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**Photographs Available Upon Request**

**Rescue a Piece of U.S. History – Back Country Horsemen of America Helps**  
by Sarah Wynne Jackson

In today's world of high technology and urban development, our nation is experiencing a new appreciation for history and relics of the past. Back Country Horsemen of America has always sought to preserve the historic tradition of using pack and saddle stock in America's wilderness lands.

The Shasta Trinity Unit of Backcountry Horsemen of California, a BCHA member organization, recently combined their love for packing with the rescue of a bit of history from the California gold mining days. They joined up with a number of other organizations to retrieve a 100-year-old portable sawmill from the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area in northern California's Shasta Trinity National Forest.

**This Sawmill's Story**

In the early 1900s, "portable" mills were used to make the lumber needed to construct flumes to bring water to the gold placer mines. This mill was manufactured by the American Saw Mill Machinery Company founded in 1903 in Hackettstown, New Jersey.

The late Richard S. Holland of the town of Denny, California, was a millwright himself and purchased the mill around 1965, but never removed it from its place in the backcountry. After his death in 2004, his children decided to donate it to the Trinity County Historical Society, for which Holland's daughter, Gay Berrien, serves on the board of directors.

After being removed from the wilderness piece by piece on the sturdy backs of pack mules, this souvenir of a bygone era is now in the care of the Jake Jackson Museum in Weaverville, California, where there are plans to reassemble and restore the equipment to working order.

**Perseverance Pays Off**

The project of rescuing the artifact began five years ago. The U.S. Forest Service does not typically allow historic objects to be removed from public lands under their management. Holland's family worked with an attorney to prove its claim to the sawmill as private property.

Former Historical Society President Rich Lorenz asked the Forest Service for permission to move it out of the wilderness, and former Weaverville District Ranger Joyce Andersen, now retired, agreed to pursue the request. In 2005, a forest archaeologist evaluated the sawmill onsite and completed a survey report. After several meetings, the Forest Service granted permission in 2007.

### **Coming Together to Accomplish a Common Goal**

The old sawmill was recovered from the National Forest the same way it was brought in – on the backs of strong men and surefooted mules. Backcountry Horsemen of California veterans Alan Hill, and Lyle and Laurie Charter worked alongside Forest Service packer Larry McLean, and Dick and Scott Morris. They all used their countless years of experience to ensure each pack animal carried a balanced and reasonable load.

Other volunteers hiked in to the site to assist in weighing the various parts and pieces of the sawmill, and to lift the heavy, awkward loads onto the pack stock. Some folks carried out 100-pound backpacks and then returned for a second load, traveling 16 miles in one day. Historical Society President Rod Plew lent a hand, as well as the Weaverville Boy Scout Troop 15 with scoutmaster Ed Leiper, and members of the Junction City fire engine crew.

### **Executing the Mission**

The first salvage trip took place in November, 2007. Hikers and packers brought out about 400 pounds of metal parts. They also weighed and sorted the rest of the sawmill for a return trip that was expected to occur shortly. But a harsh winter made the rugged trail impassable, then the trails were closed to normal use throughout the summer of 2008 due to wildfires.

In late May and early June of this year, the dedicated crew was finally able to complete their task. Two more trips of numerous volunteers, including hikers with heavy backpacks and two pack strings of mules, got the rest of the sawmill out of the wilderness. In all, over 1,800 pounds of artifacts were retrieved.

All the pieces of the sawmill are now safely stored at the museum. The next phase of the project is to reassemble and either locate or manufacture missing parts, most notably the circular saw blade. They aim to have the working sawmill on display by the end of October.

### **Pack Stock is Irreplaceable**

The job of retrieving the sawmill was not an easy one, requiring hard labor, superior horsemanship and packing skills, and seasoned pack animals that know the ropes. With heavy and unwieldy loads, rough terrain, trails that traced the top edges of high vertical drops, and too many precarious moments, anything could have gone wrong.

It is to the crew's credit that there was only one mishap, and a minor one at that. The beloved and reliable mule Molly was fully loaded at the mill site. Catching her hind hooves in a tree root, she

stumbled and fell. After waiting patiently to be unloaded, she stood up uninjured and continued on with her work.

This historic project is one example of the many reasons that pack stock will never become obsolete. These stout mules each carried loads of well over 225 pounds. The heaviest single piece was a massive flywheel weighing nearly 200 pounds. The mule's side packs were filled with wood shavings to provide a bed for the wheel to rest on. The pack stock managed these heavy, cumbersome loads over land that no motorized vehicle could negotiate.

### **Protecting the Past**

Back Country Horsemen of America is proud to be involved in preserving our country's rich historical heritage. They commend the Shasta Trinity Unit of Backcountry Horsemen of California and every other group and individual involved with this historic project for their hard work, commitment, and determination to do the right thing.

The past is a precious thing that can never be reclaimed once it's gone. As the years go by, devoting our time, effort, and resources to valuable ventures such as this proves to be more than worthwhile.

### **About Back Country Horsemen of America**

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes in regards to the use of horses and stock in the wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com), call 888-893-5161, or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367. The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands!

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