

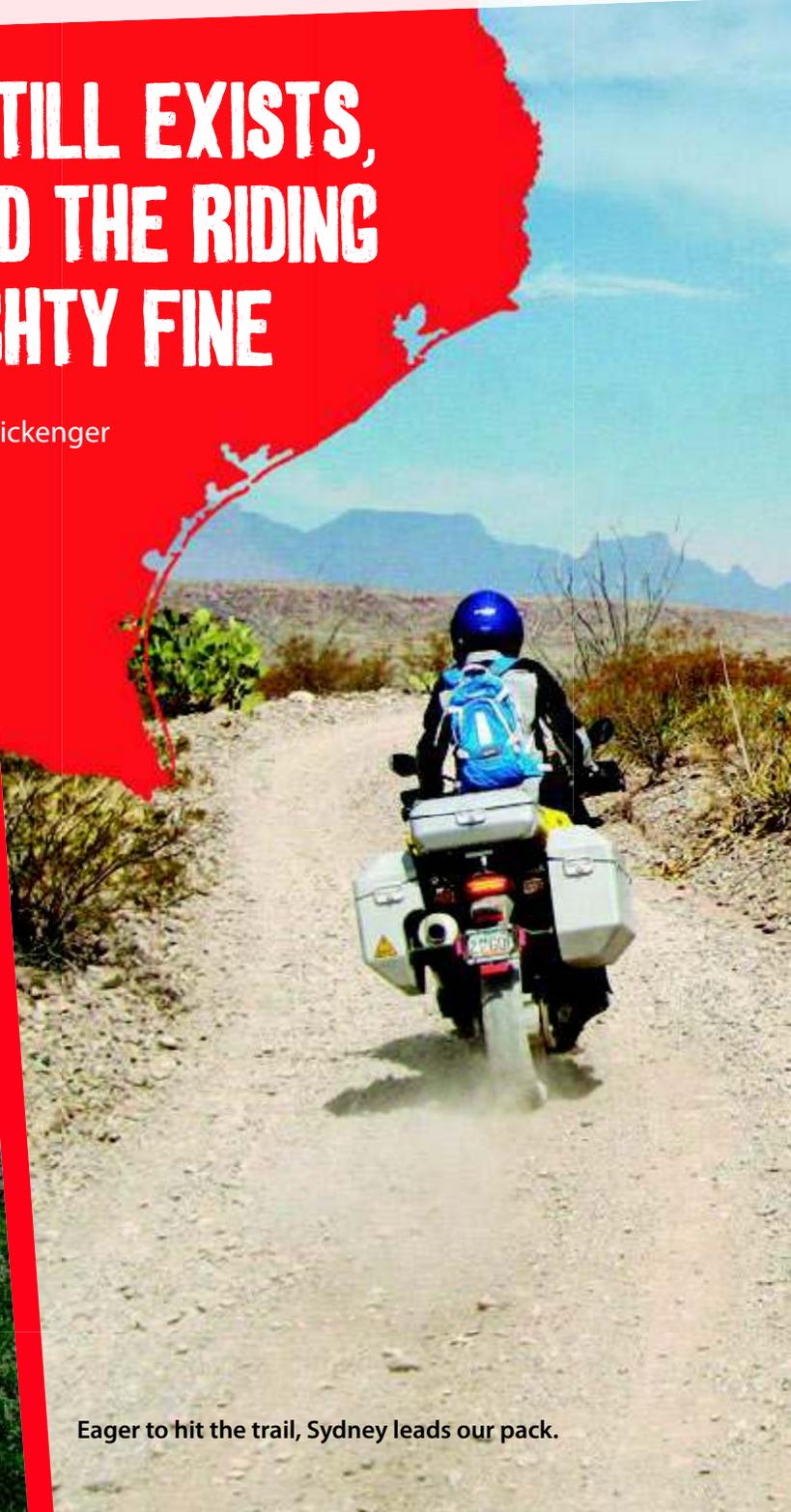
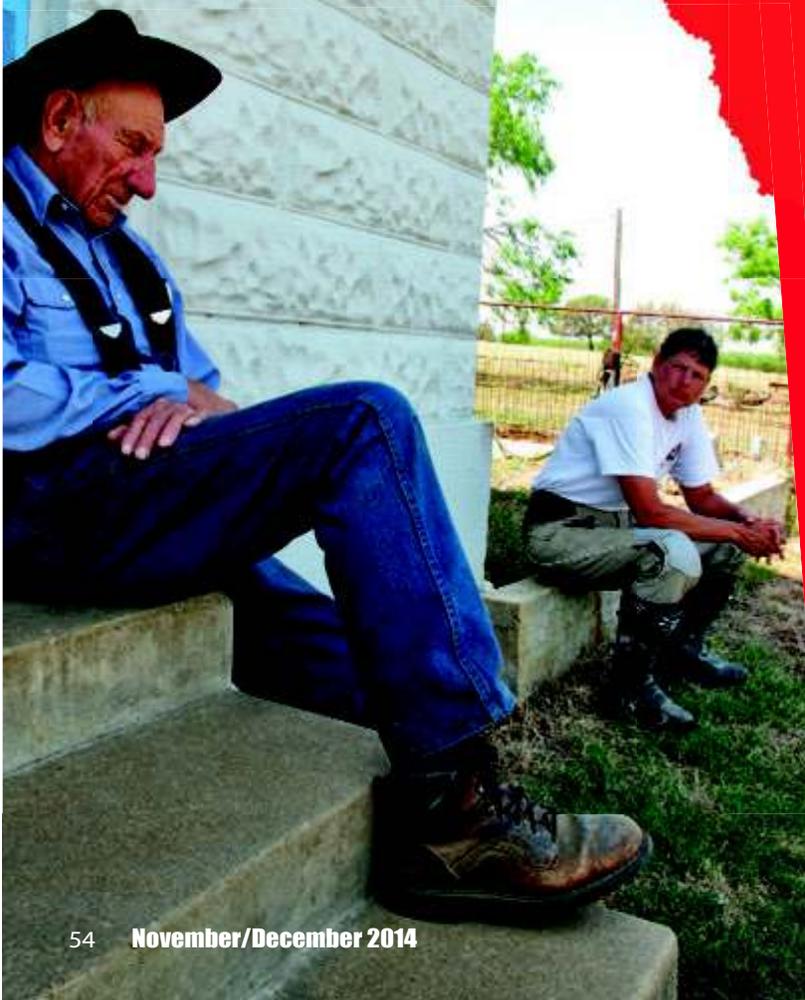


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**WHERE CHIVALRY STILL EXISTS,
COWBOYS RULE, AND THE RIDING
IS MIGHTY FINE**

by Alisa Clickenger



Eager to hit the trail, Sydney leads our pack.

TEXAS

***I**t was the type of winter that drives motorcyclists crazy because the snow and cold temperatures had extended into April—that typical Idaho winter where riders long for sunshine and the first glimpse of spring flowers to herald the riding season. In January, I had purchased a 2006 950 KTM Adventure and my thoughts were consumed with taking a trip on her. Lamenting this to my friend Carolyn, she invited me to ride to Texas and see what made her state so great.*

Departure day dawned frigid and snowy, no surprise in Idaho, so I waited until late morning for the roads to be cleared. The snowfall made for spectacular contrasts in the canyon country of Utah, but it was too cold to camp so I overnighted with friends and pushed on, eager for warmer climes.

Taking the long way to Texas, in Arizona I looked up my friend Sydney, a female rider I'd met the year before, when we were both riding to Alaska. At dinner we chatted about my trip to Texas and my plans of meeting my friend Carolyn to do some dual-sport riding in Big Bend National Park. On an impulse, Sydney decided to join us, and went to work the next day requesting a week off.

Sydney, Carolyn and I met up in Fort Stockton, Texas. At the campground we drew a crowd as we pitched our tents. For we three independent travelers, it's common to travel solo, camp off the grid and be self-sufficient. But to the RVers, we were definitely unusual. Other campers took photos of us and asked questions about our travels, as if we were a rare American breed.

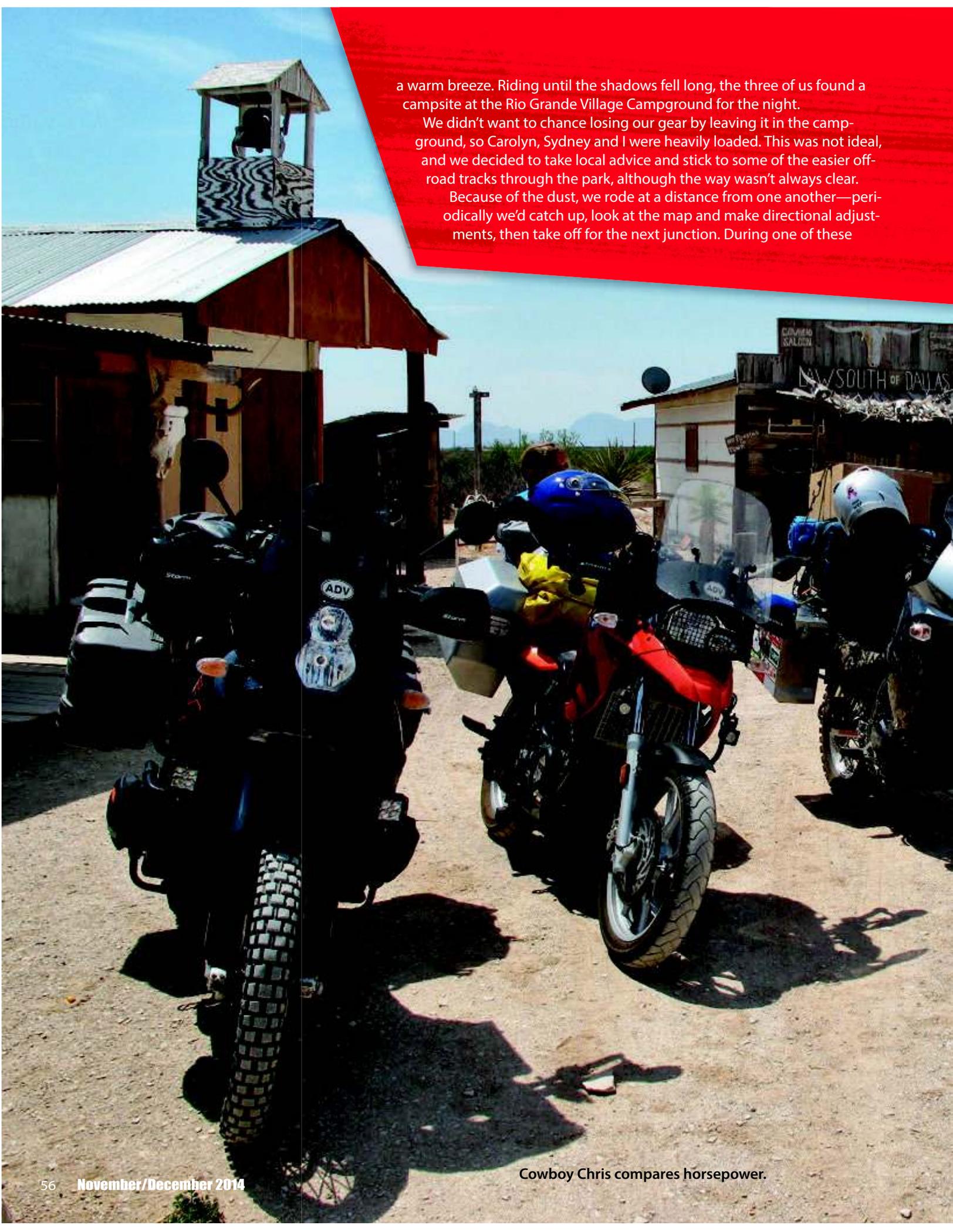
The following day it was an easy ride down to south of Alpine. Our destination was Cowhead

Ranch, an Old West-style guest ranch where we could bunk for about \$20 per night. Voni and Paul Graves, Texas friends who hosted me on my South America trip, own an adobe across the street, so it was a natural stopping point.

Paul had agreed to be supervising mechanic for some minor repairs of mine, including my first rear tire change on the *KTM*. After a day at the adobe doing small fitment repairs and general tightening of nuts and bolts on all three bikes, we had dinner with Voni, Paul, and Cowboy Chris from the Cowhead Ranch, not expecting to see them again in just a couple of days.

It would be a shame to be in that part of Texas and not visit Terlingua, so that's where we headed the next morning. Terlingua is a ghost town that's slowly being refurbished and brought back to life; it has even entered the digital age with a dot com on the town's sign. Home to squatters and renters, artists and shopkeepers, locals and transplants, you'll meet most on a walk through the small town. With a reputation for being home to a broad range of independent thinking, most residents are colorful characters in one way or another.

After lunch, it was exciting to ride into Big Bend National Park. None of us had ridden there before, and the dirt roads on a borrowed map teased us. It was a perfect Texas riding day—sun shining high and not too hot, with



a warm breeze. Riding until the shadows fell long, the three of us found a campsite at the Rio Grande Village Campground for the night.

We didn't want to chance losing our gear by leaving it in the campground, so Carolyn, Sydney and I were heavily loaded. This was not ideal, and we decided to take local advice and stick to some of the easier off-road tracks through the park, although the way wasn't always clear.

Because of the dust, we rode at a distance from one another—periodically we'd catch up, look at the map and make directional adjustments, then take off for the next junction. During one of these

excursions, while picking my way through a particularly rocky trail, I came across Sydney's downed bike, with her in excruciating pain.

What to do? We were in the middle of nowhere with no cell reception and limited options. Incredibly, Sydney offered to ride out. We managed to get her on the bike, and somehow made it to the nearest paved road. Once we were rolling on tarmac things didn't seem so bad, although stopping was pure anguish. Together we came up with a plan that involved riding back to Voni and Paul's with Sydney sandwiched in the middle, not stopping at corners and cautiously rolling through stop signs.

Voni and Paul lived along the direction to the Alpine Hospital,

so we figured it would be easier and faster to head their way. They were terrific and quickly shuffled Sydney into the car, taking her to the hospital while we waited at the adobe for news.

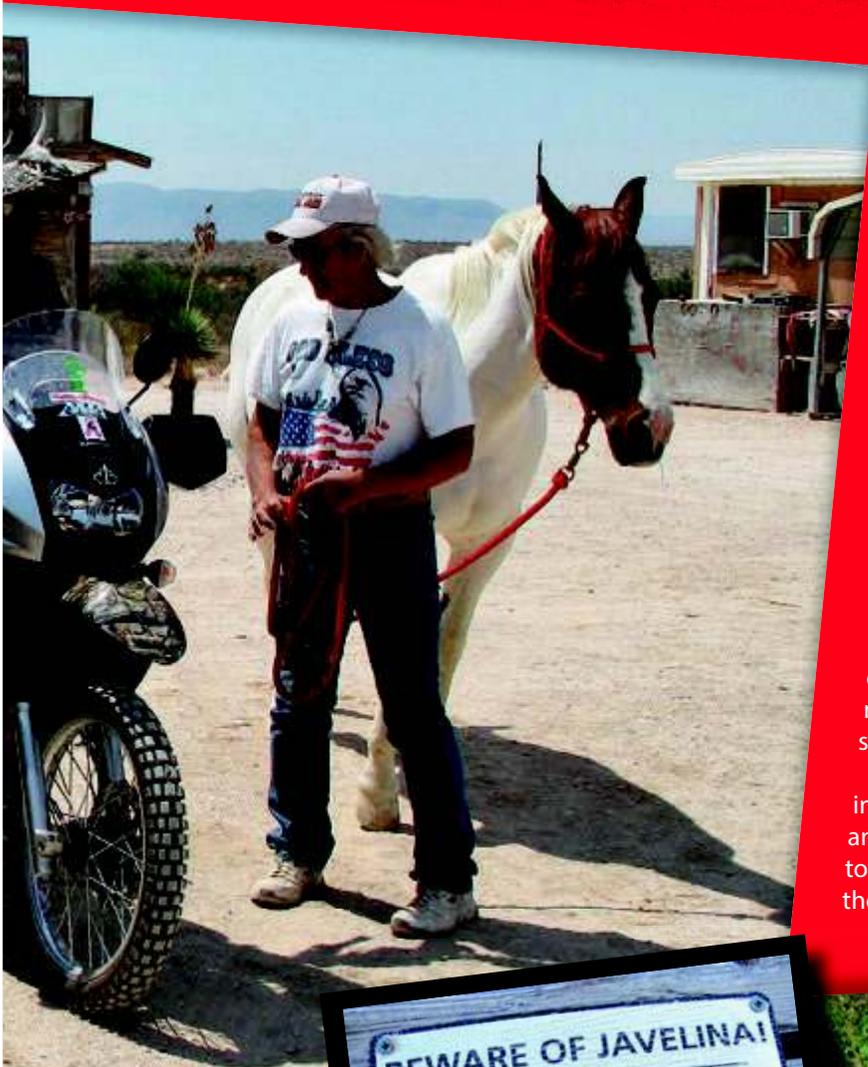
Sure enough, Sydney's ankle was broken and it was the end of the trip for her. She'd catch a train back to Arizona and pick up her bike in a few months after she'd healed. It was sad to say goodbye. Very few times in our lives did we manage a dual-sport adventure just with gal pals, and it was a shame to have it end in injury.

Carolyn and I headed back into Big Bend, but without Sydney it wasn't the same. After a couple of days we decided to head to Carolyn's place south of Waco, and do some day riding from there.

After we rolled into Amistad Reservoir late in the afternoon, we strategically pitched our tents at the water's edge. But our seemingly idyllic location turned out to be the local party spot, and around 2:00 a.m. a group of drunken locals arrived at a nearby boat launch, hollering and partying, with music blaring from their pickup. Unfortunately, they also spied the bikes.

Our bikes had drawn a lot of attention during the trip, Carolyn's KLR because of its unique camouflage wrap, and mine because it was a lesser-known brand. This was true even in the middle of the night. We huddled frightened in our tents without saying a word, listening to the revelers' footsteps as they walked around the bikes. We hoped that, because we were riding large enduros, the partiers would assume we were men and keep a more respectful distance. Sure enough, they eventually stumbled back to their pickup and drove off. As the country music receded into the distance the next thing we heard was even scarier—a lone set of footsteps walking around our bikes.

I peeked out of my tent and saw a dark silhouette standing between the machines. Did they pretend to drive off and leave someone behind? Were they just pretending to leave and then were going to circle back on foot? I laid there petrified long after all the sounds were gone, too



Carolyn exercises her inner cowgirl to clear our camp site.



frightened to whisper to Carolyn, "Did you hear that?" I didn't want to add a woman's voice to the mix of the night's events.

The next morning we discovered that the lone footsteps belonged to a vacationing Texas Ranger on leave. He was camped down the lake and had heard the partiers come to our site. He also knew we were women camping alone, and had come by to see if we were all right. God Bless Texas.

We packed up early and after a long day's ride through Hill Country we were no longer keen on weekend remote camping in Texas. Instead, Carolyn led us to her friend Norm's ranch. He let us set up our tents in the "back forty" but was surprised we didn't ask to sleep inside, I guess we'd just been too exhausted to think of it.

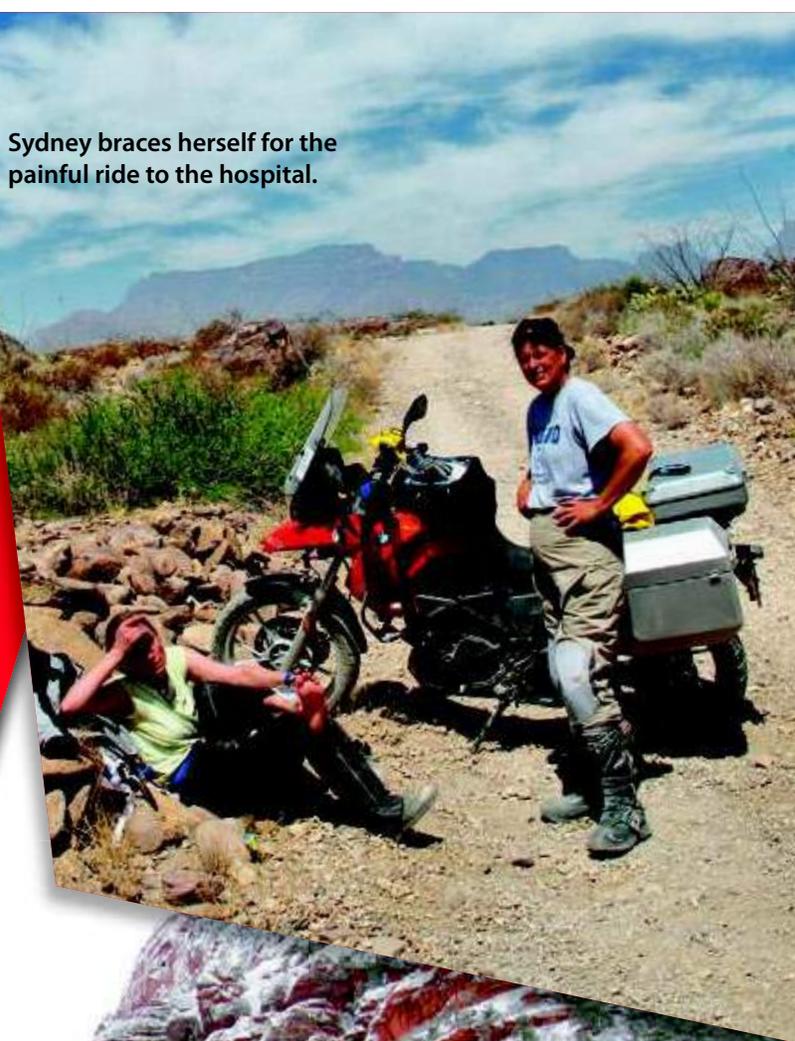
The next morning Norm treated us to a cowboy breakfast of home-cooked biscuits and bacon. He proudly showed off his prized bull, tame to him, and gave us a tour of the old homestead—the smokehouse, butchery and bunk-houses. Carolyn had been there before, but for me it was a privileged view into true Texas cattle ranching.

We said goodbye to Norm and made it back to Carolyn's ranch by late afternoon. There were lots of chores to be done, so we pitched right in. Carolyn keeps a combination of farm critters and rescued camels along with other exotic animals, and her husband was more than happy to have our help, so I stayed a few days before it was time for farewells.

After a taste of Texas, with all of its harshness, beauty and unique brand of hospitality, it was difficult to head home. Good thing it's such a big state; there is plenty more to explore.

Postscript: Sydney's broken ankle healed just fine. True to her adventurous spirit, she quit her job two years later and rode her motorcycle for five and a half months around the United States. Alisa and Carolyn continue to meet in interesting places and ride together, and have just registered for the 2015 all-female *Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles* (*Gazelle Rally*) in Morocco. They will be the first American competitors on motorcycles in the 25 year history of the rally. **ADV**

Sydney braces herself for the painful ride to the hospital.



Loaded up and headed south to warmer climes.