

# Beach Riding in Texas

Lin Sutherland

Onion Creek Ranch

Dancing down the beach, our six horses threw fine white sand like a sugar spray into the air around their hooves. The Gulf water glowed like a slick, flat nickel and the warm winds washed over our bare shoulders. A little crab saw us coming and raced for big cover—the Atlantic. With a grin and grip of our legs, we put our horses into a full gallop down the long white sand strip of Magnolia Beach, Texas.

I'm a Texan through and through, with the Hill Country and wide open spaces of this state coursing through my veins. Little bit of horse stuff in there, too—my ancestors arrived here by horseback in the 1820's—so all my life I thought riding meant the gorgeous hills and dales and river valleys in the middle of the Lone Star State. Then this year, I made a trip to the coast and found what my riding group had been looking for—the perfect place to race a horse down the sand ride into the ocean, and we've been hooked ever since.

The little town of Magnolia, Texas nestles south of Port Lavaca (“Port the Cow”, so named by Cortez when he came here by boat, a much lesser way to travel in my opinion), about two hours southeast of Houston. It's a beach front village of wooden houses, shrimp workers, one park, one old courts motel and about 300 really friendly people. My first contact was with Burns Courts because they let us camp on the beach and rent a couple of rooms for showering (\$35/day) use their beach barbecue pit and big pier with fresh water, bring our dogs, let our dogs run around, and do just about anything else we wanted. Did I mention Texans like freedom? They allow it too, and that's what I love about this beach.

We trailered in, about eight of us girl riders from Onion Creek Ranch in Austin, lined up our trailers on the beach, unloaded the horses, made a picket line between the trailers with long ropes, hayed and watered them, and gazed at the beautiful water with pelicans and gulls scudding over it. Not able to resist, we saddled up the ponies and took off south—five miles to the end of the point. There's something incredibly free about galloping down a beach and then whirling and aiming your horse right into the water, spraying surf, sending those crabs running—blue sky overhead, a good horse beneath you—who could ask for more?

We rode on down to Indianola, at the point, where there is an obelisk marking the place LaSalle came to Texas. Just about everybody did, you know. It's also the place where my great-great-great grandfather George Sutherland landed. There I sat, on my paint mare, staring at the same coastline my ancestor saw 170 years ago. It gave me the shivers.

Coming back in the red sunset, two fellows in a pickup hailed us and said, “Hey, are y'all the cow-girls? We left y'all some crabs and shrimp back at your camp!” Sure enough, they had. Well, I don't know if you'll find that kind of neighborliness at Miami Beach, y'all...

That Sunday morning it dawned still and beautiful, so I got up early and took Big Boy and Zia down to the water to watch the sunrise. They went all quiet and gentle and the three of us alone just enjoyed watching the big friendly sun come up over Magnolia Beach, Texas.

## About the Author

Lin Sutherland teaches horsemanship and riding at Onion Creek Ranch in Austin, Texas. She rides and writes where the west wind takes her.