

Back Country Horsemen of America helped improve trails from coast to coast in 2008

The group set a \$6 million volunteer value goal for 2009

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Back Country Horsemen of America has always believed in the worth of hard work.

Each year, BCHA members dedicate many hours to the hard labor of clearing and improving trails not only for equestrian use, but for everyone who enjoys the wilderness. In 2007, their total volunteer value was \$5.6 million. BCHA has set itself a goal of \$6 million in annual volunteer value, which it certainly expects to achieve in 2008 when the final results for that year are tallied at the April National Board Meeting.

Despite challenges and setbacks, BCHA accomplished a staggering amount of volunteer work in 2008. With at-large members in 47 states and member organizations in 25 states, Back Country Horsemen of America boasts 16,000 members nationwide. When that many like-minded people decide to get something done, it gets done.

New and Improved

Formed in 1992 and chartered in 1995, Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina is the oldest BCHA group east of the Mississippi River. These dedicated stock users recently built new hitching racks at the Cataloochee Horse Camp in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. They got permission through their very good working relationship with Park management.

Time and the elements had taken their toll on the old wooden hitching racks, which had become dangerous due to their state of disrepair. The new ones are made of durable steel tubing with concrete floors. Not only did Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina install the new racks, they improved the layout. Originally, three group racks served the horse camp and seven campsites, which meant that your horses and mules were not always within view from your camp. Now, each individual campsite has its own rack of four stalls.

BCHNC also added two concrete watering tanks for stock use in the Cataloochee Horse Camp. This will reduce the need for watering stock in nearby creeks. They also built and delivered a custom made manure ramp to replace the existing one. These improvements make staying at Cataloochee Horse Camp easier and safer, and should also benefit the Great Smokey Mountain National Park with increased return visits.

Get 'er Done

The Gila Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico demonstrates BCHA's strong work ethic. They cleared over 100 miles of Gila National Forest trails in 2008. Because the Gila National Forest's trail budget was very limited, many of these trails would have remained difficult if not impassable for livestock and other recreational users if not for these Back Country Horsemen.

Volunteers from the Gila Chapter worked on trails in parts of the Gila Wilderness, the Aldo Leopold Wilderness, and the Blue Range Wilderness. They also cleared a number of non-wilderness Forest trails used by hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians, including approximately 28 miles of the Continental Divide Trail.

Work began in March, when the snow cover had melted at the lower elevations, and continued throughout the year. On November 23, the Gila Chapter had met their ambitious goal of completing just over 100 miles of trail clearing. It took over 1000 volunteer hours (which were accident-free) and 144 days of stock use. But the end result was worth the effort: safe trails fit for a number of different uses meandering through the beautiful New Mexico landscape.

Many Hands Make Light Work

BCHA doesn't work only on their own projects. They often labor in conjunction and side-by-side with others who share their vision. In early November 2008, the Central Arizona chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Arizona took part in a large project in the Wupatki National Monument, thirty miles northeast of Flagstaff. Through the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and American Conservation Experience, 80 people from Arizona and around the world came together to replace old fencing along the northeast corner of the monument boundary near the Little Colorado River.



Because much of the access to the monument was tough terrain and poor road conditions, the Park Service turned to the Back Country Horsemen of Central Arizona to use their horses and mules. Twenty-seven BCHA members and their 55 horses and mules packed in over 12,000 pounds of fencing materials to the area for the three day project.

The group met and set up camp at the U.S. Forest Service's Doney Mountain recreation site on October 31. They trailered all 55 animals four miles on a rough road to a main drop point. Here, the horses and mules were loaded with 150-pound packs of barbed and smooth wire, pre-mix concrete, and five gallon containers of water. Those materials were then packed about four miles out across rugged, broken country to the farthest part of the project area along the Little Colorado River.

In just two days, the packers and crews had hauled in six tons of materials, all by horse and mule. Old fencing was removed or repaired and new fencing installed. Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of those three days was the seamless collaboration of several different organizations working toward one common goal: protecting and enjoying our nation's wilderness.

About Back Country Horsemen of America

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes in regards to the use of horses and stock in the wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: www.backcountryhorse.com, call 888-893-5161, or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367.

Read more about equestrian land conservation.