

The actual formation of the Back Country Horsemen took place in Montana's Flathead Valley in January of 1973. Back Country Horsemen's cornerstone was laid on a firm foundation of research and planning. The founding fathers of this organization were Ken Ausk (who is still active in the organization), Roland Cheek, Dennis Swift and Duane Fulton. Growth of the BCH as an organization continued with the formation of the Missoula, Bitterroot and East Slope Chapters in Montana. In 1977, the Back Country Horsemen of Washington was incorporated and developed an informal liaison with the Montana and newly formed Idaho Back Country Horsemen. The East Slope Back Country Horsemen got their start at an organizational meeting held in Valier, MT on Sunday April 9, 1978 at 2:00 P.M. at the Civic Center. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Fagerland of Big Fork along with Mr. and Mrs. Jack Watts of Columbia Falls presented an interesting slide program and explained how their chapter operates in the Flathead Valley. There were 65 people from Valier, Dupuyer, Conrad, Ledger, Brady, Shelby, Choteau and Bynum in attendance. Three women Delores Halverson, Barbara Tack from the Belgian Hill area east of Valier along with Idell Moore from Ledger rode their horses to the meeting. Each area chose representatives to serve as a steering committee to organize a chapter here. The areas and representatives were as follows. Valier; Jack Geiger, Denny Chatlain, Dick Deboo, Ken VanDenBos, Kirby Swanson and John Holden. Conrad, Brady and Ledger; Bill McFarland, Eugene Knobel, Judy Shultz, Roma Lee Fuson, Pat Becker and Brad Berthelson. Dupuyer; Mike Durnell and Bill Rappold. Shelby; Al Winters, and Mike Irvin. Choteau and Bynum; Don Petrilli, Merril Hirsch and Bill Walker. On April 24, 1978 60 persons attended the meeting of the Back Country Horsemen held at the VFW Club in Conrad on Monday evening. Election of Officers and Directors was held with Bill Rappold of Dupuyer elected President, Bill Walker of Bynum elected Vice-President, Roma Lee Fuson of Conrad elected as Secretary and Sandi Becker of Conrad was elected Treasurer. Board of Directors were Eugene Knobel and Brad Berthelson of Conrad, Mike Irvin and Al Winters of Shelby, Lloyd Walker of Bynum, Don Petrilli of Choteau, Jack Geiger and Denny Chatlain of Valier, Mike Durnell and Tom Hall Jr. of Dupuyer. It is with the foresight of these people that the chapter that we know today has grown and is now partaking on its own 30th Anniversary. It would be an understatement to say that this chapter did not have to take a few kicks and endure its share of hardships, but it has weathered the storm fairly well and is still alive and pitching in with public land managers and doing its part in the battle of management policies to try and keep public trails and lands open for all citizens to enjoy. We can also say that we still have the honor to have couple of these concerned citizens that still maintain membership with the chapter to this day. It would not be fair not to recognize these two gentlemen Don Hauge and Jack Geiger, but it cannot be fair not to mention also the others who for one reason or another have moved on to other things and so choose not to participate any more, but their recognition is just as important to the formation and growth of this chapter had it not been for them that day in April 1978 that they chose not to take those first steps at protecting our public lands.

This chapter has also had some very influential people who have led to the expansion and growth of the Back Country Horsemen, not to mention three who have had the distinct honor of chairing the Back Country Horsemen of America. There are and have been a lot of influential persons who have done much and are still giving of themselves and time to see that the visions of our founding members continue on. Growth of the Back Country Horsemen organization continued in 1979, with the formation of the chapters in Montana and Washington along with one from Salmon, Idaho, formed the Back Country Horsemen of America. Three more Montana chapters and one from Idaho were added in the next few years. In 1981, a California organization was formed known as the High Sierra Stock Users. After several years of discussion, the four groups decided to merge, using the Back Country Horsemen of America name. A constitution was drafted in 1985 and adopted in 1986. It provided that the governing body of this new organization would be a board of directors elected from each state. Montana, Idaho, California and Washington. Back Country Horsemen units became the BCHA. Since that time, there has been steady growth within the four founding state organizations. The Montana Back Country Horsemen now has seventeen chapters. Idaho has fifteen chapters. Washington has thirty-one chapters along with twenty-six chapters from California. There has also been many new state organizations that have joined the BCHA they are Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri; and there are, also, affiliated units in Tennessee, Virginia, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia along with British Columbia and Alberta, Canada. The fact that most of our members reside from many places along the East Slopes of the Majestic Rocky Mountains and are in themselves a very diverse group. We pride ourselves in the many gifted and talented members that belong to our chapter. As a chapter we take great pride in the fact that we are one of the most active chapters in doing work projects in our National Forest (Lewis and Clark) and the wilderness areas that are included in the forest, the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Scapegoat Wilderness. We also still help maintain the Pondera County Public Park and Trailhead at Swift Dam west of Dupuyer, this arrangement was made in the early 1980's with the Pondera County Commissioners. This trailhead rivals any along the Front that is managed with federal dollars, although a little more primitive, it has a certain charm that cannot be taken away from.