

# The Alisal

NESTLED IN THE CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST MOUNTAINS OF SANTA YNEZ, THIS GUEST RANCH AND RESORT IS A WONDERFUL MIX OF LUXURY AND TRADITION.



by William C. Reynolds

**S**ITTING LIKE A JEWEL—A BIG JEWEL—ON 10,000 oak-studded acres, the Alisal Guest Ranch and Resort awaits the arrival of its guests as it has since 1946. The ranch has a unique history, perfect for those with a flair for the romantic and historic. Thirty-nine years after the Spanish padres established the Mission Santa Inés in 1804, José Raimundo Carrillo (great-great-grandfather of the late Western performer Leo Carrillo) was granted 13,500 acres of land across the Santa Ynez River for his service to the newly established Mexican government. Carrillo and the five subsequent owners focused on raising cattle on the land, and it also became one of California's noted horse ranches.

A century after Carrillo received the grant to Rancho Nojoqui (pronounced Na-Who-Ee), the working cattle ranch was purchased by Charles Pete Jackson Jr. On the advice of his ranch manager, Lynn Gillham, the cattlemen's quarters were converted to quarters for dude ranch guests. On July 16, 1946, the Alisal Guest Ranch (*Alisal* is a Chumash Indian word meaning "grove of Sycamores") was opened for the summer season to a total of 30 guests and was an immediate success.

**The Alisal Ranch originally was a land grant to the great-great-grandfather of actor Leo Carrillo. Today, the Jackson family continues a tradition of ownership that began in the mid-1940s.**



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY ALISAL RANCH AND RESORT





**LEFT:** Three things make a great guest ranch: horses, horses, and horses. Alisal's wranglers and string of saddle horses ensure a horse to fit every rider.  
**TOP:** Alisal's guest cottages offer quiet and comfort with no distraction of in-room telephones or television sets.  
**ABOVE:** The Alisal Ranch is a golfer's paradise with two unique courses.

**T**ODAY, THE ALISAL PROVIDES A VARIETY OF accommodations with 73 guest units. Each unit is decorated in classic California ranch style, configured in either comfortable studios or spacious two-room suites. Each unit is designed for maximum privacy. To maintain a quiet atmosphere, the ranch has no in-room televisions or telephones—although high-speed wireless Internet connections have recently been provided.

As with any ranch experience, great food and great horses are paramount for guests, and the Alisal handles them both with style. A 1950s brochure described the ranch's cuisine: "An abundance of GOOD FOOD is one of the joys of the Alisal. Only the finest—prepared with a know-how and imagination to tempt the epicure and satisfy the ranch-hungry. Informality is the key-note of life and dress at The Alisal—only one rule: BE COMFORTABLE—COATLESS if you wish—no 'dressing for meals'—unless that is your pleasure."

Today, the Alisal operates on a Modified American Plan: Breakfast and dinner are included in room rates, with break-

fasts featuring lavish buffets brimming with fresh fruits, homemade baked goods, and specialty entrees. Guests are seated at the same table for each meal so that they feel at home. In the evening, ranch wranglers visit with each guest about the next day's ride and horse assignments—a dining tradition that is especially popular with children. For the young buckaroos in attendance, the excitement builds as the wranglers walk around and chat with each table (see "Remembering Cheyenne," *C&I* September 2005).

A guest ranch's real strength is its horses, and the Alisal prides itself on having the highest-quality horses ready for every type of rider. No matter what your experience level, the wranglers at the Alisal will fit you perfectly to your own personal "Trigger."

And then: "Let's ride!" With more than 10,000 acres and countless trails to explore, guests are sure to find a great riding adventure. Travel through scenic canyons or explore shaded valleys lined with oak trees and imagine the vaqueros of old working their cattle right where you stand.



**Actor Leo Carrillo, circa 1935, in Santa Ynez, California (pictured with cowboy artist Edward Borein). Carrillo's great-great-grandfather was the first owner of the ranch as an original land grant from Mexico.**

Every ride—novice, intermediate, and advanced—is accompanied by an experienced wrangler to ensure safety and confidence. Group trail rides are available on regular timetables, and private, intimate rides can be set up by appointment. For those still unsure about saddling up, one-hour private lessons are offered in the arena or on the trail. There's even special trail instruction for children ages 7 and older and arena lessons for ages 4 through 6.

**I**F GOLF IS YOUR GAME, THAN THE ALISAL may be your little slice of heaven. The ranch offers two championship courses to challenge even the best players. Each of the 18-hole courses has a distinctive personality shaped by the area's terrain.

The Ranch Course, designed by the legendary Billy Bell Jr., opened in 1955. It's a par-72 course that stretches for 6,500 yards and is distinguished by tight fairways. Surrounded by oaks, sycamores, and eucalyptus, the Ranch Course offers breathtaking vistas as well as a challenging game of stick and ball.

Open since 1992, the Alisal River Course enhances the tradition of naturally secluded golf. Contrasting in style and setting to the Ranch Course, the River Course provides a quiet escape, immersing players in a serene riverside setting framed by the Santa Ynez Mountains.

In addition to golf, the Alisal offers a variety of outdoor activities suited to the ranch's setting. Seven tournament-quality tennis courts and a complete tennis center are available for individual or group play, and private lessons can be scheduled. Guests are invited to fish for rainbow trout, bass, and bluegill on the ranch's 100-acre private, spring-fed lake tucked away in



## The Alisal Extra

**T**hree things make a great guest ranch: horses, horses, and horses. All three are covered at the Alisal, with one added extra. The wranglers at the Alisal are very special cowboys and cowgirls who truly love what they do—helping new riders have the time of their lives on horseback, safely. It is the reason so many wranglers stay on so long at the Alisal.

No one epitomized that devotion to wrangling at the Alisal more than the late Jake Copass. A longtime resident of the Santa Ynez area, Jake rode into the sunset this past June after working at the Alisal Guest Ranch since it opened for business in 1946. Jake was a true ambassador of the West and a sure-enough cowboy who loved nothing more than to chase and rope wild cattle. He became somewhat of an entertainer later in life, as he would hold guests' attention on trail rides and cookouts by reciting his cowboy poetry and stories. He was, for many, the memory of kindness and graciousness that the horseback experience at the Alisal represents. Over the years he greeted and entertained generations of Alisal guests. Humorist, stockman, saddle maker, poet, entertainer, and cowboy—Jake Copass was above all a true Western gentleman loved by all who knew him.



**Jake Copass was a favorite fixture at the Alisal since 1946.**



Alisal wranglers do more than ride and rope: Here Alisal wrangler and Western singer/songwriter Dave Stamey entertains at the morning breakfast trail ride with the late Jake Copass looking on.

the foothills—it's Southern California's only Orvis-endorsed fishing haven. Additional opportunities for outdoor fun range from nature walks to bocci ball. The huge outdoor pool is heated to 80 degrees year round.

All across the ranch, you'll find perfect pursuits for group and family gatherings. Breakfast and lunch trail rides include sumptuous food and a visit to the Alisal's historic Adobe Camp. Winemakers dinners spotlight the fruits of the nearby vineyards of the world-famous Santa Ynez Valley. In addition to family events, the Alisal offers team-building programs ideal for corporate or business groups. The team-building outings are designed to be fun while providing valuable learning experiences allowing participants to grow both personally and professionally.

Given the Alisal's origins, the atmosphere and location of the ranch still spin the *Californio* spell on guests, taking them back in time to the days of the early vaquero and the great horsemen of the area, such as the ranch's first owner, José Raimundo Carrillo. Leo Carrillo describes his great-great-grandfather's devotion to the ranch: "José Raimundo Carrillo was able to see a horse miracle occur in California. On the first day of July, 1796, when Father Serra and Don Gaspar de Portolá arrived at the site of San Diego, there was not a single horse in the entire area we know now as California. For 250 years horses had been



used in Mexico, but not a single one had penetrated across the arid deserts to this part of the Pacific Coast—a place of millions of acres of lush pastureland ideal for grazing yet where only wild creatures could be seen. When the horses came, José Raimundo—a great horseman himself—became, as it were, a living portion of the spirited creatures he rode."

That magic of being horseback in the world of grassy hills and blue skies, of buckskin and blue, can still be felt today at the Alisal Ranch.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY ALISAL RANCH AND RESORT

TRAIL GUIDE

## Alisal Ranch

**GO** The Alisal Guest Ranch and Resort is located on California's Central Coast near the Danish town of Solvang, just 40 miles northwest of Santa Barbara and 138 miles north of Los Angeles. Ground transportation may be arranged from Santa Barbara or from Santa Ynez Airport, which welcomes private aircraft.

**ENJOY** Superb horseback riding for all levels, two 18-hole golf courses, seven tennis courts, pool, lake with water sports, fly-fishing, volleyball, shuffleboard, badminton, croquet, billiards, table tennis, and children's programs. Nearby are wineries as well as cultural, shopping, and historical attractions.

**PLAN** Alisal's Gourmet Wine Weekend is February 9-11, 2007. Sample the California Central Coast's finest varietals and the ranch's renowned cuisine.

**MORE** The Alisal Guest Ranch encompasses 10,000 acres. It features 73 guestrooms and suites and 6,800 square feet of meeting space. (805) 688-6411, (800) 425-4725; 1054 Alisal Road, Solvang, California; [www.alisal.com](http://www.alisal.com).

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