

WEST | WYOMING

Horsing Around

History meets the Wild West at the 120th Cheyenne Frontier Days

BY DIANA LAMBDIN MEYER



One sure way to generate some unwanted attention at a rodeo is to cheer for the cows.

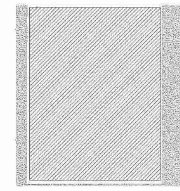
Seriously, who doesn't love the clueless antics of baby cows

when pitted against the highly skilled ropers and riders who make up America's professional rodeo circuit? The cowboys may be cute, but the cows won my heart.

That was my counterintuitive entry into the world of profes-

sional rodeo, at the so-called Daddy of 'em All: Cheyenne Frontier Days in Wyoming, the largest outdoor rodeo in North America.

And this year, the big Daddy stages its 120th annual event. The festival evolved from »



CHEYENNE FRONTIER DAYS

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INSIDE TIP

For the best seats in the grandstand, purchase tickets on the east side/ lower level, preferably between sections 69 and 134. These are just above the bucking chutes and make a great location for photos — as well as a scarier look at what the cowboys are up against.

informal competitions among Wyoming's cowboys, who in their off-hours liked to see who could stay on a bucking bronco the longest for bragging rights.

Today, the festival, which takes place from July 22-31, promises \$1 million in cash and prizes to professional cowpokes.

Some 1,500 contestants from the top eight rodeos in North America participate in five events: bareback riding, bronc riding, bull riding, barrel racing and steer wrestling.

Social-media-savvy attendees may take part, as well. Two big screens in the grandstand

Two dancers from the Little Sun Drum and Dance Group perform the men's Fancy Feather dance.

feature pictures of the participating cowboys and livestock. Fans may then text what cowboy they want to ride what bull, or whatever else is proposed.

But Cheyenne Frontier Days has also become more than just ropin' and ridin'. More than 250,000 people caught up in this western celebration descend on the state capital for a number of parades, concerts, chuckwagon suppers, lots of barbeque, art shows and sales and my favorite — the Indian Village.

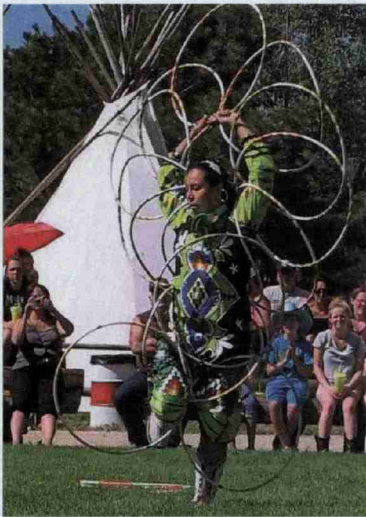
That's where I escaped to on a recent visit, to that western world brought to life, after I »



Thousands of expert rodeo riders compete during Cheyenne Frontier Days, attended each year by more than 250,000 people.

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— JASMINE PICKNER-BELL, CROW CREEK DAKOTA SIOUX

realized that my cheers for the cows during the cutting and roping competitions were not appreciated by those seated around me.

During the festivities, members of the Northern Arapahoe, Eastern Shoshone and Dakota Sioux tribes erect ancestral structures on the grounds and live on the site, much as they did in 1915 when members of the Arapahoe tribe first came to the rodeo. During their stay, they create beautiful handmade pottery, jewelry, drums and more. You can talk to members of the tribe and learn the historical significance of each color, fiber and symbol in their work.

Throughout the day, these Native Americans, as well as guests from other tribes, share stories, music and dance in an intimate outdoor circle, a tradition passed down amongst the tribes for centuries.

I was most intrigued by the Little Sun Drum and Dance Group, based out of the Wind River Reservation in central Wyoming. Even the smallest of toddlers wearing colorful tribal dress moved in harmony

with the drum and their elders in a ceremony that, although unfamiliar to me, still created a spiritual and emotional connection.

Most amazing of all the dancers was Jasmine Pickner-Bell, a Crow Creek Dakota Sioux and one of the few female hoop dancers in the world. Wearing a leather dress weighted with more than 10 pounds of beads and bells, and with her husband providing the heartbeat rhythm on a drum, Pickner-Bell dances while creating the most incredible designs out of a collection of hoops, each reflecting a core aspect of life as defined by her people.

“Hoop dancing is part of the storytelling in my culture, which is one reason I do it,” says Pickner-Bell. “But I also love the physical challenge and the ability to show that women can tell this story.”


Watching her dance, and talking to her for a few minutes after the show, was the highlight of my days at the Cheyenne Frontier Days rodeo.

That, and a few cows outsmarting the cowboys. ●

MAKE A TRIP OF IT




▲ The Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo takes place from July 22-31. Many activities, such as the **Indian Village**, are free to the public. To see the entire schedule and find guidance on transportation and parking, visit cfdrodeo.com. If you want to go beyond the Wild West, try these tips:

 Open from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m., the historic **Luxury Diner** provides hearty breakfasts and great coffee in a building that was converted from an old train car. 1401 W. Lincolnway; 307-638-8971; facebook.com/luxurydiner

 **The Plains Hotel**, a National Historic Landmark opened in 1911, is almost as old as the rodeo itself. Spectacular architecture and a Mission-style art-panel ceiling in the lobby add to the ambiance. Its 131 guest rooms feature Western artwork from Wyoming artists. 1600 Central Ave.; 307-638-3311; theplainshotel.com



 The rodeo also hosts major musical artists for all tastes, from up-and-comers like Grammy-nominated country singer Sam Hunt and **Maddie & Tae** of *Girl in a Country Song* fame, to rockers Fall Out Boy and Kiss, to country headliners Kenny Chesney and Florida Georgia Line. The tickets are reasonable — the most expensive seats are \$69 — and can be purchased on the festival's website. cfdrodeo.com/tickets

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