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**Preserve American History the Back Country Horsemen of America Way**  
By Sarah Wynne Jackson

One of Back Country Horsemen of America's major purposes is to honor our nation's equestrian heritage by using wilderness trails actively and wisely as our ancestors did. Pack horses and saddle stock were critical to the settlement and independence of the United States.

**A Brief History Lesson**

In colonial America, European traders depended on pack horses to carry their goods to Native Americans in remote wildernesses, and then to take hides and other Native American products back to colonial market centers. Prior to the 18th century, pack horse trains of over one hundred horses were not unusual. Native Americans also used pack animals when traveling from place to place.

Our nation expanded west on the backs of pack and saddle stock. They were used extensively by surveyors, explorers, fur trappers, and gold prospectors, who covered great distances and relied heavily on their horses and mules for survival. In respect to those hardy horses, many historic trails are still labeled "pack trail" on U.S. Geological Survey maps.

During the Revolutionary War, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, and other conflicts, the United States military needed horses to transport soldiers, guns, ammunition, rations, and supplies to the front lines of battle. They often had to cross difficult terrain, where the absence of roads prevented the use of horse-drawn vehicles, making pack animals essential.

Today, pack horses and saddle stock still play a vital role in the maintenance and enjoyment of America's wilderness and historic trails. The U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service utilize horses and mules to carry materials up mountain trails for the construction of resting lodges for hikers, bridges for river crossings, and for the upkeep of multi-use trails. Pack and saddle stock are particularly useful in areas of challenging terrain where motor vehicles are impractical and in wilderness areas where the use of mechanical equipment is not allowed.

Back Country Horsemen of America cherishes the role of horses and mules in making our country what it is today. Keeping trails open for equestrian use is one way to honor

and value that heritage. Many BCHA members regularly travel in the wilderness with pack and saddle stock, practicing the tradition of our ancestors.

### **Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail**

Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee, a BCHA organization, recently had the opportunity to help preserve history. They joined up with nearly 100 other organizations to support the National Park Service Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail Project. Participating entities include other trail user groups (such as Brushy Mountain Cyclists Club and American Hiking Society), historical societies (like Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and Daughters of the American Revolution), and various town, county, and state groups.

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVHT) is part of the U.S. National Trails System and passes through Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. It follows the Revolutionary War route of Patriot militia men from Abingdon, Virginia, to the site of the Battle of Kings Mountain, now within Kings Mountain National Military Park near Blacksburg, South Carolina.

The Battle of Kings Mountain took place October 07, 1780, and was an important Patriot victory in the Southern campaign of the Revolutionary War. Frontier militia loyal to the United States overwhelmed the British loyalist American militia. This battle is generally accepted as the turning point of the Revolutionary War.

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail has three major river crossings and ascends over the steep Great Smoky Mountains ridge line of Tennessee and North Carolina. It consists of a 330-mile corridor, including a 70-mile branch from Elkin, North Carolina, that joins the main route at Morganton, North Carolina.

However, only a portion of the route has been preserved. At this time, 70 miles of OVHT are officially developed for public use and the remaining sections continue to be improved for use. Much of the old OVHT route crosses private property and other portions are covered in asphalt. A parallel commemorative motor route travels along state highways and, in some stretches, actually travels over the old historic roadway.

### **Preserving the Past**

Paul Carson, Superintendent of the National Park Service Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail Project, was aware of the dedication and trail building skills of Back Country Horsemen members. He recently attended a Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee membership meeting to ask for their assistance in restoring the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail to safe standards for public use.

Carson pointed out that horses played a major role in transporting men and supplies to the battle and Carson supports that all or part of the trails will be designated for equine use. The goal of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail Project is to preserve the

entire 330 miles of trails. Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee is happy to put their hands to this project that would not only provide miles of new riding opportunities, but also the chance to experience history.

The American Revolution in the South was vital to our country winning independence, and pack and saddle stock had a major part to play in that victory. Back Country Horsemen of America as well as Back Country Horsemen of East Tennessee hope the Trail provides you the opportunity for a greater understanding and appreciation of this era in our nation's history.

### **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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