorts. It looks like a KOA-style campground next to a mom-and-pop motel next to a hunting lodge next to a dude ranch.

Owner Jake Sharp grew up on the reservation, left for 35 years. He owned motels in Wyoming and Montana. And now he has returned.

With the White River below and the spires of the Badlands in the distance, the elaborate resort has RV camping, tent camping, a motel, a swimming pool, a private lodge, a fishing pond, rock hunting, horseback riding – and shade trees. The lodge can sleep up to 30 people. Sharp has 226 acres and access to another 1,000 acres.

Visitors to the Pine Ridge will find a less-crowded, less-hectic pace than at the traditional attractions. People are friendly, but not in the yes-sir-no-sir, customer-service way so common in retail settings these days.

On a recent morning a lost traveler stopped at a craft booth near the Wounded Knee Memorial to ask directions. One of the vendors helped him find his way, then asked, "Where are you from?"

"Rapid City."

The vendor flashed a good-natured smile. "A little close to home to be lost, aren't you?"

Questions or comments? Contact reporter Dan Daly at 394-8421 or e-mail him at dan.daly@rapidcityjournal.com