Tips for getting riders out of the arena, onto trails, and into BCH

Having a diverse group of members is important for many reasons. People may not realize that horses are important for maintaining wild areas. By giving people the opportunity to enjoy and ride in a safe environment we may find members hiding in areas that we don't usually think of. These allies may help by joining to volunteer on trail projects, learn the art of packing, make donations, write letters, call politicians, answer surveys, and help educate others on trail etiquette. We won't know till we invite them in and show what we are doing.

1. Make Contact
    1. Look for barns online, talk to friends who board, go to shows, and post flyers. Most barns and shows have a place for flyers.
    2. Often a barn has a head trainer (or two) and those people will often be the point of contact for prospective riders and scheduling.
2. Outline why we want to include all stock users in BCHA
    1. a. Wilderness relies on stock to keep wild places wild.

    b. Keep Access; Consistent horse use is more likely to be maintained.

    2. c. Ability to share information on Light on the Land and Mountain Manners.
3. Outline the reasons why people should ride with BCH
    1. Local BCH members have knowledge of trails for all levels.
    2. Cross training horses outside of the arena is good for them both mentally and physically.
    3. Safety; A member will have a calm horse to help introduce trails to inexperienced horses and can teach trail etiquette.
    4. Community Involvement; Why not help the community with your horse, it's fun!
        1. Mention projects and impact.
4. Organize Event and/or Trail Ride

. Communicate with the trainer if applicable.

a. Know your audience; format your plan accordingly. These riders may not start out with big projects.

1. Start small, a lot of barn riders will be more comfortable going on a two hour trail ride than an eight hour ride.

c. Send out a group email, start a Facebook event, or group chat to touch base with everyone interested. Clearly outline what the expectations for the event will be.

1. For example; Do riders need to have a halter and rope to tie up? Lunch? Do they have saddle bags? Will there be a pack horse to carry gear for those that do not have a pack horse? How many horses are coming? What will the pace be? Is there parking for large trailers?

d. Attach Write Ups on trail etiquette or "Mountain Manners"

e. Understand that a barn or trainer may be gone for weeks at a time when showing. Usually trainers work Tuesday-Sunday or Tuesday-Saturday. Having flexibility on scheduling may help.

.This is a good time to mention the cross training benefits of trail riding, horses that are getting fit for the show season benefit from light hill work and horses that are in the middle of show season benefit from a change of scenery so they don't get burnt out.

5. Event/Trail Ride

a. Set expectations for the ride at the start.

i.Review plans and trail etiquette.

ii.Make sure everyone feels safe telling the others to stop, move back, etc.

b. Stay positive on the ride, your performance will set the tone for the day and will directly impact if the arena rider will ride on the trail in the future.
c. Take on the role of a tour guide; come prepared with knowledge of the area to share.
.What projects have BCH helped on for this trail? What are some things to improve? (ie Water bars, signage, etc)
d. Practice good trail etiquette to set an example for when riders are out there on their own.
.Bring a small saw to set an example for clearing if applicable.
e. Ask the riders questions about their horse and about themselves.
f. Make sure the ride is easy enough that you don't feel you have to spend your time telling the other riders what to do, let them ride.
g.
6. Follow Up
. Stay engaged after the ride, set up a second ride.
a. Keep an email list to send out beginner friendly projects.
b. Remember to send year end reviews/statistics to show what the group has accomplished. People will want to be part of a community of good.

Personal Experience:

I grew up in the Eventing scene in Montana. Growing up I often had retired show horses and I was able to spend a lot of time riding around the farm, not just in the arena, while my mother competed at a higher level. Throughout my teen years I worked as a groom in both upper level eventing and hunter jumper barns, managed barns of show horses, and was a professional scribe for both dressage and hunter judges. In my early twenties I traveled the west hunter/jumper show circuit with a well respected trainer. It was during this time that my love of the trails really started.

While I was familiar with short trail rides and Back Country Horsemen from a young age I did not think that I had a place in the organization. It was clear that my horse knowledge was plenty up for the challenge but I did not believe I had a place because I did not have the backcountry skills. Luckily, I had friends that were members and knew that I possessed the riding and horse skills to go with them on day rides. They always brought a saw with them and I learned about trail stewardship on our rides. They invited my huge warmblood mare with us on rides during the competition season and I used the rides as a way for her to relax and cross train before heading out for up to two weeks at shows. The trainer I worked for noticed how much happier and relaxed my mare seemed after getting out and would occasionally do the same with her horses at our local equestrian park.

After the show season was over for me in September my friends invited me on the longest ride I had done yet, 20 miles, in Glacier National Park. I was hooked after a summer of sweating in tiny stalls, in crowded events. I am very grateful that my friends were not judgemental towards my little jumping saddle, helmet, and tall boots, and large horse. They helped me learn to cross rivers, gave me a saddle bag that fit my english saddle, and taught me about how to leave the backcountry a better place. When opportunities from BCHMT became available, such as a packing clinic or class, they encouraged me and wrote letters of recommendation.

Now I have donated many hours and miles to the wilderness both in the form of working with BCHMT and with organizations like the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and Montana Conservation Corp. I have found that my background in "arena riding" and barn management is

an asset. My horses are well prepared for the difficulties on the trail and my horse care skills have a very solid foundation. My background in lessons comes in very handy when doing interactive demonstrations and packing camps and classes. That big warmblood mare? She is my lead packhorse and I rarely go anywhere without her. Both she and my riding horse traveled extensively with me to shows back in the day. They are the perfect horses for teaching, nothing prepares horses for possible pandemonium better than the atmosphere of a large show.

When we think about how to draw people into our chapters we should remember our mission: to perpetuate the use of equines in the backcountry (whatever that backcountry may look like) and to keep public lands open to stock use. It is our job to make it a welcoming and safe environment so that they can participate. Participation is paying membership dues that help fund projects, carrying a saw and being a good land steward, and even just spreading the word about our organization. As members get older, truly wild areas become smaller, and the percentage of people keeping horses at their own home drops, looking to barns and sharing our knowledge will be a good way to supplement our membership and spread our mission. It is possible (and likely) that people will fall in love with our public land when they have the opportunity to safely experience it.

Short Bio:

I grew up in the Eventing scene in Montana. Throughout my teen years I worked as a groom in both upper level eventing and hunter jumper barns, and in my early twenties I traveled the west hunter/jumper show circuit with a well respected trainer. While I was familiar with short trail rides and Back Country Horsemen from a young age I did not think that I had a place in the organization because I did not have the backcountry skills. Luckily, I had friends that were members and they invited me on day rides, despite my tiny english saddle, breeches, and huge warmblood mare. They always brought a saw with them and I learned about trail stewardship on our rides. When opportunities from BCHMT became available, such as a packing clinic or class, they encouraged me and wrote letters of recommendation. Now I have donated many hours and miles to the wilderness. I have found that my background in “arena riding” and barn management is an asset.

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