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Back Country Horsemen of America Double Diamond Award

By Sarah Wynne Jackson (revised 8/20, 2012)

As the United States' leading organization defending our right to ride horses on public lands, Back Country Horsemen of America are people who pursue excellence in all they do, from clearing trails and repairing bridges to promoting horse-friendly legislation. Appropriately, they go out of their way to recognize those who go above and beyond with the Double Diamond Award.

Recognizing Excellence

Established in 2003 by the National Board of Directors, the Double Diamond Award honors special projects and programs that best exemplify collaborative spirit, community awareness, and devotion to the mission and purpose of BCHA. Eligible projects and programs include, but are not limited to, trail maintenance, trail construction, trailhead construction, educational programs and youth programs.

Applications are judged on the scope and purpose of the project; the ways that the project improved access or benefited the general public or public lands; what was involved in organizing the project; and how the project was accomplished from conception to completion. Applicants may include letters from agencies or private parties that worked with them on the project. Winners are announced at the Back Country Horsemen of America National Board Meeting annual banquet.

Last year, there were six nominations for the Double Diamond Award. As is true every year, all the nominations are outstanding. They demonstrate the broad spectrum of work, dedication to the job at hand, and love of the back country that typifies Back Country Horsemen of America.

Winner of the 2011 Double Diamond Award: John Burns of Salmon River Chapter of BCH Idaho

Demonstrating great initiative, John organized the first annual Heritage Days, a successful two-day event giving participants a taste of back country living, held at Sacajawea Center in Salmon, Idaho. Programs covered many BCH interests such as Leave No Trace, navigating the Rockies without GPS, and packing demonstrations, to illustrate life in the Salmon River area before it was settled.

All Back Country Horsemen activities were held in a camp-like atmosphere, called Camp Discovery. The chapter provided all tents, equipment, handouts,

brochures, and maps for the event. The winner of this year's Double Diamond Award covered all points of the BCHA mission statement: it involved the public (especially youth), was informative to the public, and everyone, volunteer and visitor alike had a fun.

Selway-Pintler Wilderness Chapter of BCH of Montana

The chapter submitted for consideration several projects they worked on this past year, including their Back Country Youth Day. Partnering with Future Farmers of America and 4-H students, this program gave local youth a glimpse into the "back country" lifestyle, such as packing and Dutch oven cooking.

This BCH chapter also provided labor and pack support to Forest Service employees for restoration of the May Creek Cabin on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in western Montana. These hardworking folks used horses and mules to haul 43 loads of shingles, cement, tar paper and native rock, weighing over three tons, a total of 172 miles from the trail head to the cabin site.

John McGray and Annette Howell of Los Padres Chapter of BCH California

Although the Gifford Tank Project required the effort of many volunteers, it was John McGray and Annette Howell's leadership, very typical of BCH members, that made it, happen. John realized that the water tank above the old Gifford Ranch house was seriously dilapidated. Located east of Santa Maria on California Department of Fish and Game land and surrounded by the Los Padres National Forest, it provides water to a system of troughs used by livestock and wildlife.

Annette secured financial assistance from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and a new tank was purchased in 2010. The Forest Service supplied a helicopter to fly the new tank in to the location and fly the old tank out. This project is another great example of how Back Country Horsemen of America folks work with other groups to accomplish a common goal.

Everett Lewis of Traildusters Chapter of BCH Washington

Exhibiting the "can-do" attitude seen in many BCH members, Everett Lewis expanded on a previously produced poster titled "What a Horse Sees," which educates hikers and cyclists about what to do when they encounter a horse on the trail.

Everett gives many presentations on this topic at cycle shops but did not have visuals, which he felt would explain the message with more clarity. After many hours of preparation and filming, Everett has produced a short video he shows to the public, which is also posted on YouTube. In addition,

he created a website and a Facebook page. His efforts have helped make the trails safer for all user groups when coming upon horses on the trail.

BCH of Central Arizona

This nomination is a glowing example of how Back Country Horsemen of America members seek to share trails and solve conflicts amicably rather than exclude other trail users. Three recent unfortunate incidents between equestrians and mountain bikers on trails brought attention to the issue of riders and mountain bikers using the same trails. A few riders believed that cyclists should not be allowed on the same trails as horses, hikers, walkers, etc.

In May of 2010, at the request of The Prescott National Forest, chapter members of BCHCAZ along with two other large equestrian groups and all other area trail users, (hikers, bikers, off roaders, bird watchers, outdoorsmen) formed the Prescott Trail Safety Coalition. The coalition came together to work out solutions regarding safe trail use through new signage, education on and off the trails, line of sight trail clearing etc. This effort has resulted in trail users working together to make our trail safer for all users and created many new friendships.

Bud Bailey of Priest River Chapter of BCH Idaho

This project at Trail Creek Trail, part of the trail system of the northern Cabinet Mountains of Idaho, took three years to complete. The trail head had no amenities, inadequate parking, and horse use was limited due to the lack of a turn-around for rigs and poor connector trail access to the rest of the trail system.

Under the leadership of Bud Bailey, the chapter and members of the community volunteered their time, labor and materials to construct horse corrals, highline, hitch rails, tent pads, ample parking, and a modern vault toilet. They also refurbished the connector trails. The result is a modern, user-friendly trail head for all trail users to enjoy.

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, 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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