

Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

OUR PURPOSES

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country, roadless backcountry and wilderness areas.
- To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
- To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
- To educate, encourage and solicit active participation by the general public in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horses and people commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.
- To seek out opportunities to enhance existing areas of recreation for stock users.

Decker Dispatch



Beartooth Back Country Horsemen and Absarokee-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation Team Up For Trail Maintenance

By John Jenkins, Treasurer, Beartooth Back Country Horsemen

The BBCH had a pretty busy summer working with the Absarokee Beartooth Wilderness Foundation or ABWF (abwilderness.org-also linked in the advocacy group section of the BCHMT home page). The ABWF is a Red Lodge, Montana- based nonprofit wilderness stewardship organization that fosters appreciation for the AB Wilderness and engages in projects to help maintain this particular wilderness area. There is a similar mission to ours, just without the equines. According to David Kallenbach, the CEO, this was the busiest and most challenging year yet for the ABWF. The volunteer projects include trail building and maintenance, weed eradication, LNT education at trailheads and many others.

The ABWF has been in existence for several years, and our chapter has assisted them for a few years now. As they have become busier, so has the BBCH. The Beartooth Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana was largely started to assist in reopening the main Stillwater River trail in the AB Wilderness after the 1988 fires. This was a multi-year project by the founding BBCH chapter members. Most of

our projects are in this wilderness area and the surrounding non-wilderness public land. So the BBCH and the ABWF are very similar in their focus on the Absarokee Beartooth Wilderness.

For many of the ABWF projects volunteers fly in to Montana from all over the country (and world) to assist in trail building and maintenance and other projects.

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Packing out old puncheons.

Beartooth Back Country Horsemen [continued from front page]

By John Jenkins, Beartooth Back Country Horsemen

These are usually multi-day projects that are coordinated between the ABWF and the USFS trail management personnel. Frequently there are both volunteers and USFS personnel working side by side. When we assist, our job is to pack in the gear for the volunteer trail crew on the trail maintenance projects. The ABWF makes it easy for their volunteers. You just drive or fly in with your backpack, hiking boots and work gloves, and they do the rest. They provide the tools and grub. I think it's called working for "room and board," or maybe just a vacation.

We usually meet the ABWF volunteers and their crew chief at the trailhead first thing in the morning. We get all the gear together and they head out, hiking up the trail with small day packs. We'll pack in the tools in Utah bags, the gear in soft panniers or mantled loads, and the food in hard panniers. We'll usually pass the hikers along the trail somewhere. Four to six days later, we'll meet at the trailhead again, ride in and pack them out.

The Beartooth Chapter did several of these projects this year. Coordinating between different volunteer organizations can be a challenge. Then there is the "coordination" for packing out a crew when they are in the mountains and cannot be reached with two-way communication. "Did anyone remember to coordinate the pack out before they went in?" I might be a bit of an organizational control freak, but that flew out the window this summer. I learned that 9AM at the trailhead is a pretty universal concept between hikers, horsemen and packers. I'll run through a few of the "adventures", errr, projects, here.

At the end of spring, mid June, four of us with four pack animals rode up Paradise Valley (Yellowstone River Valley north out of the Park). This is quite a drive from our usual stomping grounds. We were tasked with packing out old pungeons from a foot bridge on the West Fork of Mill Creek. The ABWF had two years earlier repaired a section of this trail leaving behind a pile of old timbers. Well, I had never packed anything like this, or close to it. Or seen it done. I don't think my partner had either. Sure we were game. Going in I almost rode right past the pungeons piled on the side of the

trail in thick spring undergrowth. They were heavy. And there were just two of us to do the heavy lifting for a pile of about 90 timbers. Needless to say, we didn't get it all done.

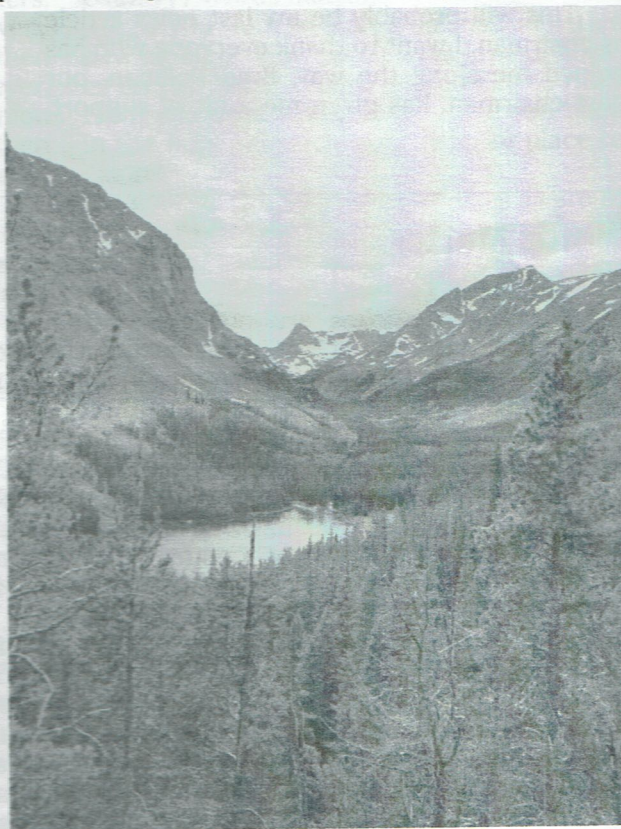
The hillside was very steep where we loaded, and was generally steep from side to side on the trail as well. Our club's youngest member, Josie Thomsen, only 12 years old, held stock while her father Randy and I loaded in a light drizzling rain. Or maybe she just blocked the trail and kept our stock from trotting back to the trailhead. We needed a seven-foot tall man on the downhill side and a four-foot tall man on the uphill side for loading the pack stock. But we managed. On the trail out our uphill load of two pungeons tended to drag the steep uphill side of the trail. Fortunately the ride was only about a mile and a half. The upside is that it rained on us to cool us off, and my wife's saddle horse learned to pack. And he learned to pack pungeons. And he learned to do it with a borrowed pack saddle that was too small for him. And too small for the pungeons as well.

And so the summer went. We were a little short on pack animals for some of these trips. A BBCH past president Dave Heinle (who it seems to me has lots of pack stock) has led many of these trips with the BBCH-ABWF in the past but was unavailable for some this summer. He also gave me some pointers on the pungeon packing when I told him my problem later in the summer. So this novice and a few others stepped up and did the best we could using a combination of many packing methods.

The next project was an early summer trip to September Morn Lake near Red Lodge. This lake is high up in the Beartooth Mountain Range about 1,300 feet under Sundance Pass, which is at 11,037 feet. The trailhead is a few miles south of Red Lodge before heading up the Beartooth Highway and Pass. It initially follows the raging Lake Fork

of Rock Creek headed west. It tops out over Sundance Pass and turns north-east, ending at the West Fork of Rock Creek. This cirque is surrounded on all sides by plateaus at about 10,000 feet (Silver Run, Red Lodge Creek, Hell Roaring and East Rosebud Plateaus). This trail is a 26 mile, one-day ride, if you are up to it and can leave a vehicle at each end of the trail. The Lake Fork of Rock Creek is aptly named for the lakes along the way. A mile in is a rocky creekside beach good for watering stock on a hot summer's day. A little farther up is a shallow, slow moving wide spot in the creek called Broadwater Lake. I've ridden this trail yearly for a few years to within two miles of September Morn Lake for trout fishing in Lost Lake and Keyser Brown lakes which are just a little ways off the trail, but had never ridden up to September Morn or the pass from this side. There are other lakes off to the south of the trail that I haven't yet explored.

We packed a nine member trail crew in to September Morn to work with an FS crew already in. The crew was helping with water bar maintenance on the switchbacks up to the pass above September Morn. Then we packed them out five days later.



Our view going up to September Morn Lake.