

# Beartooth Back Country Horsemen Trail Tales

## *President's Pen*

Happy Holidays,

I hope this newsletter finds you all well. The year is coming to a close and it is time to come together for our Christmas Party this next weekend, December 13th in Fishtail at Hanna Hall.

With the end of 2025, also brings an end to my term as president of the Beartooth Back Country Horsemen. I want to give a HUGE shout out to the board for a wonderful and very productive year. Without you, we would not have had such a productive year.

Our Youth Clinic, trail clearings, ABW packs, general meeting pack clinics, and our collaboration with the BLM to start work on the Belfry Trailhead project, our year has been full. This group of directors has made this year fun and very fulfilling for the club. Thank you for all you have done to continue to further our mission statement.

As we move into 2026, keep in mind that our club is preparing for our turn to host the 2027 BCHMT state convention. This is a time in which we as a club will showcase our beautiful area to the other clubs in the state. I hope everyone can get involved in the planning and execution of the convention.

The board has scheduled a First Aid/ CPR class for January 24th in Red Lodge at the fire hall. This is a prerequisite for crosscut and chain saw training. It is also a great training to have as you ride the trails. We ask that you are paid up on your dues to sign up for the class. On that note..... If you pay your 2026 dues at the Christmas party you will be entered to win a complete bridle set up built by Bill Yager.

I would like to take a moment to introduce you to this year's officers,

President - Sean Chepulis  
Vice President - Jeff Guckenberger  
Secretary - Sarah Lewis

### **BBCH DIRECTORS**

...

Sean Chepulis, President

Jeff Guckenberger, Vice President

Sarah Lewis, Secretary

Clark Linn, Treasurer

Scott Fluor, Board Member

Bill Yager, Board Member

### **STATE DIRECTORS**

...

John Jenkins, Sr. Director  
406-855-0238

Clark Linn, State Director

Jon Shamel, State Alternate

### **NATIONAL DIRECTOR**

...

John Chepulis  
406-322-4823

Treasurer - Clark Linn  
Board Member - Scott Fluer  
Board Member - Bill Yager

State Director - Clark Linn  
State Director - John Jenkins  
State Alternate - Jon Shamel

When you see them, thank them for dedicating their time to BBCH. They spend countless hour each year planning and directing our activities and projects.

Thank you to everyone of you for an amazing year for BBCH. Without you, the board and members, it wouldn't be possible.

See you on the trails,

Randy Thomsen

## **PARTY TIME!**



**December 13, 2025 at 6:30 pm**

**Hanna Hall - Fishtail**

**Gift exchange: \$35 limit on the gift, wrap festively and ominously!**

**Share your pictures and videos of the year to Sarah.**

**Text pics - 406-780-9500 or email [slewis\\_35@yahoo.com](mailto:slewis_35@yahoo.com), Videos - FB Messenger**

**If you have any questions, please reach out to Sarah Lewis 406-780-9500**

**BBCH PO Box 614, Absarokee, MT 59001**

## CONTEST!

Pay your 2026 dues at the Christmas party and you will be entered to win a complete bridle set up built by Bill Yager!



### ***2025 Membership dues:***

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

### ***NOTICE: 2026 DUES INCREASE***

Business Membership \$45  
Family Membership \$40  
Individual Membership \$30

**Please pay your 2025 dues!**

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

## ELECTION RESULTS

### BBCH NOVEMBER 2025 ELECTION RESULTS

By: Sarah Lewis BBCH Secretary 2025

The Nomination Committee brought these names to the general meeting on November 17th , 2024:

Jon Shamel, Sarah Lewis, Sean Chepulis, John Jenkins, and Jeff Guckenberger.

The positions up for election were as follows:

3 members for Local Board (2-year position)

1 member for State Director (2-year position)

1 member for State Board Alternate.

Elected to the Local Board were as follows:

Sarah Lewis, Sean Chepulis, and Jeff Guckenberger.

Elected to be the State Board Director was John Jenkins.

Elected to be the State Board Alternate was – Jon Shamel.

The current Board Members beginning to serve in their second year are Clark Linn,

Scott Fluer, and Bill Yager. Randy Thomsen will sit on the local board as past

president. These positions will be up for reelection in November 2026.



## FEATURE STORY

### Yellowstone's Pelican Valley

Text by Bill Yager, Photos by Laura Michali

When my friend Laura proposed an October pack trip to the Pelican Valley, I was skeptical. "It's too cold, the days are too short, the bears are hyperphagic, we might get caught in a storm", I protested. "I thought packers were supposed to be tough," she replied. So I had to agree to the trip. We started planning and found four more friends to join us.



The days before the trip were cold, with heavy rain at the ranch, snow at higher elevations and the government shut down. We didn't know if we'd be able to get into Yellowstone Park. But we decided to try. On a blustery, muddy morning we loaded our stock. During the four hour drive to the trailhead the weather improved. The Yellowstone Entry Gate was open. By the time we started tacking up the sun was shining.

We started up the trail. Three of us rode horses, the others rode mules. Our camp was loaded on three pack mules. Each of the pack mules carried a pair of panniers and a pair of top packed duffel bags. One set of panniers held food, the second held our kitchen, the third was for horse feed and assorted camp gear. Our personal gear, tents, sleeping bags, extra clothes, etc. were in the duffels.

All of the loads were covered with manties and secured with diamond hitches.

Pelican Creek flows through a wide, open valley north of Yellowstone Lake. Around it are low forested hills, meandering streams, shallow lakes and wetlands, and numerous thermal areas. Few people visit. It's a wildlife paradise. We hadn't ridden far before we saw our first bison, and for several miles we were never out of sight of them. In the open valley we were able to detour around several groups of bison on or near the trail. The big bulls especially are bad tempered and have little respect for people or horses. We gave them a wide berth. We followed fresh wolf tracks as we rode. A few miles up the valley we forded Pelican Creek near the remains of an old bridge and followed Astringent Creek into low hills with scattered trees. Here we had to stop (it pains



me to admit) to repack a mule. While stopped, we watched a coyote hunting nearby. And a grizzly bear foraging about a quarter mile away.

We continued a few miles through mixed trees and meadows, eventually catching a glimpse of White Lake. We didn't notice a pass, but now were following Broad Creek. It didn't seem to flow at all as it twisted and turned through a beautiful valley. By now the sun was dropping, the air was getting colder, and we were still a long way from camp. "This seems like a long twelve miles," grumbled Peter. It turned out to be closer to fifteen. We hurried along through lingering snow past Tern Lake. The valley got narrower, the stream got faster.

We got to our campsite well after sunset. We had a lot to do and not much daylight left. Fortunately we had a great crew. At school nobody likes a group project. But in the mountains, teamwork is essential. We had a great team on this trip. Laura, Peter, and I have camped together dozens of times. We know where everything is in the packs and where everything goes in the camp. Anna, Kasin, and Jackie were enthusiastic and eager to help.

We dropped packs, staked our horses, and turned the mules loose. Quickly set up tents and built a big fire. We didn't have much light to cook by, but Laura brought along a string of Christmas lights and it was festive. "Not really a camp, more like a bivouac," noted Peter. We all were in our bedrolls early.



Next morning was foggy and very cold. Kasin was up early to build a roaring fire. Drawn like moths to the flames, we all stayed close until well after sunup. The mules came into camp to check on us, then returned to grazing in the excellent meadow below camp. As the day warmed and the fog lifted, we watered and moved the picketed stock. By now we had an excellent bed of coals to cook up our breakfast of bannock and sausage gravy. After breakfast we moved our chairs out into the sun, to continue the visiting and storytelling that had started by the campfire. For me, this visiting and storytelling is the best part of horse packing. At home, we're always in a hurry: going to work, going to school, going to meetings, going to appointments. But here in the mountains, without distractions, we have time to catch up with old friends and get to know new ones.





In late morning, to our great surprise, a single hiker walked into camp. We fed him lunch while he told us about himself; a college professor from Texas, and like ourselves a lover of Yellowstone. He was the only person we saw on the whole trip.

In the afternoon several of us hiked to nearby Wapiti Lake. We returned to a dinner of elk steaks and cherry shortcake. Then more stories around the campfire. We never did reorganize the camp; it was still a big jumble.

By morning we were more ambitious and saddled the stock for a trip to Joseph's Coat Hot Springs. These are way off the beaten path, about five miles down Broad Creek. There is no trail. It was hard going. The valley narrowed as we went down and we were constantly fording the creek. Within a couple of miles a narrow canyon full of deadfall made it impossible to continue horseback. I stayed to babysit the animals while the rest of the party continued on foot.

Several hours later they returned. Exhausted. They found the springs dry, but saw steam vents and the colorful rocks that give them their name. They agreed that the hard trip was worthwhile. It's cool to visit a thermal area with no boardwalks, no signs, and no people.

In the evening we cooked up jambalaya and also a batch of pancakes for tomorrow's breakfast. We packed as much gear as we could, hoping to leave early for tomorrow's long ride.

Next morning reveille was at 5:00 am. We started coffee and took down our tents in the dark. As the mules drifted in for their morning camp check we caught them and tied them up. As soon



as we could see the picketed stock we brought them in also. We drank coffee and ate pancakes as we saddled and finished packing the camp. We were on the trail by 8:00 am. It was cold; Laura packed her cowboy boots and rode out in her fleece slippers.



We backtracked a few miles up Broad Creek and then crossed low hills to Pelican Creek. These two creeks run parallel less than two miles from each other. But while Broad Creek runs north, Pelican Creek runs south. It shows just how flat this area is. Reaching Pelican Creek, we took a break at a huge and beautiful hot spring. One that probably only gets a handful of visitors every year. Now we were back in the bison. I've been in Yellowstone many times and sometimes I'm a little blasé about bison (in fact I've been called Anti-Buffalo Bill). But it was really thrilling to ride through this huge valley with scattered groups of bison as far as we could see.

We passed the Mud Kettles. Lots of trails have mud holes. Only in Yellowstone does the mud boil. We saw another grizzly bear. We saw a few deer. The weather was gorgeous. The stock was in good shape and caused no problems. Yes, Peter did make an ignoble exit when his mule sunk in a mud hole. But that was the inevitable result of his own poor judgement. And Anna opened a pack of potato chips as she





rode. Her mule mistook the sound for a rattlesnake on his back. In the resulting wild run she lost her water bottle and her hat but she kept her seat. We never adjusted a pack. We rode sixteen miles to reach the trailhead in early afternoon. We had our traditional end of trip meal at the Silver Dollar in Cody.

What was the best part of the trip? Laura says it was the weather: The crisp days and cold nights. The impossibly clear air, the full moon at night, the morning fog and frosty meadows. For Kasin it was wildlife: those vast herds of bison and the grizzly bears that make your heart race even when they're a quarter mile away. Jackie appreciated the chance to build trust and

respect with her mule. So it was a great trip to a very unique area And a good lesson on how horse packing season doesn't end at Labor Day.





## FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING

The board has scheduled a First Aid/ CPR class for January 24th in Red Lodge at the fire hall. This is a prerequisite for crosscut and chain saw training. It is also a great training to have as you ride the trails. We ask that you are paid up on your dues to sign up for the class.



## CPR & First Aid Training Class

## 2027 CONVENTION OPPORTUNITIES

### WE ARE HOSTING CONVENTION IN 2027!

If you'd like to join the committee for opportunities to serve in the following areas: Communications, Meals, Education, Fundraising, Entertainment, Volunteers, Vendors, Sponsorships, & Decorations. please reach out to Melissa C. via email [codner.melissa@gmail.com](mailto:codner.melissa@gmail.com) or text 308-390-0465.



## 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](mailto:ebenezerequine@gmail.com). The listing will be removed after 3 months unless you request otherwise.

## NOVEMBER MEETING MINUTES

Board Meeting November 10th, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 pm at the Stillwater County Chamber of Commerce.

In attendance: Randy Thomsen, Melissa Codner, Scott Fluor, Sean Chepulis, Sarah Lewis, and Bill Yager.

Motion to approve the September board meeting minutes made by Melissa Codner. The motion was seconded by Scott Fluor. No discussion. Motion carried.

President's Report: Randy Thomsen reported that he paid the BBCH post office box in Absarokee for matching donations. Discussion tabled until "New Business".

Vice President's Report: Nothing to report.

Treasurer's Report: Discussion of September report. Motion to approve September report made by Bill Yager. The motion was seconded by Sean Chepulis. Motion carried.

### Committee Reports

2027 Convention: Melissa Codner (chair). Randy gave Melissa the main convention planning folder that is passed between the clubs. Discussion of convention theme needs to be decided soon.

Considering a Trailhead theme. We will build convention on chosen theme. Melissa will do one more push for volunteers at the general meeting and via email. Discussion of convention ideas and goals. Melissa will work on the preview slide show for convention 2026.

Activities: Sarah Lewis (chair). Christmas Party will be held Saturday, December 13 th , 2025, at Hannah Hall in Fishtail, MT. The party will be fully catered for this year. RSVP will be needed 10 days before. Sarah will send out email and Facebook rsvp request and Christmas party information. We will have a \$35.00 gift exchange again.

Clark is organizing a CPR certification class to be tentatively held in January. Discussion of the need to update the Google drive with current CPR certification list. Discussion of Defensive Horsemanship class to be held in 2027.



Education: Bill Yager and Sean Chelpulis reported that the packing series is going well. Discussion of standardization of Packing Style per session. Planned demonstration for November's general meeting.

Discussion of general meeting attendance being low and how to entice members to attend. Randy will send out a reminder email for November's meeting. Discussion of proper notifications for meetings via email and Facebook. Discussion of food and potluck options and planning a point person to coordinate.

Discussion of board communication and setting up a Board Member Group text for reminders and important information.

Elections: Discussion that we have enough volunteers to fill available spots up for election.

Projects: Belfry trailhead update by Scott Fluer. BLM has secured 1500 tons of gravel for the project. Scott is looking into options for hauling the gravel. BLM will provide the fencing materials. We will need volunteer support to fence. Unfortunately, the Government shutdown has delayed the completion of this project till spring of 2026. Discussion of signage for grand opening of Belfry trailhead. Discussion of logistics of this project.

Communications: Randy Thomsen (chair). Nothing to report.

State Update: Nothing to report.

Unfinished Business:

A letter needs to go out to all members about membership price increase starting in 2026. Letter will be written and sent by Jon Shamel. At the Christmas party we will have a drawing to win a Bridle for all who pay their 2026 dues at the party.

New Business:

Discussion of donations needing to always follow our mission statement values.

Trailhead Improvements- Red Lodge Creek, and Cottonwood Road.

Discussion of creating and access guide to all trails in our area including trailer access and trail information.

Discussion of meeting places for our general meetings. Is this part of the issues with attendance? Could we add digital attendance or playback options?

Meeting Adjourned 8:14pm.

Next meeting is on December 4th at 6:30pm in Columbus at the Chamber of Commerce.

## 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.





*THANK YOU TO THESE LOCAL BUSINESSES FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT!*



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