

Sleigh ride magic

Article by Susan Smith / Photographs by Andrew Hoshkiw

On a winding country road near Port Sydney, there is a place that's a little slice of paradise. It's a place where winter isn't shunned but embraced and the pleasure of riding in a one-horse open sleigh can be experienced, along with a bonfire and a steaming cup of hot chocolate.

Riding and sleigh ride trails wind through the acreage offering scenic views of a waterfall and a beaver pond. You might even be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of some wildlife; a deer grazing, a partridge in flight or perhaps a red fox on his rounds as you traverse the property by sleigh.

Cathy Foyston and Bill Statten have created this oasis, called Back of Beyond Equine Centre, on 95 acres of rolling hills, pasture and woods in Port Sydney. While they have operated the centre for about 10 years, it's only

recently sleigh rides have been added to their repertoire of services. They breed and board horses, offer lessons and organize clinics on equine wellness and equine assisted learning.

Bill has been around horses all his life. His family has run the Taylor Statten camps in Algonquin Provincial Park for many years. In fact, Statten's son is the fourth generation to run the camp. His affection and respect for the horses at Back of Beyond is clearly evident as he interacts with them.

Foyston, too, has always had an affinity for horses. She's been breeding "nice rideable horses" for the past 10 years and has built a niche market by only selling a couple of foals a year.

"We're going for quality versus quantity," she explains. Often people will purchase a foal and then want Foyston to train it. While the

horse is being trained, they ride some of Foyston's "tried and true" school horses. The horses get trained with the natural and collaborative approach that is Foyston's specialty and the customer gets a horse that is happy, relaxed and enjoys people.

The sleigh ride idea came about one afternoon when Foyston and Statten were sitting with friends David Furlonger and Johanna Neuteboom.

"We were sitting around and looked at the beautiful landscape and said wouldn't it be nice if you could see it by sleigh?"

The ideas came fast and furious as the four friends brainstormed. Neuteboom already had a sleigh and a young horse but they would need another sleigh and a draft horse. Statten knew where they could purchase a sleigh and Foyston knew someone who had a draft horse



Bill Statten drives Major as Cathy, Nathan and Halle Denardis, cozy with blankets over their knees, enjoy the sleigh ride.