Happy Fall, my BCH friends!

What a beautiful fall it has been.

I hope everyone had a wonderful summer full of fantastic rides and pack trips.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RTP Grant Committee for doing an outstanding job in getting BCH of Montana a grant to help with expenses for our projects. I know every chapter who received the funds is very grateful. We didn't receive as much as we would have liked, but the important thing is that we did receive a grant. That is a pretty big achievement for our first time requesting a grant at the state level. Thank you to all who volunteered to be on the committee, for your commitment to this undertaking and working so hard to see this through to success.

I have had the opportunity over the past several months to proudly represent BCH of Montana. BCH continues to be looked at as a leader when it comes to trails; as a back country resource and our knowledge and skills; and as a strong partner.

There have been several happenings lately that reflect this.

As most of you know, earlier this year we were one of only a few organizations which were asked to participate in and to submit comments on a new national saw policy, which we did. We are still awaiting this policy to be finalized.

CDT Montana requested our presence when their companion organization outside of Montana. The CDT Coalition and the Forest Service CDT coordinator from Colorado came for a visit to observe CDT work that has been done here. CDT wanted to recognize BCH to these folks as a strong partner and supporter of the CDT Montana efforts.

Most recently, we have been asked to provide comment on a new draft video produced by Missoula Technology & Development Center on Leave-No-Trace for stock users. This draft DVD was sent to only a few partners for review and comment.

Also recently, I represented BCH of Montana at a meeting with the Missoula County Commissioners to obtain their support for the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project that is dedicated to getting more land designated as wilderness.

Because of our hard work, our willingness to help and our professionalism we have continued to build strong partnerships and are being recognized as back country, wilderness and equestrian leaders.

Thanks again to all of you for being members of BCH of Montana.

Yours on Wilderness Trails,

Connie Long, Chairman
ON DECK

The following Chapters are due to submit articles for the February 2016 issue of the Decker Dispatch:

Beartooth  Three Rivers
Bitter Root  Upper Clark Fork
Cabinet  Wild Horse Plains

A NOTE OF APPRECIATION FROM THE OUTGOING EDITOR:

Reluctantly, I must resign as editor for the Back Country Horsemen of Montana. It was a great pleasure to prepare these newsletters; through them, I was introduced to a truly remarkable group of people and learned of the amazing work you do. How lucky for all of us who love wilderness that the Back Country Horsemen of Montana exists.

THE HORSE IN LITERATURE

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Revelation 6:1-8 King James Version

BCH of MT Contacts

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Preserving the Art of Packing

by Harry Huntsinger, CEO of A-Rocking-H Productions in Bozeman
For Gallatin Chapter BCHM

One cold spring day in March, 2010, a group of men met in a saddle makers shop off of Dry Creek, north of Belgrade, to brainstorm how to preserve the art and skills of packing into the back country with horses and mules. We were concerned that young people are not showing much interest in taking up the skill.

Clark Kinney asked a very important question as it turned out; it was what ignited the group. “Have we shown the young people why we love this great country?!”

It emerged that everybody in the group loves to pack into the back country because of the enjoyment of the majestic beauty, the solitude of the environment that God created, and the challenge of leaving no trace, leaving no tracks.

The men, having a variety of knowledge and skills, took several hours –and days– of brainstorming. We developed a syllabus in which skills could be taught by stations, and we determined how many clinic days such training would take.

The men that had the vision and passion to develop such an unusual program were Larry Thomas, Clark Kinney, Rich Iman, John Mutter, Mike Haugan, Henry Glenn, and Dan Marsh, all Back Country Horsemen, along with Dale Moore, a former school administrator, forest service outfitter, and saddle maker, and myself, Harry Huntsinger, owner of a marketing company which has marketed several equine events.

Dale Moore took the syllabus and refined it into a workable curriculum. The packing curriculum was presented to Todd Kesner, the state 4-H director, to determine if it would fit the 4-H equine and packing curriculum. Todd was so impressed with what the group had put together, he stated that that he “would totally endorse this quality program.”

Now that the committee had the blessing of the state 4-H director, we needed to develop a marketing plan and a budget to implement the curriculum. We created a brochure that was used to show potential sponsors.

We were very fortunate to get several sponsors, including Montana Crane Services (Clinic Sponsor), Ressler Motors (Program Sponsor), Stahly Engineering, Elite Kubota, Jackpot Casinos, Mountain Sheet Metal, Rich’s Flooring, Walker Construction, Walker Excavation, Murdoch’s, Montana Canvas, Quality Inn Belgrade, Universal Athletics, Lee Eblen, Charlie Hoekema Trucking, Bill n Deb Harrison Trucking, and Rocky Mountain Supply.

With sponsorship funds in hand, the committee was able to pay for instructors or mileage to get them here; rent an indoor arena (Circle L Arena); purchase awards; and provide food so the students would not have to leave the all-day clinics.

The program gained a good reputation. We attracted more instructors who supplemented the lessons we were already teaching. Mr. Bob Hoverson was one of these. He was a Forest Service outfitter for over thirty years and author of the book The Packer’s Field Manual. We were also fortunate to cross paths with Mr. Greg Benjamin, an equine 4-H leader and packing enthusiast. He became the director of 4-H packing clinics and programs.

With Greg’s energy, passion, and vision, we raised the packing clinics to the next level. We took a group of students and parents on a packing trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness so they could apply the skills they had learned in the clinics. This proved to be very valuable. The students and parents really enjoyed their experience and told more people about the program.

As a result, we were able to increase this year’s clinic to 82 participants, compared to the previous year’s 35.
Now you would think nothing more would be needed to improve the program – but you’d be wrong. Clark Kinney and Greg Benjamin have developed a great working relationship with Walt Allen, a Gardiner District Ranger who oversees the operations of the historic OTO Ranch. The three were discussing the 4-H packing program, its vision and its goals. It became evident to Walt that the OTO Ranch could be a perfect fit for the 4-H packing program. After discussing how the Forest Service was planning to use the OTO Ranch for youth programs, Walt suggested to Greg and Clark, “This could be a great time to experiment with having 4-H kids and their parents come in and use the ranch.” – Which they did. Walt was so impressed with the whole program that he hopes to continue to build a stronger relationship with the 4-H packing program. As Greg Benjamin observed, “The OTO Ranch provides a family friendly environment in which the kids can learn life skills, a work ethic, independence, and how to collaborate with other people”.

This program has turned into something special and outstanding that many good people can be very PROUD of.

I would like to personally say “Thank you!” to all the great people who volunteered your valuable time to make this happen.

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**LAST CHANCE BACK COUNTRY HORSEMAN UPDATE**

– by Lindsey Fryer, Last Chance Chapter BCHM

In the eyes of a newcomer, Last Chance Back Country Horseman has a fantastic welcoming group of members who have had quite the busy year. Among chainsaw certification, defensive horsemanship certification, bear spray awareness, crosscut saw certification/trail clean ups, supply pack trips, and Dutch oven challenges here is a little taste of what LCBCH has been up to in 2015.
Smoke Jumpers packed into Mann Gulch Through this last winter, plans came together with LCBCH, the Forest Service and, Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks to clear trails into Mann Gulch. National Smokejumpers held their 75th anniversary in Missoula, July 2015 and expected some jumpers would travel to Helena to visit Mann Gulch. Member Fred Benson, also an associate member of the Smokejumpers, volunteered to use his four head of stock.

Friday May 5, the Smokejumpers brought most of their gear and they mantied several loads plus two, six gallon water containers for the dry camp, thinking they could top pack other gear on the sawbuck saddle.

Saturday morning they trailered to Beartooth Wilderness Area camping area northeast of Helena. (This is not a road you would like to travel if wet or faint of heart.) The team met half of the smokejumpers at Willow Creek Trailhead, the other half were coming up the Merriweather Trail, having left from Gates of the Mountains on a Forest Service boat.

Some of the jumpers unfortunately didn't get the message about personal gear. At the camping area other gear arrived, along with two additional seven-gallon containers of water. We tore packs apart and re-mantied the loads. It was evident there was going to be two trips to the head of Mann Gulch, one for gear and another for water, 26 gallons total. After reloading and retying the manties, they were off.

One trail crossed a rock face like scree (but larger rocks) and there was another trail to follow across the rock field. Halfway across the field is tree with branches hanging over the trail, which, as you all know, can cause an unpredictable array of problems for pack stock. As they exited the rock field, one of the horse’s packs turned and came off with one mantied load on the downhill side. To his credit the horse just stood there and luckily continued to stand while resetting the saddle, and retying the manties. Fred believes it was the Mattock he used to balance a load that caught a limb and pulled the load over; it certainly wasn't his “packing abilities” (that his story and he's sticking to it” ala Collin Raye).

Arriving at the head of Mann Gulch, manties were unloaded, lunch was eaten and then they started down on a different trail. Monday they broke camp, loaded up and headed home, none-the-worse-for-wear, having learned a lot, and having found areas that need more attention.

Trail Clearing & Cross-Cut Saw Certification In early June, members of the LCBCH met at Hunters Gulch to lend a hand to the U.S. Forest Service to clear trails and become certified in the use of a cross-cut saw. Many trails cross designated wilderness areas, where the use of a chain saw is strictly prohibited. Therefore, a cross-cut saw is often needed. In order for a person to assist/volunteer to clear trail and use a cross-cut saw, the U.S. Forest Service requires the person be certified in its use. Bob Mickelson of the U.S. Forest Service (accompanied by Janelle) volunteered his time to provide cross-cut saw supervision and certification. With a show of 34 LCBCH members, we divided and conquered Refrigerator Canyon, Big Log Gulch, and Hunters Gulch/Kennedy Springs/Bear Prairie areas, clearing more than 100 trees. It was a great turn-out for LCBCH. We are certainly proud of the club’s exceptional work effort and contribution.
**URL Elkhorn Endurance Run Pack Trip** Fifty miles and almost 13,500 feet of elevation change would make for a long day on horseback, much less running it on foot. Running that distance on foot seems to be extraordinary, but a group of hardy runners from around the country converge on the Elkhorn Mountains near Helena every year to do just that. The race also provides an opportunity for the Last Chance Backcountry Horsemen and others to pitch in to provide pack support to the highest aid station along the route at Elk Park.

This year, LCBCH members Joe Meek, Kerry Bartlett, and Tyrel Wilson packed first aid supplies, food, and energy supplements, while member Fred Benson brought in radio gear. Fred is also a member of the Helena Amateur Radio Club and provided radio support from the Elk Park aid station. All of them rode in on the afternoon of the day preceding the race to ensure everything was ready when the first runners started coming through early the next morning. Three of them came out late in evening on race day, while Fred stayed over another night to help with any runners that might be struggling and to be there if the “trail sweeps” following the last runners needed assistance.

The Elk Park aid station load typically runs around 150-160 pounds and is packed in light pack boxes that are man-tied up for the trip in. The gear includes couple of foldable tables which, along with the pack boxes, provides solid elevated surfaces for the aid station. The gear also includes a pair of base camp-style bag water filters which we use to provide water to the aid station. In 2015, runners required about 75 gallons of water at the Elk Park station through the day and all of it is filtered from a spring near their campsite about ¼ mile away. Runners can also take on water and snacks from the other aid stations located about six to ten miles apart along the race course.

The route in to Elk Park this year began at the McClellan Creek trailhead, following the trail along a steady uphill grade past Willard and Teepee Creeks to the very head where a series of switchbacks took us over into the upper Warm Springs Creek basin. From there, another smaller series of switchbacks brought us to the head of Moose Creek. A short downhill jaunt ends the trip in at the aid station site where the McClellan and Moose Creek trails intersect. The trip in was about seven miles, with around 2,800 feet of elevation gain.

Camping in the beetle-infested Lodge-pole these days is a bit of a concern due to the potential of falling trees, and high-lining stock can be a real challenge. Luckily, their campsite included some large live spruce, so the horses could be put up safely for the night. Grazing is available, and they also usually pack in a bale of certified hay to free up time so water can be filtered and packed to the aid station.

Joe has been providing pack support to this race for several years. Joining LCBCH early this year enabled him to recruit others, which make the whole trip safer for him and the delivery of supplies more reliable for the folks we pack for.

It’s been an enjoyable year and we hope you’ve enjoyed the insight into what LCBCH has been up to. The club has definitely put in some good hard work and is ready to see what the last few months of 2015 will bring.

**Happy trailing, and until next time!!**
Castle Lake, or should I say, one of our Lord’s best creations on the planet. Why isn’t this place one of the Seven Wonders of the World? Castle Lake was absolutely amazing. We swam, tried to fish, wait...What am I doing? Let me go back to the beginning.

The morning of July 13th, 2015 was a special one. Well, a rather exciting one I would say. Me, Kobi Mathies, my (amazing) Grandpa, Rick Mathies, Ron Trippet, and the Totten family awoke to a chilly and beautiful morning. After finally seeing some bear tracks the previous day (which I’ve wanted to see since I stepped foot in Montana last summer), I was really excited for the stunning place ahead. We ate a classic BCH meal, eggs and bacon. Cooked by my gourmet chef, Rick Mathies. Okay, not gourmet, but yes, it was delicious.

Unfortunately, some bad news rolled into the camp like a thunderstorm on a Tuesday. Why Tuesday? I have no idea. Ron Trippet was unfortunately not going to be able to make it due to some bad circumstances. He was not going to be able to stay in Castle Lake, but he still had his mind set on seeing the place for the first time. So being the amazing guy he is, he still went into the place, and packed all of our hay. Next time you see him, give him a nice firm handshake and a pat on the back.

So, after a meal, and some good chatting, the horses were fed, and we were ready to take off. We packed up and set off on our journey to Castle Lake.

Okay, I lied. It wasn’t that simple.

My horse, Red Cloud, and my Grandpa’s horse, Tonto, were all saddled up and ready to be ridden for the next ten miles. All we had to do now was load up our pack horse, Casper, with two panniers and a top pack.

Simple, right? Nope.

The two panniers went on with no problem, but the top pack was an issue. It was leaning way too far forward due to too much weight going to the front. This caused the dreaded saddle roll. The saddle slipped down and started to fall. And that’s when Casper started bucking.

“Wheeeeee!” Casper yelled as he bucked his butt all around the campground.

Red Cloud began to get anxious so I quickly hopped off the horse and slammed my butt into a rock. Ouch!

With Red Cloud’s rope in hand, I held on to him until I was able to tie him up. Casper was fine, as my Grandpa, Ron, and Alden Totten wrangled him up and got the saddle off.

We later spread out the gear from the top pack onto various panniers and left the top pack. We weren’t about to mess with that thing anymore. We packed up just fine, and set out on our way.

About five or six miles down the trail, we came across a cabin, an outhouse (no it wasn’t smelly), and a barn up on the cliff next to the cabin. We rode by it, which was probably the easiest part of the trail aside from the beginning. We had to clear a few trees before that, but nothing bad.

The trail had ample tread and was very well maintained. I assume it has been ridden a lot. We went across a pretty scary part for me, which was a very steep side hill leading all the way down into the running Middle Fork. After that, it was scary switchback time. The steep back-and-forth became old about after three feet. No problem though, as all the horses did exceptionally well, especially Tonto, who is 21 years old, and by the end of the ten miles didn’t even break a sweat. Meanwhile, Cloud and Casper were sweating like pigs. Ugh.

Coming into the Castle Lake meadow was like dipping into the Lost World. It’s something I can only describe as heavily.

After getting the horses brushed and highlined, we ate a delicious lunch which consisted of a soggy peanut butter sandwich and a few days-old Pringles. Yum. Ron Trippet, the packing veteran he is, ate a sandwich, enjoyed the view for a few moments, watered his horses, and took off back down the trail and off for home. What a guy.

We set up our tents, and prepared for an amazing next couple days. Being the crazy kid I am, I decided to go swimming. Well, I thought I was before I went down to the...
shallow lake and stuck a toe in. Brrr! That was COLD water.
I don't think so. Then the Totten kids showed up, jumped in,
and pushed me in with them. Thanks, you guys.

We ate a fantastic meal of steak and headed off to bed. Un-
fortunately we couldn't have a fire due to the fire restrictions.
Dang you, drought! Causing fires… destroying little kids'
dreams of S'mores. Grrr!

That night, we were attacked by wild coyotes! Okay, we
weren't, but I did hear a stick snap. Evil sticks. Anything to
make this just a little bit more interesting for you, the reader.
How was your day? Good! Mine was okay. Well, let's put a
smile on that face! Continue reading!

We awoke to an amazing and absolutely beautiful morning.
It was very chilly, even colder than the previous morning.
We ate some more eggs and bacon and waited for the sun to
reach the campground. When it did, I put a towel down in
the sun and warmed up.

After a little while of dilly-dallying and relaxing, we decided
to go back down the trail to clear some debris. We grabbed
our cross-cut saws, axes, and cameras and headed down the
trail. Hiking just a little bit down the trail, we reached a fallen
tree which we planned on cutting on our return trip. My
grandfather and Alden cut it up and moved it to the side with
no problem, while the Totten kids and I took pictures and
drank water.

We continued down the trail using Melanie Totten and
Selene Totten as our pack horses. We put saddle packs on
their shoulders, and had them carry a saw. Don't worry, they
volunteered to do it. We have no idea why. Then we reached
the big one. A very thick tree fallen right over the trail. We'd
had to take a sketchy detour to get around it whilst coming
in.

So, after a long thirty minutes of cutting, Patrick Totten,
Melanie, and I all took our fair share of sawing. Man, that was
hard work! I salute the people who do that kind of stuff for
a hobby. I'm looking at you, Back Country Horsemen. I'm
looking at you.

We finished clearing the trail with the big one, and went back
up. Boy was that tiring. Going uphill, getting fatigued, and
wait… What's that? A wild Huckleberry? Man, those things
are amazing. Being a boy from Kansas, I had never tried a
wild huckleberry. I have been missing out. Those things are
like God's gift to man.

A heavenly place featuring God's gift to man? Coincidence? I
think not!

We went on back, had some lunch, swam a bunch, and head-
ed back up to camp. The campground was a beautiful place as
well, with a small stream running through the middle. If you
follow the stream up, you will find a stunning waterfall, and if
you climb up it (which we absolutely did,) you will find
yet another two waterfalls. And huckleberries. Yum.

That night, we ate some delicious spaghetti with Lowry's Spa-
ghetti Sauce (which you should totally try) and went to skip
rocks. Patrick got the record… 22 skips. The world record is
81, so Pat, you're getting there.

We also picked huckleberries just before supper. Up on the
mountain to the right of the trail when you enter the mead-
ow, there are a lot of huckleberry bushes. Really good for
picking. Alden brought a bag and filled it halfway,
and was kind enough to give it to me to eat. Mmm. Yum.

I sat staring at the beauty of the place and I just couldn't
believe my eyes. Sometimes we take for granted where we live
and the opportunities we have. Every once and a while, stop
for a moment and look at your surroundings. No mat-
ter where it is, whether it's the mountains, the plains, or the
beach, it has its own kind of beauty. Appreciate that.

We had some Nutella and bread and then headed to bed. I
had dreams of mountain lions stalking me. Weird. We woke
up the next morning and ate some more eggs and bacon.
Never gets old, does it? We also used up the last of our hamb-
burger for patties. We ate those as well. We instantly got to
work saddling up and preparing to leave.

I've got to tell you, it is a heck of a place to be. I recommend it
to every soul on this planet. Just think, I am one of the mere
thousand people to ever go there. Awesome!

I was extremely nervous to go on the ride out, but I can't
tell you why. Perhaps it was me dreading those switchbacks.
Who knows? The ride out was amazing. I conquered my fear
of the side hill. We met some fellow riders on the way out;
members of the Flathead chapter. Our ride out was the fast-
est three hours of my life.

Castle Lake is one of the most beautiful places on the face of
the Earth. Riding your horse down into the meadow, smell-
ing the wildflowers, and sitting in awe at the lake and the
mountains surrounding it, I guarantee you'll be speechless.

So go get 'em. Always face your fears because I promise you,
it's worth it. And to think, I never thought I would go any-
where so remote and amazing.

So go ride those trails.

Enjoy your waltz in heaven, Grandma.
Where a Tree will Grow, A Horse Will Go

By Shannon Plocher, Selway-Pintler Wilderness Chapter BCHM

The call came from out of the blue. An outfitter asked me if I wanted to guide hunters back in the Bob Marshall Wilderness during the month of October. I had no idea who this outfitter was, but I knew that the Bob Marshall is an incredible piece of country. So I said, “Yes.”

That’s how I met “Stretch.” Stretch is a cowboy-wrangler-guide from Cody, Wyoming. By the end of this trip, I would suspect he might be half horse, half mule, and definitely a full blown mountain man.

I met him in the corrals at the trailhead. He was laying out tack and stitching pieces that needed repair. It was easy to see that he knew what he was doing. I noticed his gun belt, holster and saddlesbags were hand made. His stock trailer was crammed full of necessities for life on the trail. In fact, he told me that he spends eight months out of the year in the mountains working for outfitters, spraying weeds for the Forest Service and collecting shed antlers in the spring.

At 4 o’clock the next morning, I was introduced to Wyoming style sawbuck packing. I had learned the standard Decker packing system with packs slung from a Decker packsaddle. This outfitter was using Decker packsaddles and lash ropes and diamond hitches to suck everything down tight.

There were three of us packing up the loads. I could see that Stretch knew his way around stock. We headed out horseback with 18 pack animals, both horses and mules. The horses were mostly a Percheron/Morgan or quarter horse cross out of Canada. The mules were Belgian crosses. We also were leading six out-of-state hunters.

It was 32 miles in the first day through a pristine Montana fall. Main camp was at Hahn Creek. It was already set up from previous hunts that season, but we still had plenty of work left unpacking and caring for the stock. “Trapper” was the cook; and James, a young man from Australia, was another guide.

The next day, I had two hunters from Minnesota assigned to me. Stretch was guiding an older man from Washington. We left camp together on horseback and forded Hahn Creek before starting up a steep trail toward Gordon Peak. It’s roughly a 3,000 foot ascent from camp to the head of Gordon Peak.

Stretch pointed out a faint trail leading up the side of the mountain. “That’s your trail,” he said. “Be safe.” As my hunters and I veered to take the slender trail, Stretch stopped his horse and turned in his saddle. “Hey, Shannon,” he said, “just remember, where a tree will grow, a horse will go.”

My hunters and I weren’t that adventurous. We covered some rough country and led our horse some places that could take your breath away. We would meet back at camp every night after dark with headlamps. We saw elk, but somehow never quite got up on them. By the campfire, we would hear Stretch’s hunter tell where they had been that day.

Stretch had brought along his own saddle horses. They were just grade horses, but he’d been down many trails with them. They were sure-footed and went where he asked. The hunter’s horse had no choice but to follow or be left alone on the mountain. It followed.

“I thought I was going to die,” the hunter would tell us.

Every day we hunted hard, covering some beautiful and rugged country. Every night we met in camp well after dark, tired and empty handed. We were determined. But after another long day of hunting, my hunters and I returned to camp disappointed.

When Stretch came in with his hunter, they were not disappointed. Around the campfire that night, the hunter told this story. They had ridden in places where no tree would grow. They had left their horses and climbed the side of a mountain. The hunter had begged to turn back, but Stretch had grabbed him by the front of his shirt and dragged him the rest of the way, facing him toward the mountainside so he could not look down. Finally, Stretch let him go, and the hunter nearly fell backwards.

“Don’t fall now,” Stretch commanded.

Then Stretch grabbed him again and turned him around. The mountain dropped away like a cliff. Down below was a herd of elk and a 5 x 5 bull. Stretch handed the hunter his rifle and held him leaning over the edge so he could squeeze off a shot.

“I thought I was going to die,” the hunter said.

So here’s where we part company. My tale is through. Be safe. And remember,

“Where a tree will grow, a horse will go.”
TRIBUTE TO TWO OF MISSOULA’S ORIGINAL SEVEN

By Michael & Nancy Chandler, Missoula Chapter BCHM

Late in the fall of 1973, when the Flathead had just formed the first BCH club, seven Missoula horsemen gathered at the 4B’s in Missoula and discussed plans to join the movement and form a Missoula chapter. Two of the original seven died some time ago (Chuck Smith and Fred Hartkorn), and just this past year the Missoula chapter of BCH lost two more of their seven founding members. They were Ray Roberts and Jim Brogger.

Raynor Roberts – (11/29/20 - 12/17/14)

Ray’s memorable military career started in the 1940’s when, having joined the Army Air Corps, he became a fighter pilot in WWII, flying cover for bombers in a P-38 in 70 combat air missions. At one point, he flew a P-51 back to Helena (to visit Mom) and flew through the spires of the Helena Cathedral! Later in his career he was director of operations of the Special Air Missions Wing (Presidential flying unit) at Andrews AFB and chief pilot of Military Airlift Command. He flew VP Johnson to Dallas upon Kennedy’s assassination and Johnson was sworn in on his plane. He retired after 27 years of service with the rank of colonel.

The next 27 years were spent in retirement with his wife Gladys, doing the things he loved: raising horses, riding trails, fishing and spending family time. Ray got a taste of mountain riding and camping when he accompanied Smoke Elser on a number of trips, hunting with guests and entertaining in camp. As a backcountry horseman, Ray served as the Missoula chapter’s first president and remained active until his death at the age of 94. No steak ride or pot luck was complete without Ray’s presence.

Personal memories of Ray include some of the first issues committee trips into the Anaconda-Pintlar Wilderness and the (then proposed) Great Bear Wilderness. Ray’s congeniality and keen sense of humor kept all laughing. Naturally he could spin a great campfire yarn. One memory that will never leave Nancy was riding over Cutaway Pass in the Pintlars (her first experience at such heights) and being followed by Ray, who, with the aid of his altimeter, called out the elevation just so we would know how high we were!

Ray was a dedicated advocate of our principles who never hesitated to share them with others and recruit new members. One of his classic remarks was... “you say you don’t have a horse?... well, I have been a member of the Lions Club and never had to have a lion!”


Jim was raised in the Payette country and spent time as a child on his grandparents’ ranch, becoming a proficient horseman. During college at Washington State University in Pullman, Jim spent summers packing on the St. Joe in Idaho. Jim graduated in veterinary medicine and served as a captain in the Air Force, being stationed in Japan with the canine corps as a vet.

Once stateside, Jim and his wife, Shirley, moved to Missoula and joined a vet practice there. Mike first met Jim in 1964 when he joined the Western Montana Fish & Game Association, one of Montana’s oldest and largest sportsman’s organizations (organized 1911). It was one of the only groups at that time working on protecting wildlife and backcountry resources. Jim went through all the officer positions in that organization and was very active on numerous committees.

Having horses and packing into the backcountry with his family and friends was a high point in his life.

He, like Ray, was one of the early BCH presidents of the Missoula chapter and he spent many hours working on issues and education at safety clinics. Jim was active on the very first Montana State BCH board and became a familiar face to all at conventions, never hesitating to share helpful information and valuable opinions. Jim and Shirley moved to Ronan, joining the Mission chapter and then later, after a move to Augusta, became involved with the East Slope BCH. Preserving the wilderness for future generations was his passion and the Rocky Mountain Front was most special to him. Jim also was active with the Montana Wilderness Association in these ventures. Jim and Shirley made their last move back to Missoula last April. They were happy to return “home”.

Photo Courtesy Charlie O’Leary
Personal memories of Jim include many trips into the Bob and club trips. In the late 70’s our Issues Committee organized a pack trip into the Great Burn area southwest of Missoula to increase our knowledge of, and support for, wilderness classification. This committee had become so popular that participation in packtrips was limited to those with the best attendance at meetings and in some cases limited by wilderness rules enforced by the Forest Service (15 people). We had never had any problem with those attending following club rules, such as not taking dogs or studs. When we arrived at Clearwater Crossing, one member (who incidentally was one of the founding seven) arrived with his riding mule and a foal at side. After much discussion, the group agreed to let him stay on the trip. By the third day, the foal was still causing much trouble lagging behind and then passing other riders. At one rest stop John got off his mare and went out of sight to relieve himself. Jim and another member who were avid ropers went whooping after him and chased him through the trees. They quickly roped him and told him they were going to tie him on his mare and make him leave the trip. They led him back to the trail, let him loose, and nothing more was said. Everyone but John saw great humor in all the activity. It took John a long time to see any humor. The funny thing was that for the rest of the trip, the foal caused little trouble, and John was very quiet and polite. Jim always enjoyed a good joke!

Jim never hesitated to share his expertise with others and was most generous with his time to anyone who needed help, be it with their horses or transportation to and from events. Like Ray, Jim always had some memorable experiences to share over the campfire. He was a great ambassador for BCH.

Two good friends and invaluable members of the Missoula BCH, gone now but never forgotten. Both were honored with some of the other charter members at the Missoula Chapter 40th anniversary at the state convention in Missoula in April 2014.

Mount Evans Wilderness, Colo. -- A violent wind tore across this mountain ridge four years ago, flattening more than a thousand trees and burying a prized trail in the Arapaho National Forest.

But instead of using chain saws and bulldozers to remove the debris, the Forest Service is wielding antique crosscut saws manufactured long before most of its employees were born. “It’s becoming a lost art,” said Ralph Bradt, a Forest Service recreation planner who certifies crosscut sawyers and is leading the work to reopen Cub Creek Trail.

An iconic tool that felled countless trees and helped settle the American West, the crosscut saw was becoming obsolete by World War II with the advent of chain saws.

Once relegated to antique shops, fireplace mantels or the walls of Cracker Barrel restaurants, the saws are now the single most important tool for maintaining the Forest Service’s roughly 32,000 miles of wilderness trails.

Their resurgence can be traced to the Wilderness Act of 1964, which seeks to preserve federal lands in their untrammeled state, sparing them from “expanding settlement and growing mechanization” that conquered most of the nation’s wild places. The act generally bars mechanized equipment, so Bradt, his two-person trail crew and a team of about 10 from the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps are cutting through this tangle of logs much like pioneers: with saws, axes and lots of sweat… A newly proposed Forest Service saw policy and pending legislation both aim to boost volunteers like those on Bradt’s team. A lack of funding combined with increasing pests and storms has led to a massive backlog in the upkeep of national forest trails.

Critics argue wilderness trails could be maintained faster and with less money using chain saws. But proponents of traditional tools -- including some Forest Service officials -- insist the savings are marginal after considering the several hours it typically takes to drive to a trailhead and hike to a wilderness project site.

The law allows chain saws in situations where hand tools are unfeasible and when mechanized equipment is the minimum step necessary to maintain wilderness values. But doing so is a “slippery slope,” said Bill Hodge, who runs Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS). Chain saws, he said, spoil backcountry quiet and would defeat a key purpose of the Wilderness Act: rugged self-reliance. “It’s part of what built us as a country,” said Hodge. “We had to experience these lands on nature’s terms.” …
A scarce tool
The crosscut saw emerged in Europe in the mid-15th century and began to be manufactured in America in the mid-1800s, according to the 2004 Forest Service crosscut saw manual “Saws that Sing.”

From the 1880s to the 1930s, the two-person saws ranging from 4 to 16 feet long “ruled the woods,” helping loggers topple countless Douglas firs and California redwoods in the West before being replaced by chain saws, the manual says.

Crosscut saws offer operational advantages, Hodge said. They weigh much less than chain saws, require no fuel or motor oil, and are safer since they allow users to listen for things like cracks and pops in the trees. They are sometimes preferred outside of wilderness, particularly in high-risk wildfire areas where a spark from a chain saw could ignite surrounding wood.

But manufacturers stopped making them altogether in the 1950s. While a small number of crosscut saws are being manufactured today, Forest Service sawyers say they’re inferior to the vintage saws. The agency’s Missoula Technology and Development Center once conducted field tests comparing modern and vintage saws. The newer models are stamped from lower-quality steel that is less wieldy in the backcountry, critics say. In contrast, vintage saws were made of high-carbon steel and grounded so the teeth are slightly wider than the saw’s spine, which helps prevent them from getting stuck in the logs.

So-called crescent-ground saws -- which keep all the teeth the same width -- are the “pinnacle of ergonomic design,” according to the Forest Service manual. “They should be the best cared-for tool in the cache.”

“The oldies are the goodies,” said Ralph Swain, a regional wilderness manager for the Forest Service in Golden, Colo., who oversees 47 wilderness areas in five states. “You do not order new steel.” To find these saws, the Forest Service and its nonprofit partners mine antique shops, websites like eBay and Craigslis, garage sales, and attics. They look for trusted brands including Simonds, Disston and Atkins. Prices range from $5 at garage sales to a few hundred dollars at vintage logging stores like the Axe Hole near Tacoma, Wash., where the Forest Service buys some of its saws...

...Wilderness sawyers say vintage saws have become scarcer as they are snatched up by collectors or competitive lumberjacks. Many other models are kept as family heirlooms handed down from lumberjack grandfathers.

‘There is a God’
But scarcer yet are the craftsmen who are able to properly restore and sharpen crosscut saws. Improperly sharpened saws are known by sawyers as “misery whips.”

Tom Mix, a retiree who volunteers at Back Country Horsemen in Washington state, is among a handful of people on the Olympic Peninsula who are capable of properly tuning crosscut saws, the Forest Service said in a blog post a year ago. Mix, 72, a retired engineer for Boeing who likes to fish and backpack, said he learned to sharpen saws from an American Indian man near Seattle and honed his skill at the Forest Service’s Ninemile Wildlands Training Center in Missoula, Mont., where crosscut saw maintenance and filing courses are offered for $475.

There are about a half-dozen good saw filers in the Washington chapter of Back Country Horsemen, but they’re all near or past retirement age, Mix said. “Us retirees, we need to get people versed in how to sharpen saws,” he said. “There’s not a lot of guys behind us.”

Tuning a crosscut saw can take several hours and requires precision. The cutting teeth must be evenly spaced and follow a consistent arch, Mix said. They also must stand slightly taller than the “rakers,” which are forked teeth that scoop out the wood that’s been scored by the cutters. For sawing hard, frozen or burned wood, raker height must be closer to the cutting teeth height than for soft wood. But the difference is measured in hundredths of inches. A well-filed saw will produce wood shavings resembling noodles, rather than sawdust. They’re said to “sing” as they slide through the wood.

One of the best-known saw sharpeners is Dolly Chapman, a former engineer for Daimler Trucks North America LLC who lives next to the Mount Hood National Forest southeast of Portland, Ore., said each winter he tries to teach at least three or four new students how to sharpen saws. He tries to instill a love for primitive tools in younger generations. “If young folks aren’t interested in working in the wilderness, they’ll lose their ability to go into it,” Roe said. “I’m highly optimistic we’ll be able to keep this up -- there’s a strong sentiment for maintaining traditional tools.”

The backlog
A log bucked from a national forest trail likely wasn’t cut by a Forest Service employee. Amid tightening budgets, much, if not most, trail maintenance today is performed by nonprofit groups like Back Country Horsemen and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, particularly in wilderness areas that require the use of primitive tools. While the Forest Service does not track the percentage of trail labor performed by volunteers, multiple officials said partner groups provide at least half the work.
“Volunteers are replacing employees,” said Susan Spear, the Forest Service’s national director of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. Trail funding, which comes primarily from the Forest Service’s Capital Improvement and Maintenance Projects budget, has dropped from $88 million in 2011 to $78 million this year. It’s part of an overall Forest Service budget that is increasingly squeezed by the rising cost of wildfire.

Environmental challenges add to the problem, such as the recent spread of pine beetles in the Rocky Mountain West and drought and windstorms that have killed millions of trees...It’s resulted in a deferred trail maintenance backlog, both inside and outside wilderness, totaling $314 million in 2012, up from $224 million in 2007, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. “We’ve got a crisis with trail maintenance,” Hodge of SAWS said.

The funding crunch underscores the importance of volunteers and other partner groups, agency officials said...[T]he Forest Service this summer released a draft saw policy to establish national standards for certifying crosscut sawyers for both employees and volunteers. It seeks to expand the pool of eligible sawyers by allowing partner organizations to certify their own staff or volunteers. A national database would ensure certified individuals could use saws in any forest.

Certification is important for liability reasons, officials said. Under the Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972, volunteers are considered federal employees for tort or workers’ compensation, a factor that can complicate a local unit’s ability to work with volunteers, according to GAO.

“You can’t just send out any volunteer,” said Swain. “They have to be trained. They have to be certified... Yet the Rocky Mountain region is “unable to get these trails cleared without the help of volunteers,” Swain said.

In southwest Colorado last year, Nelson’s Back Country Horsemens chapter worked a cumulative 2,000 hours and improved 85 miles of trail, he said. The work -- clearing trees, repairing tread, removing rocks, cutting overgrowth and improving water drainage -- was worth an estimated $70,000, he said. The Forest Service estimated that volunteers in 2012 performed $26 million worth of trail work, according to GAO.

COLORADO, IDAHO, MONTANA SENATORS SUPPORT FEDERAL LANDS ACT

By Edward Graham, Herald Staff Writer

Colorado’s U.S. senators are joining a bipartisan effort to reauthorize the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act, a Western land program that sold unwanted federal lands in exchange for more desirable conservation areas. The act expired in 2011.

The bill, which was introduced by Sens. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., and Dean Heller, R-Nev., is supported by a bipartisan coalition, including Sens. Michael Bennet, D-Colo.; Cory Gardner, R-Colo.; Tom Udall, D-N.M.; Mike Crapo, R-Idaho; Jon Tester, D-Mont.; and Steve Daines, R-Mont...

The act, which Congress passed in 2000, generated more than $100 million for the conservation of public lands before it expired. The “land for land” program allowed federal agencies to preserve high-priority lands in the 11 contiguous western states and Alaska.

Because the program relied on the public sale of isolated or unwanted public lands to conserve pristine acreage, prime conservation areas were acquired at no cost to the taxpayer. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that reauthorization of the act would reduce the nation’s deficit by $5 million over 10 years.

According to The Conservation Fund, the land act allowed the Bureau of Land Management to acquire 4,500 acres for preservation within Colorado’s Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. The U.S. Forest Service was able to acquire 75 acres of threatened land within the White River National Forest’s Holy Cross Wilderness because of the program.

“Conserving and protecting the public lands Coloradans cherish is a bipartisan priority,” Gardner said. “FLTFA is a responsible program which benefits both conservation efforts and the private sector, leading to economic development while protecting critical public lands.”

Edward Graham is a student at American University in Washington, D.C., and an intern with The Durango Herald.

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If your horse says no, you either asked the wrong question or asked the question wrong.

It is not enough for a man to know how to ride; he must know how to fall.

unknown
by Vickie Anderson, Mile High Chapter BCHM

Input posts, rails, horses, mules, BLM employees and Mile High Backcountry Horsemen (MHBCH) volunteers into a BLM fence project, and what do you get?

Well, the output is a solidly-built jackleg-rail fence around a dangerous mineshaft that will protect the recreating public and safeguard a cultural site, a working camaraderie between strangers, and new friends parting ways at the end of the day with promises to seek future opportunities to work together again.

On June 9, 2014, near Pipestone, Montana, the BLM’s Butte Field Office held a workday to haul fence materials using volunteers and pack animals from the local MHBCH. The purpose for hauling fence materials via pack animals was to avoid creating a new trail in the frequently used Whitetail-Pipestone ATV area.

After a tailgate safety session, the MHBCH horses and pack animals trailed to the materials staging area. There, the real work began.

MHBCH volunteers Pat Ankelman, Ryan Velin, and Jim Sladek brought four pack mules. All three knew their animals very well, which is crucial when they set out to tie 12-foot-long rails to each side of their mules. They knew just how “far” they could push to get their animals to accept the rails that hung beyond the mules’ heads and extended farther than their back feet.

Daisy, MHBCH President Pat Ankelman’s black jenny, was not impressed by the long rails threatening to tickle her long ears, but Jacob Greenwood provided comforting words to ease her worries.

Velin’s young jenny, Jesse, was voted by the group as the least impressed by the long rails. By the fourth attempt to negotiate terms with Jesse, she begrudgingly agreed to carry her share of the burden.

Jigger, the “I-can-do-it-by myself” mule: For MHBCH’er Ryan Velin’s 26-year-old roan mule, Monday was just another day at the office. An experienced packer, Jigger added packing 12-foot rails to his already impressive resume. Jigger made five trips up the mountainside to deliver the rails to a very appreciative fencing crew at the mineshaft.

Ruby, Jim Sladek’s, young jenny mule, was inexperienced, but to participate in the festivities. Ruby decided to resist again while trailing and she ended up losing her load, but dog gone it, right back on it went and she persevered for four more trips.

Ruby and Jigger, the I-can-do-it-by-myself mule, going on “automatic.”

The haul: Mules Jigger and Jesse, MHBCH’er Ryan Velin and BLM’er Vickie Anderson on her horse, Hadley.

L to R: MHBCH’ers Ryan Velin, Frank Olenick, Jim Sladek, and Pat Ankelman, and BLMer Jacob Greenwood pack Jim’s mule, Ruby.

MHBC volunteers Frank Olenick and David “Duster” Duesterbeck and BLM’er Jacob Greenwood knotted, unknot-ted, reknotted, hoisted, and stapled ropes to secure the loads. The loads needed to be very secure or they could injure people or animals during the hauling.

Jigger, the I-can-do-it-by-myself mule, going on “automatic.”

A Matter of Tails and Rails.
The Ringing Rocks Mineshaft Fence Story

14
Jacob Greenwood, not to be outdone by the pack mules, hand-carried two rails up the mountainside himself.

BLM’ers Alan Parker and Mike Wetherbee endured the hot, dusty wind at the mine site, expertly built the jackleg-rail fence as the materials arrived, and provided levity at everyone’s expense. Mike bestowed the nickname “Automatic” on Jigger for the mule’s ability to trundle down the trail without being led.

BLM’er Kyle Lockwood did just about everything to support the loading process except tie those pesky knots. A little uneasy being around the large animals at first, by the end of the day, Kyle had made several equine friends.

Vickie Anderson, BLM Range Technician, and also a member of the MHBCH, provided liaison-ship and planning between the BLM and MHBCH. She headed the pack string and provided packing support.

BLM Geologist Joan Gabelman, master originator of the project, watered and fed the MHBCH volunteers, calmed animals, sawed tree limbs, took an inordinate amount of photos, climbed the steep, rocky hill to the mineshaft five or six times that day to keep tabs on progress, and helped finish up the fence building. Her easy-going, genteel manner allowed seamless workability between BLM employees and MHBCH volunteers. Without Joan’s motivation to increase safety on public lands, there would have been just one more open mineshaft that could ruin someone’s day on BLM lands.

Hats off to all the hardworking individuals and equines. The “tails and rails” project was a great success!

Vickie Anderson is a Range Technician, BLM Butte Field Office. All photos courtesy Joan Gabelman.
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If you would like to join, please contact a chapter in your area.