

Missoula Back Country Horsemen History

In December 1973, Dennis Swift and Roland Cheek made a presentation on their newly organized BCH chapter. In February 1974, Smoke Elser, Jim Brogger, Allen Bedord, Mike Chandler and John Lance attended a BCH meeting in Columbia Falls. In March of 1974 Roland Cheek, Ken Ausk and Lloyd Fagerland from the first chapter formed (Flathead) came to Missoula to help our new chapter compose our constitution.

BCH of Missoula's first project was organized by a very strong Issues Committee on designated trail use in the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness Area. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 changed forest planning by obliging the Forest Service to use a systematic and interdisciplinary approach to resource management. It also provided for public involvement in preparing and revising forest plans. It started by requiring the Forest Service to do an inventory of all its lands, followed by a zoning process to see what uses land was best suited for - dubbed the "suitability determination." Certain trails in the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness Area trail system were considered for "limited" or "no use" of horses. BCH of Missoula members took a pack trip into that WA and talked with Forest Service employees around a campfire to resolve this issue. BCHM also met with a number of District Rangers whose areas were covered in that plan. Because of those early efforts, horses are allowed in the Anaconda Pintlers.

In 1986 BCH of Missoula began to get actively involved in planning a horse trailhead to the Rattlesnake Wilderness Area. Chapter members involved in that seven-year process are still talking about it today. Conflicts between mountain bikes and horseback riders were sharing the same narrow bridge before the horse trailhead was built. A horse trailhead with separate bridge across Rattlesnake Creek, a handicap ramp/horse unloading dock, bathrooms and seven pullout parking spots were built. A concerted effort by BCH of Missoula and other groups was made to educate the public on trail safety and courtesy. BCH of Missoula is proud of other educational programs. They teach pre-ride basics to their members at their annual Horse Safety clinic, Spring Tune-up, Log & Water Crossing, on recreation rides and on projects in the back country. Every first Saturday in June BCHM participates in National Trails Day to talk to user groups about trail courtesy. BCH of Missoula is very proud of organizing and holding an Annual Packing and Equestrian Skills Expo beginning in 2009. The motivation for the event is to provide Western Montana residents with education and information about horses and back country. Each year the Chapter's Project Committee organizes a trail clearing project that takes up two long weekends of packing in supplies and doing the actual work. The past several years these projects have included restoring old Forest Service cabins and outbuildings at Welcome Creek and Burnt Cabin in the Scapegoat Wilderness Area. Along with educating new members about horse care and safety, treading light on the ground and assisting agencies that maintain and manage our public lands, many members have made these projects family vacations that their children will remember forever.

Our chapter helped start the Bitterroot, Salmon and Helena Back Country Horsemen. Smoke Elser and Mike Chandler helped start the Back Country Horsemen of America write their constitution at their first meeting in Kalispell.

Missoula Back Country Horsemen Past Presidents

2012	Ken Brown
2011	Paul Evenson
2010	Paul Evenson
2009	Paul Evenson
2008	Connie Long
2007	Connie Long
2006	Gary Salisbury
2005	Gary Salisbury
2004	Bob Doty, then Ben Notti, then Gary Salisbury
2003	Ben Notti
2002	Diane Tidwell
2001	Barbara Parker
2000	Barbara Parker
1999	Steve Cohee
1998	Steve Cohee
1997	Connie Basham
1996	Charlie Eiseman
1995	Ed Donahue
1994	Sandi Ridgeway
1993	Clark Ridgeway
1992	Ken Brown
1991	Steve Cohee
1990	Gloria Curdy
1989	Mike Chandler
1988	Gwen Thibodeau
1987	Mike Hartkorn
1986	Connie Rice
1985	Nancy Chandler (First woman president!)
1984	Ron Hoff
1983	Phil Bain
1982	Bud Lake
1981	Fred Hartkorn
1980	Smoke Elser
1979	Smoke Elser
1978	Mike Chandler
1977	Jim Brogger
1976	Chuck (John) Smith



Past Presidents from the Membership Potluck 2009.

Back row left to right: Diane Tidwell, Smoke Elser, Barbara Parker, Gwen Thibodeau, Nancy Chandler, Raynor Roberts, Gloria Curdy, Paul Evenson, Mike Hartkorn.

Front row left to right: Gary Salisbury, Connie Basham, Connie Long, Mike Chandler

1975

Ray Roberts

1974

Smoke Elser was Interim through May until elections, then Ray Roberts