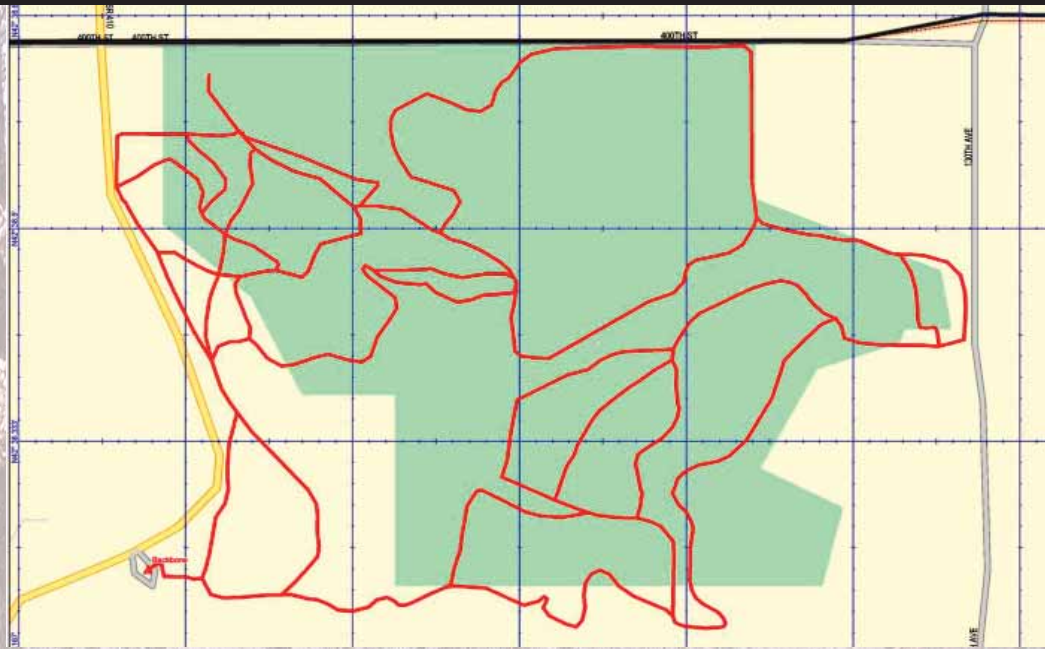


Day Riding at Backbone State Forest

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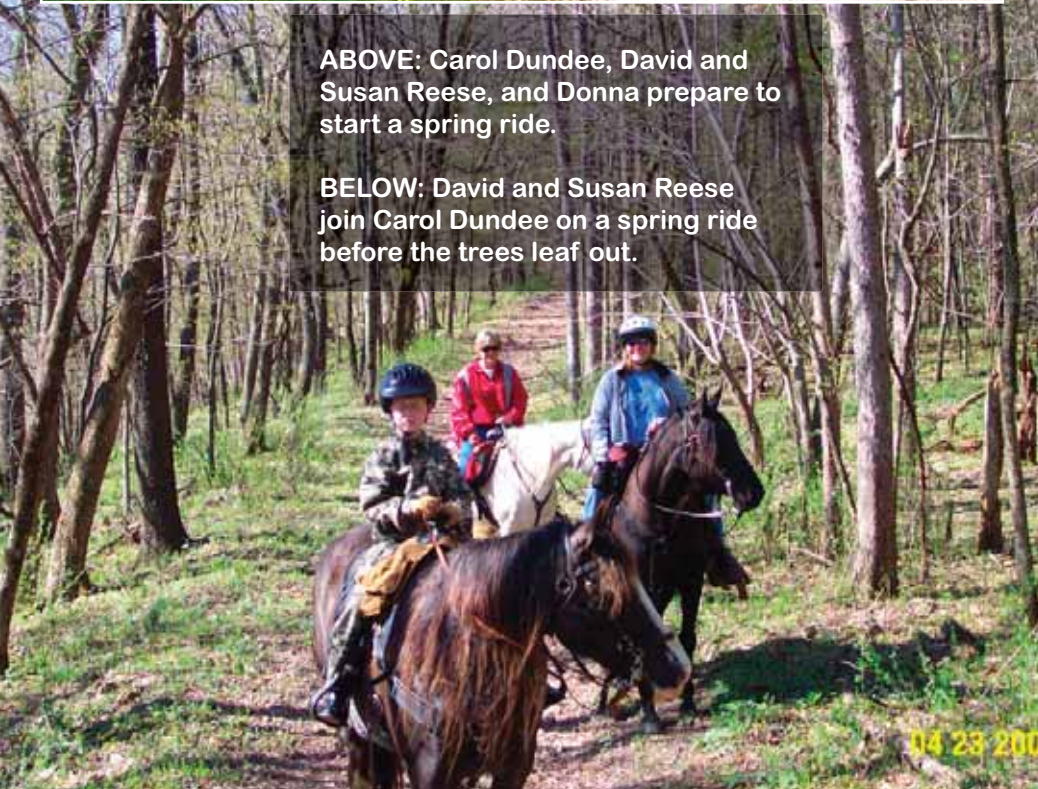
Our 2006 season ended a little early but not before we had a chance to enjoy a nice day ride at Backbone State Forest. It is absolutely amazing how so many trails can be put into less than 200 acres. Backbone State Forest is one of the smallest public land areas we ride, yet it has more trails than most. True, the trail segments are individually short, but the area is loaded with trails that make it a great place to day ride.

Backbone State Forest is adjacent to the northeast corner of Backbone State Park, 4 miles south of Strawberry Point. Access to these 186 acres of pine plantations and upland hardwood forest is from a parking lot located just southeast of the north entrance to Backbone State Park. This



ABOVE: Carol Dundee, David and Susan Reese, and Donna prepare to start a spring ride.

BELOW: David and Susan Reese join Carol Dundee on a spring ride before the trees leaf out.



parking lot is small but a convenient place to unload.

The Backbone State Forest area is open to hunting, hiking, horseback riding and cross country skiing, but not to overnight camping.

Backbone State Forest was acquired for the purpose of protecting the watershed of the lake at Backbone State Park. Most of the land being farmed at the time of acquisition was subsequently planted to red, white, jack, and Scotch pine. The extensive trail system rose out of a system of fire breaks that were developed to protect these plantings.

Users should be aware that hunting and horseback riding are legal on Backbone State Forest but not on Backbone State Park land. Every effort has been made by DNR to plainly mark boundaries between the two areas. Trail riders should, as always, stay on the trails and within the forest boundaries.

The Backbone State Forest does not have equine camping facilities. We would like to be able to overnight there because it is a nice place to ride, especially in the late fall or early spring. Grills are available for preparing a hot meal. The area could accommodate just a few overnight campers without investing in expanding the parking area.

When we were first thinking about riding Backbone, we were told of how quickly you could become confused and end up wandering around for hours. That could be true until you see a map of the trail system. On our first ride at Backbone we took the time to ride the perimeter of the forest. The perimeter is only 2.8 miles, but once you have ridden it you can ride



the interior and feel safe because you can ride in any one direction and eventually be on the perimeter trail. We have adopted the practice of always carrying GPS receivers and mapping where we ride. This also helps avoid becoming lost.

The trail system at Backbone only has about 6.1 trail segment miles which is a couple miles less than Pleasant Creek, but a whole lot more fun to ride. Because of the numerous interconnecting trails, riders can develop little games like turn left then right, then left at intersections. You can literally spend all day winding around the forest, riding over the same trails in different directions, yet feel like saying "have we ridden here before?"

Like most of the DNR trails, the ones at Backbone are wide and groomed. Occasionally Mother Nature may drop a challenge across the trail. Under the rules that DNR plans for us, you can go over it, but you may not go around it if you must go off the trail. We find the trail system to be great for the inexperienced rider or horse, yet offering a little more challenge than trails that are all flat.

The trail system is sufficiently complex that you can make the ride long enough that you may want to lunch along the trail. There are several nice places for a quiet lunch along Fenchel Creek. As you ride you may have some fun seeing the same deer as you ride a different trail segment time and again.

*For more information call 563/586-2254 or write Yellow River State Forest,
729 State Forest Road, Harpers Ferry, IA 52146 or E-mail: robert.honeywell@dnr.state.ia.us*

Our horses are cross-tied to prevent damage to the trees.



*Sheryl Stillions and "Megan" enjoy the cold and snow in January.
- photo by Steve Stillions -*

