

Working Together
for the Wild



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WILDERNESS FOUNDATION

Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness News

"It is the mission of the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness Foundation to support stewardship of the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness and to foster appreciation of wild lands."

From the Program Director:

Fall 2018

Years ago, I worked with a man who had worked for the Gallatin National Forest. At night, huddled around a campfire in the clear, starry Sierra, he told story after story of the A-B Wilderness, a wild place where porcupines gnawed on moose paddles and grizzlies left tracks through the mud. **"If you ever bring yourself to leave Yosemite, you should go there,"** he'd say.

It took six more seasons before I found myself in Montana, Beans in tow, falling in love with the Absarokas and the Beartooths. On my first backcountry trip up the Buffalo Fork, we came into a meadow with a complete rainbow so bright that it looked as if someone was projecting it out of the grass. While surveying rock shelters up on the Froze-to-Death Plateau, after hopping over thin streams slicing through the tundra and walking over rolling hills of dark granite, I saw Granite Peak and Avalanche Lake for the first time; both were so spectacular that I stopped in my tracks, mouth agape, maps fluttering in the wind.

As Program Director, my job doesn't only bring me into connection with astonishing beauty; it also enables me to connect with a wide variety of wonderful people. Few settings allow for good stories and easy laughter the way a campfire does, especially when you're fully satiated from a hearty meal and a solid day of work.

It's hard to believe that the field season is already over, taking with it the campfires and hand tools. However, we accomplished a lot and I look forward to the quiet magic of fall and winter, full of environmental education and cozy afternoons reading about the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

-Heather Briggs, Program Director



The Summer Interns:

This summer, we again supplied 4 Interns to help the ABWF and Forest Service on trail projects. Brigit Humphries (Connecticut) worked on the Gardiner District, assisting Jeremy Zimmer and his trail crew. Amelia Smith (Indiana) added strong support to Lawson MacLean and his crew on the Yellowstone District. And Cole Guzman (Billings) worked alongside the Beartooth District trail crew. And Eliza Gillihan (Bozeman) spent much of her time this summer as a backcountry ranger in training and working on cataloging and removing many rock shelters littering the popular Froze-to-Death Plateau.



ABWF intern Amelia Smith crosscuts on a USFS hitch in the Yellowstone District.

An ABWF Journal—Summer 2018

This summer began the way all good summers do: with a picnic lunch and an afternoon splashing around in an icy stream, looking for rocks and bugs. While David taught half of the Livingston Big Brothers/Big Sisters about how Wilderness preserves our freshwater, Heather stood knee deep in Mill Creek, helping kids distinguish between caddis and mayfly larvae. As the site of an old mining restoration project, Mill Creek was the ideal setting to talk about healthy streams and clean water. The ABWF is doing more and more all the time to connect kids to their public lands.



Shortly thereafter, Heather and David took an Audubon Society summer camp group out for a day of lopping and sawing above historic Camp Senia. Though it was a chilly, rainy day, enthusiasm was high as we taught the kids how to use a crosscut saw! We talked about the impacts of the 2008 Cascade fire and how dude ranches like Camp Senia helped kickstart the early movement to protect public lands.

From there, Heather began leading our trail trips. The first was in partnership with the Montana Conservation Corps and Indian Education for All. A group of native high schoolers came up from Billings to camp overnight at Palisades and help put the finishing touches on the Nichols Creek trail. The trip was rich with both laughter and reflection. After a solid day of swinging picks and sampling grouse-whortleberries, we analyzed the language of The Wilderness Act of 1964 and compared the feelings of always being “connected” via technology versus being connected in nature. We look forward to more trips with Indian Education for All!

ABWF's Educational Programs:

In 2018, the ABWF took big steps forward in delivering educational programs which promote the value of and care for the A-B Wilderness. Through a federal grant from the Forest Service (Region 1) and another from the National Wilderness Stewardship Association (NWSA), the ABWF was able to hire Sydney Arens. She put in 640 hours of work setting up our Wilderness Educational Program. Since our focus was getting more kids outside, Sydney invited classes around our region out for lessons in snowshoeing and XC skiing, snow science, winter adaptations, Leave No Trace, animal tracks, orienteering, and more! She visited many classrooms too, delivering 20 programs around the region. A few of the groups she worked with? The Bozeman Homeschoolers, Roberts Elementary School, Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (Great Falls), The Arrowhead School (Pray, MT), Gardiner and Winans Elementary Schools (Livingston).

We are pleased to keep Sydney's educational momentum going during the 2018-19 school year. If you know of any K-12 teachers or schools in the A-B Wilderness area who would like some help getting their students learning outdoors, the ABWF would be happy to help! Best of all it's FREE! Contact Heather Briggs at programs@abwilderness.org.

Since 2012, the ABWF has brought Wilderness education to school kids and adults alike. We have delivered over 80 programs in that time and have engaged over 3000 participants! in programs such as:

- Interpretive, full moon, snowshoe, and nature hikes.
- Talks on topics such as the ecology of whitebark pines, the geology of the Absarokas and Beartooths, the history of The Wilderness Act.
- Film screenings like Wild Resurrection: The Untold Story of the A-B Wilderness.
- Outdoor lessons on Leave No Trace, orienteering/map reading, and astronomy.
- Professional symposiums about public lands and Wilderness, as well as guest lectures for MSU Billings, Rocky Mountain College, Westminster College.
- Presentations and workshops by our Artists in Residence.
- The Trail Ambassadors Program which educates backcountry users & mitigates heavy impacts.



National Wilderness
Stewardship Alliance

Initial Creek Bridge Project

The trail season fully kicked off with the Initial Creek Bridge Abutment construction project. The project opened with a short rock work class. After that, volunteers were able to alternate between laying rock for checks and a single tier wall, grading nearby sections of trail, and clearing back to camp. We also cleared the mile of trail between our campsite and worksite. While we pulled off of the project a day early due to unforeseen circumstances, morale remained high. We finished up the Nichols Creek trail in preparation for the September ribbon cutting!

Big thanks to Monika Metzler who came all the way from Switzerland and helped us find the best berry patches; Jim Merring who joined us from New York and is one of our Volunteers of the Year; Danielle Shilling, an Americorps VISTA from Red Lodge who chose to break rocks on her weekend; Brian Iselin who is "mythically strong" and who helped us lay rock at twice the speed we would have otherwise; Jim Howe, who has recently become a Montanan and who is our other Volunteer of the Year; and Haley Gamertsfelder and Shannon Quinn, who took a break from fighting the good fight against noxious weeds with Montana Conservation Corps and the Forest Service to grade trail and crush rocks.



Haley Gamertsfelder demonstrating proper technique and PPE in front of the Initial Creek Bridge Abutment. In the background, you can see the single tier wall and one check!



Michelle Florence carrying a treated log for a water bar. Unlike checks, which are visible and set at 180°, water bars are set at 45° and are almost completely buried.

The 2018 Lake Plateau crew taking a well-deserved rest around the campfire.



The Lake Plateau:

With the help of the Beartooth Backcountry Horsemen, we were able to work and camp up on the Lake Plateau. We camped at stunning Lower Rainbow Lake, then hiked past Fish Lake to install over thirty check steps to rehab a rutted section of trail. With that finished, we headed up to Diaphanous Lake to dig lateral drains and prevent water from flowing onto and eroding the trail.

We could not have done this without the help of Glenn and Michelle Florence, recent retirees who have devoted their time and energy to many volunteer trail trips around the country; Jim Howe, who worked at elevation on the Lake Plateau to increase his lung capacity for the incredibly competitive Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Fun Run; Greg Perri, a student from Billings who absolutely crushed it on the trail, setting by far the most checks; Will Jones, a college student from Bozeman who kept us all entertained with his mountaineering stories; Eliza Gillilan who was one of our SCA interns and proved to be a phenomenal help in the kitchen and on the grade; and John Clayton who taught us all something new with his vast knowledge of public land history.

Special thanks to the Backcountry Horsemen who packed us in on this trip, Dave Heinle (and Jenga!), Mary Sybrant (and Brady!), Dan Kellogg, and Jake Barnum. Additionally, we owe a great deal to our wonderful USFS work lead, Hannah Marchant, for laying out the project and showing us what to do and how to do it!



Mules wait to hit the trail at the Lake Kathleen camp. The green boxes you see here are the bear-proof panniers that we store all our smelly items in, including sunscreen, toothpaste, and medicine.

Heather Briggs and Beans hard at work setting up the rock project at Initial Creek! You can see the stringers for both sides of the bridge here! While it looks like they are set at an angle from each other, they are perfectly straight!

Photo of Owl Lake by Glenn Florence

East Fork of the Main Boulder River Trail:

Finally, for the second year in a row, we hosted volunteers from the American Hiking Society. The Beartooth Backcountry Horsemen packed us into our camp at tiny but glorious Lake Kathleen. From there, we worked up the East Fork of the Boulder River, building check dams and water bars and lopping back alder and willow. We even had some free time to head up to the Lake Plateau and explore more open country!

Much gratitude to everyone who took this "Volunteer Vacation" to the A-B, including: Steve Ledbury (Steve-E) and Andy Woods who hopped the pond from England to dig drains and explore the beautiful Greater Yellowstone; Steve Schick (Steve-O) who came from Ohio to squeeze in some work with us before taking a group of Boy Scouts to Gettysburg; Lisa Curll who spent her thirtieth birthday detoxing from corporate life by learning how to build rock water bars and eating Jello cheesecake; Trevor Rapp who ventured into the world of rubble masonry on his first AHS volunteer vacation; Tim McDougall who came up from Colorado to fish Montana's beautiful waters and play in the dirt; Eileen Haney who did back-to-back volunteer vacations with our sister organization in the Bob-Marshall; and, finally, The Tarnutzer Boys, Richard, Brandon, and Craig, who have been participating in volunteer trail work trips together for almost twenty years!

As always, we could not have done this trip without The Backcountry Horsemen! Thanks to Dave Heinle (and Jenga!), Mary Sybrant (and Brady!), Dan Kellogg, John Simmons, and John Chepulis for packing in our food and gear. Mary even decided to stay in camp and lop with us! Finally, thanks to Lawson MacLean and Curtis Neppl for teaching us trail work and regaling us with stories around the campfire!



Lisa Curll and Trevor Rapp show off their in-progress check dam. Constructed entirely with local materials, the check- wedged into place with stones- sits several inches above the current trail surface, slowing down water that has been flowing down the trail and stops the sediment, slowly restoring the trail back to its intended height.



Mary Sybrant, Doc, and Fred heading out of camp with all of our tools.

ABWF by the Numbers

This summer, 71 Volunteers contributed 1,165 hours of work on our trails in the A-B.

Our 4 Interns added 1,750 hours of time working on trails.

Volunteer educators led 27 separate Ed. Programs, reaching 1,211 students in 2018.

All of our Volunteers on all projects combined put in a combined 3,750 hours of service!



Outfitter Profile: Hells-A-Roarin' - Gardiner

Warren Johnson came by the outfitter business through family tradition and good, hard work. His hunting skills and storytelling abilities (check out his blog for hilarious and exciting tales of outfitter life: <http://www.hellsaroarinoutfitters.com/warrens-blog/>) were inherited in equal parts from his father and the land. In one telling story, he speaks of being out in the frigid wind with his dad who turned to him and said, "too tough for everybody else, just right for us!"

In their 37th of business, the Johnsons—Warren, Sue, their son and daughter, and a handful of guides who return each summer—take people from all over the world fishing, horseback riding, and hunting. Their knowledge of the land, attention to detail, and love for what they do keeps their clients coming back, year after year.

This spirit is evident in everything that Hell's A-Roarin' does. For decades, they've been working with and volunteering on behalf of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Eighteen years ago, after a massive slide at Specimen Divide, they hauled 1200 loads of gravel to fill in the turnpike constructed by the USFS trail crew. For a solid week, they loaded their stock with special panniers with removable bottoms full of gravel, dumped the gravel, and returned to the trailhead to go at it all over again.

More recently, Hell's A-Roarin' partnered with the USFS and volunteers from the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation to fill three sections of turnpike on the Knox Lake trail. Jeremy Zimmer, trail foreman of the Custer Gallatin National Forest says, "they've been a valuable partner for many seasons, maintaining a subset of trails—clearing downed trees and cleaning hundreds upon hundreds of water bars—helping us on trail construction projects, and working as a contractor to pack around crews."

Sue Johnson stresses that none of this would be possible without their horses and mules. Not only do they carry heavy loads, but they also empower people who have never ventured into the Wilderness to make the 22-mile journey into Hell's A-Roarin's camp. Twenty years ago, it was common to run into folks hunting, fishing, and exploring the Hell Roaring drainage, but now they rarely run into other parties. "Horses help expose people to how great the Wilderness is," she says. "It's important for people to get out there; if they don't, how will they know how valuable it is?"

Several years ago, they opened up their annual horse drive to the public, turning it not only into a wonderful party with BBQ, cowboy poetry, and live music but also into a highly successful fundraiser. This past May, Hell's A-Roarin' raised \$50,000 to purchase three custom built Action Trackchairs for disabled Montana veterans. Per the event page, these specialized, rugged chairs "allow folks with disabilities to reclaim their freedom, independence, and mobility in the outdoors!" (For more information on how you can participate, visit www.hellsaroarinhorsedrive.com).

The Johnsons' commitment to Wilderness stewardship, the Gardiner community, and their clients' experience is truly impressive. The ABWF is lucky to have worked alongside Hell's A-Roarin' and look forward to many more years of partnership. To find out more about their operation, please visit www.hellsaroarinoutfitters.com. If you can't make it out for a trip, Hell's A-Roarin' also hosts nightly cookouts during the summer. Stop by for an hour of horseback riding, a juicy steak, and, of course, marshmallows and stories around the campfire. Thank you, Hell's A-Roarin'!



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"The Jims" Volunteers of the Year!

Congrats to Jim Howe aka "White Lightning"—nicknamed not only for his speed on the trail and his dominance at the Red Lodge Fun Run, but also for his quick wit—joined us for two back-to-back multi-day projects this summer! He has spent 18 days volunteering with us on trail and several more helping us staff our booth at the Fun Run. Jim has an infectious spirit, is always willing to lend a hand in the kitchen, and knows his way around a hammer from his time working on the railroad- a retiree of AmTrak.

When asked why he volunteers, Jim said, "I could say something profound like the A-B Wilderness is a sacred place (it is) and I want to give back to the Earth for so much I've taken (I do). But the fact of the matter is I just like to play in the dirt. My dad wanted me to be an electrical engineer, but I liked to play in the dirt. I spent 40 years on the railroad playing in the dirt and ensuring the dirt was safely sculpted. Now I have retired so I moved to Montana so I can play in the dirt in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Thank you, David and the ABWF for fulfilling a young boy's dreams!"



Congratulations are also in order for Jim Merring! Jim has come all the way from upstate New York to volunteer with us three years in a row! Not including his travel time, he has spent 13 days and 109 hours volunteering on our trails. Jim has a wonderful presence both in camp and on the trail; he exudes a calm and genuine energy, always has a twinkle in his eye, and throws himself wholeheartedly into whatever he's working on.

Jim says, "Volunteering with the ABWF allows me to give back to our system of parks and wilderness areas and help preserve these lands for the enjoyment of everyone and future generations. Volunteering has been one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had and would encourage anyone considering volunteering to do so. You will meet great people from all over the US and the world, as well as see some of the most beautiful country there is."

We certainly agree and encourage anyone who has been curious about volunteering with the ABWF to join us out on the trail in 2019! Thanks, Jims!

