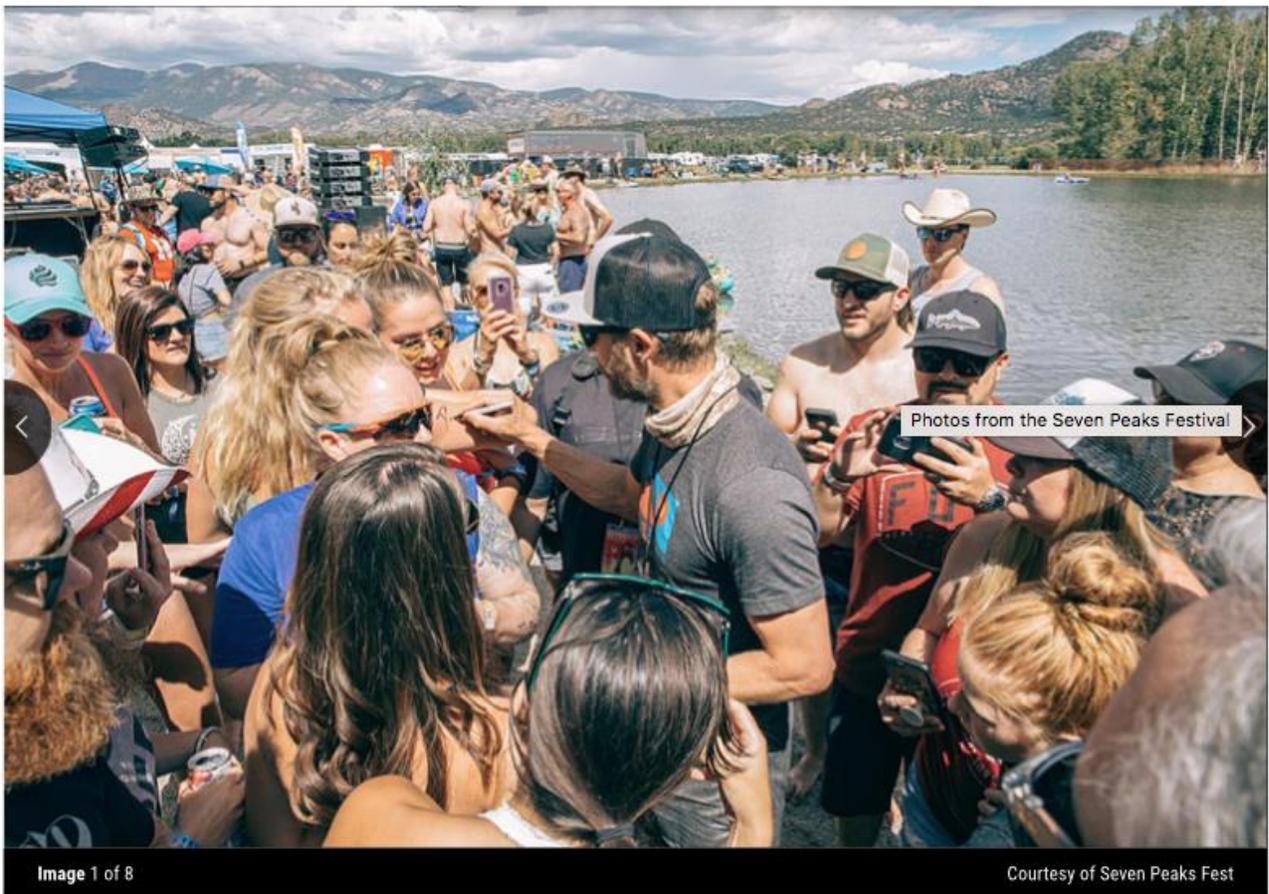


TASTE OF COUNTRY

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7 THINGS WE LEARNED AT DIERKS BENTLEY'S SEVEN PEAKS FESTIVAL

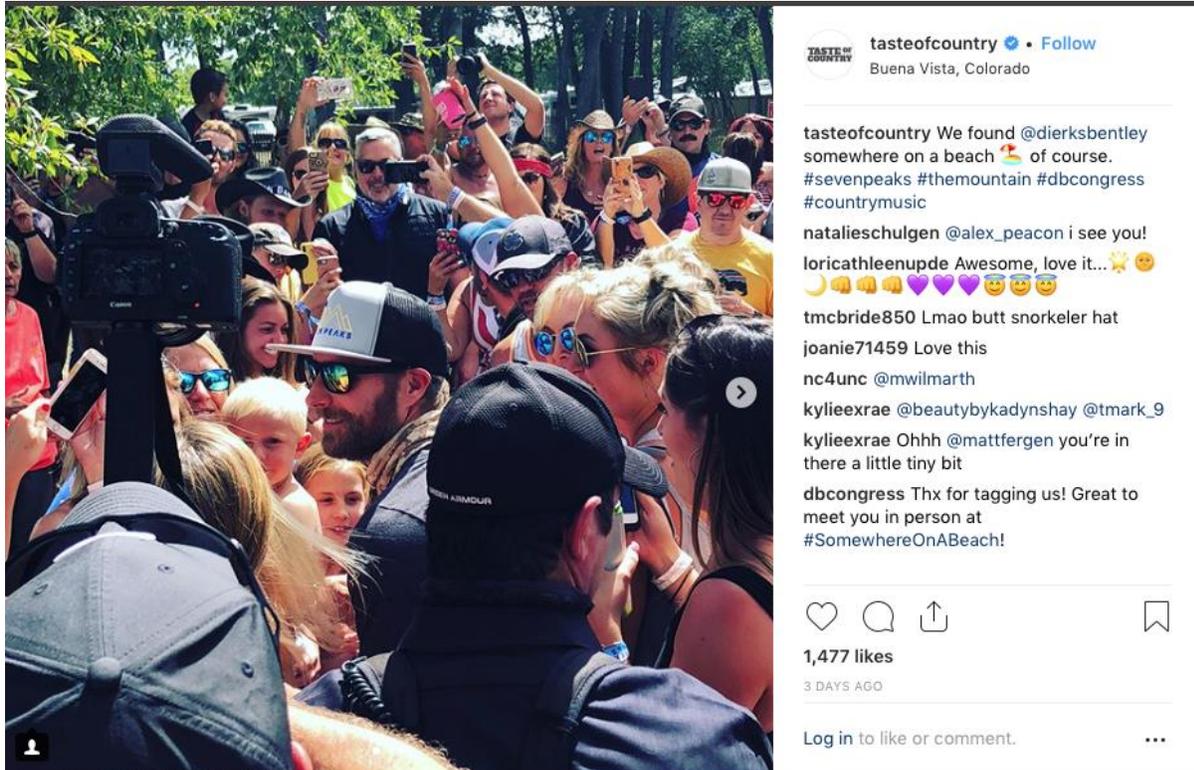


Early at the inaugural Seven Peaks Festival, it seemed like [Dierks Bentley](#) was forever on standby, prepared to be beckoned by the likes of [Clint Black](#) and more. Throughout the three-day camping, country music and bluegrass festival in Buena Vista, Colo., it became clear the courtesy extended well beyond the stage.

Bentley immersed himself in the experience, jumping on stage to join his idols (Black), contemporaries ([Brothers Osborne](#), [Elle King](#)) and local favorites (Rapidgrass) on either of the two stages. He played guitar tech for the [Cadillac Three](#), sang traditionals with the Del McCoury

Band and closed two of the three nights — once as Doug Douglason, lead singer of Hot Country Knights, a dysfunctional '90s cover band who proudly claim they're third or fourth best in the state on a good night.

He was there at the gate to greet the first fans, a regular bolt of lightning throughout the campground and an enthusiastic supporter of any and all bad behavior at an area known as Somewhere on a Beach, a glorified pond that buzzed like Huntington Beach on Saturday afternoon.



[Miranda Lambert](#), [Lucie Silvas](#), [Dan + Shay](#), Kiefer Sutherland and Sam Bush were among the artists who soaked up the scenery and a few craft beers over Labor Day weekend. Bentley tells Taste of Country that the dream was inspired by DelFest (Del McCoury's festival in Maryland) and Telluride, where Bush is known as "King."

Does this make Bentley the King of Seven Peaks? He's far too humble to make that claim, but it's clear his metric for success is not dollars earned or tickets sold, but in how many years he can repeat the experience.

Taste of Country joined Bentley and many thousands of country and bluegrass fans at 8,000-foot above sea level to watch nearly 30 artists take two stages tucked between fourteeners — Colorado-speak for 14,000-foot mountains. At times, the experience was literally breathtaking, but not to let a detail get missed, Bentley and his team at Live Nation made sure there was an oxygen bar with the concessions. A few things we learned:

1. If you build it with heart, they will come.

The dream was years in the making. The venue wasn't easy to get to. The weather was so-so at best. But fans from 49 states came to camp and party, most eager to see the organizer above all others. An official tally wasn't immediately available, but Saturday and Sunday night crowds swelled well beyond the sound board. They were loud, but not rowdy. In fact, there were a surprising number of kids enjoying the weekend.

When Bentley escaped to the beach on Saturday, he took 45 minutes to shake hands and take photos with anyone who wanted one. Most said "Thank you," not for the opportunity to meet him, but for building a festival they could make their own.

2. Jaren Johnston is one heck of a guitar player!

The Cadillac Three singer has long been known as an explosive frontman and sharp-tongued narrator, but those who watched the three-piece on Saturday found one of very few men in Nashville capable of playing rhythm and lead guitar while firing technical lyrics about love, sex, heartbreak and Southern culture. As a guitarist, his soloing style drives the gutsy rock arrangements — the raw adrenaline of the performance never slumps when he backs off the microphone to walk his guitar up the catwalk. He's an animal onstage, and the group's show should be on every country fan's bucket list.



3. Elle King could "go country" if she wanted to.

Beyond her Manuel-esque getup, King delivers honest country lyrics across pop and rock-friendly guitar licks and arrangements. Honest is a key word here. Without a doubt she'd be viewed as *too* honest (many of her new songs were beyond eyebrow-raising), and her bad girl

ways would be honey to tabloid flies. The Seven Peaks crowd embraced her like she grew up there, however. She is managed by the same person as Bentley.

4. Dierks Bentley has powerful friends.

For many, the highlight of Bentley's nearly two-hour long set on Sunday night was Trombone Shorty, who surprised the audience to perform "Mardi Gras," a song they cut together for Bentley's *Black* album. Shorty stuck around to jam with King and the Travelin' McCourys, and lawdy can that man *blow*. Long staccato notes punctuated by clean riffs and rhythms and some showmanship left the crowd — and Bentley — wondering how he didn't pass out at that altitude.



Bentley said he asked his friends to play the first-ever Seven Peaks Fest, and that may be exactly what happened. Few who took the stage failed to recall a memory with him, and everyone showed tremendous gratitude for being included. We got the sense several of the artists would have shown up for free.

5. Lanco have way more fans than anyone realizes.

Early Sunday rain kept many campers in their tents through early sets by Rivergrass and Del McCoury, but the fans crowded the stage to sing with [Lanco](#). The CMA-nominated group have one-and-a-half hit singles and are just starting to visit all the national hotspots. A tepid turnout would have been forgivable, but word of their live show (which included crowd-surfing by vocalist Brandon Lancaster) has clearly spread. "Greatest Love Story" was the first of many Sunday singalongs.

6. John Osborne's harmonies are as important as his guitar work.

This is a little meta, but a case could be made that John Osborne's harmonies are as important to Brothers Osborne as his guitar skills. Singer TJ Osborne's Sequoia-strong timbre is dynamic and rich, but it's brother John who softens the duo's sound without weakening it. Blood harmonies were on full display throughout their hour-long set, which was highlighted by this unexpected Dixie Chicks cover:

Taste of Country @TasteOfCountry · Sep 1
· @brothersosborne singing @dixiechicks "Goodbye Earl" is a thing and it's amazing! #SevenPeaksFest



0:09 4,067 views

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7. Dierks Bentley isn't going to die in Nashville.

Taste of Country talked to Bentley at length about his love of Colorado and if the Seven Peaks Festival is part of building his legacy. The full interview is coming this week, but while the 42-year-old wouldn't agree to a timeline for his relocation, he admits it's on his mind. He emphatically promises that he won't die in Nashville.