Back Country Horsemen of Montana Mission Statement

• Perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of America’s back country and wilderness.
• Work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
• Assist various agencies responsible for the maintenance and management of public lands.
• Educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustained use of the back country by horsemen and the general public, commensurate with our heritage.
• Foster and encourage formation of new Back Country Horsemen organizations.

Letter from the Chair

Mark Himmel, Chairman, BCH Montana

Well, summer has come to an end and fall is definitely here; early snow and work has kept me from riding. At this point in the year, I usually look back on the maintenance accomplished last summer and ask myself, “Did I get everything done that I planned on doing?” “Did I put enough miles on that ornery pack or riding animal so that he is better next year?” “Did I really make a difference this year or just put time in?” I am sure we all ask ourselves these questions when fall arrives, and the answer is usually the same, “There’s always next year.” The problem with that is that the next years add up real quick and before we know it we’re a lot older too.

This year I can think of one trail I did not get to; but there were a dozen others that I did get on and left them in better shape than before. I don’t quite like swinging a Pulaski but it does make a difference when it comes to getting water off the tread.

I’d like to do more packing but my pack animal is still in the ornery stage and not ready for serious work. I can think of the time we put in with the Betty grader this year and that’s one area I can see we’re making a difference and spending less time doing it.

I got to tag along with Mack and Connie this year on a Wilderness Youth pack trip to Webb Lake; now that was real work. The simple logistics of putting it all together and then accomplishing the pack trips amazed me at times. I believe it’s easier to swing that Pulaski all day, but not nearly as fulfilling. All of us do what we enjoy the most, whether packing, tread work or just getting out and clearing the trails of dead fall that seem to reappear as soon as we leave the forest.

And after all, there’s always next year.

Mark Himmel
“I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last limit of my power, --that the path before me was closed, that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity. But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.”

From Gitanjali by Tagore
Wilderness Youth Film Project: A Collaborative Effort

by Connie Long, Missoula Chapter BCHMT

Starting early last spring, Smoke Elser and I had a meeting with Joni Packard, Region 1 Volunteer and Youth Coordinator, to discuss ways of getting kids in the wilderness and plant the seed of wilderness stewardship. During this meeting the 50th anniversary of the wilderness act came up and the discussion quickly turned to what could be done to do a special project to showcase the wilderness for the celebration in 2014. As the conversation continued, the two ideas suddenly collided and a project to film youth in the wilderness was born. The concept was to film youth who had not had a wilderness experience before and capture their thoughts and feelings of wilderness as they were exposed the very first time.

After several months of planning, several twists and turns, and several large hurdles jumped, the project had a date and place. The date for the project was scheduled for August 22, 2013 to September 1, 2013. We needed a trail head where a large number of folks could congregate and a wilderness setting that was not too far to travel but offered scenery and activities. Thanks to the Lincoln Ranger District, Indian Meadows was picked as the trail head and Webb Lake was picked as the destination to set up a wilderness camp. Since this was a collaborative effort with the Forest Service, we were approved to use the cabin at Indian Meadows as well as the cabin at Webb Lake.

The logistics of pulling off such a project of this magnitude was going to take a lot of help. The obvious organization to turn to was the Back Country Horsemen of Montana. With Smoke and I being very actively involved, we knew that BCH of Montana had the horse safety skills and the knowledge to assist in this project. The state organization was overwhelmingly supportive of this project, which I am very thankful for.

Joni took charge of selecting the youth who would be offered to participate in the project and teamed up with Steve Archibald of the Carhart Wilderness Institute. Steve had been teaching area students about wilderness and had a relationship with area high schools in western Montana. The area youth were told of the project and if interested had to submit their interest in some form. Some presented videos and some wrote essays, some were very creative. From these, a selection of youth was chosen for a personal interview. At the end of the process twelve were chosen, ages 14-17. Schools involved were Sentinel High School in Missoula, Willard Alternative High School in Missoula, St. Ignatius High School and Polson High School in the Mission Valley. These students were divided into two groups of six. Each group was taken on a 5 day pack trip.

The project started on August 22. We loaded up 11 pack animals and packed camp into a wilderness site just past Webb Lake Cabin. BCH volunteers that were present that day and assisted were Mark Himmel (Charlie Russell), Kathy Hundley (Selway Pintler), Mike Chandler (Missoula), Richard Tameke (Missoula), Charlie O’Leary (Mile High) and Russell O’Leary (Mile High). Along with Forest Service personnel, Joni Packard – Regional Youth & Service Program Coordinator & Regional Conservation Education Coordinator, Nicki Drewy – Lincoln Ranger District Trails Manager, Jeff Miller – long time packer/wrangler for Smoke Elser and now works with Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters from time to time, Mack Long and myself. We rode the approximately 7 miles into the camp site, dropped off the camp, set up the adult tents but left everything else for the youth to assist with. Then we rode out. We had a very pleasant evening at the Indian Meadows guard station that night and planned for the rest of the trip and made assignments to those that could stay and help for this first 5 day trip.

On August 23rd the youth were instructed to be at the Indian Meadows trail head by 3 p.m. After introductions were made, the BCH volunteers conducted a brief horse safety class for the youth participants as most had very little to no horse experience and had never ridden before. The evening dinner was a potluck hosted by BCH of Montana, and as usual there was plenty of really good food. Amber Kamps, Lincoln District Ranger, stopped by to welcome everyone to the district and to say how excited she was to be able to assist in making this project happen with approving the use of the Forest Service facilities on her district. After dinner, there was a camp fire discussion with the youth to start them thinking about wilderness and how important their future role will be. As night fell, we all were exposed to the sounds of wolf howls all night long.

August 24 was quite a sight to see as we saddled up and headed into the wilderness camp site. We needed BCH volunteers to be escorts for the film crew. Mark Himmel and Richard Tameke assumed this role. Each gentleman brought an additional horse that the film crew could ride. Richard headed out first as his film crew person wanted to get footage of the youth riding on the trail. The next group that headed out was the youth group lead by Mack Long, Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters and BCH volunteer. Also in this group was Steve Archibald, Carhart Wilderness Institute, Joni Packard, Brandon Schulz, Forest Service Region 1 media department, Kathy Hundley and Sandi Treadaway, Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters cook. Mark Himmel with the second film crew person left separately. The
During the project, each youth participant was interviewed by the film crew at the beginning of the adventure, during and at the end. As no one has seen any of the footage as of yet, the film crew reported that there were some very dramatic changes in the youths’ responses as they were continually exposed to the wilderness.

At the beginning of each trip the youth participants were given very portable video cameras for them to record anything they wished. The idea was to give the youth a way to express their feelings and make comments during their experience. Some of these recordings will be in the finished film project and snippets on YouTube.

While we were completing the second youth trip there was another trip of college-age kids who hiked 80 miles in 11 days, being filmed about their experiences and exposure to the wilderness for the first time.

I would like to give special thanks to Paul Evenson (Missoula), for cabin sitting at Indian Meadows cabin, always being there to help those who were running back and forth and watching over the stock that were kept there when not in use. To Kathy Hundley (Selway/Pintler) for coming back into camp on the last day of the second trip with two pack animals to help us pack the camp out. To Missoula chapter members, Mike Moore, Mark and Jenna Wright, Larry and Debbie Popp for helping with the horse safety classes for the youth participants. To Smoke Elser (Missoula) for seeing that this was a good idea, getting the project started and coordinating the volunteers. To Joni Packard for her huge role on the Forest Service side of things and making this project happen.

The plan is to show the completed film in its entirety at the Back Country Horsemen of Montana state convention in Missoula next April. There also will be snippets of the film posted on YouTube as a way to engage youth across the country and hopefully inspire them to become wilderness stewards.

Photos by Mark Himmel and Brandon Schultz
Safety Thoughts: Are Spurs Right for You?

by Wade Murphy, Upper Clark Fork Chapter, BCHM

Please don't misunderstand this article. I am not at all opposed to spurs; they are a great tool for the right rider on the right animal. I do think however, a rider needs to be honest with their own ability and with the mindset of the animal that they are on before they rush to slap on the spurs. Let me explain –

Picture a new, inexperienced rider on a horse that is still a little green and fresh. This combination is actually a pretty common sight. They get out on the trail and the horse gets nervous and full of energy. This excitement in the horse transfers right to the rider who is also starting to get nervous. The rider’s unintentional reaction is to tighten up their legs and hang on. The horse feels the rider’s tension and also feels those spurs starting to rub his belly. The rider’s response as well as the spurs touching on the horse’s belly, give the horse a whole lot more to worry about. The situation escalates instead of getting better. You can imagine an even more extreme situation when a horse jumps or bolts and a newer rider instantly squeezes his legs to hold on. Those spurs can hit the horse and make a bad situation much worse.

What are spurs used for? The rodeo boys use spurs to add energy to their bucking horses. The more they buck, the more points the rider gets. Trail riders and competitive riders use spurs to add energy and responsiveness to their horses. The common thread here is adding energy. If you are riding a horse that always seems to have too much energy maybe those spurs are part of the problem. Try leaving them home on a ride or two; you might like the results. When the day comes when you want more out of that same horse, those spurs, used the correct way, might be a good way to get that added energy. Being honest with your abilities and your horse’s level of training will lead to quicker success.

Spurs can be a very effective tool when used correctly. So how should they be used? Let me start with a general horse training idea, how to make a horse light and responsive. I want my horses to move off the spur. This is followed by increased pressure with the spur. Ramp up the pressure until your horse moves off of it. Then take away all pressure. Often soft hearted or fearful riders will do this. This is like saying “please, please, please, please…….” Soon your pressure will just be ignored because your horse knows you don’t mean it. There are no consequences for them ignoring you. They will get duller and duller. The second error is too much pressure too fast. Riders will either start with light pressure and jump straight to lots of pressure (whack) or they will start asking with way too much pressure. All the horse can think about is how to avoid getting hit with all that pressure. They become very jumpy and resentful. This error can lead to a dangerous situation when your horse starts to become afraid of what you are going to do to him.

If you apply this idea to spurs, it becomes quite simple. Start leg cues with a light squeeze of the lower leg. Notice I said squeeze not kick! If your horse ignores this, squeeze harder. The next step is a light touch of the spur. This is followed by increased pressure with the spur. Ramp up pressure until your horse moves off of it. Then take away all pressure. Soon your horse will learn that the slight squeeze of the leg means business and they will be glad to get going to avoid more pressure.

Give this method a try with all your training cues. You will love the results. There is nothing like the feel of a light, calm responsive horse. Don’t forget….Horses can feel a fly land on their hair. They can definitely feel your leg pressure.

Safe and happy trails.

Wade Murphy

A Word on the “Dog”

by Neil Horne, Last Chance BCHMT

After hunting & recreating on and around what is now called “The Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area”, I felt I might be a good fit for the Spotted Dog Advisory Group. I applied and was selected.

A lot has happened since 2010 and I will attempt to bring you up to speed and keep you informed on what is going on.

First, I applaud the Fish Wildlife and Parks for stepping forward and purchasing the “Dog”. If they had not, I’m sure the land would have been purchased by developers and subdivided, just like the land that belonged to the Rock Creek Cattle Company on the west side of I-90 near Deerlodge.

There have been a lot of negative comments toward FWP about funding, past management practices and so on. From what we have been told and witnessed so far, FWP is started in the right direction. They have installed many miles of new wildlife-friendly fence and sprayed thousands of acres for weed management. There are many more projects proposed and under review.
High, wide and handsome pretty well describes the Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area (WMA), near Deer Lodge. It would seem hard to hide 38,000 acres of native grass in the backyards of Deer Lodge, Avon and Elliston, but how many of us who have driven by on Interstate 90 or Highway 12 can say that we know the place? Winter range to better than a thousand elk, with a rich cultural history, the Spotted Dog WMA continues to inspire old-timers and newcomers alike as they make their maiden explorations of this recently acquired jewel of public ground.

Beginning its fourth year of ownership, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is getting its feet on the ground and looking toward the future. FWP acquired the property from Rock Creek Cattle Company in September 2010, using funds provided by the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program to replace natural resources and recreation lost to historic mining impacts in the Upper Clark Fork Basin. The complex of intermingled FWP and State Trust Lands provide open space for the public as well as for fish and wildlife.

Controversial? Certainly so. The transfer of an historic ranch from private to public ownership is not something that Montanans enter into lightly. Celebrated by some and cursed by others, FWP’s acquisition of this incredible resource is an opportunity to establish partnerships that ultimately will benefit soil, water, vegetation, wildlife, recreation and the local economy.

David Dziak is FWP’s regional WMA manager, based in Warm Springs. Born and raised in Anaconda, and a veteran of the mines himself, Dziak opened the new WMA to the public in time for that first hunting season in 2010, and has been on the go ever since.

Mending fences. It’s been wire, posts and relationships with the neighbors around the boundaries of the new WMA. Frankly, all were understandably ragged to start. But, Dave persevered because he had nothing to hide, and has earned respect with the respect he has offered. New boundary fences are going up, weeds are being controlled, roads are being maintained, and FWP is learning as fast as it can.

Last winter, FWP advertised for applicants and formed the Spotted Dog WMA Work Group—a collection of neighboring landowners, educators, sportsmen and others who have volunteered their time and knowledge to help FWP succeed. All would agree that a spirit of cooperation is growing and an opportunity to set an example worth following is building with every conversation. Respected local rancher, John Hollenback, chairs the group.

You have to see it to believe it. Not many places in western Montana afford panoramic views in all directions, where the eye cannot reach a property boundary. In summertime, long-billed curlews still scold passers-by as they have for centuries before. There’s some surprising fishing if you work at it. Golden eagles hunt overhead and pronghorn graze in one of their last strongholds west of the Divide.

Hunting is the dominant activity in the fall until the WMA closes to the public on December 1st. The winter belongs to wildlife—to the migratory elk that need solitude on their winter range along with a maintenance diet of dried forage until the grass greens up in the spring. By May 15, the elk are in good enough shape to entertain company and Dziak swings the gates open to the public at noon. Gumbo? There are some patches of it, and I wouldn’t haul the horses up until the roads dry out in June.

Main access roads originate from Avon, Elliston and Deer Lodge. Maps are available from FWP by phoning the regional office in Missoula at 406-542-5500. And don’t be afraid to tap Dave’s knowledge; his office phone is 693-9083.

We hope you find the time to discover what you bought, so that you can pass it on to your children someday. Welcome!

**Spotted Dog**

**A Legacy to Our Children**

by Mike Thompson, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Mules in the Mines: Part I

from Copper Camp: the Lusty Story of Butte, Montana, the Richest Hill on Earth

“My sweetheart’s a mule in the mine.
I drive her with only one line.
On the dashboard I sit
And tobacco I spit,
All over my sweetheart’s behind.”

— Old Miner’s Ballad

Truer words were never written than the title line of this well-known early-day mining ballad, for the mule and his cousin, the horse, were indeed sweethearts in the mining industry in the late 90’s and first score of years in the present century.

It is certain that the great ore tonnages of those years could not have been extracted from the depths of Butte hill without the aid of these animals. They were as much a part of mines and mining as were the Irish and Cousin Jack, dynamite and the buzzy.

Around 1910 it is conservatively estimated that in sixty or more operating mines, there were at least one thousand mules or horses working underground. Their average work life was five years. Thus, over a period of thirty years, close to ten thousand of these animals laboried in the mines, each mine using from ten to fifty, with two to eight assigned to each level. They worked in shifts, some for eight hours on day duty, others taking their eight-hour turns on the night shift.

Only the best stock were used for mine work, for scrub animals could never survive the hard labor and intense heat they were subjected to. Like the miners themselves, the mules had what it takes — plenty of strength, stamina, and guts. Big, large-boned, huge-chested, pick of the equine stock, they were treated with the best of care. Every mine had its own veterinarian and horseshoer. Stables were kept scrupulously clean, with the finest fodder and clean straw bedding provided for them. To slake their thirst, fresh sweet water was lowered from surface twice daily.

Although the mules lived in perpetual darkness underground, they did not seem to mind. It is doubtful that if given their choice they would trade places with the mules and horses above ground.

Lowering of the animals into the depths was a delicate operation conducted by experienced ropemen. First, the mules were roped in the mine corrals on the surface, thrown, and securely tied. Next they were encased in a special rope-harness, resembling a large strait-jacket which did not allow the slightest movement. Bound thus, the animals were moved on timber trucks to the collar or entrance to the shaft where they were deftly swung under the mine cage and made secure. Suspended and dangling from the cage in the shaft, they were lowered to their destination from one to three thousand feet underground.

Another method, rarely used, was to place them, strait jacket and all, bodily on the cage. Haunches and tails on the bottom, heads up, the cage door was closed and securely fastened, and the animals quickly lowered down the shaft.

Once underground, procedure was simple, the mules being swung out from under the cage and onto the station. After a few moments of frightened scampering, the bewildered beasts were led to the barn, a rock-enclosed aperture in an unused drift, generally some distance from the shaft. A large pole gate kept the animals confined. After a day or two of leisure to accustom themselves to their new surroundings, the mules were ready for their underground labors. They caught on quickly.

Once they had descended the shaft, the mine was their permanent home. Serious illness, old age, or the suspension of mining operations were the only reasons for the mule’s return to the sunlight. Indeed the old-time miner could, with fair accuracy, gauge the duration of shut-downs by whether or not animals were taken to the surface. When the mules and horses came up out of the mine it was safe to bet that the miners would be in for a long periods of idleness.

Below ground, the animals were used to transport the ore from the drifts, stopes, and raises to the station where it was “caged” and taken to the surface. Six cars to a train was the ordinary load for the animals, each car containing approximately a ton or ore. The husky animals handled the six-ton trains with ease.

Each mule train was in the charge of a “skinner” or driver, and a “swamper” or assistant. The skinner handled the mule; the swamper loaded the cars from the chutes, threw the switches and generally made himself useful.

After a short period underground the animals developed an uncanny intelligence. Old-time miners will swear on an oath that the mules could count. At any rate, it is a well-known fact that very few of the animals could be persuaded to pull more than six cars to a train. As each car was loaded, the mules would move up the track the exact distance of one car-length, at the same time taking up the slack of the chain couplings between the cars. This procedure was repeated until the entire train was loaded. The moment the sixth car was full the mule, without any urging of the driver, was on his way to the station. Let the skinner attach an extra car to the train and the mule would stand stock still in his tracks, not budging an inch until the surplus car was removed. No cajolery, cussing, or beating could change the stubborn beast’s mind. It was six cars or none.

[Continued in next newsletter.]

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