



Decker Dispatch



Woods Creek Bridge Packing

By Tony Smith, Last Chance Back Country Horsemen

Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

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.



In July 2021 the Woods Creek Fire started as a small lightning struck tree in a cliff. After almost two weeks of doing nothing, it suddenly jumped to life and wreaked havoc across the central portion of the Big Belt Mountains eventually burning over 55,000 acres. Many miles of trail systems were impacted along with 10 bridges being burned. Last Chance Back Country Horsemen were approached in September about hauling replacement bridge planks into the area which is roughly five miles in.

Almost a year after the fire, we finally convened on August 12th to pack

in bridge planks. The Forest Service trail crew had cut out the trail (a couple of times), recon of the road and trail were complete, and 23 LC BCH members with multiple trailers, 24 mules and five horses got to work.

An initial trip was made by a few members the weekend before to check out the trail and deliver a couple loads of planks. It was 43 degrees and raining when they arrived which was a welcome relief from the last month's heat. After three very treacherous crossings where the bridges had been, a puncture wound to a mule's face, and an encounter with

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By Tony Smith, Last Chance Back Country Horsemen
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an old telephone wire from a lookout, it was decided to drop the loads and that all the other loads would have to be left just before the first bridge so we didn't get an animal or person hurt.

For the most part the weather was pleasant with afternoon rainstorms and it was not scorching hot. Three members went up early on Friday to get some initial loads in. Two FS trail crew members went up in front of them to widen the trail while they packed up. It turned out to be not such an early start, but they made it in and out with 6 mule loads and no issues while the rest of the crew worked on camp setup. That evening, loads were bundled, dinner was cooked, and plans were made for the next day.

On Saturday the packing went off without a hitch. Several members headed in early to get to the unloading spot. Multiple mule strings left not long after in a staggered fashion. People grabbed lunch when they got back and waited out a rainstorm. A second trip in by several members concluded the pack in. Saturday concluded with a delicious dinner, beverages, dog antics, and another shot of rain.

Thanks to everyone who made this project go off seamlessly. Things like this are always a team effort and between logistics, food, packers, camp crew, cooks, and unloaders there is a lot of moving parts. It was surprising and somewhat amazing that with 30 some mule loads of supplies there wasn't even a wreck!



Schedule for chapter news article submissions

E-mail to: deborah.bcha@gmail.com

Editor reserves the right to edit articles.

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.

Letter from the Chair

By Wade Murphy, Upper Clark Fork Back Country Horsemen Chair, BCH Montana

Fall greetings from BCHMT. I hope you all are having a great riding season. Hopefully we are headed toward a long fall so we can continue with some quality saddle time. Lonnie and I had a very good summer of riding and packing. We recently started keeping a "bucket list" on our refrigerator of new places and trails that we need to see and explore. Every year we try to stretch our comfort zone and get ourselves into some new country. We are all very blessed to live in Montana. As hard as I try I will never be able to ride all of the amazing public land that we all have access to..... but I am going to try!

It sounds like there has been a lot of positive work done over the summer by all of our hard working trail warriors. Thank you all for all that you do to keep Montana trails safe and accessible. The big change with BCHMT this year was the region wide volunteer agreement that was put in place and the challenge cost share money that was tied to it. The intent was to take most of the required paperwork out of the hands of the workers and also to give financial relief for folks that are driving and hauling stock for trail projects. The Forest Service has

budgeted \$58,000 to compensate BCHMT members for the miles we drive while doing work on the forest. For each member this will be paid out at the government rate of \$.58 per mile. This adds up quickly.

It is very easy to fill out the paperwork. If you are unaware of this process please contact your chapter leadership. My hope is that we can get all of our members full compensation to help relieve the impact of the current high fuel prices. All paperwork needs to be turned in at the end of November so don't delay.

I hope you don't put your saddles away too quick. Fall is some of the best riding we have in Montana. Take advantage of every opportunity to get out before the snow sets in. Continue to ride safe.

Wade

Contact Wade at murphywade923@gmail.com



Mile High Back Country Horsemen award scholarships

By Matthew Pederson, Mile High Back Country Horsemen

Mile High Back Country Horsemen (MHBC) gave out two \$500 scholarships at Butte Murdoch's!

Mariya Tregidga was able to attend and pick hers up, and Isabel Russo will be receiving hers in the mail soon.

Congratulations to you both, and hoping the best for you in your college years!

The money was raised through Murdoch's raffle ticket sales.



MHBC had a workday up at the East Fork Reservoir working on the Page Lake Trailhead #8039. Turned out pretty nice! Brush clearing, new parking area, and three new camping sites complete with picnic tables, fire rings, and firewood! This was the second annual workday at the East Fork.



Next Generation BCH

By Rick A. Mathies, NorthWest Montana Back Country Horsemen

The NorthWest Montana chapter was founded in 2015 with a forward-looking group of BCH members who knew we needed to figure out a way to pass on what we know and what we do to the next generation. It was clear that doing the same old things that BCH had been doing for the last 50 years was not working in attracting younger members to our chapters.

We started a program, in 2016 with our local 4-H, which just started out as 4-H Packing and became 4-H Trail & Packing. We quickly realized that packing alone was not enough information for these kids; it was clear that most of their "arena" horses did not have the skills necessary for back country trail riding safely. So, we added the "Trail" part so that 4-H members could learn what their horses needed to be able to do to be safe on trails.

This program started out slow with the first year having only 14 kids enrolled, but quickly picked up steam as the word spread throughout the 4-H horse community. By 2021 we had over 35 kids enrolled, so many that we are now thinking about having to limit the number of 4-H kids each year — something we really don't want to do. But to adequately train these students we must make sure they get enough hands-on training.

This is the reason for my article, I think that this program could be an answer for BCH chapters across the nation to attract younger members to our BCH cause. Many BCH chapters are struggling with how to attract members, especially younger ones. The beautiful thing about this program is all the parents of these 4-H kids are usually intimately involved in 4-H with their kids, and most own horses themselves so we get two generations at the same time. Many of these families have joined our chapter and are active in our volunteer work.

What is staggering is our 4-H youth have contributed over \$248,127.58 to our chapter's volunteer hours since 2018. Our program has received a lot of press recently from the Flathead Beacon to the Daily Interlake regarding what our students had done and how it has affected their lives. This program

is not easy as it takes many volunteers from our chapter to carry out the training, which runs from January through May each year. We are way too busy in the summer to carry this out, so we do it in our off months.

Currently our chapter has 29 Junior members (under the age of 21) and many family units with these young people. As you can see, they are a vital part of our chapter, but they are not recognized by the state or national as members or contributors. BCH as an organization needs to change, we need to include these young people in everything.

There is a crisis brewing on the horizon and it is up to us, as BCH members, to pass our knowledge on to the next generation. It should be part of BCH's plan to attract, train, and graduate the next generation of BCH members. If we don't, then what will become of BCH?

Our chapter has graduated five (with many more in the wings) Next Generation Packers with our Trail & Packing program. These young adults will become our legacy and the ones who will hopefully carry on when we are gone.

Last fall I sent out an offer to help other chapters and states start a Trail & Packing program in their area in hopes of passing this on. Since then, Washington State BCH is working on a statewide program, inspired by our program. This effort was spearheaded by the Olympic Chapter, the Pierce Chapter, and the Tacoma Chapter. They even asked us to do a seminar at their annual Rendezvous in Ellensburg last March. The Rattlesnake Ridge chapter in Washington is updating their Junior BCH program to be more like our Trail & Packing program as well. In California, the Los Padres chapter is starting a Trail & Packing program. I have also spoken and met with Wyoming State BCH and South Dakota State BCH regarding our program, and they are very interested.

This brings me back to why I am writing this article: I would be willing to share this concept with any chapters/state organizations. I feel so strongly that this is a possible way to pass on what BCH does, because the alterna-

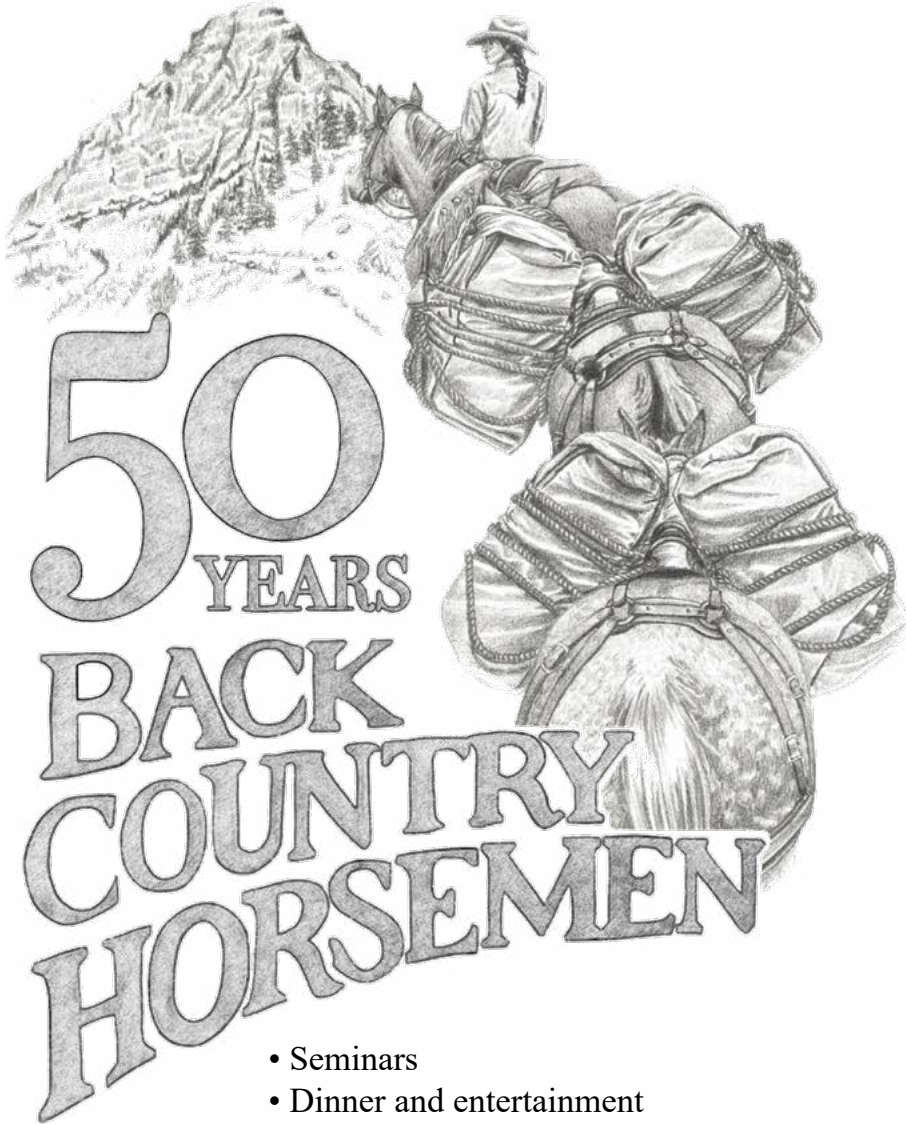
tive just doesn't look good. We must build a passion in our youth for the trails and back country we so love, so that it will continue to be open to future generations.

If you are interested in learning more about how to start your own Trail & Packing project, contact Rick Mathies, at 406-752-2209 or pastpresident@nwmtbch.org



Back Country Horsemen Celebrates 50 Years of Service

April 14-16, 2023 BCH Montana State Convention
and 50th Anniversary Celebration in Kalispell, Montana
April 16-19 BCHA National Board Meeting



- Seminars
- Dinner and entertainment
- Vendor booths
- 50th Anniversary keepsake belt buckles
- Raffle items to win / live auction / silent auction
- Come enjoy the fun, where the Back Country Horsemen started in 1973



Majestic Valley Arena, our meeting venue



Red Lion Hotel, rooms reserved

Find all the information at: <https://bchmt.org/flatbch/50-years-of-service/>

We will keep adding to this website as our plans progress.

All BCH states and chapters are encouraged to participate! Share your chapter's activities: show us what you do, and how and where you do it. Bring a slide show, bring your unique pack saddle and packing gear, bring your favorite horse or mule. Share a story. Get creative!

Safety Moment

Yes or No?

When you work with your animals are they saying “yes” to your commands or do they generally say “no!”? This simple detail is a great way to measure how well your animal sees you as its leader. OUR ANIMALS CRAVE LEADERSHIP! Deep inside them they want someone to step into their life and lead them and take charge and be their caretaker. To our horses and mules, leadership means safety and protection. As you establish leadership with your animal you gain their trust and their confidence soars. When you fail to establish leadership, your animal will feel the need to take matters into their own hands (hooves) for their own protection.

So back to the “yes or no” question.... When your animals see you as leader they tend to say yes when you ask for action. With their trust in you they also develop a desire to cooperate with you. They become soft to your cues, they be-

come a quiet, calm and safe trail partner. When you have failed to establish leadership with your animal they do not have confidence in you. They often have a constant fear in them that your action might cause them harm or injury. This can often trigger their flight response. They will also feel the need to challenge you to test your leadership. All of this can be very dangerous.

Always start with groundwork. Quality groundwork is the key to leadership. It is also a great place to measure the “yes or no” mentality of your animal. Simply ask your animal to back up a few steps and observe their body language. When they back up quietly and calmly with a light command they are saying “yes”. Keep up the good work! When their feet are stuck or they pin their ears and resist what you are asking

them to do they are saying “NO!”. You have a lot more work to do. Apply this same simple test to all your interaction with your animal.

Don't confuse leadership with dominance. Leadership is quiet, calm and firm. Dominance is aggressive and forceful which triggers more fear.

The more your animal says yes to you, the safer they are to ride. Be honest with yourself about what your horse is telling you. Horses never lie. If you need help, find a mentor or trainer who can get you started in the right direction. Pick a mentor who rides animals that are quick to say yes!

Safe and happy trails.

Wade

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By Wade Murphy,
Upper Clark Fork Back Country Horsemen
Chairman, BCH Montana



Rosco the In-Famous Mule!

By Randy Velin, Missoula Back Country Horsemen

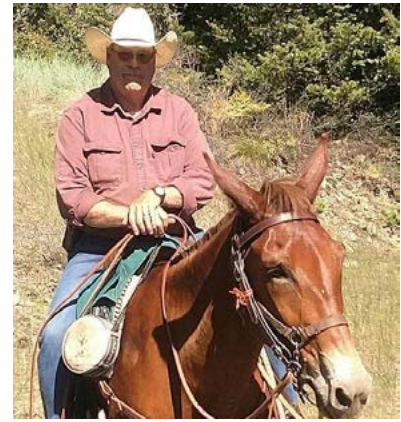
Rosco came into my life 13 years ago. He was a plain sorrel mule, rather tall (16.3 hands) and somewhat foreboding with his big eyes. I bought him sight unseen over near the Three Forks area. I talked with his owner who told me he had both packed and ridden him. The owner had originally purchased him from a breeder in Ohio as a two-year-old, as he did most of his mules. He used him in a pack string for four years. When I asked if the mule had any problems, he said that Rosco was too tall for him when packing as he was kind of a short guy. He said that he was really friendly, and a little pigeon toed but sound with no other problems. The price was right, the mule had packing and riding experience and I was okay with the size as I may want to ride him. He has walker in him so he could keep up with my lead horse who has a big stride.

We went to pick him up in mid-November. After doing the paperwork it was about 5:00pm when we headed home. We drove in a blizzard all the way from south of Three Forks to Missoula, and of course it was dark. We made it home fine at about midnight. When I went to get him out of the trailer, he turned his head around to look at me with his big eyes. As I untied his lead and started to lead him out the trailer, he put his head over my shoulder and walked out with me. He was definitely

a friendly guy! I put him into the round pen and gave him some hay for the night. I had two mares, and it didn't take him long to bond with them.

Well, fast forward over the years there are many interesting stories about Rosco and his antics. He has always been a good guard mule. Anyone or anything that comes around gets the eye from him. He gets right up to you and sniffs. If he likes you, you are welcome, and he puts his head down to let you scratch his ears. If not, you may get honked at or snubbed. He loves all kids and most women.

One of the things he likes to do is go in and out of an open trailer. One December day I was in the pasture cleaning out my 18' stock trailer to get ready to help someone move. When I was finished, I placed a blue plastic tarp on the floor to keep the snow off before moving day. I was taking the cleaning tools back to the garage when I heard a bang. I looked around to see what it was and Rosco was coming out of the trailer. I had left the back door open because I was going to bring a freight cart out to put into the trailer. The next thing I saw was Rosco running towards the back of the trailer, jumping in and BANG! as he slid to the front on the blue tarp because the floor was slick. As I was heading out with the cart, he jumped out of the back and trotted around the trailer and took another run at it and BANG!



He jumped out again and tried to get one of the mares to do it. He circled her and got her close, but no way was she going to play that game. I watched as he did a couple more slides with a victory lap each time. When I was almost to the trailer, he came out grabbing the tarp in his teeth and ran off with it. When he saw that the other horses were scared of the killer tarp, he kept chasing them around the pasture. I put the cart in the trailer, closed the door, and thought I had better save the horses from this crazy mule. I was finally able to catch him as the horses ran into the holding area and I got the gate closed before he could go through it. He was really bummed that I stopped his play time and as I took his tarp away. He gave me a honky snort and took off in his high stepping prance with his head high saying, "I will get even someday"!

In the news

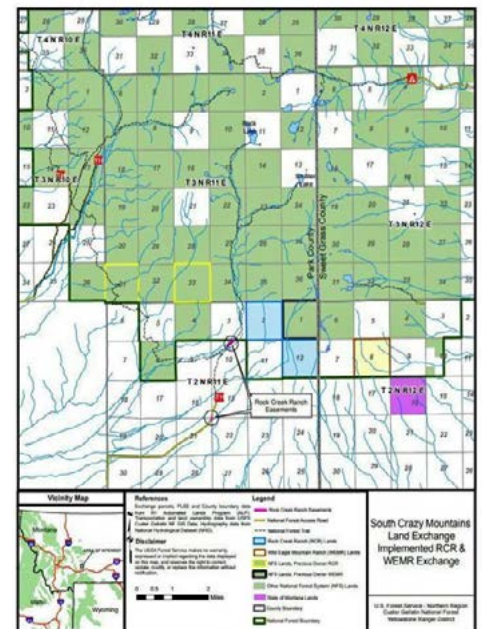
South Crazy Mountain land exchange finalized

After more than a decade of work, the Custer Gallatin National Forest has finalized its South Crazy Land Exchange, acquiring two easements and exchanging approximately 1,920 acres of forest for 1,877.5 acres of private lands. The acreage in the Crazies, located northeast of Livingston, are now open to public use.

"Our team is pleased to bring this exchange to the finish line and have these sections in the public estate," said Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor, in a press release. "Completion of this exchange demonstrates progress in this highly valued and complex landscape.

"While we recognize there is work ahead to continue improving public access and land consolidation in the Crazy Mountains, it feels good to pause to celebrate this step forward," she added. "We're thankful for the interest and passion that people have for this area, and for the cooperation and support from landowners and partners in making this a reality."

The newly acquired sections consolidate forest lands, creating a larger block of clearly identifiable public lands, benefiting dispersed recreation opportunities. The exchange should reduce unintended trespass issues with intermingled private lands and save administrative maintenance costs, the agency said.





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If you would like to join us, please contact a chapter in your area.

Find more information on our website:
bchmt.org

