

Beartooth Back Country Horsemen Trail Tales

President's Pen

I thought autumn was here at one point. I sure have enjoyed the cooler mornings. But I'm not sure what kind of weather we're having now. Here's an example...

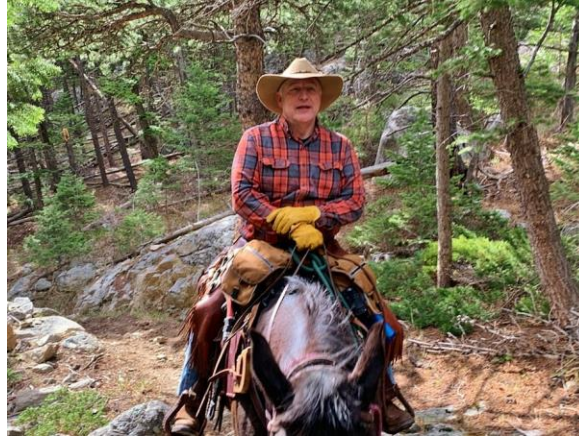
I headed out hunting on opening weekend, in the rain on a strange (to me) horse, on a steep mostly muddy uphill ride 2.5 miles, in the dark, an hour before daybreak, flashlight in my mouth. It had rained all night, but within 15 minutes of my ride out it's snowing moderately hard. And it snowed (wet) most of the rest of the day. At least we stopped and built a fire to dry just a few body parts just a little bit. We called it a day and got home by 9 PM.

Then all my friends are out riding the trails the next 2 weeks in 60° weather in shirt sleeves while I'm stuck at work. I think the weather is SPRINTER this autumn. That is, part spring and part winter. I'm going to try to catch the spring part of this weather next time.

But on the other hand, this, at times, unseasonably warm weather has been a blessing. We've had some trail crews out working on trails we were unable to tackle earlier this year or last year. Kudos to you all. I hope everyone else is getting some nice rides in this mild weather.

So, what's coming up? Equine dentistry by Dr. Lacey Fahrmeier (DVM) from Absarokee at the General Meeting in November. Elections too in November. Then we'll have our Christmas Party in December. You'll need to RSVP since the club decided to cater the whole shebang. White elephant gift exchange. Details inside and more details to come.

Just a note on the elections. John Chepulis and I are taking names on the Nomination Committee. We would like to have as many people as possible to have input into the club's directions, plans and activities.



BBCH DIRECTORS

...

President- John Jenkins
855-0238
Vice President- Dave Heinle
321-4326
Treasurer- Melissa Codner
308-390-0465
Director- Keith Brighton
425-1122
Director – Ray Longstreth
406 224 5185
Director- Bob Knutson
698-0290

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...

John Jenkins
855-0238
Randy Thomsen
425-0204
Keith Brighton (Alternate)
425-1122

NATIONAL DIRECTOR

...

John Chepulis
322-4823

Please step up and serve. Talk to any board member about what's involved. If I can help out, you can too. And it's been a lot of fun for me. No experience necessary. It's on the job training!

Happy Trails

John Jenkins

Newsletter Editor – NEEDED!

Robin's last Newsletter will be the December 2022 issue.

This is a great opportunity for someone else – and a great way to “contribute” to our Chapter! This volunteer position starts with the January, 2023 edition. The Editor will provide oversight for the newsletter, curating or writing newsletter content as needed; collate and format articles, photos, BOD meeting minutes; and, email the completed newsletter, by the 10th of each month, to the membership. A template of the existing Newsletter will be provided. Of course, the new Editor will have the freedom to “make it their own.”

Contact: Robin Morris, junkerette@msn.com, or John Jenkins john.k.jenkins@gmx.us or any board member.



November 21st - 6:30 P.M. Potluck – General Meeting @ 7:00

Columbus Fire Station

944 E Pike Columbus

Presentation By: Dr. Lacey Fahrmeier (DVM), Equine dentistry

NOTICES

BBCH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Fishtail Community Hall - Monday, December 19. **CATERED BRISKET AND ALL THE FIXIN'S!** Dinner at 6:30 Sharp.

White elephant gift exchange, no more than \$25. We will need help with decorating the day before. More information to be announced at the November meeting and in the December newsletter.

Since we are catering this, **YOU WILL NEED TO RSVP 1 WEEK PRIOR, BY NOON MONDAY DECEMBER 12.** We'll let you know how to rsvp in the next newsletter. No RSVP, no brisket. Be there or just be a Scrooge!

ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER - NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

No, this is not an ad for politicians in the state or US capital. It just sounds like one.

But we are looking for a few good horsewomen and horsemen! We will be electing three board of directors for a 2-year term, 1 state director for a 2-year term, and one alternate state director for a 1-year term. The board of directors meets the first Thursday of each month for 1 -2 hours for planning club activities and other necessary club administrative functions. It's a great way to learn more about the BCH, local trails, public land management, etc. We do request that the directors try to attend at least 75% of the meetings.

State Directors also attend a quarterly Montana BCH state directors meeting. The alternate attends if one of the state directors cannot.

Contact any board member for more information. Or John Chepulis and John Jenkins (contact info on the front page), the nominating committee. Nominate yourself at the meeting if you wish. Floor nominations will be taken at the November general BBCH meeting.

NEW SIGNS PLACED ALONG TWO TRAILS!



Island Lake



Ernie Strum Trail

2022 TRAIL CLEARING – MYERS CREEK TO DEER CREEK CABIN

Written By: Robin Morris

Several work crews have been busy trying to reopen the trail between Myers Creek and the Deer Creek Cabin. I last rode this trail on October 8, 2016. I tried a couple of other times, but didn't get far due to the extreme downfall. On June 1st and 2nd in 2019, after hearing me whine – for a couple of years, we put together a crew and cut a “mountain” of downfall and trees, but were stopped at the first Creek Crossing by high water. I continued trying to generate interest in reclaiming this trail.

In 2006, the Derby Fire scorched over 200,000 acres. This



area was hard-hit. Sixteen years later, most of the 60'+ dead-standing lodgepole pines near the trail have fallen.

The trails and creek crossing were a tangled mess with six years of abandonment, constant winds, and severe flooding from record mountain snow levels.

On April 2nd, our Chapter cleared from Jim's Gulch, up West Bridger Creek, to Deer Creek Cabin. Our Chapter hadn't planned on clearing between Myers Creek and Deer Creek Cabin. Finally, two of our members took it upon themselves to take on the

task. Craig and Tara Smith got things rolling on September 20th, clearing Lodgepole (from Myers Creek) up Lower Deer Creek towards the cabin, for 7.16 miles. Then on October 12th, and October 17th, Craig and Tara rode in from Jim's Gulch, picked up the trail at the cabin and cleared four of the most challenging miles one can imagine - that included many creek crossings! Craig and Tara focused on the dozens of trees across the trail that *had* to be cut in order to keep going. Many were



extremely large trees – several over 20" in diameter! Later crews were very impressed with their efforts. Several trees that you could ride over or around, were left for another day.

On October 24th, Robin Morris, Randy Thompson and Dan and Janae Kellogg headed in with one pack mule and two chainsaws. Headed up Lodgepole we widened prior cuts to allow better access for pack stock. Many had been short-cut years ago. As we started our descent, we cleared several downed trees you could ride over and more logs that could catch on stock panniers. I brought a battery-powered saw, and Dan brought his son-in-law's gas-powered saw – it looks like it has a 20" bar. Dan used my saw on the smaller logs and grabbed the "big" saw for the more substantial logs. Again, several trees had diameters over 20". Dan amazes me with his chainsaw skills – I call him the beast. Janae would control our string of equines while Dan cut; I cleared the smaller stuff, and Randy helped toss the cuts off the trail.



The recent snow covered the pine boughs. We came to a section of dense sapling lodgepole pines, 10-15' high. The path was narrower than Beau, and most branches extended across the trail. As the first to



pass through the "pine tunnel," I was covered in snow. Dan declared, "this forest has enough trees. Let's get to thinning." So, we went opposite directions with our saws culling over 50 saplings crowding the trail. It looks great! Just over 7 miles up Lower Deer Creek we stopped, once again at the first water crossing. Dan and I were able to cross the creek on foot and clear between the 1st and 2nd water crossing. But a log remains on the far side of the first crossing that will need to be cleared for stock to pass. With the frigid temperatures and waning sun light we weren't prepared to ride out with wet boots.

On October 28th, I headed in solo from Jim's Gulch to recon "what was left" prior to Dave Heinle arriving on the 29th to help clear. I made it 3 ½ miles past the cabin, clearing one large log to provide a better exit from the creek and several smaller logs. On October 29th, Dave Heinle and I had aspirations of getting the trail



completed. We cleared a few logs over the trail and swore to cut others on the way out. Craig and Tara had done the heavy lifting thus far. At mile eight, things didn't look right. Large logs were cut and lying in the creek, giving the assumption that the trail traveled across a solid, sloping boulder partially submerged in the stream. Tara told me she had an incident with her horse slipping on a "mossy" rock. This had to be the rock she mentioned. The original trail crossed the creek and traveled back to this side 100' upstream. We climbed over the cut

logs for a better look. What a nightmare. The flood riddled the path with multiple tangled massive logs jammed with debris. We crossed the creek back to our stock and figured we could walk the mules over the rock, on the part out of the water, safely back to the trail ahead of us. Dave gathered his riding mule while I grabbed his pack mule. As Dave led his mule on the rock, sh*t hit the fan. His mule slipped in the creek, scrambled back up, slid down again, hopped back up, and this time was sliding down the rock on its side. We were both worried about it flipping over in the creek. Through an amazing effort on the mule's part, he made it to solid footing.

There was no way we were going to lead that mule back across the rock, so it was time to buck up, fire up the chainsaws, and clear the "original" trail. Dave's mule stood quietly on its island. Amazingly, what may appear "impossible" can be possible with the right motivation. Our motivation was the safety of the mule – watching our progress from his island. After clearing the trail, we headed back to move the logs cut by Craig and Tara. No way around it - our boots were getting wet – thank goodness it was in the 50s. I climbed into the creek to shove the logs to Dave while he hoisted them out of the way and sent them downstream. Whew – we were both pleased. Ironically, we briefly discussed riding from Myers Creek and clearing to where Craig and Tara stopped. Had we done that, we would not have known about this dangerous obstacle, and a horse or human could have been injured or killed. We felt good about our work.



Trail is straight across the creek – time to get busy!



Crossing this rock is not advised.

Three-quarters of a mile further, we came to where Craig and Tara stopped. After another ½ mile and a dozen cuts, we walked the hill and saw a lot of work remaining. While we were just half a mile from the section cleared from Myers Creek, we called it a day. Dave had obligations, and we would be running out of daylight. As promised, we did take care of the downfall we swore to cut on the ride out.

While I was disappointed that the trail has half a mile remaining before we can ride from Myers Creek to the Deer Creek Cabin, I am pleased with the miles cleared and taking the "mossy" rock out of the equation. This project will definitely be on the schedule come Spring!



Original trail reclaimed – across the creek – not the mossy rock!

All teams left some work behind – which is fine. When you have a crew, it is essential to get the most work out of your team as quickly as possible. Especially with a limited amount of daylight. By tag-teaming, I feel really good about the condition of the trail – although that half mile remains before we can call the trail “clear.” There is one section, not far past the cabin that will need some skilled labor. Several years ago, a dozen large trees fell on top on each other and the go-around trail is in a deep, dry creek channel, full of rocks. I’m guessing that a good crew with three sawyers and several “tossers” could reclaim the original trail in an hour or two. It is my hope that we can complete the trail early in 2023, so folks can enjoy the 22 miles in-out-trail from Myers Creek. It is a beautiful ride – complete with a waterfall!



FACE OF THE MOUNTAIN

Written By: Robin Morris

10/31/2022: I haven't ridden the Face of the Mountain Trail since June 11, 2020. That was a happy time. Several Beartooth Back Country Horsemen members rode to the cabin to meet with a representative from the BLM and observe the latest improvement – a new vaulted toilet, and to discuss building corrals as the BLM was preparing to make the cabin available for rent. On June 13, 2021, a careless biker riding off-trail in a non-motorized area started a fire with his dirt bike. The fire burnt 30,000 acres and destroyed many homes and outbuildings. One of the casualties was Line Cabin – and the vaulted toilet. I have many beautiful memories of the cabin – that I will hold on to for the remainder of my life. I had to see the destruction for myself.



The new trailhead



Louise Jenkins and I spent several, joyous hours limbing these trees on 6/9/2018

The road between Highway 212 and the trailhead – is a nightmare! While it is only 3.3 miles, it's a slow 20–30-minute drive. The one-lane road turns to dirt after half a mile. A mile further, you head down a steep grade, crossing a cattleguard with a sign warning "Drone Surveillance Area!" What the heck? The last mile is the worst. The road is not graded for drainage – it is a trough. I drove on the uphill edge to straddle the deep ruts that could easily high-center my trailer, going from side to side to avoid the ruts that meandered back and forth. I asked Aghy (my dog) twice to lie down so I could watch my towing mirrors to see where my trailer tires were. We arrived at the trailhead just after 10:00. I first noted the parking lot. It now borders the Meeteetse Trail Road. There is room for one trailer – two at the most with a "coordinated plan."

After unloading and bridling Beau, we were off. While the west wind was howling, it was only one and a quarter mile to the mountain's base, where things would be calmer. The sagebrush was unscathed from the fire, but as I approached the first creek crossing, I was shocked by the reality of the dead standing and the road

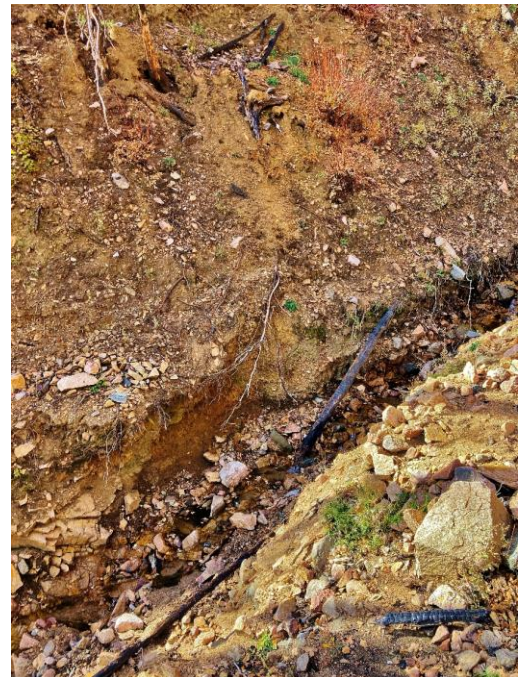
scattered with sapling Balsam Poplar trees. Past the creek, plants and grasses have already re-established. And, surprisingly, some of the pines were spared – including several Whitebark Pine. I kept smelling something "sweet" in the air. As I rode the switchbacks, I grabbed handfuls of vegetation, trying to narrow it down. Alas, I discovered it was Douglas Fir. Several plants were thriving – although in their dormant stage, especially White Snakeroot and Cow Parsnip.



And then came my memories. Louise Jenkins and me limbing the pine trees along the trail; some were spared, others weren't. Further up, I recalled where Win-e, then several years later, Reno, slid off the



trail in the deep snow during trail clearing projects. On a narrow passage, Nancy's horse turned around – she wasn't happy as she is not a fan of heights. Then I came to the spot where Jody, Keith, and I cleared a horrendous mess – with handsaws. No sign of the debris remains.



We've spent a lot of time on this mountain. A small grove of living pines greeted me up the switchbacks! Dropping down the other side of the mountain, you enter a narrow trail with a south slope. It has always been narrow but the erosion has eaten away parts of the path. With little vegetation to stabilize the ground, it will only get worse. Several times the dirt sloughed beneath Beau's hoofs. I was glad to enter the forest and flatter ground. Everything was dead, the soil was barren, and the tree bark burnt off. It was eerie in a beautiful way. As I approached the first sharp draw, the trail was washed out from the heavy run-off. I hopped off Beau as I would have to head above where the trail used to be and walk along a downhill incline. Imagine your left foot on the ground and your right foot on two stairsteps above you. Beau did fine.



The next draw was worse. A small stream of water was running in a channel 10' below where the trail used to be! What now? I jumped into the stream below and asked Beau to join me. Guess what? He said, "no." I didn't want to backtrack over the last obstacles, so I searched for a solution. We headed down the steep slope at an angle, with his hoofs sinking into the rocks and debris up to his coronet band. At the bottom, and now in the creek channel, we headed back up the more gradual slope, returning to the trail. I was now

hesitant as I knew the North Fork Draw was ahead of us. Thank goodness, it was fine. When we reached South Fork, a sign on the trail marker read, "Warning Trail Impassable to Stock & Bikes, Trail Damage Between S. Grove and Gold Crk."

As we rode the service road to the cabin, my apprehension rose. There was a lump in my throat, and my eyes teared up. Beau and I spotted the cabin site at the same time. He noticed something was different. His ears were straight up as we approached the ground where the cabin sat. Rocks outlining the cabin's footprint – were all that remained. I rode Beau to the cabin's center to take in the view - it's stunning. I looked to the meadow, where Beau grazed on several



occasions, to the dead tree I always tied him to, and where the amazingly modern vaulted toilet stood. The metal fire ring looks out of place – with everything else gone. I turned Beau loose to graze the meadow while Aghy and I enjoyed lunch. I was glad I brought a beer, as this will undoubtedly be my last trip to the "cabin." It was time to embrace the moments I had and smile. And so, we did. I walked the footprint and noted several large corral nails that survived the intense heat that consumed everything else – the metal roofing, the glass – all of it.

The ride out brought more tears. But anyone that knows me knows that nature's outstanding beauty always brings tears of sheer joy. The magical view of the limestone Meeteetse Spires carries my soul. Riding the service road to the base of the mountain was more like a slip-and-slide. The road grade ranged from 19° to 25°. The spring run-off left deep troughs and rocks covering the surface, making it a slow ride to Robertson Draw. I giggled, recalling when we installed John Simmons' steel "horse friendly

– vehicle barrier" gate. After the gate was installed, we agreed to gather at the cabin. The reps with the BLM decided to drive up the service road to the cabin. I was on a horse. The truck bucked up and down and over the rocks with all four tires spinning out as they headed up the road – it was hysterical. Finally, John Simmons had enough and asked them to stop, so he could get out and walk. The steel gate now rests on the side of the road. A new gate has been installed at the bottom of the hill to keep motorized vehicles out.



We headed north on the Meeteetse Trail Road. The backside of the Spires is equally stunning. More erosion is apparent on several sections of the road that takes you through a section of private land.



With less than a mile to go, we stopped for one last drink of water from the small stream that runs into Bear Creek. As I rode to the trailer, I was thankful. Thankful for the recall of the memories and the chance to say goodbye. But not for the drive-out! That I will not miss.

The next several pages include "Face of the Mountain" pictures, from the past.



BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001









MINUTES – OCTOBER 5TH, BBCH BOARD MEETING

In attendance: John Jenkins, Melissa Codner, Randy Thomsen, Nancy Thomsen, Keith Brighton, Bob Knutson, John Chepulis

Meeting called to order at 7:11pm at Columbus Chamber of Commerce

Keith Brighton moved to approve August Minutes with changes. Randy Thomsen second. Motion passed.

Treasurer's Report has been filed in Minutes. Keith Brighton moved to approve Treasurer's report. Randy Thomsen second. Motion passed.

There have been a couple new memberships for 2023. The club is over budget for pack trips and animal per diem. Discussion on stipend change beginning of this year, higher mileage trips, membership interest and budget for next year. Keith Brighton moved to pay for additional expenses, over budget for mileage and animal per diem turned in prior to this meeting. Randy Thomsen second. Motion passed.

BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001

John Chepulis has delivered gravel for the Forest Service use to Meyers Creek Trail. Discussion on the gravel delivery to Initial Creek. Randy Thomsen moved to pay \$185 for gravel at Meyers Creek. John Jenkins second. Motion passed.

Education: November club meeting presentation will be equine dentist, speaker from Stillwater Vet.

October presentation will be equine nutrition, pending confirmation of speaker.

December meeting is Christmas party, Melissa Codner will check on having party catered. Party will be held at Fishtail Community Center, December 19.

Communications: Robin Morris will be retiring from the Newsletter in December. Please contact board member if interested in publishing newsletter.

Laura O'Conner will be asked to handle BBCH Instagram account. Chamber of Commerce is having an annual banquet. They are asking for auction donations or a table of 8 for \$350 for dinner. Randy Thomsen moved to donate an auction item. 2 hats, 2 t-shirts, 2 water bottles, and a one-year family membership. Bob Knutson second. Motion passed

Activities were successful this year. More participation is needed. Ernie Strum sign pictures should be submitted to Newsletter. Meyers Creek Campout pictures should be submitted to Newsletter. Please return club pack equipment to Randy Thomsen. Please submit hours and mileage paperwork to John Chepulis.

One new member signed up at the Real Deal Trail Challenge. Melissa Codner, John Jenkins and Brad Molnar and family manned a booth for BBCH.

Issues: A letter will be sent by BCHMT on the issue of the Holland Lake Resort. The highway to Initial Creek and Main Stillwater trail is still closed.

BCHMT: Committee is working on an equine version on "Leave no trace". There will be a webinar on e-bikes on October 22. A vote will be taken on the Blackfoot Water Compact. The State youth pack clinic received the bear proof panniers BBCH purchased and donated to them. State convention will be held in Kalispell, April 14-16. BCHA convention will be held directly after state convention in Kalispell. More information will be arriving in December, along with raffle tickets.

Nomination Committee for Elections will be John Jenkins and John Chepulis. A State Alternate (1 year term), a state board seat, and 3 general board seats.

The Board would like to Thank John Chepulis for his help with the Meyers Creek Campout.

Meeting adjourned 9:15pm

LAUGHING STOCK

What happens in the Wilderness – stays in the Wilderness.





October 16, 2022: "New" Castle Creek to Initial Creek Trail


Please send any submissions for the Newsletter to Robin Morris, junkerette@msn.com,
by the 5th of each month. Thanks!

Thank you to these local businesses for their continued support!



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