



Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

# Decker Dispatch



## Victory for the Badger-Two Medicine!

From Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance

### 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.



Photo by Chris Pederson, Hungry Horse News

### Solenex Lease Retired!

These wild and sacred lands are finally free from the threat of oil and gas!

Friends, Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance is excited to announce that along with our Blackfeet and conservation partners we have reached an agreement to permanently retire the last oil and gas lease in the Badger-Two Medicine! We did it!

This is a huge victory for the land,

wildlife, the Blackfeet Nation and all people who love wild places. The Badger will not be drilled. Not today. Not ever!

Thank you for being a part of this struggle. You can read more about our reaction to this historic agreement and what we're doing to celebrate on our blog.

<https://www.glaciertwomedicine.org/blog>

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## Judith Basin BCH proud supporter of the BCH mission

By Linda Westby, Judy Fossum and Candy Phillips

Judith Basin chapter is comprised of a group of fun loving country folk who know the value of hard work and a job well done. We ride till the cows come home and appreciate this great country of America, so we were excited when Bob Gilko contacted us in July. Bob, from the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, presented an opportunity to assist in the reopening process of Cottonwood Creek trail that was washed out in the 2011 Montana floods, making it inaccessible for 11 years. It was a job they were starting in 2022 to conclude in 2023. Cottonwood Creek trail is located approximately 20 miles southwest of Lewistown on the north side of the Snowy Mountains. Assistance was requested with packing out a work crew of seven that required three pack animals.

The uncertainty of what lay ahead was enticing, as we do enjoy the trail less traveled. The trailhead was a buzz with members Candy Phillips, with an experienced pack mule and horse, John Westby, with a first time pack horse, Judy Fossum, to lead Candy's pack horse, and backup wrangler Linda Westby. Shirley Simmons, a private land owner who generously allowed us parking on her property, arrived saddled and ready to ride with us. Another local landowner, Randy Barta, brought words of wisdom along with a key to a large gate to accommodate the pack string. The AmeriCorp crew members met us at the trailhead to guide us to the extraction point. With great anticipation we started out. We commented on what a fast pace the work crew set, only to have them say every time they looked over their shoulder there was a horse muzzle within inches! Trees were removed, many creek crossings were made, and finally a changing of boots for the hikers as we embarked on the mountain trail. The creek bottom trail left a lot to be desired, but we persevered. It was a pleasing three mile ride as we rode over the newly reestablished trail, passing crew members with chainsaws and the swinging of an occasional pulaski.

A pleasant surprise awaited us as we arrived at the campsite. The gear was all packed and ready to go! Our experienced and first time packers sprung into action, quickly organizing the many various items and packing two mules and a pack horse. We all enjoyed our lunch and visiting with the AmeriCorp group. We had a calm ride out to the trailhead with expressions of appreciation as the AmeriCorp hikers followed the pack string - I'm

sure enjoying not feeling stalked by horses from behind. It is always a great day when all humans and animals survive without injury or explosion!

Much to our surprise a call came in August to finish the Cottonwood Trail, needing pack horses in six days. As luck would have it, the chapter was able to change plans and accommodate the request. The original members Candy, Judy, John and Linda were joined by Michelle Bass with her three year old first time pack horse. The four pack animals were loaded and with cautious energy, and we set off on another adventure. It is a wonderful thing to have such knowledgeable, adventuresome and generous private land owners, JBBCH, AmeriCorp and Forest Service to fulfill the purpose and mission perpetuated by BCH of America. This great organization has empowered all horsemen with opportunities to keep our country's heritage alive and thriving.





## Letter from the Chair

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

Hello friends!

I hope you all had a great summer. Hopefully you were able to spend some quality time in the saddle in this great state of Montana. Fall is my personal favorite time in the back country. I'm hoping for a nice long fall, so I can add on some more great trail miles.

Things have been sort of quiet at the BCHMT level this summer. I see that as a good thing. I assume that means you all have been busy enjoying your four-legged partners. Did you get a chance to see the article that was printed about BCHMT in the Missoulian newspaper? Their reporter Alex Mitchell spent a little time with Mack Long, and then wrote a great article promoting the Back Country Horsemen. If you missed the article it is easy to find with a quick internet search (see page 5). So much of what our hardworking members do is behind the scenes. It is nice to get some publicity to promote our organization.

I hope you all have been keeping quality records for your work projects. Volunteer hours will be due very soon, and also reimbursable mileage through our state-wide challenge cost share will be collected soon. I am hoping we can take full advantage of this program to help offset the cost of these frustrating fuel prices this summer.

Don't hang up your saddles too soon. Fall is a great time to ride. I hope you all take advantage of every opportunity to get in the saddle before the snow comes.

Safe and happy trails!

Wade

Contact Wade at [murphywade923@gmail.com](mailto:murphywade923@gmail.com)



## BCHMT Youth Program Report

By Ally Pike, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead

Ah yes, August in Montana. Small and large fires seemingly around every corner. Unfortunately that means we have to stay on our toes for anything planned in the backcountry. Even if there looks like a small window of opportunity, safety overall is the priority. This year The Back Country Horsemen of Montana Youth Program had plans to spend 4 days in the Badger Two-Medicine, traveling and packing, but we had to practice being dynamic due to fire.

We couldn't miss the chance to still gather and learn about packing, so we went to visit Smoke Elser! Saturday when we were supposed to be deep in the wilderness was spent deep in Smoke's barn digging for gear. With the handful of kids that came, we held a competition to have 65lb matching clean loads on the saddles. Each team had a pair of students working together to practice their skills. At the end we all had chocolate (we forced the winning team to share the prize).

Our beautiful Montana wilderness is rarely predictable or accommodating to our schedules, but we can always continue building our community and practicing. We had an amazing day full of food, laughter, stories, and learning.

Our youth in Montana holds the promise of seeing and protecting our beautiful landscapes, sometimes it's just from a distance. Our youth in Montana holds the torch for learning backcountry packing skills, sometimes it's just in a cozy barn with snacks.

The Back Country Horsemen of Montana Youth Program Instagram page has nearly 100 followers!

Check out the photos and videos and please, follow our page! Let's spread the word about our youth summer camps and create more opportunities for young people to get involved in horses and volunteering on our public lands.

<https://instagram.com/bchmtyouthprogram?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk-2ZA==>



# Safety Moment

By Wade Murphy,  
Circle Cross Equine



## Are you ready for trouble?

Back country riding is an amazing experience that we as Back Country Horsemen love to do. I am continually amazed by the amount of remote country that is available to explore and enjoy. The enjoyment of seeking solitude in the back country also comes with a certain amount of risk. When a cowboy gets hurt at the local rodeo, there is usually an ambulance outside the fence to come to their assistance. When we have trouble in the back country, we need to be ready to fend for ourselves. We not only need to take care of ourselves, we have a responsibility to make sure that our animals are cared for when things don't go as planned. Knowledge and preparedness are very important. I thought I would write out some bullet points of some of the things that are worth considering.

So you are in the back country with your partner and they somehow become incapacitated...

- Do you have the first aid training, skills and equipment to tend to your partner?
- Do you have the navigational skills to get out of the situation that you are in?
- Do you have a satellite or radio communication device to call for assistance, and do you know how to use it? Do you know where you are when calling for assistance?
- Do you know how to set up a shelter while you wait for help?
- If you had to ride out for help by yourself, do you and your horse have the confidence to ride out away from the rest of the herd?
- Do you have the knowledge to care for your herd as long as needed?



- Do you have the packing skills to load up animals without your partner's help?
- Can you lead out a pack string if your partner is unable to? Does your saddle horse have the confidence to lead the string?
- Can you rig up a high line without your partner's help?
- Do you have the knowledge and supplies to care for injured stock?
- Do you have a plan when an animal loses a shoe?

Hopefully we will never find ourselves in a scary life or death situation, but with the lifestyle we have chosen,

bad things can happen. There is no way to plan for every scenario, but the more self-sufficient you are, the more likely you will be to get yourself, your partner and your animals out of a bad situation.

I think it is the responsibility of all of us to assess our own abilities and spend some quality time preparing ourselves for trouble. Preparedness leads to confidence and confidence leads to a higher level of enjoyment in the mountains.

Ride safe.

Wade

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### Schedule for chapter news article submissions.

Submit 400-500 words, photos in separate .jpg files (not in Word)

E-mail to: [deborah.bcha@gmail.com](mailto: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.*



## Horse Power: Montana-originated Back Country Horsemen ride on into 50th year

By ALEX MITCHELL, Missoulian, Aug 21, 2023



Mack Long, left, and Scott Kiser clear trail on their way to Lake Otatsy along the North Fork of the Blackfoot trail. Photo by Ben Allan Smith, Missoulian.

On packed horses and mules, Back Country Horsemen volunteers ascended into the wilderness on a trail surrounded by fresh wildflowers and burnt timber.

The trail to Lake Otatsy near the North Fork of the Blackfoot made for a 15-mile round trip on the start of their two-day trip. Every so often, volunteers dismounted their horses to do what they were there for — saw away fallen trees and debris to improve the path for themselves and for all future recreationists.

It's a needed service as trails see increased use in the area. And it's a service the Back Country Horsemen have been happy to provide since starting 50 years ago in Montana's Flathead Valley with a focus on advocating and creating greater trail access. The organization has since expanded to 37 states.

The chapter that cleared the trails in the mountains bordering the Bob Marshall Wilderness was one of 17 chapters in Montana, with around 917 members total enrolled in the state organization.

The trail-clearing project was one of several the group has done or will do this year. That includes tree-thinning projects around a historic lookout and a campsite to better prepare for future wildfires, and packing gravel for the U.S. Forest Service to help repair a trail to

Heart Lake near Superior.

"These projects really give us a strong sense of purpose for what we do and what we can accomplish as an organization," Mission Valley Chapter President Mark Potter said.

Potter, 72, joined the Back Country Horsemen in 2015 after retiring the year before. A lifelong hunter, he purchased a couple mules as it became harder to carry his gear just on his back. He got further mentoring on the use of mules, and after hearing colleagues mention the Back Country Horsemen, his passion developed into their mission.

"They really make you feel like you're part of a family," Potter said.

The organization put more than 2,000 miles on Montana trails while volunteering last year. In total, the Montana Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen provided an estimated \$1,031,544 in value with the services they offered, according to U.S. Forest Service calculations.

They most often collaborate with the Forest Service, taking projects that staff doesn't have capacity to accomplish. Superior District Trails Manager Rachel Ryan, with whom the chapter collaborates, said the district has only two permanent staff for trail clearing and six in the summer. It's not always

enough to keep up with trail maintenance.

"The biggest value they offer is just adding their support to us," Ryan said. "They're able to take on some of these extra projects that our workforce itself can't always handle and they are still very important projects that need to be completed. They're a group that is always willing to try new things and work where they're needed."

Ryan said the trail clearing has become even more beneficial to them recently. Trails in the area have seen increased demand since the start of COVID-19.

"Out here in Superior we didn't get as much of the traffic out on our trails," Ryan said. "But when COVID hit, everyone was going outside. That's held since 2020. People wanted to go outside and be able to do things. Now it's just starting to be more of a hobby for people and people are back in the outdoors and are enjoying it again. I think it's super awesome."

While more people are out on the trails, Vice Chair of the Montana Back Country Horsemen Mack Long has noted declining enrollment within the organization. He's seeking out new members with hopes of growing to the roughly 1,300 members it was pre-pandemic and perhaps beyond that.

Alongside its education and outreach efforts to hopefully get younger interest in the organization, members of the organizations teach youth to ride horses, as well as invite others on some of their service trips that might not require horses to reach the areas.

Read the full article online:

[https://missoulian.com/news/local/backcountry-horsemen-trail-clearing-recreation-50th-year/article\\_15f6f1d0-3e17-11ee-bc67-3f8c203bddff.html](https://missoulian.com/news/local/backcountry-horsemen-trail-clearing-recreation-50th-year/article_15f6f1d0-3e17-11ee-bc67-3f8c203bddff.html)

# A Step Back in Time: History of Packing in Idaho's Selway Country

By Kathy Hundley, Selway-Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen

The Selway-Pintler Wilderness BCH has had a great summer clearing various trails in canyons that access the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness. Instead of writing about our summer projects, we opted to share with you some interesting history of packing in the Selway and the Forest Service in its early days. The following excerpts are from research and a document created by *Cindy L. Schacher, Archaeologist Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests Updated 7/15/2016.*

***The Partnership Between the Forest Service and Packing:*** In 1891, Congress authorized the President to withdraw public lands and create forest reserves. This led to the 1897 establishment of the Bitterroot Forest Reserve by President Grover Cleveland. The Forest Reserves were initially under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Forestry of the General Land Office, Department of Interior. In 1905, the Bureau of Forestry, its personnel and the forest reserves, were transferred to the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service was created as a department agency. By an act of Congress in 1907, the Forest Reserves were changed to National Forests. Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the Bureau of Forestry, scouted the Selway area in 1896. An outfitter from Montana, Fred Printz, led Mr. Pinchot on the trip, providing the needed provisions and pack animals. Thus began the partnership between the Forest Service and animal packing, which has served as the principal means of transporting personnel and goods into the backcountry by the Forest Service since its infancy.

***Early Forest Service Rangers:*** The dream of many young men was to become a ranger, and being a ranger required that you had the skills of a packer. Establishment of the Forest Reserves, and later the Forest Service, presented a need and opportunity for would-be forest rangers to pursue their dreams. It was 1907 in the small central Idaho community of Kooskia where the first Forest Ranger examination was held in the area. Each candidate had to supply three head of horses and tools to build trails and cabins. He also had to demonstrate that he



Selway National Forest Ranger, Adolph Weholt, 1910.  
Adolph Weholt photograph, courtesy of Don and Esther Morrow

knew how to use the tools and pack items like a barrel, tools, bedding, and a tent on his animals using a diamond hitch. There was a compass and pacing exercise where a tract of land was staked off. The men had to pace and give the acreage of the tract. Lastly, there was a written examination, which required the candidate to furnish practical solutions to various problems. Those who passed the exam were given jobs in the order of their scores and appointed at \$75 per month.

Adolph Weholt, a Ranger on the Selway National Forest, told of choosing his crew from husky 18 to 20 year old mountain kids. The workers were required to provide their own riding horses and board themselves. After his

(continued next page)

## MEN WANTED!

A RANGER MUST BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF AND HIS HORSES UNDER VERY TRYING CONDITONS; BUILD TRAILS AND CABINS; RIDE ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT; PACK, SHOOT, AND FIGHT FIRE WITHOUT LOSING HIS HEAD . . . .

ALL THIS REQUIRES A VERY VIGOROUS CONSTITUTION. IT MEANS THE HARDEST KIND OF PHYSICAL WORK FROM BEGINING TO END. IT IS NOT A JOB FOR THOSE SEEKING HEALTH OR LIGHT OUTDOOR WORK . . . .

**INVALIDS  
NEED NOT APPLY!**

USDA Forest Service Ranger Recruitment  
Poster c. 1905



## Step Back in Time (continued from previous page)

tryout in a corral full of half wild horses, Loyd Rupe was judged the most adept at handling stock and throwing the diamond hitch, so he became the official packer.

Mr. Rupe later told of traveling through Blodgett Pass on the Idaho/Montana divide on a steep and dangerous trail. On many of the switchbacks the horse's heads would protrude into space as they made their turns. He also found it necessary to reduce his loads to 35 pounds to keep the horses from tipping over backwards as they clawed their way up the rock bluffs. The bleached bones of rolled animals could be seen far below—bleak evidence that an unfortunate hunter or trapper had met with disaster!



Gil Erlewine with the Bear Creek Ranger Station Packstring, 1929.  
"The best packer in the Selway. He could pack a 600 lb. stove",  
Bear Creek District Ranger Leroy Lewis.

## Montana Matters Youth Outdoor Experience

By Kathy Hundley, Selway-Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen

On Saturday, May 6, 2023, the public was invited to join over 30 outdoor, wild-life and conservation-based organizations for a day packed with learning, prizes and fun! The event was held at the Ravalli Co. Fairgrounds in Hamilton, MT and was formerly known as the Teller Youth Expo. The highlight of the day is where youth, ages 14-17, can win a chance to attend camps held around the state, all paid through grants and donations. The Selway-Pintler Wilderness BCH chapter has been one of the 30 conservation/volunteer organizations who participate in the event since its beginning in 2013. This year's event was made even more special by the presence of the Northern Region Pack Train. Winners have attended our BCHMT Indian Meadows Youth Packing Camp, Montana Matters Magruder Camp, and Boone and Crockett Club's Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch Outdoor Adventure Camp west of Dupuyer, MT. At these camps, students are introduced to the skill of horse and mule packing, horsemanship, safety, Light on the Land, and the beauty and special place we call the back country!



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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](http://bchmt.org)



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