

Beartooth Back Country Horsemen Trail Tales

President's Pen

Happy 2024!

This is going to be a busy year so I hope you are up for it!

We are in the year of getting all of our certifications caught up so before we even swing a leg, be prepared for adding chainsaw, crosscut, first aid, and defensive horsemanship on your calendar. This is required by the Forest Service and to make sure we are covered under the Forest Services insurance. These certifications are not only imperative for that but also to keep us as safe as possible while in the backcountry, whether we are clearing trail or just enjoying a trail ride.

We are also hosting a youth clinic in April at the new event center in Columbus! Sarah has been spearheading this project and we are grateful to be leading the next generation to a love of the backcountry. In this clinic, we will be introducing the youth to trail riding and working on how awesome packing in the wilderness really is. We may be asking at the meetings if anyone has any supplies that could be used for a makeshift trail course.

Our next general meeting is Monday, January 15th at the Fire hall in Columbus. Pot-luck at 6:30, meeting at 7:00.

Melissa



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NEXT MEETING:



Monday, January 15 at 6:30 pm
Columbus Fire Hall
Education: Walkie Talkie Etiquette

2024 Membership dues:

- Business Membership \$40
- Family Membership \$35
- Individual Membership \$25

Please pay your 2024 dues! You can deliver them to Jon S. at our next meeting or mail them to PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001. We are not raising our dues as we want to encourage new and existing members to stay active.

Not a member yet? Application available for download [here](#).

BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001

HORSEBACK IN YELLOWSTONE

In July and August, 2023, we (Bill Yager, Peter Yager, Hannah Orth, Laura Michalak) toured Yellowstone Park. We did it the traditional way, on horseback. We carried food, tents, and bedrolls on pack mules, and camped at night. We called ourselves the Rawhide and Rocky Trails Expedition. Six other friends and relatives joined for portions of the trip, some of them choosing to walk rather than ride.



Yellowstone Park can be very crowded, especially around the major features and especially in mid-summer. But beyond the crowds are a thousand miles of backcountry trails that get light use. These trails take the hearty traveler to geysers, hot springs, and waterfalls that most Yellowstone tourists never hear of, much less see. They lead over high mountain passes, along placid lakes, through raging rivers and across wildlife-filled mountain meadows. There are few people back there; we sometimes went for days without seeing another person.

We rode those trails for 240 miles. We didn't just see the sights; we lived Yellowstone for 26 days. We felt the warm morning sun and the cold rain. We smelled the perfume of wildflowers, the smoke of campfires, the sulphureous steam of hot springs. We heard the howls of wolves and the screams of sandhill cranes. We fought swarms of mosquitos and horseflies. We sawed our way through deadfall. We relaxed in rich mountain meadows, soaked in hot springs, and followed the tracks of wolves and grizzly bears.



STOCK

We took four horses and four mules. We knew that the success of the trip depended on sound, reliable, well-trained stock. Most of our horses have packed and most of our mules have been ridden. Nevertheless, we mostly rode horses and packed mules on this trip.



Many of our animals have extensive mountain experience. We were surprised how much the hard work and constant exposure to new challenges seemed to calm and steady them on this trip. Living with our stock and depending on them every day (and they on us), we developed close bonds. I got used to the sight of mules and wranglers stretched out together sleeping on sunny rest days.



We use the sawbuck style of packing. All of our pack saddles have two cinches, a breast collar, and a breeching. Each mule carries a pair of pack boxes. On top of the boxes, we place either a commercial H-pack or a pair of army duffel bags. The load is covered with a tarp and secured with a diamond hitch.

This packing system works very well for us. The wranglers, Hannah and Laura, soon perfected their technique: carefully adjusted saddles, tight cinches, perfectly balanced packs, and tight diamond hitches. We hardly ever adjusted a pack on the trail, and none of our pack animals developed galls or blisters.



Yellowstone Park discourages tying to trees and highlines. We used hobbles and picket ropes for stock restraint. The herd leaders, including the bell mare, are always picketed. To picket, we use a long steel stake and a rope about 25 feet long tied to one front foot. We use hobbles when we can watch the stock but don't depend on them to keep animals in camp. The mules often run loose; they won't leave unless they have a horse to lead them.

We carried a small amount of certified weed free horse cake, to help catch loose stock and to supplement a couple of horses. For the most part our stock lived on mountain grass.



EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

Each of us brought a light backpacker's tent, a sleeping bag and pad, and some extra clothes. Some of us learned the importance of quality raingear the hard way. Peter brought official Ukrainian army raingear, mine was from Walmart. Both of us got wet and cold.

We never went hungry. Our kitchen included a Coleman camp stove, a rectangular fry pan/ dutch oven, an assortment of pots and pans, and a couple of Jet-Boils. We took plenty of food, and were able to resupply twice. Menus included biscuits and gravy, steak with the trimmings, pineapple upside down cake, and (18 days into the trip) a thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings including cranberry sauce. We used a lot of freeze-dried and dehydrated food to minimize weight. We used bearproof panniers for food storage.



TRIP PLANNING, RULES, and REGULATIONS

This was not a spur of the moment trip. Planning and preparation took months. Backcountry travelers in Yellowstone Park must obtain a permit. Permits require use of designated campsites on specified dates. There isn't any flexibility; in the Yellowstone Backcountry you have a schedule and you stick to it. We started the complicated permit process in early March, having already very specifically planned our route and dates of travel.

I've been organizing similar trips for a long time and always pack according to a checklist. I have a general checklist that's evolved over time, and I fine-tune it for each specific trip. The checklist for this trip was about six pages long not including food.

As our departure date approached, preparation became a full-time job. Permits and paperwork had to be obtained, horses and mules shod, tack and camp gear adjusted, repaired and organized. Food and supplies had to be purchased and packed, transportation had to be arranged. I was lucky to have good help, especially my wife Melissa. She made sure that what needed to be done got done.



HIGHLIGHTS

Hawk's Rest is called the most remote spot in the continental United States. As we approached down Falcon Creek, giant mountains, Hawks Rest and the Trident, towered right in front of us. Bridger Lake and the confluence of the massive, open valleys of Thorofare Creek and the Yellowstone River were just below. We could see up the Yellowstone to its headwaters, and down many miles down to Colter Peak and the Turret. Laura says this place seems sacred. It's hard not to be moved by the grandeur of Hawk's Rest.

Big Game Ridge was literally the high point of our trip. On the 10,000 foot ridge we had a 100 mile view of Greater Yellowstone, from the Beartooths in the north to the Gros Ventres in the south, from the Absarokas in the east to the Tetons in the west. Heart Lake and Yellowstone Lake were both visible from our lofty perch.

Union Falls is the second highest waterfall in Yellowstone. In my view it's the prettiest. Near Union Falls is Ouzel Pool. Judging from the amount of time she spent there, Ouzel Pool is Hannah's favorite place. It's a substantial swimming hole at the base of a small waterfall on Warm Creek. There's a diving rock. Best of all, the swirling water is bathtub warm.

The Bechler River Canyon is my favorite ride in Yellowstone. For 14 miles the river tumbles in a series of waterfalls and cascades. At the head of the river is a thermal area that includes Mr. Bubbles, a renowned soaking pool.

The Shoshone Geyser Basin sits right on the edge of Shoshone Lake. It includes over 50 geysers and hot springs. None of the geysers are large. But wandering through a geyser basin with no signs, no boardwalks, and no tourists is an incomparable experience.

Heart Lake is a delightful place. I've camped in the same spot there for over 20 years. The trail to Heart Lake passes through the Witch Creek thermal area. Mt Sheridan rises abruptly 3000 feet right from the lake. Rustic geyser spouts on the shore. The water is warm enough for swimming and full of giant cutthroats and lake trout.

THE LAST CAMPFIRE

We saw some awesome places on our trip. But to me, the best part was the special feeling that comes from sharing backcountry adventures with good stock and wonderful people.

As the last campfire burned to embers on the shore of Yellowstone Lake, I felt much like Osborne Russell, writing about his Yellowstone trip in 1835: *"for my own part I almost wished I could spend the remainder of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor surrounded by majestic battlements which seemed to support the heavens and shut out all hostile intruders."*

2024 NATIONAL BOARD MEETING



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!!!

March 24th - 27th, 2024

Ramkota Hotel & Conference Center

800 N Poplar - Casper, WY. 82601

[CONFERENCE REGISTRATION HERE](#)

[BOOK HOTEL ROOM ONLINE HERE](#)

BCHMT 2024 STATE CONVENTION

March 8, 2024 @ 8:00 am - March 10, 2024 @ 5:00 pm - \$85



This event will be held on March 8th through the 10th 2024 at the **Fairmont Hot Springs Resort** sponsored by Mile High & Upper Clark Fork Back Country Horsemen Chapters. We have a fun filled weekend planned for you. In addition to our meetings there will be a photo contest, chapter displays, breakout sessions and vendors for shopping. On Friday evening we'll hold the crosscut saw competition and afterwards enjoy live music & socializing. Saturday evening we'll have our traditional banquet meal and live auction. If you're staying at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, which has fabulous indoor and outdoor pools, be sure to take some time to relax and enjoy the hot springs.

RAFFLE TICKETS were mailed out to chapters early so everyone will have plenty of time to distribute them during the holidays. The tickets make great gifts or stocking stuffers! If you need more-please don't hesitate to contact our chapter presidents or send us an email (upperclarkforkbch@hotmail.com).

MEALS - The Saturday evening banquet meal is included in the Full Registration cost. If you have a guest with you who is not a delegate or convention attendee, you can purchase the banquet meal(s) separately. All other meals are optional and offered for purchase separately on your registration form. Please note there is a 40-person minimum needed to host these meals, so please sign up for them early. In the event that we do not make the 40-person minimum, we'll refund your money & notify you in advance of any changes so you can make other plans. When you check-in we'll provide you with a list of restaurants in the local area. Butte and Anaconda have some great places to eat as well as the usual fast-food varieties. Fairmont Hot Springs Resort rooms have refrigerators and microwaves. Fairmont Resort has a café and dining room for individual dining needs. They ask that you make reservations in advance for their dining room so they can be properly staffed to serve you.

PRESIDENT'S BREAKFAST - There will be a Chapter president's breakfast meeting on the schedule for Sunday morning. The Fairmont "Mt. Haggin" breakfast buffet will be set up and ready so they can fill their plates at the buffet and move to a separate room for their meeting. Please purchase the meal ticket for that if you do plan to partake in that breakfast buffet when you register.

[Welcome Letter](#)
[2024 Photo Contest](#)

[2024 Raffle Flyer](#)
[Registration Form](#)

[Area Accommodations](#)

BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001

6 BEST-EVER TIPS FOR WINTER-RIDING FUN

Whether You're Already A Fan Or Simply Curious To Learn More, Check Out Our 6 Best-Ever Tips For Winter-Riding Fun With Your Horse.

By Jennifer Forsberg Meyer for [Horse & Rider](#) November 25, 2019



Snowy magic! Winter riding is especially enjoyable when you go with friends. Photo courtesy of Bar W Guest Ranch, Whitefish, Montana

Are you a fair-weather rider? Or do you love to log saddle time even when the weather is frosty? Here are our essential tips for winter riding fun with your horse.

1. TAKE IT EASY.

When the weather's cold and the ground is hard (and perhaps snowy), focus on staying safe and comfortable, and simply enjoying the moment. A quiet walk through a snowy field can be as satisfying as a gallop if you use all your senses to be fully aware of the scents, sounds, and vistas of your ride.

Be aware, too, that riding through snow, especially if it's deep, can be tiring for your horse—another reason to take it easy. And because post-ride cooldowns can be problematic in

frigid temps (more on that in a moment), keeping your horse from working up a big sweat just makes good sense.

Obviously, for safety's sake, never ride over icy or otherwise slippery footing. Also, in snow, stick to areas where you know the lie of the land underneath.

[RELATED: [7 Winter trail-riding hazards.](#)]

2. PLAN TO STAY WARM.

The goal is to be toasty but not to break a sweat, as dampness can lead to a chill. Dress in layers you can add or subtract as needed during your ride. Good gloves are essential; and you'll be happy to have ear warmers under your hat or helmet.

Waterproof, insulated riding boots will help ward off that I-can't-feel-my-toes feeling. (Be sure whatever boot you wear is riding-safe, though, with a decent heel and a tread that won't hang up in the stirrups.) Chaps can be an extra wind-shield for your legs.

For the coldest days, gel-packet hand- and foot-warmers can provide delicious heat for the duration of your ride. (Find them at sporting-goods stores or at Amazon.com.)

[MORE TIPS [for great winter-riding apparel-layering.](#)]

3. DO EXTRA WARM-UP, COOL-DOWN.

Your horse's muscles and tendons require additional time to warm up in frigid temperatures, before you start asking him to struggle through snow.

After your ride, towel-dry any sweat he may've produced (again—ideally, not a lot), and make sure he's fully dry before you turn him out and/or blanket him. (A winter blanket on a damp horse defeats the purpose of blanketing.)

[RELATED: [Warm-up basics before any type of riding.](#)]

4. MIND THE FEET.

We already talked about your feet, but if you ride your horse in snow, ask your hoof-care professional about the various ways of increasing traction and avoiding ice balls in *his* feet.

Options to keep snow and ice from accumulating include special shoes or hoof pads or the application of a nonstick agent (such as bacon grease or a commercial product) to soles.

For added traction, ask about a hard-surfacing material (such as borium) applied to shoes; studs affixed to shoes; the use of horseshoe nails with ribbed heads; or hoof boots with removable studs.

[CURIIOUS? [Here's an example of equine 'snow shoes.'](#)]

5. GO BAREBACK?

If your horse is comfortable being ridden bareback (and a cold day is NOT the right time to introduce it!), consider going without the saddle, especially for shorter rides. Your horse's heat will help to keep you warm on your walk through the winter wonderland.

[PLAN IN ADVANCE: [Bareback basics to prepare you and your horse.](#)]

6. BE SMART.

Wear UV-blocking sunglasses—ideally wraparounds—to protect your eyes from glare and wind. Keep yourself and your horse adequately watered, too, as cold weather can promote dehydration. A small snack, such as a protein or granola bar, can help you stay warm during your ride by revving your metabolism for digestion.

Don't forget to warm the bit before bridling your horse—you want him to enjoy—not dread—your winter outings.

Finally, if your horse is new to snow, be aware of any signs during pauses in your ride that he's thinking about rolling in it. I actually had this happen to me during my mare's first outing in snow—she dropped so suddenly I could only focus on pushing free...then had to follow her back to the barn, on foot.

Forewarned is forearmed!

[MORE GREAT TIPS [to help you warm up to winter riding.](#)]

[READY? TEST YOURSELF! [Ace these winter-riding trivia questions.](#)]

FOR SALE

If you have a saddle or piece of packing equipment, please feel free to email the information to Rochelle at ebenezerequine@gmail.com. The listing will be removed after 3 months unless you request otherwise.

RESOURCES

Life Flight Network

Let's talk about the not so fun part of the backcountry. There are definite risks involved about being away from civilization and being self reliant if anything goes awry. If something bad happens and you are unable to exit on foot or horseback, the only option is via helicopter. It is incredibly expensive but there is some insurance for the just in case instance. Following is the link for informative purposes only.



PLEASE NOTE: This is NOT a sales pitch. This is a non-commissioned link.

<https://member.lifeflight.org/#lp-pom-block-370>

Membership is under \$100 and, according to the website, will cover the flight. There is also additional ground insurance.

Online Defensive Horsemen Information

Website - <https://bchmt.org/wp/education/>

Scroll down towards the middle and you will see Horse Safety

This is good information and a great resource for new members that still need some defensive horsemen prior to doing any work activities this year.



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

~~Lose weight~~
~~Get fit~~
~~Eat healthier~~
~~Save money~~
~~Keep house tidy~~
~~Go to bed earlier~~
~~Watch less TV.~~


Spend more time with my horse



@hearhorseuk


January 1:
My Mare: New Year, New Me

"I will control my impulses to be a willing partner to my Small Predator."



January 2:
My Mare: JK

"How DARE you use your left leg, Peasant!?"



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