

## Klineburger Brothers



### **The Klineburger Brothers and the High Lonesome Ranch**

In 1954 three Klineburger brothers -- Gene (b.1920), Bert (b.1926), and Chris (b.1927) -- bought the Jonas Brothers taxidermy studio in Seattle and by the early 1960s turned it into one of the largest taxidermist studios in the world. But their business was much more than taxidermy. The brothers went on to establish their own fur manufacturing company, and introduced fur parkas to the world. In 1962 they established Klineburger Brothers Worldwide Travel, and through it booked hunting trips worldwide. In 1960 Chris established the High Lonesome Ranch on 50 acres on the Sammamish Plateau in present-day Sammamish, where he recreated an old west frontier town and entertained many of his clients, which included dignitaries from all over the world, for the next several decades. This account, prepared by Sammamish Heritage Society historian Phil Dougherty, is based on two interviews of Chris Klineburger in September 2007, and is reprinted with the kind permission of the Sammamish Heritage Society.



## Beginnings

The Klineburger brothers grew up in Bisbee, Arizona and served in the military during and immediately after World War II. They had been interested in hunting and taxidermy since they were children, and when their military service ended, knew what direction they wanted to go with their lives: nature, hunting, and taxidermy. In the late 1940s Bert came to Seattle to serve an apprenticeship under Guy Jonas of Jonas Brothers in Seattle, and in 1951, Chris came to Seattle and joined Bert at Jonas Brothers.



In the early 1950s Jonas Brothers was already well established in the taxidermy field, having operated in Seattle since 1939 and in Denver for

some years before that. In 1954 Gene joined Bert and Chris in Seattle and in July 1954 they bought the Jonas Brothers operation. The business maintained the Jonas name until the mid-1970s, when the Klineburger brothers changed the name to Klineburger Taxidermy.



During the 1950s the brothers opened stores and receiving stations in Anchorage and Fairbanks and opened one in 1960 in Nome. By the early 1960s, the brothers were also operating in three locations in northern and western Canada (including a receiving station in Whitehorse, Yukon). The brothers also participated in hunts during this time and quickly learned the prime hunting areas; they also worked as a referral service for guides and outfitters worldwide, as well as for hunters interested in a specific hunt.

By the early 1960s the company had become one of the world's leading taxidermy studios. But their work was far from limited to just taxidermy. Beginning in the early 1960s the brothers, especially Chris, branched out in a variety of ventures that left a worldwide impact.



## Going Global

In the early 1960s the brothers began expanding their operations. With the arrival of jet travel about that time, it was now more practical to travel overseas, especially to Africa. Their first big break came in 1960 when they were approached by a representative of the Ugandan government. The Ugandans wanted to develop their own safari operations once they received independence from Great Britain, primarily because they realized the money-making potential in having their own operations as opposed to someone coming in from another nation, fully outfitted for a hunt, and spending little or nothing in their country. When Uganda gained its independence in 1962, the Klineburgers established Jonas Brothers of Africa, and opened a taxidermy studio in Kampala, Uganda. At the same time the brothers packaged their first African safari. In 1962, \$2,350 got you round trip jet travel from New York to Uganda and 21 days of hunting in three different pre-established safari camps.

This development led the brothers to begin representing clients from around the world. They recognized the potential for further growth in developing sportsman wildlife programs which would bring in a bigger volume of hunters, and later, in developing conservation programs to properly manage the hunts. They established Klineburger Brothers Worldwide Travel and referred guides to various hunters worldwide, depending on the type of animal being hunted. "Eventually we knew every outfitter worldwide," said Chris Klineburger.



From Uganda the Klineburgers branched out and began handling bookings for hunts worldwide -- initially in Africa, India, South America, and the South Pacific, which were the few places outside North America where hunting was then open to sportsmen. But later in the 1960s other countries, such as Iran and Mongolia, began to open their doors to hunters. This trend continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with even more countries worldwide allowing hunting. The Klineburgers spent considerable time in Asia and Africa from the mid-1960s through the early 1990s developing various programs, referring clients, and participating in numerous hunts themselves. Chris remarked that he tended to spend more time in Asia, while Bert favored handling the company's operations in Africa. The Klineburgers sold Klineburger Brothers Worldwide Travel in 1991.



All of the Klineburgers were avid hunters, and hunted most of the big game animals in their day. Some of these included the "big four" in Africa: lion, leopard, buffalo and elephant. They also hunted sheep, bear, moose, tiger, and the Lord Derby Eland, the world's largest antelope. But one of their most exciting hunting trips came in the late 1960s when Chris and Bert traveled to Afghanistan to hunt for a Marco Polo sheep. These sheep, named after the explorer Marco Polo, are known for their long, spiral-shaped horns that can exceed six feet in length. These sheep are found only in the Pamir Mountains in the border region of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan. They traveled -- first by jeep, then by horse, then by yak -- over a 17,000-foot high mountain pass in this adventure. But the trip was successful, and they got their Marco Polo.

The brothers acquired a wide array of unique ornaments and tools from around the world during their travels, including a bracelet made from an elephant's tail and a flyswatter made from a yak's tail. Chris also acquired Eskimo harpoons and spear points, and an impressive knife and sword collection of weapons from around the world.



But the Klineburgers were not all about hunting. When they traveled they carried with them a keen interest not only of the game to be hunted, but also of the history and culture of the country they were operating in. This helped the brothers set up quality hunting programs in these countries,

while leaving as little of a footprint as possible for future generations of hunters and travelers.

Meanwhile, there was still the taxidermy studio in Seattle. One of the Klineburgers' more well-known jobs came in 1968 when they preserved Bobo the Gorilla after he passed away at the Woodland Park Zoo. The brothers maintained their studio in several locations on Capitol Hill between 1954 and 1982; in 1982 they moved to a location on First Avenue South, just south of South Spokane Street. Many of their customers remember the large bear, rearing up on its hind paws, in front of their store. Bert left the company in 1973 to run a safari business in Africa (he is still booking safaris and guiding the occasional tour to Tanzania and Argentina today) and Gene retired in 1982. But Chris, his wife Colleene (1940-2002) and son Kent (b.1961) continued to run Klineburger Taxidermy before closing it on November 29, 1996.



Kent Klineburger is still doing business today (2007) as Klineburger Enterprises. He specializes in trophy room restoration, wildlife appraisals for insurance and donation purposes, and works with people and museums with regard to trophy donations to museums.

### The High Lonesome Ranch

But there was another component to the Klineburger operation that will resonate directly with many of Seattle's Eastsiders -- Chris Klineburger's High Lonesome Ranch. When I asked Klineburger how he came up with the name High Lonesome Ranch, he answered, "I dreamt it." In 1960 he purchased 50 acres on the Sammamish Plateau along and just east of 244th Avenue NE, about a quarter mile south of NE 8th Street, paying \$55,000 for one 44 acre parcel and about \$10,000 for another six acre parcel on Allen Lake. Access to the property was south on 244th Avenue NE from NE 8th Street in what was then unincorporated Redmond. He moved to the property in October 1960, and within a year or so built a "frontier town" for the purpose of providing people with an authentic Western experience. "Come



visit and see the recreation of old western atmosphere and hospitality” reads a circa 1961 flyer for the High Lonesome Ranch.



Frontier Town, as it was called, consisted of a long, low pine building that was subdivided into several smaller units. There was the Lavender Horse Saloon, a “hotel” (more accurately described as a bunkhouse), a working blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and a feed house. The ranch was open year round, though late spring through early fall saw the most activity there.

The Lavender Horse Saloon hosted numerous events in its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. There were school parties there, as well as church parties and weddings; the Seattle Sounders soccer team held a celebration there after one season. Fledging bands also tried out in the saloon. Some of the saloon’s customers -- usually the more genuine westerners (such as Roy Rogers) -- had their own “running iron” (branding iron) which they used to make the mark on the saloon’s wall.



Chris Klineburger also hosted many of his clients at the ranch. Roy Rogers came often (and maintained a close friendship with the Klineburgers until his death in 1998), astronaut Wally Schirra visited, as did Texas politician John Connally. But the ranch attracted worldwide guests as well, such as Prince Abdorreza Pahlavi of Iran and Afghan Sultan Mahmud Ghazi. Guests from the Soviet Union and China were also entertained at the ranch.

The ranch also had a smokehouse and a meat processing area in the lower barn where meats were prepared. Klineburger kept exotic animals (various types of rare deer, sheep, and llamas) on the ranch and these provided much of the source of the meat, although occasionally a bear ham or

sausage was prepared. He sold most of the meat to area restaurants, particularly Rosellini's Other Place in downtown Seattle.

### The High Lonesome Riders



The ranch provided horse rentals to the public, and in February 1965 Chris Klineburger took it a step further and established the High Lonesome Riders club. The purpose of the club was to develop trails and riding facilities in the area between Redmond and Issaquah east of Lake Sammamish -- "At that time you could go from our house south to Beaver Lake and never see another house," he remarked -- and to provide group and family activities such as trail rides and pack trips. Membership was open to all, and the club grew rapidly; a year after its inception the club boasted 99 paid members and 120 horses.

The High Lonesome Riders participated in drills in the Redmond Bicycle Derby for a number of years and participated in horse racing contests (such as jumping and barrel racing) with other local horse riding clubs. The club put on barn dances for its members (seating was provided by hay bales). The club also had "Progressive Dinner" rides. Club members would mount their horses and ride to one house for h'orduerves, a second house for salad, a third house for the main course, and one last house for dessert.

But the High Lonesome Riders were particularly known for putting on some long, challenging rides and campouts, and not just on the Sammamish Plateau. During Memorial Day Weekend 1965, 15 club members participated in a ride and campout east of the Cascades, along the Columbia River near Vantage. (There were) "only a few major incidents," commented the club's June 1965 newsletter in recounting the trip. "Chris had his toe stepped on,

Pam's horse dumped her in the swimming hole, [and] the cattle ate the wiring off of the stock trucks."

The ranch continued to host the High Lonesome Riders into the 1970s, but by the late 1970s Chris's business ventures prevented him from spending as much time on the club. By this time, Colleene had been seriously injured in a fall from a horse and this affected her ability to handle the numerous activities on the ranch. The Klineburgers phased out of the High Lonesome Riders, which moved to another location in Redmond in the late 1970s and seems to have disbanded soon after.

The staff at the ranch was small -- probably fewer than 10 employees, and that included Chris's wife Colleene and, when he became old enough, son Kent. Chris maintained the ranch through the 1960s and 1970s, but as his taxidermy business continued to expand and he traveled more and more worldwide to set up hunting operations and to hunt, he had less time for the ranch. Meanwhile, Collenne's horse-riding injury had also slowed her down. Chris also grew frustrated with customer thefts at the ranch, such as the barstools from the saloon.

#### Later Days



About 1980 the Klineburgers subleased Frontier Town and let others run it, but the problems continued. People kept pilfering from the saloon; the crowds grew ever larger, and, by the mid-1980s, development on the

Plateau was accelerating rapidly. "It wiped out the solitude, which was the whole point of the ranch," observed Chris. By the late 1980s the Lavender Horse Saloon was closed. During the 1990s Lori's Sammamish Stables leased Frontier Town and offered horse rentals to the public before closing its operations in the late 1990s.

The Klineburgers lived on the ranch until March 2000. They sold the ranch "as is," with Frontier Town still intact. Although there was talk of preserving Frontier Town, it was instead quickly torn down as was the Klineburger ranch home and other structures on the ranch. New housing was quickly built on the site and today no trace remains of Frontier Town or the High Lonesome Ranch in Sammamish.

But what a journey it's been. Says Chris Klineburger: "The essence of life is discovering what is on the other side of the mountain. . . [but] upon reaching the destination, we realize that there is no end. Distant mountains lie before us; it is time to meditate and give thanks."

Phil Dougherty  
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Sources: Phil Dougherty interview of Chris Klineburger, September 1 and 3, 2007, North Bend, Washington; Chris Klineburger archives.