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**Back Country Horsemen of America
Announces 2012 Legacy Award Winner
by Sarah Wynne Jackson**

Back Country Horsemen of America leads the nationwide effort to preserve trails for horse use, not only for today's equestrians, but also for tomorrow's. They seek to leave an inheritance to future generations; a legacy of responsible enjoyment of America's wild lands the way our forefathers did: by horseback.

With that goal in mind, Back Country Horsemen of America selects an individual member each year whose numerous contributions, made over many years of dedicated membership, exemplify their mission and values. In 2012, BCHA chose Val B. Johnson of the Salmon River Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Idaho.

There From the Start

Val was an organizing founder of Salmon River Back Country Horsemen in Idaho in 1978, the fourth group in the original BCH organization, and the first outside of Montana. Val joined the presidents of the three Montana groups (the Flathead, Missoula, and Bitterroot BCH), to outline a proposal for uniting the existing groups into a formal organization. The presidents presented their plan at the first BCH annual convention in Kalispell, Montana, on March 17 and 18, 1979.

That weekend, Back Country Horsemen was born, with stated purposes that Val helped draft: 1) to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness; 2) to work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use; 3) to assist the agencies responsible for the management of public lands; and 4) to educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage. Over the years, slight updates were made, and a fifth was added: to foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.

In March, 1983, Val was elected Vice Chairman of Back Country Horsemen. He took the Chairman's seat a year later, with the goal of

affiliating with Washington Back Country Horsemen and the High Sierra Stock Users Association of California. Val was also very involved in the drafting of the BCHA constitution, which was adopted in 1986 by representatives of the groups in Montana, Idaho, Washington, and California. The organization officially became Back Country Horsemen of America.

In 1989 and 1990, Val was again elected Chairman. He served on the BCHA National Board of Directors through 1991, and again from 1999 until 2011. Val was also Chairman of the Visions Committee for a number of years, and the unofficial historical and constitutional watchdog.

Many Roles of Service

Born in Nampa, Idaho, and raised in Cascade, Val spent his early years with his father and grandfather at Snowshoe Cabin at the head of Pistol Creek in the Idaho Primitive Area. After college in Utah, he worked one year as the Sulphur Creek Patrolman on the Landmark District of the Boise National Forest. That fall, he attended Officer Training School and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He served in Vietnam from December 1965 to December 1966 as an intelligence officer.

Upon returning from Vietnam in 1967, he and a fellow officer from Oregon bought an outfitting and guiding business, offering big game hunts and summer float and pack trips out of Salmon. They sold it in 1971, but retained the summer float and pack trip portion of the business. After earning a teaching certificate, Val began teaching social studies in the Salmon High School in 1972.

Driven by his love for the former Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas, along with the Middle and Main Salmon Rivers, Val became involved with the management of those areas, and eventually became dedicated to promoting the use of horses and mules on public lands.

About Back Country Horsemen of America

Back Country Horsemen of America commends Val B. Johnson of the Salmon River Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Idaho for his outstanding example of commitment and dedication to the vision and principles of BCHA. They encourage horsemen from coast to coast to allow his accomplishments to be an inspiration and encouragement to achieve their goals for protecting our right to ride horses on public lands.

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at-large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes regarding 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; 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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