

Looking Back

By Rick Adair of Shoshone Back Country Horsemen, Wyoming



If Not Your BCHA, Then Who?

With the beckoning calls going out to help maintain our public lands, the question arises, if we are not able to respond, will those calls go unheeded. Like the proverbial tree falling in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it still make a noise when it falls? Will there be anybody there to answer the call for help? Our BCHA is at the forefront of assisting in keeping the trails open and the trailhead facilities operational.

A similar request is made yearly to the Shoshone Back Country Horsemen (SBCH) here in North West Wyoming. Our chapter has a long-standing agreement to assist the Shoshone National Forest (SNF) management team in cleaning trails that are in bad shape or

they do not have an adequate budget in place to hire a commercial trail cleaning team. The SNF is recognized as the first national forest in the US and still primarily a horse and foot travel forest.

With this season almost over, our SBCH chapter has already cleaned over 114 miles of trail during 2017. This is a contribution of 1,526 hours, 19,046 miles on vehicles and 255 stock days. In “looking back” at one of our recent trail clearings that the SNF had asked SBCH to clean this year, the trail came with an enduring history. Native American Indians traveled the corridor to their hunting grounds long before our history ever started. Renowned scout, bison hunter, and entertainer Buffalo Bill Cody established his tour-

Top: “Looking Back” is Bob Yeats, SBCH member as he summited Crow Creek Pass. The prominent peak in the background is Bill Cody Peak, halfway point in the trail cleaning venture. Inset photo is a BCHA method of taking a selfie. Thoughts were: something old, something new, me, just passing through, leaving no trace.



ist/hunting lodge on the confluence of the Middle Fork and North Fork of the Shoshone River approximately five miles from the east entrance of Yellowstone National Park.

Crow Creek is located a mile and one half north of Bill Cody’s lodge at Pahaska Teepee. Crow Creek Trail is within the North Absaroka Wilderness area and is a hand tool only maintained trail. The trail is approximately 11 miles in length. It starts on the North Fork of the Shoshone River at an ele-

vation of 6,500 feet, following along Crow Creek, climbing to the summit of Crow Creek Pass at 10,500 feet. The vista to the west is a sizeable portion of Yellowstone National Park with views on a clear day extending to the Grand Teton mountain range. To the east is the Absaroka Mountains with prominent peaks appropriately named like Silver Tip and Bill Cody. There are a number of states smaller than the area that can be viewed from the majestic perch going over Crow Creek Pass.

[continued inside on page 2]



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59 Rainbow Road
East Granby, CT 06026
(888) 893-5161

Interested in Joining?

Contact BCHA or the organization nearest you for more information.

National: BCH of America Erica Fearn 59 Rainbow Road East Granby, CT 06026 (888) 893-5161 FAX (360) 832-1564 efearn@bcha.org www.bcha.org	BCH of Minnesota 30490 335th Street Way Lake City, MN 55041 bchminnesota@gmail.com 651-345-9909 www.bchmn.org
State Organizations: BCH of Alabama 1404 Arkadelphia Road Warrior, AL 35180 (205) 936-9043 chad.bowman@hatchmott.com backcountryhorsemenal.com	BCH of Mississippi 600 Old Hwy 51 N. Box 641 Nesbit, MS 38651 (901) 485-2982 jeanne@arcelle.com www.bchms.org
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Arkansas Back Country Horsemen 3566 Highway 397 S. Harrison, AR 72601 (719) 337-4474 Jacque.alexander@arkansas.gov	BCH of Montana 2130 9th Street W. #109 Columbia Falls, MT 59912 bchmt406@gmail.com www.bchmt.org
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Hoosier BCH Indiana 12784 E Rollins Lane Springville IN 47462 (812) 797-4540 hoosierhorsemen@yahoo.com	BCH of Utah PO Box 13195 Ogden UT 84412-3195 (801) 985-1909 www.bchu.com
BCH of Iowa 3445 Lima Trail Missouri Valley, IA 51555 (402) 350-3249 sue.maiwald@yahoo.com	Virginia BCH 55 Lost Creek Lane Buena Vista VA 24416 (540) 570-1910 deborasensaba@gmail.com
BCH of Kansas 1409 Lincoln Road Concordia KS 66901 (785) 243-2494 steve.lindsey@lia_ks.com	BCH of Washington PO Box 1132 Ellensburg WA 98926-1132 (509) 276-6226 www.bchwa.org
BCH of Kentucky 2068 Pondsville Kepler Road Smiths Grove KY 40353 (859) 744-0397 jthorses2009@gmail.com www.kybch.com	BCH of Wyoming 2446 Spriggs Dr Lander WY 82520 bighorn@vcn.com www.wyobch.org
BCH Pigeon River and Beyond, MI, Inc. 6631 E Ashard Road Clare MI 48617 (517) 296-4475 marietad@frontiernet.net	Affiliates: Saratoga BCH PO Box 461 Cambridge NY 12816 859-230-0980

If Not Your BCHA, Then Who?

By Rick Adair [continued from front page]

In accepting this task, we knew Crow Creek Trail had not been cleared of down timber for three consecutive years. This was due in part to two wild fires in the previous decades along with significant bark beetle infestation that fell a sizeable portion of mature pine and fir trees. Brewing the “perfect storm” scenario, the winter of 2016-2017 brought one of the heaviest snow packs in modern history. Consequently, the spring runoff freeing the high country of snow melt had the local rivers and creeks running at near bank levels, thus delaying an early start.

On June 20 and 21, SBCH members set out on the mission of clearing Crow Creek Trail at least to where snow drifting would prevent further access of the high country. This was still weeks before forecasted peak of high water in creek crossings was to occur. After the first day, we saw that the previous goal was as lofty as the distant mountain pass itself. It was a three-mile day that had most of us licking our wounds. On the way back out to the trail head that evening, two adult grizzlies bears were roaming right above the trail. Ironically, the grizzlies were tame compared to crossing the swollen creek from a warm day’s hefty snow melt. White water rapids up to the belly of our stock made for an interesting conclusion of day one.

Day two on the 21st was less gain than day one. Not only did we not make the snow line, we had not cleared to the half way mark on the trail. In unspoken thoughts going back down the trail after a full day’s work, we all knew the crossing this time would be dangerous. Sure enough, the water was up to the flanks on our stock causing them to get pushed down stream all the while struggling to maintain footing in the large river boulders. Further attempts of clearing this trail would have to wait until the water crossing subsided.

With one small exploratory expedition in early July, we made another full court press on July 25 and 26. Our goal this time was to make the summit by the 26th. In order to maximize work time, this was an overnight trip with pack stock. Camping was right off the trail in one of the few mountain meadows. At the end of the 25th it began to rain. The rain was not quite hard enough to force on rain gear, but wet enough to soak us by the time we reached our make-shift camp that evening. There is cooking in the rain, then there is nothing more somber than cooking and eating in the rain. A close second is going to bed in the rain and knowing that the only thing to greet you in the morning would be putting on cold wet clothes from the day before. Day two on the 26th left the survivors hastening to reach the pass in order to make it back to camp, pack up, and make it back to our trailers before night fall. Rain was once again forecasted. Thinking we were so close, but not knowing what lay ahead further up the trail, we had to stop once again for private life commitments. Our GPS readings told us the “crow flies” distance to the pass, but not the trail distance with the upcoming switch backs.

The man hours spent so far on this trail was well beyond what anybody could have planned for and the goal

still several miles from the pass into Yellowstone National Park. With other trails on the schedule to be cleaned, our dedicated chapter came through once again. Crews were divided and a call went out for all-hands-on-deck. Once again on August 10 and 11, we set out on our mission. With five pack animals in tow, five volunteers made it back into the meadow to throw down camp and get on with the job of cleaning the trail. The last several hard fought miles did not come easy. Now at over 9000 feet elevation, running a hand saw was very exhausting, so was walking from one downed tree to another. Several times, the final switch backs left us thinking we were closer than we actually were. Then like a light at the end of the tunnel, we crested into one of the most rewarding sights and efforts that we ever put forward. The view at the top of this wilderness paradise made us all quickly forget our sore muscles and calloused hands. The only disappointment on the trip, we had only a few moments to enjoy the view before we had to depart to make it back to camp by dark. Before this day was over, we would ride over 16 miles, plus clean the final segment of trail before getting back to our camp and awaiting pack stock.

In pulling camp and riding down the totally cleared trail on the 11th, there was plenty of time to reflect on our achievement. Was it worth it? Without any doubt, yes it was. The next person to ride this trail will hopefully appreciate some unknown stranger’s efforts to keep this wonderful trail open. In conclusion, here are some of the numbers for this one formidable effort. The SBCH had 17 members contribute a total of 35 men/women work days on Crow Creek Trail, in all totaling 309.5 man hours. Fifty-one stock days were recorded along with 1,403 miles of hauling mules and horses to the trailhead.

Makes you proud to belong to a great organization does it not? In concluding, from where this recap of Crow Creek trail started, if not your Back Country Horsemen, then who would do this? Let’s all make sure the legacy continues by recruiting the next generations into our great organization.

The SBCH has been assigned trail cleaning for the Crow Creek Trail for 2018 by the SNF. We hope to clean this trail yearly for a few years to keep it from getting in the shape it was in 2017.



The crew finally made it to the top. Bill Cody Peak is in the back ground. We had already cleaned this portion of trail on previous trips trying to get to the top.



The weathered, downed sign indicated that we had finally reached our goal, Crow Creek Pass, entering into Yellowstone Park. The journey was over.



The stock is getting itchy feet, knowing that the trailhead is getting close as we finalize this episode of cleaning trails in the SNF. Only those that see the trail between a set of mule ears can understand the significance of this pic. This pic is dedicated to all the mule riders out there.



Silver Tip Peak, showing the magnitude of downed trees that we had to deal with.

Photo below: Packing up camp on the final day and packing out. Our saw training class cautioned us to prevent “mission creep”, staying within our certification of being Buckers. The leaners will be on the ground this winter with us being there next summer to remove them.



View from the Chairman's Saddle

By Freddy Dunn, BCHA National Chairman



Looking forward to 2018

I can honestly say that 2017 has exceeded my expectations when it comes to Back Country Horsemen of America. I wasn't sure what to expect as the first female chairman of this historically male-led organization. But any reservations I had were overcome through working with professional, enthusiastic, and dedicated members and staff. I couldn't be prouder to represent this national organization.

As 2017 comes to a close, BCHA is financially sound. We have 13 committees ACTIVELY working for BCHA. We have action plans in place for each committee with thoughtful budget requests for 2018. We're ahead of the game this year. We've had joint committee chairmen conference calls to inform each of what the others were doing and eliminating duplicate efforts. We've continued the state presidents' calls every month that we started several years ago. Individuals have stepped up and raised the bar this year, and it is my hope that the momentum that has built will carry on through 2018 and beyond.

Communication was the greatest challenge and the greatest criticism that BCHA has had to overcome. We're spread from coast to coast. But, the knowledge and technology used by our management company Erica Fearn, along with our amazing webmaster Marty DeVall and our social media administrator Mark Himmel, has allowed us to communicate directly with our members and nonmembers in ways and in frequency as never before. Meeting minutes are available within days on our website in the Members Only Resources of our website. Action Alerts are sent directly to member email addresses. And, hours and hours have been spent working on our member and donor data bases to make them as accurate as possible. We even have changes coming to our website to make it cleaner and easier to navigate.

Challenges ahead

But we have big challenges ahead! Public lands are being attacked from every angle, including the two obvious ones -- the transfer and sale of public lands and the attempt to amend The Wilderness Act of 1964.

At the start of an early December congressional hearing in Washington D.C., BCHA's opposition to a bill that would authorize mountain bikes in Wilderness was noted by the ranking member of the Federal Lands Subcommittee. Representative Colleen Hanabusa

(D-Hawaii), in her opening statement on H.R. 1349, declared that "this bill is opposed by more than 200 Back Country Horsemen of America chapters... and we have received dozens of letters in opposition to this bill." Her statement is affirmation of BCHA's ability to make our concerns well known throughout the Halls of Congress.

BCHA joined The Wilderness Society in a petition to force the Department of Interior into a public rulemaking process to clarify its (in)ability to facilitate federal land transfer to the states. This represents a proactive step to make the Administration publicly disclose its limitations in the absence of direction from Congress. While the Administration could choose to ignore the request, petitioners could choose to challenge the lack of response via the Federal Court system.

Our new channels of communications were paramount in the success that we had reaching out to our membership. And we thank you for your action. Stay tuned -- we'll need you in the coming months more than ever.

We need your voice to continue these efforts

I urge all of you to go to the members only portion of the website and update your profile. Make sure the contact information for you is correct. Add your picture! This program, called Your Membership is extremely versatile and we're exploring different uses for it. We're even using this platform of the website for a pilot program to renew memberships in Washington State. Results will be tallied and communicated in January or February.

But most of all, talk to people about BCHA. When you see folks at the trailhead, pass them on the trail or see them at clinics, invite them to join the fun and experience the satisfaction of making a difference. There's great instant gratification when you can experience the before and after of clearing a trail, or cleaning up a trailhead. And, oh by the way...you don't have to own a horse to support Back Country Horsemen!

In conclusion, please keep your ears tuned for alerts and requests from Randy and me regarding upcoming hearings on H.R. 1349. We, along with our partners, are monitoring it closely. And your response will be vital.

Thank you for being Back Country Horsemen. Thank you for your years of service and dedication to keeping our public lands public and our trails open for all.

Above all, be safe!

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Foundation Offers Grants for 2018

The Back Country Horsemen of American Education Foundation directors are pleased to announce that funds are available for 2018 grant requests. These funds are from individual donations made directly to the Foundation, funds from auctions and raffle of donated items (including Peg Greiwe's popular quilts) at the BCHA National Board Meeting, and 30% of the donations made to the BCHA Trails Forever Fund.

Grants are available to BCH chapters and organizations for trail head and trail construction and/or maintenance, educational events and youth programs. Partnerships with public land agencies, youth groups, and equestrian trail advocacy organizations are encouraged. Grant requests can be funded up to \$1000 each and by special request of a donor there are three \$1000 grants available for projects east of the Mississippi River.

The grant request form and more information on the BCH Education Foundation can be found on the web site www.bcha.org by clicking on "Education". All applications can be sent in digital format to grantrequest@bcha.org, or a request form can be mailed to PO Box 385, Graham WA 98338-0385. All applications are due by March 15, 2018. Notifications of funded applications will be made by end of April. Questions about the application or the Foundation can be directed to bchfndn@RainierConnect.com or mfilkins@bak.rr.com.

All funded grant recipients are required to send a final report of completion to the Foundation, as well as submission of an article and photographs to the BCHA National Newsletter. BCH Foundation directors are Mylon Filkins DVM, Becky Hope, Joanne Mitchell, Michael Murphy, Karen Saner and Executive Secretary Peg Greiwe.

BCHA Officers, Chairs and Staff

Chair

Ms Freddy Dunn
Chairman@bcha.org

Vice Chair

Darrell Wallace
vchairman@bcha.org

Treasurer

Sherry Copeland
treasurer@bcha.org

Past Chair

Donald Saner
sanerent@gmail.com

Executive Committee

EC@bcha.org

Doug Bechen
Ginny Grulke
Alan T. Hill
Becki Krueger
Yvette Rollins

Director of Public Lands and Recreation

Randy Rasmussen
wildernessadvisor@bcha.org

Executive Administrator

Erica Fearn, CAE
59 Rainbow Road
East Granby, CT 06026
860-586-7540
efearn@BCHA.org

Committees:

National Public Lands

Jim Allen, Barry Reiswig, Co-chairs
publiclands@bcha.org

Public Lands – State

Sherry Copeland and Roy Cornett, Co-Chair
StatePublicLands@bcha.org

Public Liaison and Advocacy Partners

Don Saner
publicliaison@bcha.org
partners@bcha.org

Expansion

Steve Lindsey
expansion@bcha.org

Education

Mack Long
education@bcha.org
scholarship@bcha.org

Funding

Ginny Grulke
EC@bcha.org

Media and Marketing/Facebook

Mark Himmel
media@bcha.org

Newsletter

newsletter@bcha.org

Vision

Yvette Rollins
vision@bcha.org

Volunteer Service

Larry Zauberis and Mary K Church, Co-chairs
volunteerhours@bcha.org
volunteer@bcha.org
awards@bcha.org

Web Masters

Marty DeVall and Mark Himmel
web@BCHA.org

BCH Education Foundation of America

c/o PO Box 385
Graham WA 98338-0385
360-832-2451
bchfndn@RainierConnect.com

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efearn@bcha.org

National Reports

How to Nominate a Project for the Back Country Horsemen of America Double Diamond Award

The BCHA Double Diamond Award is presented annually at the National Board Meeting for an exceptional volunteer effort and/or educational program completed during the previous calendar year. The projects eligible for recognition can include, but are not limited to, trail maintenance, trail construction, trailhead construction, educational programs, and youth programs. It is imperative that **all nominations be received by April 1, 2018**, so committee members will have time to thoroughly review them before the National Board Meeting.

Exemplary projects and programs were accomplished in 2017. If your chapter has an outstanding project, now is the time to nominate it for the Double Diamond Award. The BCHA Volunteer Hours Committee, appointed by the National Chair of BCHA, will decide the recipient of the 2017 Double Diamond Award, which

will be awarded at the National Board Meeting banquet in Spokane, WA, in April 2018.

BCHA will accept applications from any chapter/unit for a volunteer project or educational program that has been accomplished during the calendar year immediately preceding the April National Board of Directors Meeting (Jan.1-Dec.31, 2017). All award applications shall be for a **specific** project or **specific** educational program, not for multiple projects or programs undertaken during the year. Multiple outings to accomplish a specific project are acceptable.

Include a **maximum four-page narrative** describing what the project entailed and how it was accomplished from start to finish. Answer the questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how. **A maximum of eight photos** may be included to help the committee make its decision. Support letters

from the agency or private parties that were in collaboration on this project or program may also be included. Be sure to **clearly name** the chapter or unit whose project is being nominated. Applications must be submitted by **email attachment** in Word or Adobe format, or **US Postal Service**. Digital format is preferred; however, a hard copy will be accepted if electronic options are not available to the nominator.

Email digital format applications to: Volunteer@backcountryhorse.com

Mail US Postal Service hard copy applications to:

BCHA Double Diamond Award
5132 County Rd. 277
Palmyra, MO 63461

Applications must be received by April 1.

For questions, call 573-406-2566.



State volunteer hour reports are very important to BCHA.

- ☛ Volunteerism is one of the most important activities BCHA can use in our effort to perpetuate enjoyable common sense use of horses in the backcountry.
- ☛ Volunteerism earns horsemen a seat at the table where decisions concerning access to public lands by pack and saddle stock users are made.
- ☛ Individual volunteer efforts support the Back Country Horsemen of America mission statement.
- ☛ Volunteer service by BCHA is consistently underreported.

All National Directors:

are reminded it is time to have their state volunteer hours coordinators submit reports to the BCHA Volunteer Hours Chairman:

Larry Zauberis (larry@77outfit.com) (970-759-5629)
or to Erica Fearn, Executive Administrator (efearn@bcha.org)

The BCHA Nominations Committee is searching for candidates who desire to run for 2018 seats. There are six positions to fill: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, and Three Executive Board Members (one who is a non-Director). Some will be seeking re-election but all National Directors are eligible for election. There is also one executive board member from outside the Directors.

Contact one of the Nominations Committee: Steve Lindsey, Mary K Church or Roy Cornett with your intentions to run before February 1, 2018.



BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF AMERICA

Steve Lindsey, National Nominations Committee Chairman

1409 Lincoln, Concordia, KS 66901

785-243-2494 Expansion@bcha.org

National Reports

Public Lands Report

By Randy Rasmussen, Director of Public Lands and Recreation

The following report expands upon an action alert sent December 15th via email to all BCHA members for which we have on file an email address. If you did not receive the action alert and would like to be added to BCHA's email database, please go to BCHA's website, click on "About Us," then "Join Our E-Blast List."

H.R. 1349, Bikes-in Wilderness Bill, Gains Momentum in Congress

In early-December, Congressman Tom McClintock (R-Calif.) scheduled a hearing for HR 1349, which he introduced in March 2017. The public was provided only one week's notice and Rep. McClintock did not invite anyone with opposing views to testify during the hearing. As was expected, the hearing was one-sided and included many mischaracterizations about the history and implementation by federal land management agencies of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Rep. McClintock skillfully guided his witness during the question-and-answer period, which included exchanging verbal swipes at horseback riders and "commercial pack trains."

The following week, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources voted 22-18 to move HR 1349 to the full House for consideration and a vote. Unfortunately, committee members fell into a party-line vote, with only Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) voting against the bill.

As with trails, Wilderness should not be a partisan issue. Wyoming BCHA has reached out to Rep. Cheney, including letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers, thanking her for her vote and for defending the 1964 Wilderness Act.

What Might Happen Next?

HR 1349 could be put to a "floor vote" in the House of Representatives at any time. When, or in what form, the bill might be voted upon is unknown.

Given the speed and relative stealth by which this bill moved through committee, however, BCHA members must be prepared to reach out to their representatives at a moment's notice. BCHA is monitoring the situation and will alert members once we learn the potential date of a floor vote. That's why it's important we have your email address on file.

Reach Out to Your Representative

There is nothing stopping members from reaching out to their representative in Congress at this time to share their views on HR 1349. Contact information for your representative is listed in your BCHA membership profile (BCHA website, login is required). Ask to speak with your representative's Legislative Assistant (LA) for natural resources- or public lands-related issues. Develop a relationship with the LA by speaking with them or leaving a message each week. Make sure they know you represent a broader BCH state or chapter, and tell them about the

great things you do as a volunteer to keep trails open for everyone.

House Leaders Likely to "Hide the Ball"

The timing of a floor vote would have to be approved by the House leadership. HR 1349 could be voted on as a stand-alone bill or, more likely, it could be packaged with other public land bills or must-pass legislation.

Given that amending the Wilderness Act is known to be highly controversial—the Act has never been amended throughout the Act's 53-year history—a floor vote on HR 1349 will most likely be bundled with other, less controversial or even potentially beneficial, public lands legislation. Doing so might be viewed as providing "cover" for legislators who don't want to be exposed as voting to undermine the Wilderness Act.

Don't let them fool you. A vote to undermine the Wilderness Act is still a vote to undermine the Wilderness Act, even if your representative claims they intend to vote in favor of another bill in the package.

Senate Bill Likely, Contact Your Senators

We are on the lookout for introduction of a Senate "companion bill" to HR 1349. Given that legislation must be passed by both the House and Senate before it goes to the President's desk for signature, a companion bill could be introduced at any time by anti-Wilderness senator(s). Alternatively, should the House pass HR 1349 on a floor vote, the bill automatically would be sent to the Senate for consideration.

Consequently, it would be wise to reach out to your senators to let them know your feelings about HR 1349 (contact information for your senators is listed online in your BCHA membership profile).

Coalition Working to Oppose HR 1349

BCHA continues to work in partnership with a number of regional and national organizations to prevent HR 1349 from being enacted into law. These partners include The Wilderness Society, American Horse Council, Pacific Crest Trail Association, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, American Hiking Society, the Partnership for the National Trail System, and the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance.

Importantly, the International Mountain Bicycling Association has publicly stated its opposition to HR 1349 and will not act to promote the bill. In addition, hundreds of organizations have signed onto group letters declaring their opposition to HR 1349.

Bikes-in-Wilderness Supporters a Small Minority

HR 1349 was introduced on behalf of two small organizations that neither understand nor respect the origins and the intent of the Wilderness Act. They believe the Act should be "modernized" to let mountain bikes have legal access to the last remaining 2.7% of

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lands in the continental U.S. that today are designated as Wilderness. By insisting that "mechanized forms of travel" be allowed in Wilderness (the purpose of HR 1349), they chose to ignore the potential for Congress to insert other damaging provisions into the bill.

HR 1349 Could be Made Worse

Again, don't be fooled. Members of Congress could offer amendments

on the House floor to further undermine the Wilderness Act. It's critical we apply constant pressure on our representatives until HR 1349 is soundly defeated. Let your member of Congress know that we will resist all attempts to undermine and weaken the Wilderness Act.

BCHA NEEDS YOUR HELP AND WE NEED IT NOW

By Jim Allen and Barry Reiswig, Public Lands Committee Co-Chairs

Back Country Horsemen of America is facing unprecedented challenges in Congress ranging from outright transfer and sale of our public lands to bills that would allow mountain bikes in Wilderness areas.

We need our members to step up and support good land management and resist efforts to amend the Wilderness Act to allow mechanized forms of travel.

We need to be able to contact our membership, on short notice to urge members to contact Representatives and Senators and get them to support our positions on land transfer and bikes in Wilderness. The Bikes in Wilderness bill (H.R. 1349) recently passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee and is headed for the full House. We need to stop this bill in its tracks.

Right now, the national organization has only about 60% of the email addresses of our members. Sending out notices in the newsletter is way too slow given it is only printed quarterly.

We need to be able to contact you the members quickly (within hours sometimes) to ask you to contact your respective members of Congress on various bills. We know some members are reluctant to provide your email address, but we have a critical need to contact you. Our association manger Erica has a secure system for the storage of email addresses; **BCHA will never sell, distribute, share, or trade your information.**

Our public lands and Wilderness Areas need your help like never before. Please consider providing your emails the next time you renew your membership. Your assistance and support is critical in these desperate times. Your help is greatly appreciated.

BCHA will NEVER sell, distribute, share, or trade your information.

Catch Pen

Many Hands (and Mules) Make Light Work

On October 11th, the Bureau of Land Management held a ribbon cutting to recognize the completion of a major road improvement project at the Red Rock National Conservation Area. The included construction of bridges over low water crossings, a flood warning system, pulverization and paving of the 13-mile Scenic Drive, and expansion and improvements to parking lots. These improvements mean better access for visitors, new restroom and over 200 more parking spaces. The project was awarded the Federal Highway Administration's 2017 Environmental Excellence Award for the two bridges over the low water crossings.

The work day was organized by the Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition and the BLM in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. The Bristlecone Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Nevada assisted the Friends of Red Rock Canyon on a day of trail maintenance on the Pine Creek Trail on Saturday, December 2nd. Using their horses and mules, the

group hauled 7,200 pounds of gravel to help keep the trail in good condition for hikers to use and enjoy. To learn more about Back Country Horsemen visit: <https://www.bchnvb.com/> and for more information about the Friends of Red Rock visit: <http://www.friendsofredrockcanyon.org/index.php>

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Front Range Colorado BCH Grant Report

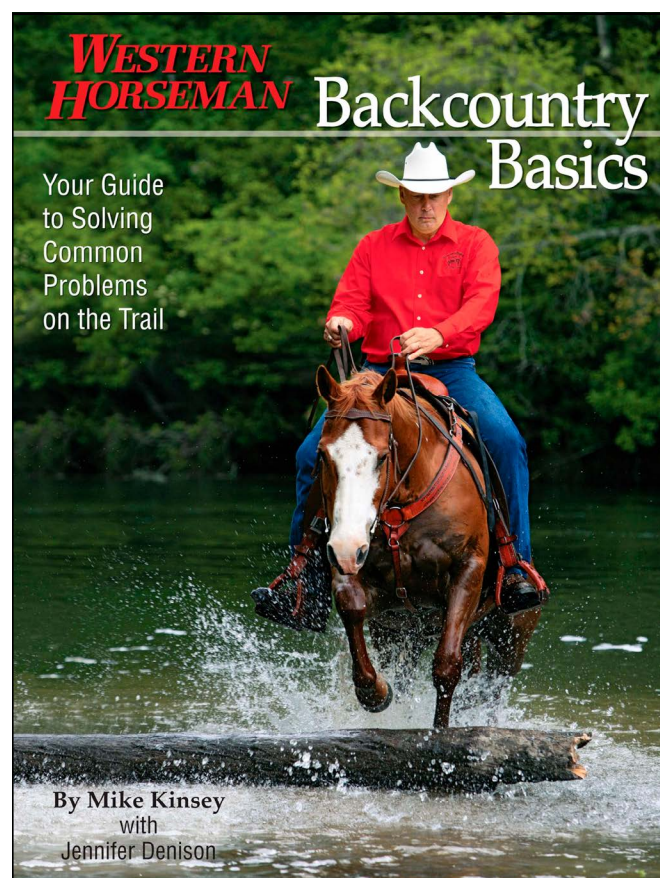
Thank you so much for the grant of \$500 to put toward the cost of food, supplies and trail maintenance materials for our annual weekend campout to do trail work with youth.

As sometimes happens, plans change. The group of mentors and boys we had been doing this with for the past six years could not participate this year. Instead, we recruited other boys and girls to help us. We had seven children and 15 adults who worked a total of 126 hours on this project.

We partnered with the Pike National Forest district to fix and maintain the Burning Bear Trail near Buno Gulch on Guanella Pass. The trail is adjacent to a bog and had deteriorated. Forest Service personnel came in a few days before our weekend and realigned the timbers along the sides of the trail. Then our group of adults and children worked with wheelbarrows, shovels and rakes to refill the trail with an aggregate trail surface base.

As in previous years, we set up our camp kitchen and porta potty trailer. We supplied all the food and propane. Some FRBCH members brought their horses, giving the boys and girls opportunities to help care for the horses and learn how we use them in the backcountry. The kids did most of the cooking and cleaning up. We held formal and informal conversations on survival skills, wilderness first aid, proper use and care of tools, and leave no trace ethics.

Above: Before and after.
Middle and bottom: Workers.



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Catch Pen

Horse Corral at San Isabel National Forest Horn Creek Trail Head Project

By Gerald Martin, Rocky Mountain BCH Chapter, Colorado

Members of the RMBCH chapter joined forces with the local USFS office to build a 20' x 20' steel pipe panel stock corral, a pipe hitch rail and a pipe high line set at the Sangre de Cristo mountains Horn Creek Trail Head. Materials acquisition was shared and the club provided the labor for the corral installation. This trail head receives considerable use by out-of-state stock owners. There are eight fourteeners in the local range between Alamosa and Salida. A multitude of trails, many leading to high country lakes, travel in on both the east and west sides of the mountain range. A very popular ATV

trail, the Rainbow Trail, transits almost the complete distance along the east facing side. Elk, deer, bear, bighorn sheep, and mountain lion may be seen.

Now, after flexing our unmounted leg muscles, our local Forest Service liaison is so happy with the potential, he is probably going to ask us for repeats at other trail heads. Wow, what did we get into??

In all seriousness, we are fortunate to have over a 20-year working relationship with our local public lands management agencies. We hope to continue our contributions in the long term.



A New Passion Found....in the San Juan Mountains of SW Colorado

By Annie Pack, SJBCH-BCHCO

Passion: have it, feel it, live it.

That's how I've always felt about horses. From the time I was a young girl visiting a friend's family farm in Yoakum, Texas, the love of riding horses and being in the country became a feeling I would never be able to shake. But it took me a while, almost 50 years later actually, to get my first horse and that home in the mountains I so desperately longed for. That was almost three years ago. Sometimes you just want something so badly you just can't let anything stand in your way. A note of disclosure. My horse was hidden from my husband for about a year before I came clean -- don't ask.

I joined San Juan Back Country Horsemen (SJBCH) originally to have some people to ride with. Little did I know it would become so much more. When my horse Victor was delivered to his new home where I board him a couple of years ago, I had never even saddled a horse. The difference between a bridle and a harness? Well, I didn't know that one either. Fortunately for me, I got a great horse not even knowing what I was doing, and an even greater teacher. You see, I'm very new

to this game.

My first real outings came this year with some of my neighbors Mike Pluth and his wife Rena Gallant. We were up above Opal Lake on the Leche Trail one day riding and it was absolutely shocking to me how many downed trees we came upon, areas that were "match-stick-ish" with fallen trees and impassible by our horses. I was told that trails like this that didn't eventually get cleared would be closed by the Forest Service. They simply don't have the budget or the manpower to do everything that is needed to tend to all of the trails. Very sad really. It was then that I began to understand how important it was for all of us who are able, not just horse owners alone, to help out. I just assumed all of the trails were somehow magically cleared, never really gave it much thought.

Having moved here from a large city may have something to do with my feelings about the Colorado mountains and viewing them from horseback. It would be unfortunate not to be able to travel these trails and get lost in the beauty and serenity that they offer. It is my hope, my passion, that we all can remember why we're a part of this wonderful Association of Back Coun-



try Horsemen. Thank you to all of you who have nurtured this new green rider, I'm sure it has been maddening on occasion, but what the "hay"....I'm learning to be a handy sawyer!

Happy, peaceful trails~

Youth

Utah Wasatch Front BCH Grant Report

Another successful youth campout is in the books! Utah Wasatch Front BCH Chapter's annual event draws lots of interest and excitement from the kids who attend every year. This year was no different. There were several fresh faces too!

Thanks again to a \$450 grant from the BCHA Foundation, our chapter was able to cover the cost of having over fifteen kids and their adults participate in the weekend-long event. Getting youth out camping, having fun, and riding with their friends is what brings them out year after year. But the adults know there are other reasons for doing this. The reason is to get the kids more confident in trail riding, learning about the importance of being good equestrian trail users, learning the Leave No Trace principles, and inspiring youth to

be our next generation of back country horsemen.

It is great to see friendship renewed through the common interest of horses and trail riding. This year's campout was held at Weber County's North Fork Park in Eden. This place is one of the favorite horse camping spots because it is a quick drive from Ogden. Besides being easy to get to, the location is ideal to provide much needed relief from the valley heat. The Wasatch Front Chapter is also very active in this park with helping maintain their trails and building horse facilities. So, if you're in the Ogden/Salt Lake area and have a kid that's interested in trail riding please contact us through the bchu.com website to find out more information about our next youth camp out! See you on the trails!



Spring Sponsorship Deadline:
March 5, 2018

BCHA Newsletter Media Kit

Our BCHA newsletter is read by passionate trail riders, saddle and pack stock owners, avid back country packers and others who have an investment in saddle and pack stock and public land management. We serve over 13,000 members nationwide who belong to 194 active chapters/units and affiliates in 31 states. Our mailing list includes members, public land agency personnel (Forest Service, BLM, National Parks, state land agencies), elected officials, advertisers, other trail and horse organizations. Visit www.bcha.org for more information on BCHA.

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E-mail: efearn@BCHA.org

Managing Editor

Sherry Jennings
PO Box 305
East Olympia WA 98540-0305
E-mail: BCHAEditor@comcast.net

Design, Layout and Sponsorship Director

Deborah Schatz
4720 Trumble Creek Road
Columbia Falls MT 59912
(406) 314-1084
E-mail: deborah.bcha@gmail.com

Printing

Eagle Web Press
4901 Indian School Rd. NE
Salem OR 97305

Buffalo River Chapter BCHA Reporting In

By Pam Floyd

As members of Back Country Horsemen of America, we know with certainty that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. After all, this great organization, grounded in the spirit of the West, steps up to help get a bipartisan National Trails bill passed when little else is moving through Congress. It gives us a voice when equestrian trails are threatened (case in point, the recent Alert regarding H.R. 1349 inspired many of us to contact our representatives, encouraging them to oppose this legislation that would allow bikes in the wilderness). At the national level, BCHA also nurtures new state and local chapters at a time when other fledgling groups struggle to gain a footing.

We know all this, but..... when you round the bend on a favorite trail that you feel responsible for and find that a massive game of Pick-Em-Up-Sticks effectively bars you from proceeding on your merry way, you temporarily lose the lofty and instead become grounded in the nitty gritty. Your perspective narrows to the one foot in front of the other approach that says, "Let's get 'er done." That's the beauty and the beast of our dual citizenship: the local chapter and the national organization. And it works!

To borrow from the idea that all politics is local, we'll suggest that all trail work is local, especially when you're met with the aftermath of nature's fury. For us members of the Buffalo River Chapter BCHA in northwest Arkansas, this fury came in the form of unusually heavy winter flooding and an early March tornado. The tornado was especially generous with its time, skipping here and there to ensure multiple and far-flung damage sites within the area that we serve on the upper Buffalo National River.

In light of recent weather events in our country, devastation is too strong a word here, but I will just say that it will be awhile before there will be a soft place for your eye to rest upon on certain parts of our beloved trails. No whining, just fact. Any daydreams* of members wandering down a perfectly manicured trail singing *Don't Fence Me In* in perfect three-part harmony were laid to rest after we first rode the affected sites. Abruptly laid to rest.

Here's where it really gets local. We did our usual trail work throughout the year, staying busy, knowing that bigger things were ahead. We clipped and lopped and picked up trash all along the upper Buffalo and its watershed. Some of us taught Leave No Trace classes. Some took advanced wilderness medicine classes. Many participated in a Kids' Camp hosted this year by one of Arkansas' two new chapters. And, we waited.

We waited on ticks and snakes to settle into their wintering grounds, and we waited on a plan. Ticks and snakes would work themselves out, and the plan would come from our Vice President and Trail Boss Arlus Trice. Reconnaissance, regrouping, and then riding – that's how it would work.

So, on a beautiful day in late November, just after Thanksgiving when we were still feeling especially grateful, 17 members of Buffalo River Chapter BCHA set out to right the natural



Carver work day 2017 - the work crew.



Carver work day - trash detail.

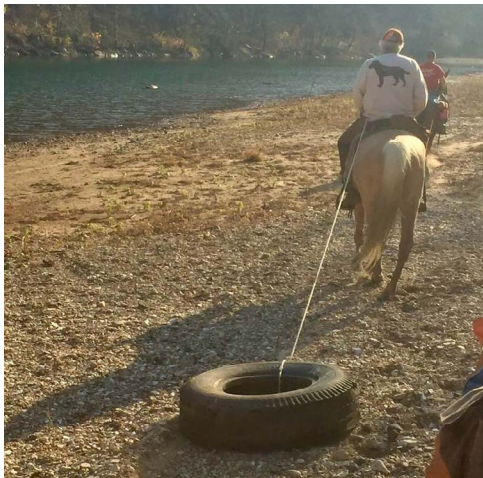
wrongs that had been visited upon us. We were in the good company of our 17 equine partners and two pack animals who carried all sorts of saws, ropes and loppers. Carver, a lovely trailhead on the lower end of the upper Buffalo River, was our meeting place. Arlus, who was ready with a plan, quickly divided us into four teams: cane cutters, trash collectors, and two groups of sawyers.

Now, cane cutting just comes along with any trail maintenance on the river (it's voracious), and trash detail....well, you who ride public trails have that image engraved in your memory (just add an old canoe and truck tires embedded in the gravel bars, and you've got the picture). As for the folks who were sawing? Well, it's hard to overstate the grim determination of that springtime tornado, but its actions were well met. I'm preaching to the choir here (knowing that you will understand) when I say that the sawyers were the heroes of this story. Cut by cut, that mighty debris field gave way.

Logistics aside, a fun, light-hearted, simply wonderful day was had by all participants. How is that even possible considering the daunting task of clearing a Lincoln-log jammed trail? I don't understand the magic, but this particular kind of alchemy that changes hard work into good times happens all the time here on the Buffalo. What I can say for sure is that by the end of this work day the trail from Carver to Mt. Hersey (a beautiful section of river) was declared open for business.

But, we are not ones to rest on our laurels. Remember, there were multiple assaults on our trails, and so, a few days later in early December we moved on to the Upper Buffalo Wilderness Area, the main target of the earlier tornado attack.

Wilderness tells much of the story here. It's a place so rare and special that chain saws are unwelcome and pack animals, on this day at least, are unnecessary. This is the place where wild



Carver work day - Mike and tire.

magnolias bloom in late spring, and old tumbled-down rock walls, chimneys and civil war gravesites bloom all year long with stories to conceal. The magnitude of the storm damage here is enough to rock you back on your heels and make you think what if there were no BCHA? No Buffalo River Chapter BCHA? But, we are here, and again we ride, saw, clip, and rework until old trail reaches out to meet old trail once again. It happens so slowly, so seamlessly; it's almost as if the spirits that we all feel here, but do not acknowledge, conspire to make it happen. Thick, grasping greenbrier gives way, deadfall falls, and old routes reform. Make no mistake, there is a lot of actual work involved, but the end result seems to transcend the physical. Another beautiful day goes by, horses, mules and riders work together, and a hopelessly tangled trail reopens.

Reporting in, that's the way it is here on the upper Buffalo River in northwest Arkansas as we approach the end of the year. Come, see for yourself. You are welcome here, just as many of you have made us feel welcome on your trails. Meanwhile, we are thankful for the dual nature of our relationship where national meets local. It's at the junction where vision and mission meet action and purpose.

**this particular daydream may be mine alone, and it is not reflective of our general membership*

Wilderness Trail Clearing - South San Juan BCH Colorado

By Kristie Hefling

In late October 2017, San Juan Back Country Horsemen (SJBCH) members Mike Pluth and his wife Rena Gallant invited Annie Pack, a new neighbor and friend, to join them on a beautiful ride in the South San Juan Wilderness. SJBCH is located near Pagosa Springs, in southwest Colorado. Mike, Rena, and Annie rode on the Leche Creek trail #576, so Annie could experience riding in the wilderness and the beautiful views. Annie is a newer member to the SJBCH and fairly new to horse ownership. But she jumped right in as a new hard-working member, on foot and on horseback with her new equine partner, Victor, a trustworthy and sturdy mountain horse. The plan was ride up with packed lunches, have lunch then ride back. Little did they know what they would run into.

They rode the Fish Creek Trail up to Opal lake, where it then turns onto the Leche Creek trail. It took 3 ½ hours to ride 3 miles. All 3 said it was unbelievable. Mike has ridden these trails for the last six summers and cleared the Leche Creek trail in 2016. Mike, Rena, and Annie saw an unbelievable number of downed trees on the trail, that looked like giant matchsticks, crisscrossing the trail in every direction!

That was the beginning of a very hard but rewarding late-season project, one that was not on a list of projects for SJBCH. Mike contacted SJBCH member John Nelson regarding the state of the Leche Creek and Fish Creek trails in the Opal Lake area. John is retired Forest Service and the Forest Service Liaison and Trails Committee chairman for the SJBCH. John and his wife Lisa are valuable members and assets. John brings a lifetime of knowledge of how the Forest Service works. Lisa, with much journalism experience, brought her ability to write up applications for grant requests for the SJBCH.

Mike, Rena, Annie, John, Lisa, and seven horses worked on the first day. The group split up to cover more of the trail. Lisa, John, and Annie worked on one area while Mike and Rena worked in another. Mike and Rena met a group on the trail from the Fish Creek Outfitters. They had a family with them that had been coming up to this area from another state for 25 years to elk hunt. The Outfitters group wanted to know if Mike and Rena were part of the Back Country Horsemen. When Rena and Mike replied, “Yes.” The group said, thank you so much!! The Outfitters group said it took them over three hours to get through three miles. Seven trees were cleared on Leche Creek Trail and 20 trees were cleared on Opal Lake/ Fish Creek trails. It was a long day!!

Mike and Rena went back out a couple of days later to cut more trees. On that day, they met two local teachers with about 20 special needs kids who hiked up to Opal Lake. Mike and Rena said the teachers asked if they were with the Back Country Horsemen. Mike and Rena said, “Yes.” The teachers thanked them and said it meant so much to them because they could not have hiked with the kids if the trails were not cleared! The students were very interested in the horses and very happy to get to do something they don’t often get to do, pet a horse! Mike and



Rena said it was so moving to get to see first-hand what an impact their work on the trails had on these kids!

They also met a couple from Phoenix, Arizona who wanted to know if they were with the Back Country Horsemen. After receiving affirmation, the couple asked, “Do you know Kristie Hefling?” Mike and Rena said, “Yes.” One of the couple said, “We have been following your San Juan Back Country Horsemen on the SJBCH Facebook page. We purchased property in the Pagosa Springs area and when we move to Pagosa Springs, we want to join BCH.”

Mike has continued to work on clearing up the trails going up to Opal Lake about twice a week since. More clearing is planned, weather permitting. Mike said, “What we are doing has an impact on the locals, the kids and adults, visitors from out of state, hikers, horseback riders and Outfitters. Everyone we have met out on the trails is so grateful for the Back Country Horsemen!” He added, “But we are also doing this for ourselves, we are using the Wilderness as it was originally intended, a place where you can refresh your spirit and re-connect with nature, that is why we have the Wilderness, so there are wild places and to keep those places wild for all people and for all generations to come.”

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- 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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My Trail Classification System

By Doug West

You might wonder why I decided to develop my own trail classification system. Most websites and trail maps will give you some information about length, time, and difficulty. While these are adequate for most trails, they don't include what I call the "Wild Jim" factor. Jim and I have been riding together regularly for a number of years. He is a fearless rider who likes to create his own trails: me, not so much. At my age, I prefer the typical 18" wide, well maintained, and signed backcountry public land agency trails. Jim regularly gets me out of my comfort zone. The sunglasses hide the mischievous glint in Jim's eyes when he says, "We can get there from here." My usual response is "Are you kidding me?" To make this conversation as brief and objective as possible, we will now refer to My Trail Classification System. We have an understanding that I will ride all trails in Classes I-III and some in Class IV. However, he frequently forgets to tell me about the one bad spot that instantly changes from III to V.

Jim had his sunglasses on, so I didn't notice the glint in his eye when he told Robert to stop at the mouth of Huber Wash. Immediately, he tells us, "We can get there from here." Check your maps. There isn't an established foot or horse trail up the wash. Huber Wash is on state lands that connects with the Park. My immediate thought "How far and how bad?" At the start, I was encouraged to see hoof and boot prints as we let ourselves through the gate. It wasn't long before we were following an old stock or game trail full of deer tracks and an occasional hoof print. A classic Class IV trail. All of us are experienced riders used to rough country. However, Jim



The Scoggin's Stock Trail is a short connector which drops approximately a fourth of a mile into Scoggin's Wash. While short, it is quite steep with a bit of exposure. It is easily negotiated on a good horse, so I classify it as a typical Class III trail. There isn't an established Park Service Trail in the wash, but through regular use, an obvious trail has been created by hikers and horses. It is an intimate place with interesting rock formations on both sides of the wash with a stream of water in the upper reaches where your tired and thirsty horses can get a drink. Using my subjective scale, I classify the approximate 2-1/2 mile ride to the junction with Coal Pits Wash as an easy Class III. When you reach Coal Pits Wash, the fun and challenging part of the ride ends. Coal Pits Wash is named for the piles of black, volcanic rock found on the benches above the wash. It is beautiful in the fall when the cottonwood trees are awash with color and in the spring when leafed out. This time of year, you ride on the banks through sage brush flats paralleling the lower part of the wash to Highway 9 approximately 12 miles from the mouth of Huber Wash. The most dangerous part of this ride is along busy Highway 9, the main artery to Zion Canyon, where we parked the truck and trailer. By now, it's obvious that trail classification systems, especially mine, are quite subjective. Degree of difficulty depends to a great extent on a rider's risk tolerance and experience. More importantly is the trust he has in his trail horse. While I have ridden most of my life, exposure still gives me pause, and I always like to ride Class IV and V trails uphill. NOT down. At my age, I'm long past trying to impress anyone, and I never have had Jim's tolerance for risk. My mot to is "Live to ride another day." Doug is a member of the Southwest Chapter of BCHU. He lives in St. George, Utah with his wife Trea, dog Maynard, and three Walking Horse mares. You can contact him at parasite.ranch@gmail.com.

Trail Classifications

Class I.	Ho Hum Ride Through Central Park. An established bridle path that frequently parallels a well-established walking path.
Class II.	Follow the Yellow Brick Road. A two or single track shared with mountain bikes and ATVs.
Class III.	Backcountry Trail. An established, non-motorized Forest Service, BLM, or National Park Service trail which is passable when cleared, maintained, and signed. These trails all too often deteriorate to Class IV or V due to lack of maintenance.
Class IV.	Game or Stock Trail. These are never found on any map which usually causes uninitiated riders to loudly question, "Are you out of your mind?"
Class V.	No Trail at All. Usually only fit for good mules, where even experienced riders frequently scream "Are you nuts? I'm walking!"

Class IV or V: Follow the Deer

Let's try applying my Trail Classification system to an actual ride to see how it works. I live a short 40-mile drive from Zion National Park. While Zion Canyon is overrun with tourists, March to December, the area managed as wilderness sees a lot fewer visitors. In these areas, you have to either use your feet or ride a horse, substantially reducing, traffic and crowds. The Chinle Trail, one of my favorite rides, provides magnificent views of astounding red rock formations. Using my rating system, I would classify the trail as mostly an easy Class III. It has all the classic features of most National Park trails: well maintained, well signed, and only a few rocky, steep spots. Jim, Robert, and I decided to ride the Chinle Trail a few Saturdays ago. I thought we would take the traditional route starting at the Anasazi Way trailhead located in an upscale subdivision between Rockville and Springdale. The most difficult part of the Chinle Trail is parking your horse trailer. The parking area requires a sharp left turn off Highway 9 and an immediate sharp right into the parking area. Maneuvering my 26-foot trailer around the blind turn is a bit unnerving.

and Robert were riding two relatively inexperienced horses. Both are young and strong, but have spent most of their lives in the arena team penning or reining. They are just learning to negotiate the steep, rocky, ledges found on this section of trail. While the riders were experienced on Class IV and V trails, Dorey and Dodger were still at Class III. Fortunately for them, they had an experienced teacher in my 20-year-old Walking Horse mare. Like Jim, my Rose is totally fearless, and goes anywhere I point her nose. Even with Rose leading the way, I thought seriously about turning around, but there wasn't room and I didn't want to ride down what we had scrambled up. After a hard-rocky climb, we found hoof prints and boot tracks again, a sure sign that we had reached the junction with the Class III Chinle Trail. It wasn't long before we met hikers. Their facial expressions led me to believe they thought we were three ghost riders who had plummeted from the sky. Rather than dropping from the sky, we had climbed Jacob's Ladder to intersect the Chinle Trail where they were hiking pleasantly. We continued on another two to three miles to the junction with the Old Scoggin's Stock Trail.

Roland Cheek's Presentation to Bitter Root BCH of Montana

By Kathy Stroppel-Holl

Roland Cheek, the last living member of the four original Back Country Horsemen founders, was the featured speaker at Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen's July general meeting at Larry Creek Trailhead in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley of western Montana. Roland provided an interesting and entertaining presentation on the origins of BCH and offered suggestions for BCH's future. He regaled the crowd with the backstory about how the founders, Dennis Swift, Ken Ausk, Dulane Fulton, and himself, met around campfires in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in the early 1970's to talk about backcountry use and deterioration and how it could be saved. These campfire talks and meetings resulted in the creation of BCH in 1973.

Roland recently exchanged emails with some outdoor writers and friends and was surprised to discover one of his friends was uninformed about BCH's origins in Montana and that Roland was a founder. He subsequently sent out a link to his video on the origin of BCH and asked for advice on how to better inform the general public about our organization. A high-quality magazine and wider distribution of his video are two items he feels would really enhance BCH's image. Roland felt that the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's accomplishment of growing into a major non-profit organization with a high profile and a very high qual-



ity publication is what BCH should strive toward. He reflected that BCH does a lot of work that goes unknown and unrecognized, and that we need to toot our own horn more, promote our accomplishments across the country, and fly above the radar! The crowd thoroughly appreciated the insight of the last surviving founder, and many enjoyed looking through and purchasing his numerous fiction and non-fiction books. Check out his website at <http://www.rolandcheek.com> for more information and watch his video "The Beginning of Back Country Horsemen, the Most Influential Trail Riding Group in America" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m27V3z8Bid8&feature=youtu.be>.

Thank you, Roland, for continuing to provide your historical perspective and advice to BCH members!

Four Things That Can Save Your Life When Riding Horses

By Robert Eversole, TrailMeister

My summer of trail rides and horse camping was wonderful. Until it wasn't.

You might have heard that I took a tumble recently. It's true. I was riding in the Three Sisters Wilderness in central Oregon when I joined the unplanned dismount club. Although I don't remember all of it, I got to visit the hospital ER, met some great doctors, toured the surgery, and now I have a shiny new shoulder! Fun times.

I can't tell you with certainty what went wrong, although I think it was bees. One moment I was in the saddle taking pictures and the next my head was impacting a tree followed by proof that Newton's law of gravity is true. As I'm finding that narcotic fueled dreams are anything but pleasant, I've had plenty of time to ponder what went right during my misadventure.

Riding with a partner

The first thing that I did right was ride with a partner.

Kim McCarell, author of the series Northwest Horse Trail Books, was my Oregon riding companion and guide as we rode and horse camped around the Three Sisters area. Kim was not only excellent trail company; she gave me a second set of eyes on my injury and was able to take care of my mule as we made our way off the mountain. Had Kim not been nearby to help I might still be out there. She helped get my floppy arm stabilized and generally watched me like a hawk during the long slow walk out. She even arranged transportation to the emergency room

while we were still on the trail.

Your life may depend on it, so choose your riding partner wisely.

Carrying first-aid kits and having the knowledge to use them

The second thing I did right was carry a first-aid kit and have the knowledge to use it. When we found that I couldn't move my arm, we were able to stabilize it using the supplies in the first-aid kits we both carried. Between the two kits we were able to get an oddly floppy arm stabilized enough that I could make my way off the mountain.

The emergency room staff was quite impressed with our efforts and the ER nurses made a point of saying we did a good job of improvising in using a belt to immobilize my shoulder. They also made of point of mentioning that most people don't know how to help themselves in an emergency. The incident may have had a different outcome if we hadn't carried first-aid supplies and taken the time and effort to learn how to use them, before the ride.

Having the knowledge to use a first aid kit, and improvise if needed, is just as important as carrying the kit.

Carrying a communications device

Being able to call for help is a good thing. Having good communications is the third thing we did right.

Kim and I both carried tools to contact help in an emergency. We used them that day. Between the two of us we had cell phones, a personal locator beacon, and a Garmin InReach (satellite technology). With these tools at her

Chris Torno

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No-host bar - 5:30 pm, Dinner - 6:00 pm
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SUNDAY DOORS OPEN 8:00 AM

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- ★ Free Saddle Fitting 12 pm

Bitterroot clan, honored for backcountry pack mule work, has some stories to tell

Reprinted with permission by EVE BYRON, Ravalli Republic
eve.byron@ravallirepublic.com
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Oh, the stories the Schram/Duggan clan can tell about pack mules, the backcountry and Mother Nature.

Seated around the kitchen table, Julie Schram, her daughter Christy Schram-Duggan and husband Ed Duggan fire off anecdotes about years of packing so quickly it's tough to keep them straight. One involves packing in four boxes of dynamite, detonation cords and blasting caps, making sure that the explosives were on different mules.

"Pete had the biggest load — we put 220 pounds on him because the rock drill weighed 110 pounds and we needed to keep it even," Schram recalls. "We ended up going 22 miles and the last mile and a half they had snowdrifts up to their bellies. What happened was, there was a landslide and we couldn't go where the trail went, so we had to go down to this deep, steep spot with drifts still there. This was around the Fourth of July!"

With the easy banter of family, they finish each other's sentences while sipping coffee and tea.

"We packed a 6-foot ladder in one time," Duggan said.

"That was awkward," Schram-Duggan adds, laughing.

"And then there was the 8-by-10-foot roll of canvas that we couldn't fold up," Duggan said. "We took the pack boxes, loaded them up and put the roll on the pack box. It stuck out past the mule's head and past her tail. We packed it on Lady — she looked at us like 'Really?'"

They've packed mules since they were in their teens, and all are members of the Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen, which works with the U.S. Forest Service to help maintain trails. They're also volunteers with the Montana Wilderness Association, packing in tools — and lots of food — for crews as they take care of those places where mechanized equipment isn't allowed.

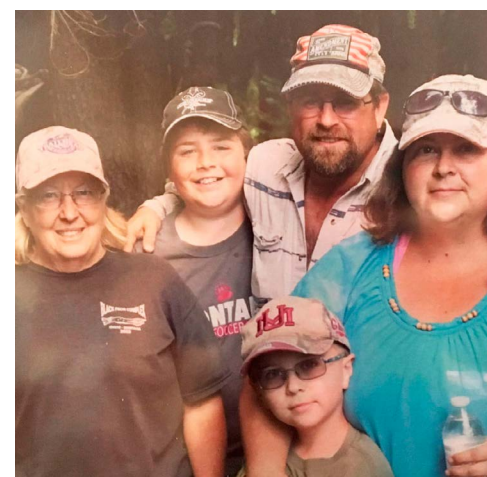
"MWA is a fun group, and have people come in from all over the country to work on the trails," Duggan said.

"Remember the guy from New York last year?" Schram-Duggan adds. "And the guy from Texas who was a vegan? He was hard to wrap your head around. He's from Texas and doesn't eat meat?"

All three agree that the trail crews do amazing work, so they were surprised last week when they were honored by the MWA with the 2017 Continental Divide Trail Crew Volunteer award. Sonny Mazzulo, the MWA stewardship coordinator, noted that Schram and her late husband Dave have been helping out since 2008, and after Dave died in 2016, Schram, Schram-Duggan and Duggan picked up the slack.

"They're damn good people," Mazzulo said. "Much of the Forest Service and BLM's highest priority trail work is deep in the backcountry. Without the support of Backcountry Horsemen like the Schram-Duggan family, MWA would be unable to get crews into these areas to work."

The award also included



(Clockwise) Julie Schram, Beau Duggan, Ed Duggan, Christy Schram-Duggan and John Renner were honored as the Volunteer Trail Crew of the Year by the Montana Wilderness Association.

Schram-Duggan's two sons, John Renner, 10, and Beau Duggan, 12.

"The award caught us totally off guard," Schram-Duggan said. "When he said our name, he had to coax us to go up there for the award. I was like, 'Crap, we have to stand up.'"

They modestly counter that without the trail crews and their fellow High Country Horsemen groups, many hikers and horseback riders wouldn't be able to get into backcountry.

"They do amazing work. Sometimes we ride in on a rough trail, and come in the next week to pack them out and you can't tell it's the same trail," Schram-Duggan said.

Last summer, they packed in four out of the five Continental Divide trail projects; the fifth began at the trailhead. They take in bear-proof metal food boxes, most of the crews' personal gear, tools and beverages. If the trail is 8 miles or less, they'll drop off the items, stick around for lunch, then head home. If it's one of the longer trips — like 22 miles — they stay overnight.

"Packing is a skill and an art rolled together," Duggan notes.

When the trail crews are finished, the family makes the return trip to pack them out.

"And we always have cold beer for them when they come out," Duggan said.

"And Gatorade, and Power-Ade," Schram-Duggan added.

They typically pack in with anywhere from six to nine mules and a handful of horses. In their pasture on a cold winter morning, where Schram-Duggan is the sixth generation, the livestock nuzzle them for scratches or watch warily.

Duggan says the mules all have distinct personalities. Lady is an old Forest Service mule and a "diva" who hates getting loaded but who is one of the best on the trail. Joe gets offended if he's not carrying the tool box, and will hit every tree on his way down the trail until he gets it. And don't put Pete and Joe together on the string.

"One will go one way around a tree and the other goes the other way," Duggan said. "With mules, especially these characters, they'll do things just because it's quiet or boring."

And after listening to their stories and laughter, it's clear that the Schram-Duggan clan takes after their mules more than they'd like to admit.

Hello from Iowa!

By Dorrine Norby, Back Country Horsemen of Iowa

Our BCH of Iowa has been a member of BCHA for the past two years. Even though Iowa does not have mountains or a whole lot of need for packing in and out of our parks (but we do some packing once in a while), we have worked very hard to maintain our trails, getting the public informed of our purpose, and have had delegates at the national convention each year. In our first year, we had over \$50,000 worth of volunteer efforts in our Midwestern state. We thought that was a great accomplishment on our part. We are excited to learn how much we did this year - we know that we are over that mark already!

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