



Part I

“National Trails Day – Trash Pickup at Steck Park”

“Well, that’s something you don’t see every day.”

National Trails Day fell on June 1st this year. Early June weather can be unpredictable and access to high timber country difficult. As one of the SBBCHI project coordinators, I like to look for a project in the high desert to kick off the season of trail maintenance.

One of my pet peeves is the littering of our public lands. Hike into any accessible area and you will find trash strewn from one end to the next. I wanted to do something about it and possibly help to promote the effectiveness of horses in the backcountry and BLM . I’d put the power of the SBBCHI to work picking up trash along a 5 mile stretch of the Snake River from Steck Park camp ground to the “red gate” that marks the end of the road; beyond which I assume is private property.

Friday evening I hauled my horse, Jack, to Steck Park. I saddled up and scouted for an area large enough to accommodate several of our member’s large fifth-wheels, campers and horse trailers. I’d only been on the old road past the park on four- wheeler and horseback. Upon closer inspection, I opted to not risk the narrow, steep, winding road. We would have to find someplace above the park to camp.



The Corrals

Jack, Shade, my dog, and I rode onto an old corral made of power poles. A nice spring with a watering trough above the corral had our camping spot written all over it. I doubted the other members would see the spot from the road so I set up temporary camp next to the road with plans to move to the corrals when the rest arrived.

I wondered if I would see any of the other members before morning. There was enough cell service to send a text of my location to those that had signed up for the project. An hour before dark, Devon, Linda, Mildred and their grandson, Anthony, pulled into our temporary camp. We checked out the corrals and agreed we would camp there.



Camp breakfast

Come morning, we placed a paper-plate sign at the turn off pointing to our camp and waited for the rest of our crew. Chick and Lorraine arrived just in time for breakfast, Linda style: omelets in a baggy. I called Rob's cell and gave him directions to our camp. Rob had server issues at work and said he would be late and to not wait for him, he would catch up. As fast as Rob's horse walks, I had no doubt he would catch up sooner than later.

Armed with 14 large garbage bags; seven of us headed down river on a mission to clean up the beaches and turnouts along the 5 mile stretch. It

never ceases to amaze me what people are willing to pack in full, but can't manage to pack out empty. Keystone light took the prize for that one – followed by water bottles, juice boxes, night-crawler containers and diapers. Tied for the most disgusting man made items were toilet paper and used condoms. Apparently even slob practice safe sex. Note to self: Next time bring latex gloves and sanitizer.

A person gets pretty creative in their method of used toilet paper retrieval. The two-stick-chop-stick maneuver was my personal favorite. Reaching into the middle of sagebrush to retrieve that Styrofoam container left you with a less than warm and fuzzy feeling too. "What was that sound? Was that one of those buzzing bugs, or was it a rattle snake!?"

The Chicks and I reached the red gate and stopped for lunch. Rob indeed caught up with us and arrived with his pack horse's bags filled to the brim with garbage. Not long after, Linda, Devon, Mildred and Anthony rode in from cleaning up their own section. We ate lunch along the much cleaner" rivers edge and watched four year old Anthony play in the water.



Anthony playing in the Snake River

We had too many bags to pack out on one pack horse. We piled 8 or 10 stuffed bags in a heap in the middle of the beach. If the camp hosts were not willingly to pick them up, I would come back the next day with my four-wheeler and haul them out.



Lorraine picking up trash on the way back to camp

anytime and bring your horses. They are all beautiful – especially that appaloosa and that black pony.” (We didn’t have an appaloosa or a pony...black or otherwise)

Back at camp, Devon brought out a game he built called “Washoes.” Similar to horseshoes, you toss large washers onto a board with three holes just large enough for the washers to fall through. The game involved a complex scoring system that I now seriously suspect Devon of making up as he went along. I could work with that. Devon was on my team and we beat the pants off Rob and Lorraine. Actually, Devon beat them...I don’t think I got one of them damn washers in a hole. Whatever...it’s not who you are, it’s who you pick for your team and I know who built the game boards. My momma didn’t raise no dummy.

What we lacked in latex gloves and hand sanitizer, we made up for in food! SBBCHI members know how to eat and no amount of smelly dead catfish, unidentifiable floating river scum or used Trojans would suppress our appetites! Dinner consisted of hamburgers, spicy sausage-dogs, potato salad, green salad – chili, chips and cheese and gluten free pineapple upside-down cake. Oh-yeah.

Rob and the Chick’s pulled out of camp shortly after dinner. The rest of us would spend another night and ride Sunday. We sat around a small camp-fire and reflected on the project. Linda commented on the day as an excellent lesson for Anthony, who agreed that after picking up other people’s garbage all day long, would be less likely to litter in the future.

We rode out picking up trash along the way and stuffing it in Moose’s pack. We got a system going: one person would walk and pick up trash while another person led their horse – then switch to another walker and so on. We road into the park, emptied Moose’s packs in the dumpster and stopped to talk to the camp host. The host’s said they had never been down as far as the red gate, but would be happy to pick up the bags for us:”Thank you so much and come back to our park



Chick and Rob emptying pack bags.



Anthony

Anthony's favorite expression of late has been: "Well, that's something you don't see every day." I agree Anthony, although I'm afraid when it comes to human disregard for our environment, it's something we unfortunately see all too often.



The Snake River

My faithful alarm clock (aka hungry horse high-lined outside my camper) woke me at 5:00AM PST. I led Jack down to the water tank, grazing along the way. I picked up an old beer bottle and a half dozen bottle caps between camp and the trough. As Jack nibbled on the sparse green grass – a pick-up pulled up to the bank above the water trough. "Good morning...just out for a ride this weekend?" The angle of the steep bank and the trees obstructed my view of the man. All I could see was a pair of sandals, tan shorts and the start of a green shirt. You can call me paranoid if you want, but I've often been warned about roaming around in the hills alone. Drug growers are known to have crops back in these areas and defend them to no end. Crap...did I stumble upon a crop and was about to be "silenced." I wasn't too worried – I had my dog with me and the others were not far away, asleep in their camper. I grabbed the beer bottle by the throat, "just in case" and positioned Jack where I thought

I might be able to jump on him...although unlikely – I haven't been able to swing on a horse since the gravitational pull on my backside exceeded that of the spring in my once agile legs. I peered warily through the trees to get a better look. "Morning...yep – just out riding. What are you up to?" I said. From this view I could see the big gold letters written across the side of his deep blue pick-up, "SHERIFF." Oh good – I wasn't going to be murdered, I was going to be arrested for trespassing or early morning consumption of an alcoholic nature. "OH! I'm sorry...I could not see who you are...and Oh..I'm not drinking this...I'm just picking up trash in the area." I explained. The burly, square jawed officer smiled, "I thought it was a little early in the morning to be drinking." I refrained from telling him the true intent of the bottle was to crack it over his head if he turned out to be a drug dealing serial killer.

We chatted back and forth and I told him more than he ever wanted to know about the Back Country Horsemen and why we were there and what it was we were doing and why it is that I absolutely go anal about people throwing their trash out. He politely smiled and pretended to be interested while making a mental note of the brand on Jack's shoulder. "Nice looking horse...whose brand is that?" Ah...now we are getting down to the nitty-gritty. "It's my brand," I proudly tell him. I am pretty proud of my brand – ask anyone who knows me. So, it was not unusual when I felt compelled to babble on and on about how I came up with the brand and what it meant and how you have to be a nerd to understand it..."Uh huh," he said. "Are those two little bars coming out on each side?" I knew what he was getting at and I started to offer to show him my brand card, but figured I acted guilty enough without further elaborating. Why is it that no matter how benign your activity – when face to face with law enforcement personnel, you

feel like you've just been caught with both hands in the cookie jar? Surely I am guilty of SOMETHING and this man can read it all over my face! We chatted a little more and he promised to check with the camp hosts and remind them to pick up the garbage bags we had left behind. Convinced that I was not horse thief with a drinking problem and he was not a drug dealing serial killer – we bade farewell and parted ways. He to his ever faithful service keeping the public safe and I to my never ending obsession for picking up other people's shit.

We gathered in Linda and Devon's camper for breakfast and discussed the plan for the day. The wind had picked up overnight so we decided to pack it up and find a different place to ride. The terrain in this area was mostly steep and rocky. We would find an area that would be easier on Star, the old Arabian cross that Anthony rides. Star may be small and he may be old, but he has the sweetest, biggest heart of any horse on the trail. Anthony was gaining more confidence in his riding abilities with each ride. For the sake of the horse, and for Anthony – we would ride in an area less strenuous.



Deaf Leopard.

Several miles down the road toward home we pulled over and saddle up. A dirt road meandered through rolling hills. Part way into the ride we stopped to rest and Devon spotted an unusually colored lizard. It looked like a leopard gecko. The lizard didn't scurry off like most of them and Anthony got a good look at him. "Isn't he just SO CUTE?" Anthony said. I told Anthony he probably made that lizard's day because I doubt that lizard had ever heard himself described as "so cute."

Anthony's new cowboy boots kept slipping off his heels. Let's duct tape them! Yep – that would be my brilliant idea. I seriously thought I had duct tape on me. I keep it in my saddle bags normally. All I could come up with was the next best thing...vet wrap. Devon dismounted and secured Anthony's boots to his legs with purple vet wrap. Say what you want about us...if nothing else, SBCHI members are a resourceful bunch. Anthony peered down at his feet: "Well, that's something you don't see every day."



Anthony riding without being led!



Use number 101 for Vet Wrap



Anthony, Devon, Mildred and Linda. Three generations

A few windy ridges and two wire gates later and we came to the consensus that the road we were on did not loop back to the trailers. Not wanting to return to the trailers via Utah, we turned around and headed back the way we came.

We loaded up one last time for the weekend and voted on lunch in Weiser. We said our goodbye's at the Homestead Café' and called it another successful project for the SBBCHI.



Grandpa Devon, Anthony and Shade

I could not get the nagging feeling that those garbage bags were not going to get picked up. We worked too hard to have them scattered by bears or malicious humans. I'd have to head back down and check on them myself. I turned Jack over to Annie to dote on and made plans to go back on four-wheeler and see that our hard work was not undone. It might take a little over an hour to run down and back; a small inconvenience to pay for tying up the loose ends of a successfully fun, but uneventful weekend that was about to turn anything but.

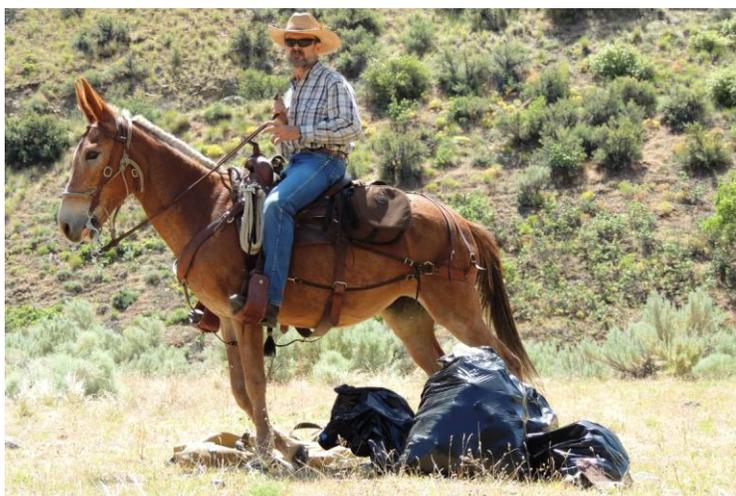
(stay tuned for Part II – “The Mystery Lady of Steck Park”



The watering hole



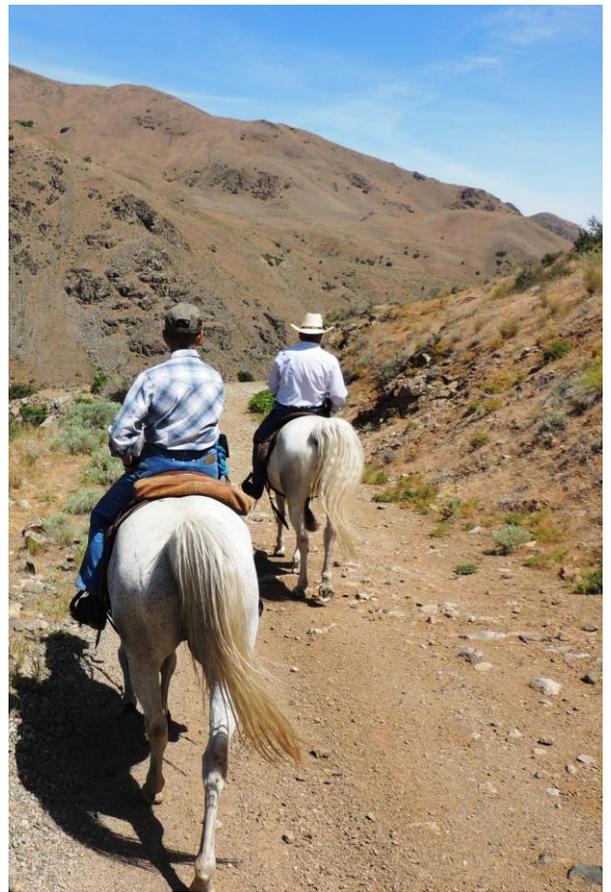
Lorraine and Chick



Devon and Lillie



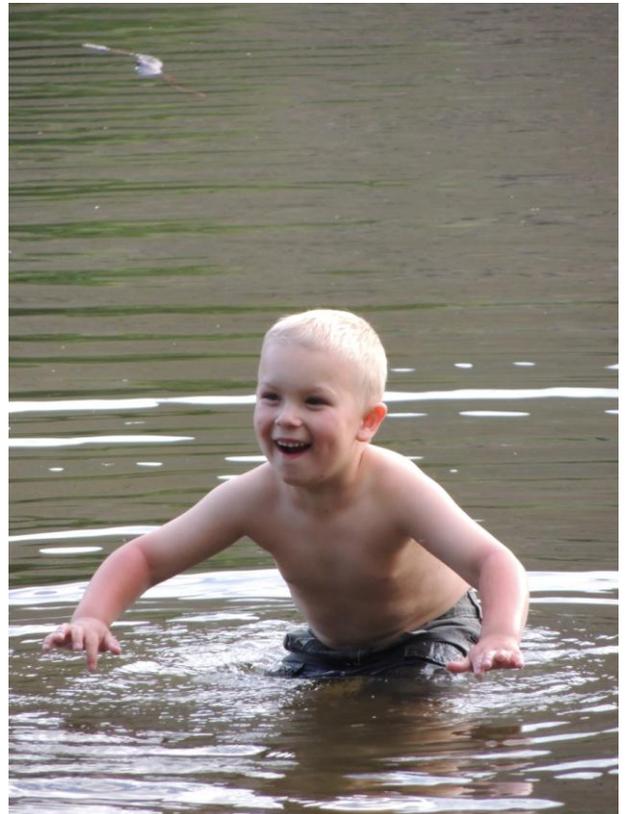
Anthony and Devon



Lorraine and Chick



Chick and Sammy



Anthony

