

Back Country Horsemen of America

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www.bcha.org

Summer 2017

Trail Stewards

By Dillon Tabish, Flathead Beacon, Kalispell, Montana. Reprinted with permission.



Verna and Steven Barker with the Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead, pictured on May 24, 2017. Photo courtesy of Greg Lindstrom | Flathead Beacon

There are 2,249 miles of designated trails in the Flathead National Forest, enough single track to journey from Kalispell, Montana to New York.

Among its many tasks, the U.S. Forest Service is responsible for managing that expansive network of public paths, which provide beloved access to alpine lakes, towering peaks and wild valleys.

Needless to say, it's not an easy or inexpensive job.

That's where vital volunteer organizers have stepped up in recent decades to assist the federal agency.

Groups such as the Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead devote large chunks of spring, summer and fall to clearing and maintaining sections of trail.

Last year the local backcountry club and its nearly 90 members completed 13 projects clearing 146 miles

inside the Bob Marshall Wilderness and 437 miles outside the wilderness. The group, with its herd of helpful horses, also participated in 13 trips packing in tools and other supplies for state, federal and other organizations.

Last weekend the Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead carried on a May tradition with the first trail project of 2017. The club met at Meadow Creek Trailhead near the South Fork Flathead River and spent four days in the wilderness, venturing nearly 30 miles of trail and cleaning up after winter. Working in concert with the Forest Service, this volunteer operation involves picking up all the debris that Mother Nature has dropped along the trails, including massive trees. To clear these trails, crews must use cross-cut saws because chainsaws and motors are illegal in the wilderness.

"I wouldn't say it's really hard

work, but it is rewarding work," said Steven Barker, the new club president and a member of the local chapter for more than 20 years with his wife, Verna.

"After you're done you can look back and say, 'Hey, we cleared that.' And we come back year after year, and on a lot of these trails we can see the progress from the past."

The Flathead chapter of the Back Country Horseman organization was formed in 1973 by passionate outdoorsmen and women who saw the need to help the Forest Service while promoting common-sense use of horses in the wild.

"We're trying to keep as many trails open as we can because if we don't, the Forest Service will close them because they don't have money to do it," Barker said. "We clear as much as we can because the Forest Service keeps getting less and less funding."

There are other rewards, too. Last year Steven and Verna helped pack in an organization with a group of troubled teenagers from Texas. They ranged in age up to 16 and had never been in

the wilderness before. They were also glued to their smartphones and other gadgets. That all changed when they arrived in Northwest Montana and joined the Barkers on an adventure.

"It was funny, when we got them all together and packed them in — nobody talked to anybody because they didn't really know each other," Steven Barker recalled. "And then when we picked them up after five days, they were cutting up and talking. They had a good time in there and did trail work."

The club will host multiple clean-up projects every month throughout the summer, and anyone is welcome to participate, even those without horses. Other volunteer organizations, such as the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, also provide opportunities to help maintain public lands and trails.

"Mostly I enjoy the people who go on these trips and I ride my horse along," Verna Barker said. "It's rewarding that we get these trails open, not only for us, but for other people, too."

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Trail Stewards

[continued from front page]

Note from the Flathead chapter: Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead's annual Memorial Day weekend project is held at the Meadow Creek trailhead on the Spotted Bear District of the Flathead National Forest.

- This year our accomplishments include:
- Installing new legs on five feed bunks.
 - Building and installing two steel hitch rails.
 - Clearing 210 trees from five trails leading out of Meadow Creek and Gorge Creek trailheads into the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Photos: Above—Edd Blackler supplied his Bobcat to do the heavy lifting. BCH workers removed the rotten legs from each feedbunk and replaced them with treated 6x6s, then returned the feedbunks to each campsite. Rocky ground made for difficult digging.
Top right—Stu Sorensen repairs a wilderness sign damaged by wildlife (likely a bear!)
Right—Traditional hand tools are used for clearing trails in wilderness. Jim Thramer and his grandson, Jacob, help Stu Sorensen move a log.



Public Lands Update

By Randy Rasmussen, Director of Public Lands and Recreation

With respect to public lands, things are heating up in Congress. And not necessarily for the better.

Bikes-in-Wilderness Bill

While last year's nefarious bikes-in-Wilderness bill (S 3205) did not gain traction, a different bill was introduced earlier this year that seems to carry the same intent. For more on who was driving this bill and how it would have adversely affected horsemen and the wilderness experience, see the Summer and/or Fall 2016 BCHA newsletters.

HR 1349 (no formal name given) was introduced by Congressman Tom McClintock (R-CA) in early March. Its purpose is clear: to amend the 1964 Wilderness Act to remove the long-standing prohibition on "mechanized travel" in Wilderness. McClintock is Chairman of the Federal Lands Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources. As such, he's in a strong position to move the bill forward if he so chooses.

We are mystified why staff of Congressman McClintock, who many times has risen to the defense of horseback use on public lands, did not first consult with Back Country Horsemen, outfitter and guides, and other Wilderness users prior to introducing the bill. We can only hope this was an oversight.

Nonetheless, HR 1349 has gained five co-sponsors to date. We need your help to prevent this bill from gaining further traction.

TAKE ACTION

Please act now by phoning or writing your member of Congress in the House of Representatives.

Ask that they oppose, and not co-sponsor, HR 1349. The Capitol Switchboard can connect you to your legislator in Washington DC.

Call: (202) 224-3121.

But please call right away!

If you send a letter, a template with recommended talking points regarding HR 1349 is available on BCHA's website under "Chapter Resources" (note: member login is required). Please also see BCHA's action alert located near the bottom of the BCHA website home page www.bcha.org

President's Budget

Dismal and outrageous are terms to describe the president's proposed budget for fiscal year 2018 with respect to budgets for land management agencies and programs that are critical for

trails and public access, including the Land & Water Conservation Fund. The magnitude of proposed cuts to agency budgets is unprecedented and would include an 84% cut to the US Forest Service trails budget alone.

Should Congress choose to adopt the president's blueprint, it would represent an abrupt retreat from its intent last year to enhance the public's use and enjoyment of public lands and the economic benefits that increasingly are being documented as a result of the nation's growing "outdoor recreation economy." Adopting the president's blueprint would also fly in the face of congressional intent when it passed, last fall, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (our "Trails Act").

In response, BCHA is working with national partners on a proposal to counter the president's proposed cuts, so the many programs that benefit horsemen and our enjoyment of public lands are spared from the axe of this short-sighted budget proposal.

Wildfire Disaster Funding

On a positive note, Representatives Michael Simpson (R-ID) and Kurt Schrader (D-OR) in early June reintroduced a bipartisan bill to address the debilitating "fire borrowing" that is forced upon the US Forest Service with increasing frequency. Fire borrowing—typically during the late summer—affects the accounts for recreation, fire prevention and other programs, when funds are withdrawn to divert resources

to fighting wildfires during heavy fire seasons.

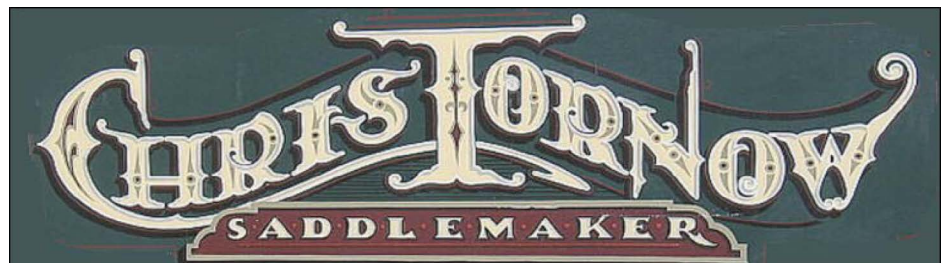
The new bill is HR 2862 (titled: To provide for wildfire suppression and for other purposes) and currently enjoys 18 co-sponsors, split evenly among Republicans and Democrats. Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) are expected to soon introduce a similar bill in the Senate.

The text of HR 2862 was not available at the time of this writing. If it resembles bills introduced by previous Congresses, it would represent a common sense and long-needed solution to create a FEMA-like mechanism to absorb the cost of fighting wildfires, at no additional cost to the federal treasury.

For details about previous bills on this topic and of their need, please go to BCHA's website and add the search term "wildfire" in the search box at the top of the page.

Make One Phone Call or Write One Letter to Perpetuate the Enjoyment of Wilderness

In closing, please contact your member of Congress today regarding HR 1349 (Bikes in Wilderness). It's possible that only a groundswell of public opposition will serve to prevent this bill from moving forward. Horsemen and women must do everything they can as individuals to ensure their member of Congress understands what's most important to maintaining our traditional use and the sanctity and solitude of Wilderness.



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View from the Chairman's Saddle

By Jim McGarvey, BCHA Past National Chairman



Hello, I am filling in this issue for BCH Chairman Freddy Dunn. As I write this, Freddy is in the hospital with a serious, but not critical illness and we look forward to her quick return. In her stead, Freddy asked me to report on the Back Country Horsemen's participation at the International Trails Symposium held May 7-9 in Dayton, OH. The ITS is a forum for all trail users. Attendees came from around the world.

A few weeks prior to the start, ITS organizers gave BCHA the opportunity for a complimentary two-day exhibit space. ITS wanted a horse for display on the convention floor on Sunday May 7th. In return BCHA received exhibit space valued at \$1,000. If we agreed to keep the horse on display Sunday evening for the cocktail party, ITS agreed to provide kickoff party tickets.

BCH KY members Edith Conyers, Ginny Grulke, Roy Cornett, and I organized the logistics for bringing stock to the Convention for the Sunday day-long display. We all met at Roy Cornett's house in Georgetown, KY on Saturday to watch the Kentucky Derby and then left early Sunday morning for the 3-hour trip to Dayton. Edith Conyers hauled 'Tig' her Haflinger pony and 'Friday' her pack mule along with canvas, stall mats, shavings, hay, water, and everything needed for equine comfort. Ginny and Roy hauled corral rails and the BCH exhibit backdrop.

Incredibly, in a downtown situation, we pulled the trailers within ten feet of the door and our display areas were just inside the door. We were all set up with Tig (saddled) and Friday (in packing gear) by about 10:00a.m. The convention floor opened to the public at 12:30, with the kickoff party in the same venue from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. The BCHA display booth was staffed by Roy, Ginny, Edith, myself, Beth Powers, president of the Certified Horsemanship Association and Jan Hancock, an American Trails board member, author and trail designer. Beth and Jan displayed some of their material on our table, as well.

Across from our booth was the U.S. Transportation Department Recreational Trails Program booth. They

displayed the recently released USFS/BCH-MT DVD on "Leave No Trace for Stock Users." Also, just down from our booth and equine display was a triple set of displays staffed by the NPS, USFS, BLM and US Fish & Wildlife.

Friday and Tig were great ambassadors for BCHA. When someone would come up to the corral, they both would go right to the visitors to be petted. Hundreds of people came by with some taking selfies with our four-legged BCH-KY members. At the 8:00 p.m. close, we had help from BCH and AZ Horse Council folks cleaning up and hauling the equipment back to the trailers. Initially we had fears that we would be there till 11-12 that night but everybody pitched in and we were completely done at 9:05 p.m. Edith, Roy and Ginny pulled out shortly after with Tig, Friday and the equipment and headed back to Lexington.

On Sunday afternoon, there were a number of seminar sessions. I spoke at the beginning and moderated a session entitled Horse Trails Caucus from 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. There were about 30-35 people in attendance including Ginny Grulke and BCHA Executive Committee member Yvette Rollins (BCH-IN). The attendees were seated as four teams and reported their thinking on the trail successes of the past year and the trail challenges coming up.

On Tuesday May 9th, at a 10:00 a.m. session, USFS National Program Manager for Trails Jaime Schmidt, the Chief Operating Officer for the Corps Network Marie Walker, and I presented a 90-minute program on the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. Using a PowerPoint, I explained how the idea of the bill came about beginning with Dennis Dailey (BCH-WY) in 2009 through President Obama signing it into law on November 28th, 2016. I also gave all of the people in attendance one of our 4 x 6 cards about the Trails Bill that we handed out to Congress – suggesting that these cards are great to use from your county commissioners to U.S. Senators. I also held up the recent DVD made with the Forest Service Leave No Trace for Stock Users and said that BCH has done several DVDs with the FS.

In her section, Marie Walker of the Corps Network told the attendees about the positive impact the Trails Act will have on the Service Corps volunteer groups under the Network umbrella. She also mentioned that BCH California and Montana do a lot of work with the 21st Century Conservation Service Corp.

In her section, Jaime Schmidt explained the impact that the new Trails Act will have on the USFS and trail users. Jaime mentioned the Back Country Horsemen numerous times in her talk from "BCH are the folks that got the trails bill idea started" to "BCH folks do trails right." Also, she said that 2018 is the "Great Trifecta" for the USFS: 1) The 50th anniversary of the National Trails Act, 2) the completion of the two years in development of the USFS Sustainable Trails Plan, and 3) the first law in 50 years The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act directed to the USFS and its trails. Jaime added, "Thank you Back Country Horsemen."



Photo 1: From left to right: BCH-KY members Roy Cornett, Ginny Grulke, Edith Conyers, BCH-GA Jim McGarvey, and Certified Horsemanship Assn President Beth Powers.

Photo 2: Edith Conyers and her BCH four-legged members Tig and Friday who have traveled the trails throughout the US.

Photo 3: Cleaning up the mule and pony display.



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Highlights from the BCHA National Board Meeting,



Glenn Casamassa, USFS Assoc. Deputy Chief



Randy Rasmussen, Director of Public Lands and Recreation



Lee Gault, Montana Conservation Corps



Cindy McGarvey and founding member Phyllis Ausk



Ray Redding, Charlie Russell Chapter, BCH MT



Jaime Schmidt, USFS National Trail Program Manager



Joni Packard, USFS Region 1 Volunteer Coordinator



Ben Pendergrass, American Horse Council, Randy Rasmussen, BCHA and Paul Spitter, The Wilderness Society



Glenn Casamassa, USFS Assoc. Deputy Chief, and Randy Rasmussen



Kathleen Foxley, Alaska; Steve Lindsey, Expansion Chair; and Chair Don Saner welcome Alaska as a BCHA state



The 2017 National Board Members, Great Falls, Montana

Great Falls, MT April 20-22, 2017



Jim McGarvey, Executive Director



Cindy McGarvey reports on BCHA Facebook



BCHA Timeline- 5+ years of accomplishments!



BCHA Store – showing off our new insulated water bottles



BCHA Auction Items – shirts and drawing by Melinda Wagner



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Front: Mack Long, Chuck Miller, John and Bonnie Chepulis, Sandy and Mark Himmel, all BCH MT. Rear: Kathy Young and Jason Ridlon, BCH WA, and Brad Pollman, BCH MT.



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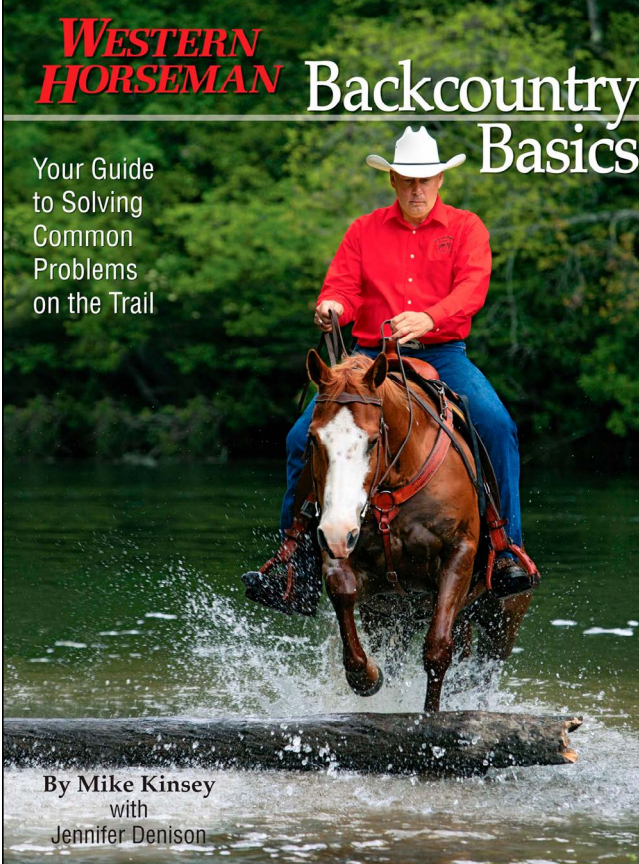
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1. To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness areas.
2. To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational use.
3. To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
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.
5. To foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen's organizations.

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- April 15-16 and 22-23: Weekends of National Park Week
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- Sept 30: National Public Lands Day
- Nov 11-12: Veterans Day Weekend

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https://bcha.site-ym.com/events/event_list.asp

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Al Sammons, Co-Recipient of the BCHA Legacy Award

By Past BCHA National Chairman Donald Saner with Wind River Chapter member Valier Harris

I met Al Sammons close to 25 years ago. He came over with a few other Wind River BCHA'ers to help start the Teton BCHA chapter. That was the start of a long friendship and my journey down the trail of BCHA that led me to be the National Chairman. I couldn't have done it without his leadership and council. During our long friendship, I came to understand just how much Al influences equestrian issues and public lands.

Al was one of the original founders of the first chapter of BCHA in Wyoming in 1989. The Wind River BCHA met in Hudson and had over 100 people in attendance. Al drafted the constitution and bylaws and applied to the National BCHA for an Affiliate status.

Al worked as the Expansion Chairman in Wyoming and helped organize the Cloud Peak, Powder River and the Teton chapters in Buffalo, Gillette, and Jackson. He wrote the state constitution and bylaws. In May 1993, Wyoming received full state status at the National Board Meeting held in Lander, WY.

Al was appointed by Governor Michael Sullivan to serve as the equine representative on the Wyoming Trail Advisory board. Al also served as a chapter and state representative on many BLM and Forest Service planning processes, including the Shoshone Forest Management Planning. He provided comments to the Washington DC delegation regarding the DuNoir Special Management Unit of the Shoshone National Forest. As national chairman of BCHA, Al lobbied members Congress in DC for funding trail maintenance and set the stage for BCHA to have representative on the America Horse Council.

Al wrote grants that led to Wyoming receiving state funds for an educational project from the Wyoming State Trails Commission, federal funding for improvement to the Bonneville Trailhead access road, and reopening of the Ramshorn Trail FS. 819 – a section of trail that had been closed for nearly 20 years.

Al was an active volunteer on many Wind River work projects – clearing trails; building numerous bridges on the Middle Fork, East Fork, DuNoir, and Brook Lake; inventory and later signing of the Continental Divide Trail on BLM and the Shoshone and Bridger Teton National Forest. Most memorable was the signing of the CDT across the Teton Wilderness to the Yellowstone National Park boundaries. Al also had some of the best pack and saddle

mules in the area.

Over the years, Al organized and participated in numerous educational events, which included packing demonstrations to high school and adult groups, the Wyoming Game and Fish Expo in Casper, and Wyoming Winter Fair in Lander, WY.

In addition to serving as a chapter officer in numerous positions, Al was selected by the Wyoming State Board to represent the state of Wyoming as a national director to the National Board of Directors in 1997. He was elected that year as the national secretary/treasurer at the meeting held in Washington and served the two-term limit until 1999 when he was elected as national vice-chairman, and then on to a two-year term as national chairman. Following his elected positions, Al was appointed by the subsequent chairman to serve on the public lands committee and as national expansion chairman. His management style was "find good people and let them do their job." He

served on the national level for 13 years as either an officer, committee chair, or state director.

Al wrote the National Expansion Handbook (a detailed guide to forming new chapters). With the help of Lorraine Broody from NM, Al created the familiar green trifold which was handed out by the thousands. He was a regular contributor to the quarterly newsletter. His articles varied from those dealing with serious BCHA issues to a bit of poetry or short stories such as the Busted Potty Bunch and Star Light and Shoe Sparks.

Al initiated the Double Diamond Award program at the national level which recognizes exemplary volunteer work.

In October 2001, Al said, "If I am called an environmentalist because I practice low impact horse use, or because I try to look at both sides of an issue to seek a solution to our backcountry problem, then I am dammed glad of it."

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MLU Sponsored Student Packers Win World Championship – Again!

By Lucy Badenhoop - Photo by Dr. Amy McLean

The Mother Lode Unit of BCH-CA is pleased to announce that the collegiate pack team from University of California in Davis won the “World Champion Interscholastic Pack Team” competition at the Bishop Mule Days during the 2017 Memorial Day weekend. MLU sponsored the team for the last three years and this is their second consecutive championship. Sponsorship credit is shared with Craig London (owner of the Rock Creek Pack Station) who provides all the pack stock and tack for all the collegiate teams who compete during Mule Days.

This year the competition consisted of nine intercollegiate teams. The standings were: first place 88 points, second place 82 points, and third place 72 points,

The students compete in five team events:

- #168 Team Packing
- #169 Team Pack Contest
- #170 Pack Team Scramble
- #171 Comedy Class
- #172 Pack Relay Contest

In addition, they participate in

events focused on encouraging young packers:

#158 Youth Individual Packing Contest

#159 Youth Diamond Hitch Contest

#160 Youth Box Hitch Contest

#161 Youth Individual Scramble Contest

The winning UC Davis team consisted of four Animal Science and Management majors (left to right in picture): Jacob Anuszczyk, Dean Almong, Holly Doner and Bobbi Sue Dizmang. The students are sporting their new team shirts in the UCD colors of gold with blue embroidered lettering down the sleeve: UC DAVIS on the right sleeve and BCHC-MLU on the left sleeve.

The top row in the picture are Andy Assereto (the team's MLU packing coach), his dog Tucker, and Dan Sehnert (Animal Facilities Coordinator, UC Davis Dept. of Animal Science). Also, supporting the team but not in the picture is Dr. Amy McLean (Equine Operations Supervisor, UC Davis Animal Science Horse Barn).



The top row in the picture are Andy Assereto (the team's MLU packing coach), his dog Tucker, and Dan Sehnert (Animal Facilities Coordinator, UC Davis Dept. of Animal Science). Also, supporting the team but not in the picture is Dr. Amy McLean (Equine Operations Supervisor, UC Davis Animal Science Horse Barn).

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Angel Goes Packing

Hi, my name is Nicolas and I am a 15-year-old who has Angelman Syndrome (AS). It's a rare genetic disease affecting my 15th chromosome. For me, it means I speak only two words rarely, my walking is unbalanced, I need help with a lot of my daily activities, and I really like getting into things, so someone needs to be around me all of the time. I am also generally a very happy guy. I can't write, but my mom knows me pretty well, so she's writing what she thinks I would say if I could.

Over ten years ago when I was four, our family learned about a place called RideAble that provides horsemanship instruction for people with special needs. On the first day, I got to hold the reins of my horse "Goldie", lead her to the arena, and ride her. I loved it! I felt so big and independent! I have been taking lessons almost every week ever since. Not only am I having fun, but my muscles are also working hard to keep me centered on my horse. I am learning how to make the horse go, stop and turn. I am interacting with some great volunteers and instructors who love horses and are very committed to helping people like me. They keep my lessons interesting and change them up with new challenges. Sometimes they even have me ride bareback backwards! I really have to concentrate when I do that. My favorite part is when we trot!

My parents attended a RideAble auction about six years ago and bid on a pack trip led by Matt and Becky Hope. The Hopes are members of the Emerald Empire Chapter of the BCH of Oregon. The Emerald Empire Chapter covers the Southern Willamette Valley of Oregon. They are an equine group of riders

protecting the ability to recreate on our national, state, and county public lands. They volunteer for trail work/maintenance, Leave No Trace education, trail advocacy, and youth programs. Basically, these are fun people who like horses, hard work, and outdoor fun!

My papa and older sisters had an amazing time on the pack trip and that fall they took our whole family for a trail ride at Elijah Bristow Park. It was so fun having my family ride with me. I got so excited seeing everyone up on horses, especially my papa. Something clicked with our family and theirs, and we have been riding together ever since.

My papa and three sisters have been on a few pack trips with Matt and Becky. Matt said a couple times, "We need to get Nicolas and Alisa out there on a trip." I was pretty much for it, because I like to try new things and am a good sport. My mama was a little hesitant. Sometimes taking care of me can be a lot of work and I think she wasn't sure if it sounded fun and worth the effort.

With planning and encouragement, the day finally came. We packed up all the horses and rode 8 miles into Buck Meadows in the beautiful Three Sisters Wilderness. I and my horse were ponied so we didn't get off course. We had a few obstacles on the trail riding in and out. There were a lot of trees down so we had to stop, assess our options, ride cross country, then get back on the trail. Sometimes there were logs we could jump. Others we went under and had to duck our heads. We went slow and I had to pay attention. We also encountered some bee nests. The horses don't like being stung so they usually start running to get away from the bees when this happens. It's

pretty exciting!

When we arrived at the perfect spot, everyone worked to get camp set up, because we'd be staying there for the next four nights. They even packed in a sturdy chair for me to sit on. Over the course of the next few days we went on some awesome mountain trail rides in meadows, near lakes and waterfalls and got really close to the mountains. Matt and Becky are super cool and fun to be with. Nothing really fazes them and they are very organized and well-prepared.

The Hopes have a cool water filter system, since we can't bring in water for everyone. We camp near running water so all the animals have access to it. Also, we all try to limit the amount of trash we have. We burn what we can, then pack out the rest. As you can tell, it's a pretty organized operation.

Mealtime is a big part of our experience together, as we all love sitting around the fire, soaking up the amazing surroundings, and enjoying a good meal. Food doesn't just appear on our plates; it takes some good planning and preparing since we have limited space. Becky and mama planned ahead, froze a lot of food, and did a great job delivering nutrition to us all. Everyone pitches in with getting the meals ready and washing dishes when we are done. I usually supervise!

The Hopes have a wonderful group of Norwegian Fjord horses: Darwin, Ekko (who I ride), Thumper, Regney, Sy,



Scout, Bo and their friend Flint. Quigley and Clancey are a great pair of Australian Shepherds and our Golden Retriever Samson has fun with them all.

One morning Becky was hanging out with me while everyone was getting ready for that day's ride. I was tired of sitting and I wanted to get closer to the horses. Becky walked with me to each one of them so I could say hi. This is a great example of how good Matt and Becky are at including me and helping me interact with the horses.

My family loves to be outdoors and hike, which is pretty hard for me. It's very cool that thanks to all these wonderful people and horses, we have found something we all love and can enjoy together in the great outdoors as a family.

The Desert Blooms!

By Doug West

All of us have special places we like to ride. Mine are found among the red rock canyons of southern Utah. When the temperatures approach 110 degrees, I retreat to the higher altitudes of the Colorado Plateau. June through September I enjoy the cool breezes wafting across alpine meadows while watching my horses graze at 9,000 feet. Early June finds me on the Boulder Mountains checking the spring pronghorn antelope hatch or riding among the cow elk with their recently born calves.

While I love the High Plateau Country, there is nothing like the desert Southwest in full bloom. It doesn't last long – maybe two weeks or so – but the profusion of wildflowers is incredibly beautiful. After an unusually wet winter, the desert floor is a carpet of orange, yellow, pink, red, and blue. For years, I have packed my *Field Guide to the Southwestern States* in my pommel bags with the intent to identify more species by name. After all these years, I still only know a few at first glance such as globe mallow, Indian paintbrush, sego lily, creosote bush, and a few others.

While I struggle with the names of various plants and wildflowers, I don't need my field guide to identify *Crotalus viridis lutosus* – the Great Basin Rattlesnake. Utah is home to 7 different venomous species, and the Great Basin Rattler is the most common. For some unknown reason, I can't seem to ride anywhere this spring without finding another rattlesnake. My riding buddy "The Reverend" Cline now calls me the "Snake Charmer." Doc Johnson has started to avoid me to concentrate on his golf game.

Even my four-year-old Aussie Maynard has started avoiding me. He spent a recent May evening at the afterhours emergency vet after being bitten by a snake. Fortunately, his bite wasn't terribly serious and only suffered a swollen muzzle for a few days. He has now

completed the rattlesnake vaccination series recommended by the vet, and is scheduled to attend rattlesnake avoidance training in a few weeks. Until then, he stays home while I ride the desert to enjoy this year's wildflower bloom.

From what I understand, Great Basin Rattlers are naturally shy, sit and wait predators. They don't go looking for trouble, but I doubt Maynard would agree. Unless provoked they will quietly let you pass or try to retreat. Knowing my dog, I'm quite sure he provoked the one that bit him. I have encountered hundreds of rattlers over the years, and the description of their behavior is consistent with my experience. Don't bother them and they won't bother you.

I'm often asked about whether I kill the snakes I literally stumble across. While I readily admit that I don't seek their company, I always let them go. At my age, I'm at greater risk dismounting from my horse with a snake around in rough country than the chance of having my horse or dog bitten. In fact, killing one in Zion National Park where I ride frequently is a federal offense, and can lead to legal action and a substantial fine. Also, though most people in Utah aren't aware, the Great Basin Rattler is a protected species. It is illegal to kill them unless you, your pets, or property are threatened.

So, what do you do? Stay home until they hibernate again in October? Not me, my horses, or my dog. March through September we take extra precautions to avoid serious snake encounters. I watch where I sit and put my feet, and now have my dog vaccinated at the start of active snake season. Until recently there wasn't a vaccine for horses. From what I have read, there is a three-shot series given 30 days apart if you have serious concerns about your horses getting bit. I haven't seen the need yet even though I live and ride in snake country. According to the



literature, very few horses die from rattlesnake bites, but it's imperative to immediately seek veterinarian assistance if your horse or dog is bitten even if they

are vaccinated. Staying calm and finding help isn't easy to do 10 or fifteen miles from your truck, but don't stay home. Get out there and ride!

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