

INTRODUCING...

Stuart Wilde

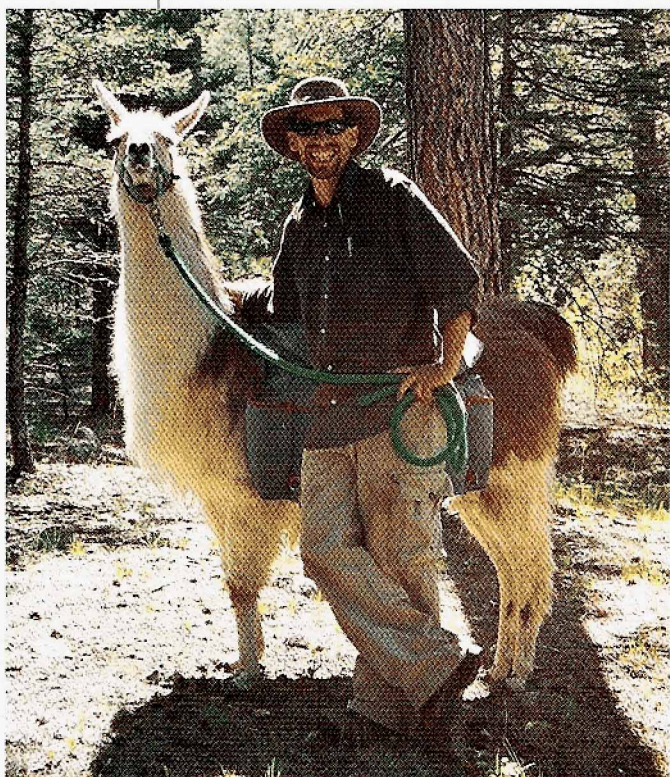
Llama treks enrich Santa Fean's love affair with nature

BY JOANNE S. LIU

WHEN STUART WILDE, of Latir, decided to move 17 years ago, he looked for a pristine place to call home. "I realized I wanted to live someplace with clean air and water, and where I could walk out my front door and revel in the beauty of the natural world," he says. He found that place in New Mexico. "It was

But soon after arriving in New Mexico, Wilde embarked on a different path: he got his first llama, Azul, and several years later, started a llama-trekking operation. "Wild Earth Llama Adventures is an extension of my passions and interests, and my hope is that people come away from these experiences with

Magic developed buck-teeth because the owner didn't allow him to forage. Hobbs suffered abuse by a 4-H club—a boy attacked Hobbs with a 2-by-4. These days, you'll find Magic and Hobbs foraging in the mountains with Girl Scouts who insist on French braiding their owners' shoulder-length hair.



JOANNE S. LIU

a newfound appreciation and respect for the natural world, and realize that we are not separate, but a part of it," Wilde says.

With the pack-carrying abilities of his llamas, and the sure-footed lead of Azul—the alpha or king of the herd—Wilde leads hiking trips into the Carson and Santa Fe National forests in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These wilderness excursions are about making connections with the people (and animals) who accompany him. As director and head guide, Wilde educates trekkers about the proper ways to interact with nature and llamas.


His love for llamas, the heart and soul of his operation, is obvious. "Because they're prey animals, they're skittish by nature," he says, when explaining how to interact with these two-toed, leather-padded creatures. For an animal lover who wasn't allowed to have pets while growing up in New York, Wilde has more than made up for this oversight. At last count, 15 llamas occupy his herd and the numbers continue to grow.

Most llamas come to him through rescue operations. "Many people got these animals as an exotic pet or a business investment," he says. "And a few years down the road, they don't want them anymore." Some of the llamas suffered abuse and neglect.

Wilde also imparts his knowledge of flora and fauna to trekkers. Though armed with formal education in environmental science and ecology, his knowledge of regional ecology is self-taught through what he calls a 17-year field study in the southern Rockies and high desert of northern New Mexico. He points out wild oregano and parsley, and even plucks sprigs for willing tasters. He demonstrates useful tricks: To collect salicylic acid (an active ingredient of aspirin), vigorously rub your palms against an aspen tree trunk and the powdery substance collects on your skin.

Although Wilde performs the field work, he reminds people that it's a family-run business. His wife, Leah, the expedition coordinator, manages the phones, books reservations and matches customers to the appropriate wilderness experience. Wilde says, "She does all the behind-the-scenes shopping and prep work, not to mention taking care of our two children, Zack and Sacha, while I'm out in the backcountry."

What passion for ecology Wilde fostered as a teenager continues to show in his work. "My goal is to subtly promote conservation ethics and wilderness protection by leading fun and educational wilderness adventures for people of all ages and fitness levels."

For more information, call (800) 758-5262, or log on to www.llamaadventures.com. 

Joanne S. Liu is featured in "Story-tellers" on Page 6.

Stuart Wilde, of Latir in Taos County, imparts his wisdom of flora and fauna during his many excursions through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

one of the least populated and most scenic areas of the country, with a rich history and diverse culture."

Wilde's love for nature flourished early in life, long before he roamed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. "By the time I was an early teen, I was in leadership positions, responsible for groups of people on hiking and camping excursions in the New England backcountry," he says. Back then, Wilde immersed himself in environmental politics, testifying at public hearings and organizing his community to establish the country's first mandatory curbside recycling program.