



The Desert Riders are sworn in at the beginning of 1970. Marj Krall, second from the left, Clare Woodmansee, Jane Lykken Hoff and Art Smith sit mounted on their horses. Standing Boo Hoff, Carl Lykken and Ed McCoubrey stand in front of them. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# A remarkable horsewoman

Now nearly 100 years old, Hoff served in leadership of the Desert Riders

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Special to Palm Springs Desert Sun  
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**Editor's Note:** Tracy Conrad is away this week, so we took the opportunity to republish this "Thanks for the Memories" installment, which ran a year ago in The Desert Sun. This week, in almost perfect palindromic fashion, Jane Lykken Hoff turns 100 years old on 02-20-2020. Happy birthday, Jane! That is a lot of candles.

Many candles will be required on Jane Lykken Hoff's birthday cake this week: 99 to be exact, which is remarkable. (It warrants a large cake!)

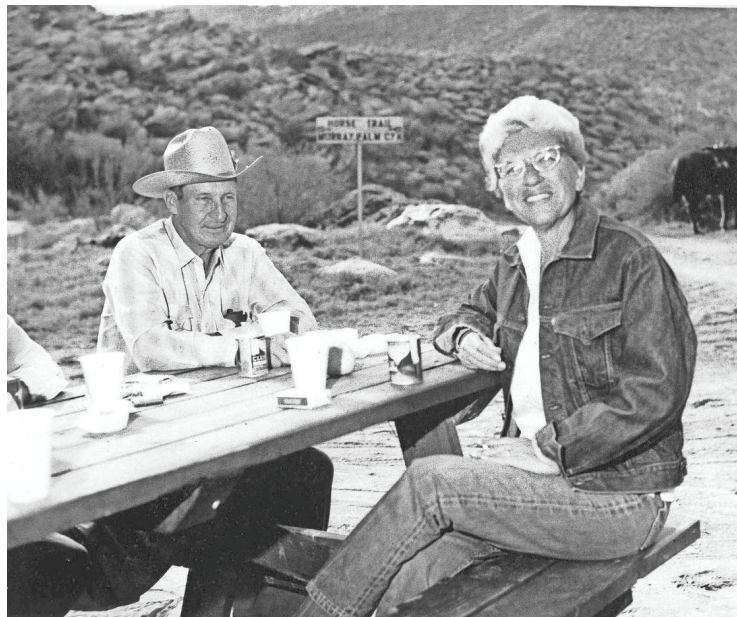
But Jane is remarkable for many reasons, not just her longevity: she has been involved with countless community causes and has been a fixture at the Palm Springs Historical Society.

Jane is also a particularly gifted horsewoman. She started riding almost concurrently with learning to walk, when she was in low single digits at age 2. From a vantage point of high double digits, almost 99, she remembers that there wasn't much else to do in the desert back when. She owned roller skates but the only sidewalk was that in front of the Desert Inn. "The town was only two blocks long and one block wide." Horseback riding made more sense.

The established hotels all sent guests out to horseback ride into the Indian Canyons, or across the miles of open sand dunes dotted with verbena and globe mallow, popcorn flower and brittlebush. There were no fences and no need for trails. You could see across the low of the valley back to the little town, punctuated by the El Mirador Tower by which to navigate.

The horses knew their way home anyway. Frank Bogert, Palm Springs' mayor cowboy, who also lived to be 99 years old, wrote about Jane in his book, "View from the Saddle." He recorded that one of Jane's earliest memories was the thrill of seeing horses running freely through town. Quoting her, "After visitors went riding, the stables just turned the horses loose to make their way home...and they did."

Jane's father, Carl Lykken, owned and operated the town's first general store, "a multipurpose venture," it offered groceries, hardware and dry goods. It served as the town's first post office and later the Western Union Tele-



Al Smith and Jane Lykken Hoff relax at a picnic table in Andreas Canyon.

graph office. Frank notes "It was the primary gathering place for Palm Springs' early residents."

Beginning in 1931, Lykken and a group of friends, mostly errant businessmen, organized a weekly outing, calling themselves the Desert Riders. They would saddle up early in the morning and ride out to meet a chuck wagon for breakfast, skipping work to have a little fun. It was a social gathering full of good cheer and company. For Palm Springs Life Magazine years later, Jane mused about the fried eggs, bacon and hot cakes, that the "food, cooked over a flame, always tasted so much better outside." The rides came to include a cowboy singer and an occasional rope trick, but mostly it was about the wide-open spaces, riding on the desert.

Membership in the Desert Riders was prized. You could go riding twice as a guest, but then had to be voted on for

entrance to the club. Important business leaders, early pioneers, society mavens and celebrities all sought membership. Robert Taylor, William Holden, Clark Gable, Henry Fonda and Cary Grant all joined. Movie stars Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy, creators of the Racquet Club, were longtime members. Trav Rogers, owner of Rogers Stables and proprietor of the "Mink and Manure Club" and Tony Burke, the indefatigable photographer and publicist of the El Mirador hotel, were members for decades.

Being elected to serve in the leadership of Desert Riders was even more prestigious. By 1972, Jane was Round-Up Boss of the Desert Riders. That spring, she led a string of riders out to dedicate a new trail. The club was no longer just about a little socializing having realized that the booming development of the valley would cause the extin-

tion of horseback riding if trails weren't marked and maintained.

At the dedication site, Trail Boss, Art Smith was waiting with a case of champagne. The new trail was to be named for longtime member Charlie Berns, owner of the famous 21 Club in New York. Prominent citizens and cowboys alike raised a glass.

That afternoon had another highlight. All those attending sang "Happy Birthday" to Jane Hoff. She was presented with an outsized birthday card with all the names of the members written on it.

From high on the new mountain trail the party moved to the Racquet Club for a charity luncheon. The money raised would be used to build the new Lykken Trail to honor Jane's father and founder of the Desert Riders. Almost 50 years later, consummate horsewoman Jane Lykken Hoff is closing in on triple digits.