

# Beartooth Back Country Horsemen Trail Tales

## PRESIDENT'S PEN

Beartooth Back Country Horsemen, May 2020

Our local chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana, the Beartooth Chapter, is one of 18 chapters in the State of Montana. Montana was the very first State to organize, 47 years ago in the USA and is now one of 32 affiliate States, our main purpose, is: "To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses/equine in America's roadless back country. "

Our Local Chapter started 24 years ago in response to the Historic Stillwater River trail becoming impassable after the fires of 1988. The fire left many half-burned trees that fell across the trail during the ensuing windstorms for the next ten years. The complete path through to upper end was not opened until after that time. We started with a partnership involving the Custer Forest Service, and the Montana Conservation Core. Our earliest mission was to help clean the Stillwater River Trail back to Forest Service pack stock specifications. The USDA Forest Service trail construction and maintenance book States; that trails designed for equine use are called "pack stock trails" these are to be cleaned, (brushed back) 8 feet wide and 10 feet high. These are the specifications that the Forest Service trail crews use, these are also the standards that we as BCH MT members attempt to use when we do authorized work for the Forest Service. Our local Forest service crews will be starting up clearing the trails again this mid-May. Our Activities committee will soon coordinate some of our customary help projects.

During the first few years we were able to finance our projects by grants from the Federal Fish Wildlife trails grant program.

BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001

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Now with the good fortunes received from the foresight of some key members of our chapter, we decided to sponsor one of the Montana Specialty License plates for our income needs. Our "Backcountry Horsemen" plate has become one of the most popular plates in the state, we receive a dividend for each one sold. These dividends have allowed us to spend dollars to benefit ourselves and other backcountry travelers. Our help to the U.S. Forest service including the nearby magnificent Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness helps ensure our right to access and enjoy these public lands. Not only do our member's equines pack food and personal gear for the ABW trail crews, we spend time and funds for the public's safety education and for, equine packing, and riding.

Now due to the health pandemic, we the BBCH Board of Directors have realized that there could be many of our neighbors living in our member's nearby communities who are now or soon to be negatively impacted by the stay at home order. So, our BOD Members voted for a special mission this Spring by sharing some of our good fortune.

We have authorized our treasurer to forward \$2,250.00 to help these fellow citizens, we have sent \$500 to the Fishtail Community Center, our official meeting location. They had to cancel their yearly fund raiser, also sent \$500 to the Billings Food Bank. The balance will be \$250 checks sent to each of the food banks of Absarokee, Columbus, Joliet, Laurel, and Red Lodge.

John Simmons BBCH President

There will NOT be a GENERAL MEETING in May!

Stay tuned and stay safe. We look forward to gathering...when the gathering is good.

### 2020 BBCH Dues – are Due!

Individual: \$35    Family: \$45

Business: \$50, which includes your Business Card in the Newsletter

Mail your check to: BBCH, PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001





**April 9<sup>th</sup> – Weatherman’s Draw - “Valley of the Shields”**

For those that haven’t explored this trail, here are the directions:

Drive south of Bridger, turn right on HWY 72, head south for 5 miles, turn left on Golden lane, drive 1.4 miles.

There will be a sharp left turn, take the road headed up hill to the right, and cross the yellow cattle guard (Cottonwood Road), continue for another 10.6 miles. The Trail Head is on the left.

**Please send any submissions for the Newsletter to Robin Morris, [junkerette@msn.com](mailto:junkerette@msn.com), by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month. Thanks!**

## MAIN STILLWATER – RECON AND TRAIL CLEARING APRIL 29TH & MAY 1ST

Trail Clearing in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest is underway.

On April 29th, I headed up the Stillwater with four good friends to recon and see just how hard the winter's toll was on the trail. I was joined by Wendy Galvin, Michaela Schultz, Rachel Toler, her boyfriend Jared. We headed in through the Gorge and ran into our 1<sup>st</sup> downfall at 1 ¼ miles in, and they continued through mile 4.4. We had to drop/remove a few...just to continue on down the trail; but left what we could go around or over for a BBCH work crew. It was a beautiful



day and we were able to make it to the Overlook (7 miles in) for a nice lunch break. I walked up on the rocky top to get a picture of the water and a Canadian goose flew up from the shoreline, to reveal her nest of 6 huge eggs. I am worried about the location she chose as high waters will most likely take out her nest – brood and all.



On May 1<sup>st</sup>, John Jenkins and I headed back with his 5 ½' crosscut saw, his respirator, which is now part of his PPE, my Silky saw, wedge and WD-40. We needed all of it to tackle some pretty healthy entanglements. As John says, "you eat the elephant one bite at a time." We left a huge mess (you can get around it) for a larger crew as it will require "multiple" cuts to be manageable. A few logs we simply dropped so we could focus on the true "roadblocks." We got in a great workout – in the only gym that was open at the time, worked our tails off, and were rewarded with a pleasant ride out. We rode to Flood Creek, stopping on the bridge to enjoy lunch...at 3:00. Both trips were so needed and very enjoyed. New memories for my "old lady" bank 😊.







On May 5<sup>th</sup>, Melissa Codner, Mary Sybrant, Matt & Chris Anderson headed up the Stillwater to leg up their steeds. They headed in taking the Bypass, clearing a couple through that section, as well as a few on the ground before Sioux Charley Lake. They rode to the old Dating Cabin site, 4-miles in.



## Weatherman Draw/Valley of the Chiefs

Reprinted from MTHikes.com

Eighteen miles south of Bridger, MT lies an unusual hiking destination, called Weatherman Draw. At first, Weatherman Draw (also referred to as Valley of the Chiefs by many Native American tribes) seems lifeless and barren. Here there isn't any flowing water, and only the occasional juniper tree provides shade. What does make Weatherman Draw an amazing hike has to do with the history of the Valley of the Chiefs, and the geological wonders of the area.



Valley of the Chiefs' geological formations are not typical of a Montanan wilderness. There aren't any towering granite cliffs, or evergreen forests. Instead, there are sandstone cliffs that rise hundreds of feet above the valley floor, and coulees that wind for miles through the valley. The landscape is almost surreal, with narrow ravines carved through beautiful sandstone blocks. These formations, while unusual, are formed via familiar processes of erosion.

What makes the erosion processes unique in this area has to do with the amount of rainfall this area receives. Valley of the Chiefs receives so little rainfall that it qualifies as a desert- which is apparent as soon as you start hiking this dusty trail. When rain does fall, the ground acts as a barrier to the rain- the hard clay makes it difficult for rain to soak into the ground. This results in flash floods, which are responsible for many of the geological features on this trail. Although these geological features are impressive, the most interesting feature of this hike has nothing to do with erosion, but instead has to do with what features have survived erosion. These pictograph paintings that are hundreds of years old allow us to have a connection to the past, and to the heritage of some Native American tribes.

Considered sacred by Crow, Blackfeet, Comanche, Sioux, and Shoshone tribes (to name just a few), Valley of the Chiefs contains more pictograph art than any other location in North America. This valley has been used for vision quests, burials, and prayer. As such, it is imperative to step on this trail with a light foot- this valley has received enough abuse to last a thousand years. As you hike along the trails in the Valley of the Chiefs, you will unfortunately see signs of graffiti such as names scratched into sandstone boulders, and pictograph art that has been ruined by gunfire. Fortunately, this vandalism has not affected all of the art in this valley, or spoiled the geological wonders that lie down the trail.



Finding these works of art can be something of a challenge, which makes this hike fun for everyone. Some pictograph paintings are within view from the trail, whereas others are up to a mile from the main trail. Some paintings are on the sides of boulders, a seemingly unlikely location for a pictograph; others are located on the sides of sandstone cliffs, where one would traditionally expect a pictograph to be. Since this area receives heavy abuse, writing about the exact locations of these sacred pictographs would be foolish. Instead, the only hint I can offer is to look for the telltale red or orange splotches on sandstone. If you walk up to the splotches, you might be lucky enough to see a pictograph. If you don't find one at first, don't get frustrated- the nearly flat trail allows you to cover much of the valley quickly.

The trail itself winds up the valley, and passes smaller coulees and gorges along the way. This trail is unusual, in that it has no real destination. Instead, this hike is about getting off trail and wandering. Since the main trail passes by so many pictographs and natural features, off trail travel is a necessity. These added miles make mileage for this trail impossible to calculate. As an example, the main trail has five branches, and they all have their own side trails. Off trail travel here is relatively safe- the landscape is barren of tall trees, which makes navigation trivial. With all of these off-trail options, a mileage chart could not be included on this hike.

This hike does have a couple dangers that any hiker should be aware of. From May until October, rattlesnakes are common in the area. While snakes usually avoid confrontation, the morning hours are particularly dangerous, as a snake might not have enough energy to retreat. Take care while hiking, and be sure to keep an ear out for the telltale rattle. More common than rattlesnakes (and potentially more deadly) are the rare rainstorms that move through the valley. Flash floods are common here (as you can see by the many sinkholes), and even a light drizzle can make driving difficult. Cottonwood Road becomes a muddy mess in the rain (called gumbo), which makes travel nearly impossible, even for 4-wheel drive vehicles. While these two hazards may seem risky, it fortunately rarely rains here, and the rattlesnakes are more afraid of you than you are of them.

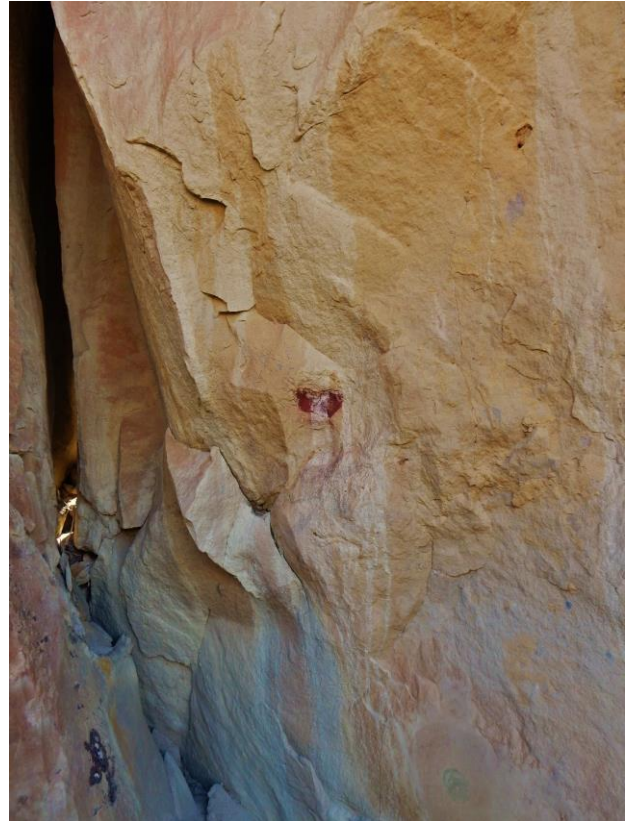


When you are ready to leave this inspiring landscape, head back down the way that you hiked, or hike this trail on a loop. A plethora of side trips are available for this trail, which is one of the highlights of hiking in this area. At the end of the day, you won't have an idea of exactly how far you have hiked, but you will have a better understanding of the area, and its history. The point of hiking this trail is an experience, not a destination.

## Our Venture to Weatherman Draw

Submitted by Robin Morris

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, I headed to Weatherman Draw, with good friends Michaela Schultz and Wendy Galvin. With COVID restrictions in-place, we each drove our own trailers. I first saw this trail in October of 2014, when Sally Carver coordinated a Fun Ride for the Beartooth Back Country Horsemen. I love the pictographs and it was fun showing them to the gals. We chose a ledge to dangle our feet over for a lunch spot, that also provided a glimpse of the history that transpired. After lunch Wendy and I climbed a bunch of the rock formations searching for additional pictographs and just enjoyed the afternoon acting “young.” While we didn’t see any rattlesnakes, Tom Williams did a few weeks later.



## HOW TO ENJOY THE OUTDOORS WHILE STAYING SAFE AND PROTECTING OTHERS



### TIPS FOR HIKING RESPONSIBLY DURING COVID-19 KEELY DAMARA

Communications Coordinator, Montana Wilderness Foundation

Here are a few tips to help you get the outdoor time you need while keeping you and your fellow Montanans healthy and safe (photo by Sara Schroeder)

On March 26, Montana Gov. Steve Bullock issued a stay-at-home order that [made exemptions for essential services and outdoor recreation](#) — as long as physical distancing is practiced.

Public lands are extremely important for our physical and mental well-being, especially now. But if we don't enjoy them responsibly during this health crisis, we will be putting our own health, and our neighbors' health, at risk.

If you choose to head onto public lands in search of fresh air, exercise, and solitude, please do so safely and respectfully. Here are a few tips to help you get the outdoor time you need while keeping you and your fellow Montanans healthy and safe.

1. **Stay close to home.** Enjoy public lands in your backyard, and don't risk health and safety by traveling unnecessarily. [Find trails near you](#) with our Hike Wild Montana hiking guide. Remember to check the managing agency's website before you go to ensure it's open to the public at this time. Note that while many of our public lands are still accessible, state and federal agencies have [closed facilities, campgrounds, and national parks \(including Yellowstone and Glacier\)](#) in an effort to curb large gatherings.
2. **Avoid crowds.** Stay away from busy trails and trailheads and maintain at least six feet of distance between yourself and others. Don't meet friends at the trailhead, either – hike with those you live with.

3. **Don't take unnecessary risks.** Our hospitals, medical staff, and first responders are facing, or are going to be facing, a monumental workload. Let's not add to that load by getting ourselves hurt.
4. **Avoid using toilets, sitting on benches, and using other facilities at trailheads** and anywhere else on public lands. This might be a good time for a refresher on [how to dispose of your own waste](#) when out on public lands.
5. **Respect closures.** If parks, trails, or other sites are closed, go somewhere else.
6. **Be a good steward.** Our public lands belong to all of us and it's up to all of us to take care of them, now more than ever. That means packing out your trash and following the other [Leave-No-Trace principles](#).
7. **Be kind.** We're all in this together, and showing kindness to fellow hikers, agency staff, and everyone else can go a long way.

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### ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Staying close to home is a simple way to protect public health while enjoying some fresh air. Here are some ideas for close-to-home activities that can provide important outside time.

- Go for a walk around your neighborhood [while practicing physical distancing](#)
- [Check out these webcams](#) featuring public land across the state or [take a virtual tour through a national park](#)
- [Read up on bird watching for beginners](#) and learn about [Montana's birding hotspots](#) to visit at a later date
- [Plan your wildlife-friendly garden](#). It's not only a great stress reliever, but you'll also be helping to combat habitat deterioration.

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## BBCH 2020 - Work Projects/Schedule of Activities

Any changes or additions will be emailed to all members and updated in the Newsletter monthly.

- **May 16<sup>th</sup>**, Clearing Stillwater Trail. Swing a leg (not get-there time) at 9:30 sharp! Pack stock will not be needed, but please bring your handsaws. Several of us will have our 3 ½" up to 5" crosscuts saws that are easily packable on our riding stock. **Directions to the Trailhead:** From MT 78 (between Red Lodge and Absarokee), turn onto MT-419 to Fishtail. Drive through Nye and past the Stillwater Mine for a total of 28.7 miles until you dead-end at the trailhead. Paved road, stock trailer parking.
- **May 18<sup>th</sup>**, BBCH General Meeting – **CANCELLED**
- **May 22<sup>nd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>**, Memorial Day weekend clearing of West Fork
- **May 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup>**, Clearing Stillwater Trail???

Face of the Mountain, Line Creek, and Meyers Creek still to be determined.

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**Beartooth Back Country Horsemen** has committed to provide stock support for the ABW projects highlighted in "green." Local contacts to sign up for those projects will be listed as they come up on the

schedule. The ABW is looking volunteers for each of the projects that follow. It is a great opportunity for members that do not have horses and/or no longer ride, but still want to spend time and help in the Back Country. To volunteer for any of the ABW projects, sign up is on their page: [www.abw.org](http://www.abw.org) under "Volunteer."

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**June 6<sup>th</sup>, Saturday - South Fork of Deep Creek #388—National Trails Day**

- Location: South of Livingston—Yellowstone District
- Work: Sawing out trees across the trail; treadwork (widening and grading the trail)
- Description: National Trails Day occurs the first Saturday of June every year. The ABWF and Custer Gallatin National Forest have made a tradition of kicking off the season by working on one of our popular local trails. Local groups like the Livingston Bike Club and the Park County Environmental Council have traditionally added their volunteers to make this a great team effort.
- Group size: Unlimited; we'll split into small working groups in the wilderness; bring a friend!
- Meeting time & location: 8:30 a.m. Yellowstone Ranger Station, 5242 Hwy 89 South
- Bring: water, lunch, snacks, sun protection; a friend

**June 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup>, Saturday/Sunday - Line Creek Trail #7A – Community Trails Day**

- Work: Sawing out trees across the trail; treadwork (widening and grading the trail)
- Description: This may well be a trail few people know about, so add this trail to your bucket list and learn more about it by helping improved it! It's on the south side of the Line Creek Plateau and starts outside of Clark, Wyoming. (If you went up and over the plateau from the Corral Creek Trail/Piney Dell Resort, you'd end up at the Line Creek trailhead. Every year the ABWF calls upon the Red Lodge/Billings communities to join us for some trail repair and improvement
- Group size: Unlimited; this one is outside Wilderness; bring a friend!
- Meeting time & location: 8:00 a.m. Beartooth Ranger Station, 6811 South Hwy 212.
- Bring: water, lunch, snacks, sun protection; bear-spray; a friend. Pack for car-camping if you intend to stay over. There's good camping in the area and we'll plan on grilling on the campfire.

**July 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, Thursday-Monday - Pine Creek Trail #627 to Palmer Mountain**

- Location: Northeast of Gardiner/Jardine—Gardiner District
- Work: A lot of Brushing and extensive treadwork; adding fill to rutted trail; might need to shift the trail over in some places; tree-clearing as needed.
- Description: A multi-day project, with nearby camping in Timber Camp site.
- Camping: We'll car camp for the duration in the Timber Camp undeveloped site (there is a toilet) up the Bear Creek Road. All Food is provided.
- Group size: 10 max
- Meeting time & location: 9:00 a.m. Gardiner Ranger Station, 805 Scott Street, Gardiner.
- Bring: Boots, long pants, day pack, work gloves. Car camping.

**July 23-27, Thursday-Monday Trail: W. Fork Stillwater Trail #90/Breakneck Meadows**

- **Location:** West of Nye, Montana (Stillwater Mine/Absarokee area)—Beartooth District
- **Work:** A lot of Brushing (lopping/sawing brush growing over the trail; Sawing out trees across the trail as needed. Plus, tread work (widening and grading the trail)
- **Description:** We'll be hiking up the beautiful and reclusive West Stillwater Valley 8.5 easy miles along the W. Fork of the Stillwater River to Breakneck Meadows where we'll set up camp for four nights. Each day we'll be working within roughly 2-miles of camp. We'll be doing a lot of brushing and trail grading. There will horse-packing support to carry in our heavy food, tools and camping equipment. Breakneck Meadows is a gorgeous destination!
- **Difficulty:** Moderately strenuous. Hike in is moderate. **BBCH Horse Support.** **Elevation:** 7500'
- **Group size:** 10; this project takes place in Wilderness;
- **Meeting time & location:** 8:00 a.m. We will gather together at the Old Nye Picnic Area just before you get to the Stillwater Mine. Then we'll carpool/caravan to the Trailhead, which is a very rough road for passenger cars as it winds up and above the Mine to Initial Creek Campground and the W. Stillwater TH.

**July 31–Aug 3, Friday-Monday (4 day) Trail:** W. Fork Boulder River Trail #41. High School only!

- **Location:** Southwest of Big Timber/McLeod; SE of Livingston—Yellowstone Ranger District
- **Work:** Extensive brushing of lodgepole saplings obscuring the trail; Sawing out trees across the trail. Age appropriate work. This area burned a decade or so ago, and the lodgepoles came back with a vengeance!
- **Description:** This trip is for High School kids only! This is the fourth time the ABWF has successfully led a group of high school aged kids into the wilderness backcountry to engage in this type of service-learning work. Our group will be hiking about 6 miles before we set up camp in pretty meadows along the stunning West Boulder River for 3 nights. From camp we'll hike 2-miles or less each to where we'll do our work to make this trail much more passable. We'll also spend time in the evenings talking about conservation issues and the value of our public lands and wilderness. **BBCH Horse Support** to carry in our heavy food, tools and camping equipment.
- **Difficulty:** work is Moderate. Hike in is moderate **Horse Support:** YES **Elevation:** 6300' ft.
- **Group size:** 10; this project takes place in Wilderness
- **Meeting time & location:** 9:00 a.m. at the West Boulder Trailhead/Campground, which is at the end of the W. Boulder Road just past McLeod. Easy to Google Map.

**Aug 19-26, (8-days) Trail:** Fourmile/Meatrack Trails #22-23 w/ American Hiking Society

- **Location:** South of Big Timber, along the Main Boulder Road at Fourmile Creek. Yellowstone RD.
- **Work:** We will pull non-native hounds tongue, construct water bars, build check dams and retaining walls out of stone and wood; and finish everything off by brushing the corridor. This is an all-around quite strenuous work project, as we will be working with stone, locally sourced logs, and standard trail tools (shovels, Pulaskis, picks, crosscut saws).
- **Description:** This is our annual project with the members of the American Hiking Society. Our trip starts at the Frosty Freeze in Big Timber, MT. From there we will carpool/caravan up the Main

Boulder River to the Fourmile Trailhead. The first and last night of the trip, the crew will camp at the Fourmile Trailhead. On the morning of Day 2, we will hike in the 5 miles and establish a basecamp for the rest of the week. The Beartooth Backcountry Horsemen will pack in our heavy stuff—food, tools, tents, etc.—so volunteers only need to carry a day pack with their clothes and personal items. This is an American Hiking Society trip; you must be registered for through their website: <https://americanhiking.org/volunteer-vacation-trip/absaroka-beartooth-wilderness/>. The road down the Main Boulder River gets quite rough beyond 4-mile; most passenger vehicles can make it to the 4-Mile bridge, but it's slow going.

- **Difficulty:** The work is Strenuous. Hike in is moderate to fairly strenuous. **BBCH Horse Support** Elevation: 8000 ft.
- **Group size:** 11; this project takes place in Wilderness.
- **Meeting time & location:** Whether you are driving yourself or catching a ride from the airport, we will convene at 2:30 p.m. at the Frosty Freeze in Big Timber and drive to the trailhead together. **This one we need BBCH to pack us in on August 20th in the morning, and pack us out on August 25th, in the afternoon.**

**Thank you to these local businesses for their continued support!**



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