



Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

# Decker Dispatch



## Bandits of the Back Country

By Arnold D. "Smoke" Elser, Missoula Back Country Horsemen

Leave No Trace of your passing is a very old concept and practice dating back hundreds of years. Explorers, Native Americans and trappers, such as Jim Bridger, all practiced the art of Leave No Trace in their passing. Their very survival frequently depended on this. Leaving clues that they were in the area, such as campfires (fire rings), scarred trees, heavily used campsites and even tracks could mean their very lives were in danger if found by less friendly intruders.

Traveling through the wilderness areas and back country took a very specialized ability and a keen sense of your surroundings and how to leave them so that there was no trace. This concept has come of age again in our back country, wilderness areas and wild lands. Today's explorers, campers, fishermen, hunters and horsemen must also revive and practice with diligence the age old art of Leave No Trace. Our wild lands are getting more pressure by a more diverse population who have little or no experience in the art of Leaving No Trace.

Traveling with one or more thousand pound backpackers, such as horses or mules, requires even more skill and training in minimum impact to the land and leaving no trace. It requires specialized training and maybe even special equipment. Above all, it requires plan-

ning ahead. Traveling through today's back country dictates a special behavior, a mind set that this will take you and your animals and move them through this country, taking only memories, pictures and peace of mind and leaving no trace of your passing. We must educate ourselves and develop special practices that will allow us to be the trappers, explorers and Native Americans of today.

Through many years of wilderness and back country camping and packing with mules and horses, I have found some equipment that helps leave no trace on the landscape. The use of lighter weight equipment and materials, which have been developed in recent years, such as aluminum stoves and pack boxes, lighter weight fabrics for tents, and some dehydrated foods, etc. have allowed me to use fewer animals and, therefore, reduce the pack animal wear and tear on the ground. Because of the use of these kinds of equipment, you do not have to reduce all of the comforts that are allowed when you use pack animals in the back country. Planning is still a major prerequisite to any trip going into the back country with stock. It is a good practice to pack all stock with their optimum load, not maximum and not minimum, but their optimum load carrying capacity. This is 1/5th of the animal's weight, a formula that is

### OUR PURPOSES

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country, roadless back country and wilderness areas.
- To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
- To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
- To educate, encourage and solicit active participation by the general public in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horses and people commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.
- To seek out opportunities to enhance existing areas of recreation for stock users.

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## Bandits of the Back Country

By Arnold D. "Smoke" Elser, Missoula Back Country Horsemen

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based on information from the Manual of Pack Transportation by Mr. H. W. Daly, Chief Packer for the U.S. Army in the early 1900's. This manual states that a pack animal could travel twenty-five miles per day year round, with his optimum load, if fed, watered and cared for properly. This is a practice that I follow and it has reduced my number of stock, as well as made me develop, find, and purchase specialized equipment for my horse packing trips into the wilderness.

One of the most important things that everyone must do when entering the wilderness or the back country with stock, is to know the land, study trail conditions, campsite areas and, of course, collect all the information possible from previous users, government agencies and others who may know the country well. A poor campsite on wet ground, near the lake shore or the stream bank, is always a fatal stockman's mistake. These lands heal, but usually do not heal quickly and always heal with evidence of your passing, scars that may last for many years. Drier campsites and carefully selected trails always lead to a better outcome in Leaving No Trace on our precious back country. Carefully selecting the site to hold your stock overnight is vital. Selecting a site that has grass that horses will eat, and by turning your stock loose as much as possible, away from your campsite, the main trail, running water, and any major attraction, will allow your animals to utilize the landscape very much like elk and deer. Pre-training at home is a must. Determine your ring leaders among your animals, and learn to picket or secure those animals and allow the rest to roam free. This is an excellent practice. Of course, when in the back country always use tree saver straps and high lines to secure your animals for long periods of time. They must be trained to this practice, as well, prior to heading to the mountains. Here again, select your site carefully. It should not be too near (100 to 200 feet) trails, water, campsite locations, or soft ground. When leaving a back country camp you must be sure to clean up after yourself (such as fire rings, fire wood, human waste, and any camp construction). You must also clean up after your "thousand pound back packers" (your stock). Clean up any picketed

and high line areas. Of course, I firmly believe that's one of the reasons that a pointed toe cowboy boot was developed! It works great for kicking the manure and scattering it out. Once while I was practicing this technique, I remember kicking a fairly large clump and hearing it make a funny "splat" sound against one of my more sophisticated elderly clients! With a red face, I apologized, but I have been much more careful of my aim since! Scattered manure returns to the soil much faster and leaves a campsite much cleaner. As you mount your horse and leave a campsite with your pack stock it is always a good idea to look back and ask yourself, "Is this how I would like to see this campsite next year?"

Keeping some of the above basic ideas and practices in mind, each individual horseman must look at his own equipment, stock and practices and adjust them according to the country he is planning to visit. We need to be constantly on the lookout for better ways to protect our wilderness and back country resources, and we must develop the right mind set to Leave No Trace of our passing.

Several years ago while traveling over one of the higher passes in the Bob Marshall and coming down a series of steep switchbacks, looking out over many thousands of acres of pristine wilderness, I overheard a guest nervously talking to his steed. "Now easy, now watch what you're doing, now don't put your foot too close to the edge." Coming to a sharp switchback, his horse stopped and surveyed the horizon before turning sharply and continuing down the trail. I heard my guest say, "You scenery loving son of a gun, get back on the trail!" Later that night as we sat around the campfire, he remarked, "That was a great adventure and a day's experience that I will never forget." The next morning while leaving camp, he noticed my packer carefully cleaning up the campsite and remarked that it is right that we not leave tracks across this beautiful country.

Today's back country users, whether with stock or hiking, must practice to be "bandits", stealing the wilderness experience and pleasure, and leave no trace. If we are bandits, then we must leave no trace or clue of our passing, leaving the land in all its beauty the way it has been for centuries.

## Letter from the Chair

By Sherri Lionberger, Last Chance Back Country Horsemen Chair, BCH Montana

I would first like to thank the board of officers that has served with me this last year through these interesting/trying times. I very much appreciate their consistent communication via phone and email. I'm also very happy to serve with them all again for another year and looking forward to resuming our in-person meetings starting this month in Deer Lodge. Congratulations also to our re-elected National Director (John Chepulis) and alternate (Brad Pollman). They and Mark Himmel do a tremendous job representing Montana at the National level, and many of their efforts go unseen by us. Thank you to all.

At our May meeting I hope to hear that chapters are able to get work projects lined out with the Forest Service for this coming season. Last summer was slow for a number of chapters and getting people back to doing what we do best – clearing trails, packing crews/gear is needed to re-engage

our members. This past winter's wind events likely played havoc with many trails; our help clearing them is always appreciated by the public who uses them.

We have a committee working on a gathering in August at Monture Ranger Station near Ovando. While our Deer Lodge meeting in May is always open to members, this gathering is for everyone – not just directors, and I hope to see many of you there. Stay tuned for more information on that.

Happy trails.

Sherri

Contact Sherri at [chair@bchmt.org](mailto:chair@bchmt.org)



## A Girl and a Horse

By Casey Drishinski, East Slope Back Country Horsemen

This morning, three of our horses were grazing in the yard. Stevi, our 15-month old, squealed with delight when she saw them out the window and it got me thinking.

When my husband's daughter – now 24 – was just a toddler, they brought home a chestnut weanling filly. Gabby named her Peanut, presciently foretelling, as only children can, the serious allergy – to the nut, not the horse – she would develop in the coming years. When Gabby was eight years old, Peanut became her first 4-H horse. As Gabby grew, Peanut carried her on her first pack trip into the Bob Marshall. When Peanut had a colt named Twister, he became the first horse Gabby got to break and train.

A few years back, Gabby was away at college and Peanut stepped over a barbed wire fence, rubbing a nasty wound on the inside of her back leg. I think most folks might have looked at a serious injury like that on an older horse and decided that was the end of the story for poor Peanut. But someone knew that Peanut had more life to live and my husband patiently nursed her back to health.

Gabby is now teaching agricultural education in Grass Range. She and her boyfriend have a little place with a few cows and are making a real go of things. A few months ago, Gabby thought she might sell Peanut to another young girl

looking to start out in 4-H. But as my husband saddled her and stepped up on her for the first time in many years, it was clear she was not the beginner horse her 22 years might suggest. When we got home, he called Gabby and told her that he didn't think Peanut was a good fit for a kid horse. "Well," Gabby said, "I guess she better come live here." So my husband loaded her up and drove her to her new home, and back to her first rider. When Gabby called the other day, she was riding Peanut, moving some new pairs out to pasture.

Several weeks ago, we brought home a bay filly named Rose. Everyone was excited for a new baby on the farm, especially Stevi. As a new mom, sudden bursts of overwhelming emotion prompted by thoughts of my sweet little girl growing up so fast are not uncommon. But then I thought of Peanut and Gabby and realized that this new horse is literally going to see my child transform from barely walking baby to grown up woman out on her own. Well, anyway.

Every once in a while I lament living so far from town, and from all the fun "city" things that I grew up with – the zoo, the roller rink, the amusement park – that Stevi is going to miss out on. But those thoughts don't last long. When I look out the window to see the horses grazing in the yard, I am filled with pure gratitude that my child is going to have

the opportunity to learn some of life's most valuable lessons – patience, responsibility, confidence, and dedication – from a horse.



Stevi and Peanut



Gabby and Peanut

## Horsemen Safety Refresher, April 25, 2021

By Judy Fossum, Judith Basin Back Country Horsemen

The JBCH chapter of Lewistown area conducted a Horsemen Safety Workshop on April 25, 2021, at the Pavilion at the Fergus County Fairgrounds in Lewistown. We covered the syllabus for the Horse Safety Program whose purpose is to help members be safe in the backcountry with their horses or mules. We had about 25 members at the workshop ranging in age from our youngest, teenager Quincy Workman, to active members 80 plus.

The first item was to have all members demonstrate their proficiency in safely loading and unloading a horse in a trailer. We practiced staying in the safety zone, loading them without them lunging uncontrollably into the trailer, how to properly tie, and how to unload also staying in the safety zone. Gregg Morse, Henry Gottardi and Brad Fogle checked us off on each successful completion.

Following that was a question and answer session during which Sharon Gottardi presented us with situations and allowed members to relate their experiences, both positive and negative, and to share tips we've learned through experiences.

Candy Phillips gave a demonstration on Interactive Educational Packing which she uses for day trips and overnight stays. She calls it "Pack it Light, Pack it Easy." (Non-Traditional Equine Packing 101) She demonstrated sev-

eral over-the-saddle panniers systems. Her reasons for using this method are less impact on the environment, concentrate on safety, cost of equipment, and more time to enjoy the environment. Candy stressed she practices safety first by conditioning the horse or mule mentally and physically. She discussed how much weight an animal can carry based on their body weight, how to balance the weight on each side, and how to safely tie the load down. She also stressed practicing ponying the pack animal before the start of each trip.

After lunch we played in the pavilion on our horses with various obstacles, some simulating what we experience on our trips into the wilderness, whether on a trail work detail or for a trail ride. We had gates to open, a wooden bridge to cross, tarps to cross (probably won't find many of those in the wilderness but they are noisy and scary), a pile of poles like fallen down trees, narrow places to back through and/or in which to turn around. And don't forget to pick up the mail out of the mailbox!

Although our Back Country Horsemen of Montana Horse Safety cards are good for three years, we decided as a chapter to offer this workshop every spring in order to include any new members, and as a refresher for the rest of us. It is an opportunity to get together with our horses to play, eat and laugh.



## The Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

By Rich Carl, Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

The Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen are a fortunate bunch. We have hundreds of miles of trails through majestic mountains and scenic landscapes to enjoy from our saddles.

But, as President Kennedy once said, "For those to whom much is given, much is required."

From the very beginning, our group, established in 1985 and made up of 19 families and 11 singles, has been ready, willing and able to give back through trail maintenance projects.

While we have never shied away from clearing trails, a grant for work on the CDT trail system from the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) through Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has made our chore easier over the past three years.

The \$15,687 grant enabled us to hire contractors to do more work in a week than we could over the course of several years. In 2019 we maintained and cleared 80 miles of trails. The grant will be used for trail maintenance, improvements to trails and trail reconstruction.

Included in our efforts is the removal of downfall and leaning trees. We do all aspects of trail maintenance from clearing to erosion control.

Our mission statement states: The purpose of this organization shall be (1) to perpetuate the commonsense use and enjoyment of horses in the back country/wilderness and (2) to assist the various government agencies in their maintenance of said resources and (3) to educate, encourage and solicit active

public participation in wise and sustaining use of horses and use by people commensurate with our heritage and the back country resource.

The grant enables us to help achieve all our stated goals.

We conduct monthly meeting to inform and educate our members. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings became more challenging and were conducted via ZOOM,

We look forward to getting back together in person and on horseback soon and we will be back out there clearing trails.

Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen are also proud of Mark Himmel, BCHA's new Vice Chairman. Great job, Mark.



## National Director's Column

By John Chepulis (Beartooth BCH) [barcdiamond@gmail.com](mailto:barcdiamond@gmail.com)  
National Director, BCH Montana

Back Country Horsemen of America Board Members met for the second time April 25-28, via Zoom, to conduct its Annual Board Meeting. It was supposed to be held in person at Kansas City, MO, but was

canceled for the second time because of the COVID pandemic. Hopefully we can meet in person again at the 2022 Convention which will be held April 10-13, 2022, in Kansas City, MO.

**Sunday afternoon, April 25th**, all National Directors were asked to participate in a call to get familiar with Zoom and then to review our responsibilities and governance policy. We then reviewed our meeting documents which were available on the new BCHA shared Google Drive, and became familiar with them. After a question and answer period we were excused for the day.

**Monday, April 26th**, the BCHA meeting officially began with the agenda being presented, a memorial to our departed members, the 2020 National Board Meeting minutes, executive committee reports, treasurer report, then on to committee reports which took up the better part of the day. All committee reports are posted to the BCHA Shared Drive on Google.

*New Business discussed on Monday:*

- Governance Policy changes to change the name of the Public Liaison Committee to the Partnership Committee and to refine its makeup and operation.
- Investment Policy Statement, investing the Legacy Fund with Stifel.
- 2021 - 2022 proposed budget.
- No resolutions.
- Voting will take place on Wednesday. There was no unfinished business.

**Tuesday, April 27th** began with *Essential Knowledge for a Successful Back Country Horsemen*. Afterwards there was a director round table discussion by regions consisting of:

- Southwest, (AR, AL, FL, GA, KY, NC, SC, TN, VA),
- Northeast (IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, NM, MO, NY, WI),
- Rockies (CO, MT, ND, NM, SD, UT, WY),
- Far West (AK, AZ, CA, ID, NV, OR, WA)

I attended all, and participated in the Rockies region discussion. These are just some of the items discussed.

- E-bikes
- Mountain bikes
- What can BCHA do for me
- What can you do for BCHA
- Be good collaborators with other user groups
- Attending work days in different States
- Major changes this past year
- If you have questions, who do you call?

- Posting on Facebook
- Better communication

**Wednesday, April 28th**, Scott Walker, Chairman of Back Country Horsemen of British Columbia, gave a very interesting presentation about BCHBC, which was founded in 1989. They have 21 chapters and 800 members at present. Look them up at [www.bchorsemen.org](http://www.bchorsemen.org).

Next was a discussion by past BCHA chairmen addressing the history of BCHA during their time in office. This discussion was very entertaining and educational.

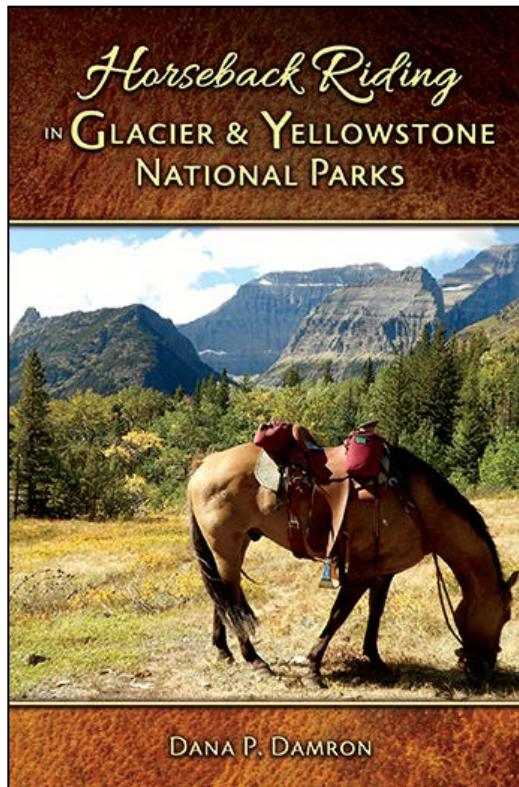
The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Mike McGlenn, past BCHA chairman from Washington, and the Double Diamond Award was presented to BCH of Virginia, Golden Horseshoe Chapter.

The 2021 - 2022 Budget Proposal was approved, then final nominations and elections. Elected were:

- Chairman-----Sherry Copeland, MO
- Vice Chairman-----Mark Himmel, MT
- Treasurer-----Latifa Rodriguez, CO
- EC Non-Director-----Brad Pollman, MT
- EC Director-----Jim Allen, SD

Congratulations to all.

John



Dana P. Damron shares his expertise and insights on riding on some of the most scenic trails in the world. The Parks' vast trail systems were created with horse riders in mind. This guidebook is designed for novice and experienced horseback trail riders alike; with detailed information about the best trails for horses, trailhead parking, and tips for a safe and enjoyable ride for both horse and rider.

Available for \$15.95 from [www.farcountrypress.com](http://www.farcountrypress.com)  
**Order yours today!**

# Save the Date

**August 19-22, 2021**

**Please join us for the BCHMT Monture Gathering**

With the past two conventions cancelled due to Covid, we have missed you. The BCHMT officers and state directors invite you to join us at the Monture trailhead. Everyone is welcome and can join us for any part of the weekend that they are able.

**Thursday: arrive after noon and ride**

**Friday: ride, socialize around the campfire**

**Saturday: ride, dinner and campfire**

The Monture Guard Station is about 8 miles north of Highway 200 near Ovando, MT. It is a trailhead for the south end of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. We have permission to use the guard station and there is a very nice public trailhead. The public trailhead has several corrals as well as feed bunks and hitchrails. There are several trails in the area for all riding abilities.

We are still in the planning process. Wade Murphy will teach a half-day horse training clinic. He can have up to 10 riders so if you would like to ride in his clinic please let him know, 406.431.1717, wadeandlonnie@hotmail.com. Everyone is welcome to watch if they are interested. We will also have a packing demonstration. If you have a talent that you would like to demonstrate please let Greg Schatz know, 406.261.5450, gregschatzbuilder@gmail.com, and we'll see if we can get you in the schedule.

Dinner Saturday evening will be \$10. All other meals are on your own. Please fill out the registration form found on the BCHMT website and send your registration and \$10 to us before August 5, 2021.

**Watch [bchmt.org](http://bchmt.org)  
for more details.**



## Devils Creek

By Jim Thrasher, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead

With the effects of an unknown virus circulating the country last year, we were unsure if we could accomplish any projects. But, as the year went on, it was determined that with proper social distancing we were able to complete a major trailhead improvement on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

The trailhead is along Highway 2, which winds between the scenic southern border of Glacier National Park and the Great Bear Wilderness. The trailhead is called Devils Creek and accesses the Great Bear Wilderness, which is part of the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex. Our chapter was able to win a RAC grant the year before to help improve several trailheads in the area.

The original road to the trailhead was a single lane that dead ended and was difficult, if not impossible, to turn a six-horse or living quarters trailer around or allow the larger trailer to park overnight. Also adding to the problem were hikers who would park in front of the hitch rails or in the turnaround area. This made it extremely hard to navigate with a horse trailer.

Our plan was to make a pull-through road to loop back and allow trailer parking overnight, as well as a signed area for hiker parking.

One of our members in the building trades had some equipment contractors willing to help with the dirt work for a low cost for the BCHF. We waited

until October when trail use declined and started the dirt work by removing tree stumps, bringing in a dozer to rough-in the loop and an excavator to load dump trucks with debris. The winter weather finally put a stop to finishing till spring when we will be adding gravel as needed, seeding with grasses, installing parking signs and getting signed off with the Forest Service.

We have one more trailhead improvement on the South Fork of the Flathead this summer on Logan/Baptist trailhead with a new location to be able to access both trails from one trailhead with a loop road to be better for the bigger trailers.

## Nonprofit Bookkeeping [part three]

By Carey Monson, Treasurer, NorthWest Montana Back Country Horsemen

### Use accounting software designed for nonprofits

One of the best decisions you can make to help the committees is investing in a nonprofit-specific accounting software solution.

Bookkeeping for nonprofits differs from that of for-profit organizations; so why would you want to use the same software for each of them? The unique needs of nonprofits require a specialized set of tools from accounting software.

Small organizations who are just getting started may be able to get away with a general accounting software solution. However, they will likely outgrow it incredibly quickly and start looking for a new software investment.

The best bookkeeping software for nonprofits will come with key features such as:

- FASB-ready reporting templates
- Internal controls to protect financial data
- Multi-year budget storage
- Human resources and payroll functions (not needed for BCH).

### Intuit QuickBooks

QuickBooks has been trusted by for-profit organizations for years. The comprehensive solution has expanded to include a nonprofit solution. This software allows you to:

- Accept donations
- Connect donation apps
- Sync with your bank
- Customize reports
- Track grants

This is an inexpensive solution with all the features needed to get up and running; however, you may find it limiting as the organization begins expanding.

Intuit QuickBooks makes it easy to automate custom reports for your organization. This helps your organization facilitate the transfer of effective internal reports between departments. Specifically, custom reports keep you on track with your regular meetings with your development department. Intuit QuickBooks is a great bookkeeping software for nonprofits who are just getting their start. Because it is a small solution, many organizations choose to use this while finding their footing. Keep in mind that you will probably outgrow this solution quickly and need to invest in a new solution soon.

### Conclusion

Nonprofits are unique. Therefore, bookkeeping for nonprofits is also unique. Taking steps like educating yourself about the subject and investing in effective software will help your BCH chapter become more and more effective.

**The youth program committee would like to thank the following for their generous donations.**



Shannon Friex



Beartooth  
Back Country Horsemen

## Mustang Chronicles: Training Chica (part two)

By Sandra O'Brien, Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen

Sometimes, looking at my mustang Chica with the herd of domestic horses we have, other than a yearling mustang who I don't believe has spent much time, if any, in the wild, I imagine she is the same as the rest of her adoptive herd. But she isn't. She came with a different language. It's like she speaks Spanish Basque and the rest of the herd a kind of Standard English. A very wild dash of something in a group of horses who accept me hanging over their backs, or lifting a back leg without donning a halter or pulling a tail to help stretch a back.

She came speaking a totally different language. Some will say a horse is a horse. But when Chica came to live here, she didn't really seem to want to interact and even now is kind of like that stranger who doesn't quite fit in and looks awkward when the other horses are close. Like someone who's moved into the neighborhood and has strange customs. She is shy approaching the lowest gelding in the herd for a mutual neck scratching, or tolerating one of the mares, who pushes over to say hello. She appears to be frustrated by some interactions and maybe the small nod she gives to acknowledge the lead gelding isn't even seen by him. And maybe she double-barreled the other mare because she is a domestic dullard and moved in on the hay when Chica was clearly claiming it. In her language. She picked up my dog Baxter when he didn't pay attention to her signals. She left no marks or bruises. She simply surprised him because he wasn't paying attention. A reminder that we are bound to have moments of miscommunication.

I still have not accomplished getting a trim for my mustang Chica. She is still somewhat fearful of other people, and I am not fearless when it comes to her feet; unless they are moving. When she moves, she is like music. She wears her hooves down when I work her each day in the pebbly sand of the arena, so she is not too overgrown, but I know that one of these days I will have to brave working on those beautiful, big boned feet. Mustangs in the wild survive because of their feet. She is thick boned



and hard footed. I had her DNA tested and her top three breeds are, in order – Peruvian Paso, Rocky Mountain, and Mountain Pleasure. Though from a line of gaited horses, she is not gaited. She moves like water over stones though, and I can imagine that we will one day be loping in Montana meadows and clambering over stony paths in the Montana Wilderness.

We are still working on our relationship in movement. Step by step, by step, we are exploring tuning our partnership to a finer level. I can ask for a circle around me, her wrapped around, as if in a body hug. We have moved from a walk, to a trot, and now we are practicing a canter. She has learned to come to a call, across the arena. She will also come over barrels or whatever is in front of her, to arrive at my shoulder. We even competed, she and I. We braved the world of technology and videoed ourselves to compete at liberty. We didn't place because I didn't read

the instructions correctly, but she was my hero, working diligently at each task presented. We trotted over poles and over the bridge, over a blue tarp and then forward and backward through the "L", side-passed both ways over a pole and then pivoted both ways in a box. She stood still while I requested a "hold" and walked completely around her and then she trotted snakelike through the cones to a stop.

What language do we use? A nod, a hip, a crouch, and lots of laughter, together and separately, acknowledging the differences, and yawns and lip licking and big smiles recognizing our sameness and our desire to connect.

Sandra O'Brien is a member of Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen and served as its chapter's treasurer in 2020. She has a deep-rooted love for horses and has been involved with them for nine years in Alaska's and Montana's wilderness areas.



# 2021 YOUTH SUMMER PACKING CAMP

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# Carrying on a Tradition of Volunteering to Preserve Our Wild Places

By Henry Glenn, Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen

It all began in 1864 when many in the United States began to realize that our wild places were worth preserving for future generations. Visionaries of that period could foretell what might happen if there weren't protections implemented. As land was cleared for railroads and the settlers that followed, the idea that natural resources were not inexhaustible began to germinate. George Perkins Marsh published a book in 1864 titled *MAN AND NATURE* that spoke directly about the issue of exploiting and overusing America's natural resources and extolled the philosophy of "responsible stewardship" of public lands. Marsh's words later helped to spawn the "conservation movement," a period from 1890 to 1920 when numerous Congressional acts aimed at government management and protection of America's natural resources were passed.

Through his efforts and others at the time came the USDA Forest Service in about 1905. In the beginning rangers stayed out in tents and had to provide their own food, supplies, horses, and many other necessities. Soon the Forest Service could see that to properly manage the forest there would need to be "comfortable" accommodations provided. It took until 1964 for people to realize that forest management alone would not protect the very wild and special places. That year congress passed the Wilderness Act to protect exceptionally wild and special places in perpetuity. Montana is blessed with several designated Wilderness areas. The Absarokee-Beartooth Wilderness, which this article is about, was established in 1978. Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen was established in 1985 as a chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and eventually part of Back Country Horsemen of America.

So this story begins with three cabins built by rangers in the early part of the 20th Century. These three cabins lie north of Yellowstone National Park (YNP) in the Absarokee-Beartooth Wilderness area. In those days the cabins were located so that a ranger on horseback could ride from trailhead to cabin or cabin to cabin in one day, usually

about 14-16 miles. Hellroaring Cabin, built in 1925, sits at 6,650 ft elevation on Hellroaring Creek about 15 miles east of Jardine, MT and about four miles north of the YNP line. It is the largest of the three cabins and has three rooms. It is the only cabin to have a kitchen and bedroom along with a large living space. All cabins are equipped with wood stoves for heat and cooking. Hellroaring Cabin has both a cookstove and a stove in the living space for heat.

Buffalo Fork Cabin sits in the Buffalo Fork Creek drainage to the east of Hellroaring Cabin about a day's ride and about four miles north of YNP. It sits in a beautiful valley with lush meadows and timber. This cabin has a loft and two stoves. It is the highest and oldest cabin, being built in 1913 and sitting at 7,730 ft of elevation. To get from Hellroaring to Buffalo Fork you have to cross the divide into Telephone Basin with stunning views in all directions. Telephone Basin is a very high basin with water and grass and is a place for the wildlife to escape the heat and bugs of summer while grazing on the lush grass that is found there. From there you drop down into Buffalo Fork drainage over a very abrupt edge and wind your way down via the many switch backs in the trail. If you arrive late the sun will already be gone from the valley floor.

Slough Creek Cabin was built in 1920 and sits at 6,800 ft. It is still further east and lies at the south end of Frenchy's Meadow, again about a day's ride from Buffalo Fork and four miles north of YNP. But to get there from Buffalo Fork Cabin you have to cross Bull Creek divide on Lookout Mountain which correctly received its name because of the stunning views it provides. Leaving the Buffalo Fork valley you have a very steep climb with breathtaking views of the valley as you wind your way up to the divide north of Lookout Mountain. Then it is off down Bull Creek, a heavily forested drainage that has old growth timber and, frequently, lots of blown down timber so bring a good crosscut and know how to use it. After Bull Creek flows into Slough Creek you are now in Frenchy's Meadow about five miles north of the Slough Creek Cabin. Frenchy Duret

was an early settler to the region and was quite the character and the subject of a future article.

Now that we have described the cabins in slight detail we will tell you about work that Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen (GVBCH) have done and continue to do to maintain the cabins. It all began in September 2010 when Clark Kinney organized a trip to Hellroaring Cabin to oil the cabin and replace the tack shed roof.

In 2011 we went to Slough Creek to rebuild a portion of the trail between the park line and the cabin that Slough Creek had washed out. The Nine Mile Pack Train and several volunteers built punchins and hauled 81,000 lbs of gravel to reestablish the trail.

In 2013 we made a trip to Buffalo Fork and over Bull Creek Divide to Slough Creek in early September, clearing trails and inventorying both cabins. We also made a trip packing in supplies to Hellroaring Cabin leaving from YNP and crossing the Hellroaring swinging bridge over the Yellowstone River.

In 2014 GVBCH helped with a big project to replace a sill log that had rotted at Buffalo Fork Cabin. We cooked for a large crew and finished the work in a week. We also went back a week later to clean up and repair the pasture fence and the tack shed. In that same year we helped pack the Montana FWP's wolf biologist in to do research and reconnaissance on wolf numbers in the A-B Wilderness that turned into the trip from hell with a horse accident with the wolf biologist and her horse. Left us a bit shaken but all survived and made a full recovery.

In 2015 we made two trips. The first trip was to Buffalo Fork Cabin to repair the foundation and wood box that a porcupine had gnawed on. We had another horse wreck with a pack horse, but no people or horses were injured, well maybe a little pride. In September of 2015 we packed supplies into Slough Creek from YNP via the wagon trail up Slough Creek. We then went across Bull Creek Divide going west to Buffalo Fork. What a day that was. We sawed so many trees in the old growth timber of Bull Creek that we finally gave up. We made it to Buffalo Fork Cabin at dark.

That day ended with a sore pack horse from a twig getting under his blanket. Since we had unloaded the freight at the cabin we were able to put his pack saddle on an empty pack mule and let him go out without a saddle.

In 2016 GVBCH made three trips with the main event being to replace the south sill log on Hellroaring Cabin. After making a supply run to stock up on supplies for the upcoming crew that was replacing the log, we dug a new toilet hole and installed cribbing to keep the varmints from digging underneath the toilet. We then skidded in a new sill log to the cabin. It was 42 feet long and without Lawrence VanDyke's mules Clyde and Marvel it would have not happened. Lots of hard work this trip. The second trip was to support the large crew lead by Dusty Burns of the Forest Service. We fed a total of 11 men and women for most of a week. Later in September we went back to finish chinking the foundation with cement. Lawrence and I had packed in sand from a sand bar about five miles from the cabin on Hellroaring Creek.

In August of 2017 three members of GVBCH left for Buffalo Fork Cabin. Seems as though a porcupine had gnawed into the tack shed floor and had played havoc with everything inside. We were able to put hardware cloth under the boards we used to repair the floor with and keep Mr. Porcupine out. We also made a trip to Slough Creek to prepare to rebuild the pasture fence and to put new siding on the tack shed that the Nine Mile crew had packed in the fall before.

Starting in August of 2018 we were back working on the tack shed at Slough Creek cabin. It has a heavy sliding door that is bear proof and it needed to be removed so we could replace the siding on that end. We then rehung the door. We did not have the proper tools or supplies to complete this the year prior. In late August we went to Buffalo Fork to pack supplies and to try to keep a pack rat out of the cabin who had gained entrance last winter. What a mess we found. It took four of us two hours to clean the cabin to even get in and think about cooking and sleeping in there. We rode up to Hidden Lake

to clear the trail and tried fishing for a couple of hours but no one caught a fish. In September we went to Hellroaring Creek Cabin to clear trails. We also wanted to go to Carpenter Lake to fish one day. We headed out and immediately were inundated with down timber on the trail. We arrived at the lake about 2pm, too tired to fish and it was too windy to cast a fly, so we took a nap and headed back to the cabin via another route and only encountered a couple downed trees across the trail.

In 2019 we started the season out with a trip to Buffalo Fork and on the way in I was sawing a big blow down out of the trail when I got bee stung. We were going in to finish chinking the cabin so the varmints could not get in. We were up on ladders working on the gable end logs to fill all the holes. We also repaired the foundation by chinking some small holes with cement we had packed in. We also discovered that the tack shed had five broken rafters from a heavy snow load so we set about repairing them. Since we didn't have a jack with us we had to improvise and use poles to jack up the roof and scab some old lumber onto the rafters to hold them until we get back to make a proper repair. We also repaired several broken corral poles and replaced about 10 of them. We cleared the trail to Telephone Basin of a lot of blow downs from a recent wind storm. On the pack out we followed a mama grizzly and her two cubs for a couple of miles. The tracks were so fresh that I kept thinking we might catch up to them but we did not. In early September we packed a trail crew into Buffalo Fork and cooked for them while they cleared trails in the area. We then packed them over the Bull Creek Divide and down into Slough Creek. We cut 43 trees that day and it rained most of the day. We were all very happy to see the Slough Creek Cabin as we had ridden 14 miles in the rain. It was still raining when we packed out the next day. In addition to the work mentioned above, on every trip you have to clean the cabins and cut firewood to fill the wood boxes. They are always left ready to use for the next group.

Each person who enters the Absarokee-Beartooth Wilderness will never

forget the experience. They will always have a little bit of the wilderness in their heart and it will always remind us of those who had the vision and were wise enough to set this beautiful part of God's creation aside to remain unchanged for generations to come.





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Winter Issue: articles due January 5th  
Beartooth, Bitter Root, Cabinet, Mission Valley, Three Rivers, Upper Clark Fork, Wild Horse Plains, and convention hosting chapter.

Spring Issue: articles due May 5th  
Charlie Russell, East Slope, Flathead, Gallatin, and Judith Basin.

Fall issue: articles due September 5th  
Last Chance, Mile High, Missoula, Northwest Montana, Selway-Pintler Wilderness, and Trout Creek.