



RIDING "THE BOB"

For those of you who live in the west, the term "The Bob" is probably very familiar. The Bob Marshall Wilderness in western Montana is a very popular riding area. My friend Bill Conger of the Squaw Butte Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Idaho and his wife Marybeth have ridden "the Bob" for many years but for me it was my first pack trip there. I've spent a great deal of time in Idaho's Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness and was excited to see the famous China Wall in "the Bob" of which I had only seen pictures.

Bill and I took off from Emmett and drove the 12 hours up to Montana and the west side of the wilderness arriving at the Holland Lake trailhead. The horse camp trailhead was a great surprise compared to the trailheads on the west side of the Frank Church Wilderness. There was ample parking for the trucks and trailers, metal feed bunks for the animals and individual water troughs, too. We spent the night and were up the next morning, packed and ready to go by eight.

The Forest Service requires that all livestock must travel up the trails before noon while downhill livestock is for the afternoon. Foot traffic can go either way at any time. The first six

miles of the trail is in the National Forest to reach upper Holland Lake where the Bob Marshall Wilderness actually begins. At the lake there are metal hitch rails for the horses to tie up and rest and readjust packs. We continued on our first day's ride down to Big Salmon Lake where we found a nice meadow to make camp. That day was only 21 miles. Bill likes long rides! We set up camp, hobbled the animals and had a long pull on a strong drink. Later two other riders camped near us. They were both retired men, one who had been packing "the Bob" for 40 years. We enjoyed their conversation.

The next morning after some coffee and one of Marybeth's famous breakfast burritos we broke camp, packed up and headed down the trail to the South Fork of the Flathead River. The Forest Service has made some very impressive pack bridges in the wilderness and the condition of the trails was excellent. I just wish I could say the same thing about the trails in the Frank Church Wilderness here in Idaho. We were close to the trail system that headed east to the China Wall but due to a forest fire on the west side of the wall, the trails were closed to the public so we changed our route and headed for Big Prairie Wilderness Ranger Station.

Having a wilderness ranger station in the middle of a million acre wilderness manned by 23 personnel was a pleasant surprise. Their trail crews are out every day clearing downed timber and working on tread. My hat goes off to the Forest Service in Region One for their excellent work on the trails. After a wonderful cup of real coffee offered by the ranger station staff, we headed south to see the old Danaher ranch but made it only as far as Basin Creek where, once again, there were closed trails due to forest fires. This year has been bad in the west because of the numerous fires in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Oregon but any riding on great trails beats no riding at all.

On our last day of a seven day pack trip we decided to take the Gordon Trail back to Holland Lake. That was 28 miles and 9 hours in the saddle. Did I mention that Bill likes long rides? When you have great trails, wonderful scenery and two or three "Aleve" tablets you don't mind a sore butt. We made the Holland trailhead about six in the evening, fed the horses and mules some well-earned hay and headed to town for a hot shower and a good steak dinner.

In seven days of riding approximately 80 miles of trails, we stepped over 11 logs. The trail system is in great condition due to the work of the wonderful trail crews. I have stepped over that many logs just getting out of my truck on the west side of the Frank Church Wilderness here in Idaho. I just don't understand why the Bob Marshall Wilderness can have such well-maintained trails and active trail crews and the Frank Church Wilderness have such a back log of clogged trails and no forest service trail crews. There is something wrong with this situation. We need to get this changed or there will be no open trails in the Frank Church Wilderness here in Idaho.

For those of you who enjoy long pack trips on excellent trails and wonderful scenery, I recommend taking a week or two and travel to Montana and ride "the Bob".