

## **“State Comm., this is Back Country Horsemen Mobile Two, over!”**

With this simple statement spoken into hand held radios, a whole series of events were put in motion. What events led up to this radio call? Back in March, Squaw Butte agreed to provide packing and food support for a volunteer crew of seven from the Idaho Hikers Association in conjunction with three members of the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFCF). This support was for the period of July 7<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup>.

On Saturday July 7<sup>th</sup> Phil Ryan, Robbin Schindele, Bill Selkirk and I transported our stock and about 300 pounds of food and other equipment to the Sand Creek Trail head, just southeast of the Landmark Air Field. We moved the items that we would be packing into Pistol Creek Canyon to the Snowshoe Cabin trail head. The road to this trail head is not suitable for most trailers so the stock would have to walk the 55 minutes from Sand Creek to Snowshoe Cabin. On Saturday night we met the other members of this work project and prepared a shrimp and rice dinner for them. We took the opportunity to go over the equipment that the SBFCF had and selected what we would be using along with our own stuff. We made arrangements with the group to have all their personal equipment packed and stacked at the trail head for us to pack into the camp site Sunday morning.



After breakfast, the trail crew with cross cut saws and tools in hand and full water bottles started the 7 ½ miles trek from the trail head to 44 Cabin where we would be setting up a base camp for the next few days. Along the way they would be doing tread work and cutting out the 100 plus down trees that blocked the trail. The Back county horsemen team saddled up their stock and rode from Sand Creek up to Snowshoe Cabin trail head. Once at the trail head, we started building load to transport to the base camp. As there was more to transport than our stock could move in one session, we loaded up what was needed for the next 24 hours with the plan of returning for the rest the next day. As it was, we moved more than six hundred pounds the first day.

Sunday was a hot sunny day, the trail offers almost no shade as most of the canyon was burned by the fire of 2002 and that same fire provided a lot of dead timber that over the ensuing years had fallen on the trail. The work was slow and it wasn't long before the pack string caught up with the trail crew. For the rest of the way to the base camp, the stock had to step over or find routes around down trees and bogs. All members of the party arrived hot and tired at the base camp by 19:00 and dinner was served about 45 minutes later.



Monday started clear and cool, but as the day progressed, cloud that turned into local thunderstorms developed. The trail team worked on the remaining down timber between the camp and the trail head. Again the work was hard and until noon, hot. A storm moved over the canyon in early afternoon with rain, heavy at times, hail and lightning, though not close strikes.

While the trail team was working, Bill and Rob returned to the trail head to pick up the remaining food and equipment. Phil rode down trail to survey the trail to the next projected camp site. Robbin, while in the process of getting his stock ready to ride with Phil, was kicked so elected to spend the day in camp.

The BCHI and trail crews were back in camp after long rides and the clearing of many down logs around 17:30. A second set of thunderstorms moved over the canyon so most took shelter in the old 44 cabin or in their tents. Dinner was delayed hoping the rain would abate, but it didn't. The crew ate grilled salmon and red potatoes around 19:00. It was mentioned by a couple of members of the trail crew that one of the members was not feeling well, and was going to skip dinner and get some rest.

Tuesday's plan was to start working the trail between 44 cabin and the next camp site on 45 creek a distance of about five miles. Phil had ridden it the

day before and indicated that there were fewer downfalls, but that the trail scratched out the year before through a land slide needed a lot of work before pack stock could use it. Phil offered to bring the trail crew lunch and it was agreed we would meet in the meadow about three miles down canyon at noon.



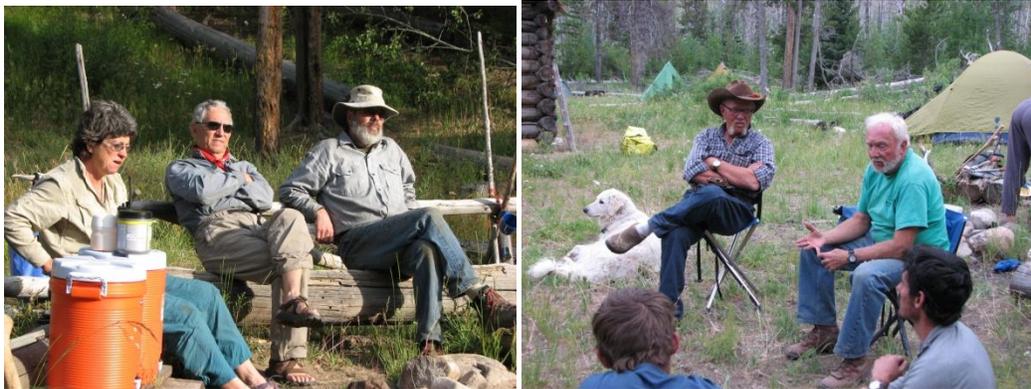
The BCHI crew cleaned up the breakfast dishes and saddled up for the ride, we wanted to graze our stock for a couple of hours. We were feeding hay cubes at 44 cabin, and had a limited amount. One of the trail crew members, Mary Kay, a woman in her 60's choose to stay in camp, still not feeling well after the work of the previous two days. She was not interested in eggs and sausage, but did drink some tea.



The ride to the lunch meadow was uneventful and the stock really enjoyed the knee deep mountain grasses. At noon the trail crew arrived, enjoyed lunch in the one shady spot in this section of trail. At lunch it was decided that the volunteers would finish the work on the trail between the meadow and 44 cabin, and the Selway-Bitterroot-Frank crew would survey the

landside and cut a large tree blocking the trail. The BCHI crew let our stock eat until 14:00 and then headed back to camp to start prepping dinner.

On the ride back to 44 cabin disaster almost struck, a log that crossed the trail at an angle with a splintered end got caught in the rigging of one of the stock's pack saddle. As the horse panicked and tried to move away from it, the log rotated pushed the horse off the trail into a bog. The heavy pack pad prevented impalement, but the ragged end of the log did cut the back leg as it came loose.



Arriving back in camp, a bit shaken from our encounter with the evil log, we unsaddled our stock and treated their wounds. Mary Kay wandered over to see what we were doing. We ask her how she was feeling and she indicated she was not feeling very well. She had tried to spend the day in the shade and to drink some electrolytes one of her friends had given her, but was having trouble keeping them down. While she was talking to us, she took a drink and shortly threw up.

We questioned her about the last 24 hours and found out that she had not been able to keep anything down, was feeling weak and dizzy. She said that the trail work had taken a lot more out of her than she expected. It appeared to Phil and me that Mary Kay was dehydrated and likely suffering heat exhaustion. It was also very clear that being miles inside this hot shade less canyon was not helping the situation.

***Dehydration: (mild) characterized by dry mucous membranes (lips & mouth), normal pulse, darkened urine, and mild thirst.***

***Heat Exhaustion: characterized by increased heart rate, headache, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, thirst***

We had a quick conference and broke out the radios to contact *State Comm.* and see if we could arrange a "Life Flight" pickup. We called out on both

*State Comm.* Channels, but got no response. A plan "B" was needed. We knew that Eric from the SBFCF radio could contact someone as he had checked in earlier this morning; his radio has a Forest Service channel, one we don't yet have. But Eric was down canyon and we were not sure when he would get back to camp. Mary Kay didn't want a flight out, but was willing to ride. Rob's Willow and Kestrel were saddled and the plan was to start riding to the trail head. We could keep in touch on the hour by radio as to progress and the evolving situation. When Eric got back to camp he would contact the Forest Service and ask them to contact Mary Kay's husband telling him she was being taken to the Cascade Hospital.



Mary collected the personal items she wanted to take with her; the rest was placed in her tent. Water bottles were filled and we started up the trail. For the first mile I led Kestrel. He doesn't like to leave his mare "Mestena" and she and the rest of my stock were complaining loudly about being left behind. After about a mile we could no longer hear them and Willow and Kestrel were into the job of walking out so the lead rope was secured to Mary Kay's saddle. It turns out that Mary Kay had ridden quite a bit as a girl and it came back quickly.

While she was not feeling well, she was enjoying the ride and talked about riding in the past and other volunteer projects she had worked on. We were making good time when the first check-in radio call was made. Eric was still not back in camp and I could still not reach *State Comm.* Hour two passed with us steadily moving up the canyon. Mary Kay was able to take small drinks of water and keeping it down. The second radio contact was made. Eric was still not in camp and I still could not contact *state Comm.*

Up till now we were on the canyon floor, an area that was burned by the 2002 fire, with little shade and the trail is dusty. The last third of the canyon trail starts the climb out and angles up the canyon wall. This area

didn't burn and the trees offered shade and a number of streams provide drinks for the stock. Mary Kay continued to talk and take small drinks and said she was feeling a bit better. We reached the canyon rim and the Snowshoe Cabin trail head at 19:00, three hours after we had left 44 cabin.

I tried *State Comm.* again and got an immediate response. I explained who I was and that I had a sixty-five year old woman with me that was showing symptoms of Heat Exhaustion and Dehydration. A number of questions were asked and answered and I requested that they contact Valley County EMT's and Rescue to meet us with an ambulance to transport Mary Kay to the Cascade Hospital.

The next question was where we should try and meet. *State Comm.* suggested we pick a location so we would not be driving around looking for each other. The Landmark Air Field was very close to where we parked our trailers and seemed like the perfect location; both groups should have no problem finding it.

Valley County Rescue was contacted and indicated they would be on site in 45 minutes. I indicated it would be a bit over an hour before we would be there as we still had a 50 minute ride to the truck. During the ride down the Sand Creek trail a number of radio calls were made, assessing progress, asking more questions and updating status. We also started hearing radio traffic with a Life Flight helicopter. Mary Kay said she hoped it was not for her.

At 20:00, four hours after we started our ride we tied our stock to the trailer, removed their saddles and jumped in the truck. The trip from the trail head to the air field took less than 5 minutes. When we got there a large group of cars and trucks were parked along the road trying to find out what was going on. On the air field sat an ambulance with lights flashing and a Life Flight chopper. It took me a couple of minutes to thread my way through the road block and drive onto the field.

The EMT's from both Valley County and Life Flight jumped to action. Mary Kay was whisked to the ambulance and their evaluation started. One of the pilots talked to me while they worked. After a short time it was determined that her condition was such that if she wanted, she had the choice of going by ambulance to Cascade or a helicopter ride to St. Al's. She choose the truck ride over the flight, Life Flight was released from the case and took off for their fight back to Boise. A few minutes later after filling me in on her condition and getting an IV running the ambulance left and so did I.

Back at the trail head, I let my stock graze and checked my trailer for something to eat and drink. I found some scones from Sunday's breakfast and a beer in the cooler. Not the grilled chicken that they were having back at 44 cabin.

Wednesday Morning: I woke with the sun starting to come in my trailer window; it was time to head back down the trail. I let the stock graze for a bit while I had a breakfast of another stale scone and a squirt. We were under way by 07:00. Early morning is a great time to see game and this morning was no exception. On the ride up Sand Creek trail I saw a number of mule deer, a marmot and a crane. Riding down canyon from Snowshoe Cabin I saw a dozen elk cows and calves.

As I was curving around the canyon wall I met one of the project volunteers hiking out. I ask what was going on, and he told me that Eric had held a meeting last night, declared the project a success and that we were going to pack out early. I figured I would get more details when I talked to Phil. What that information did tell me, was this was going to be another long day in the saddle. Over the next couple of hours I met the rest of the members of the project hiking out and at 11:00 rode into camp.

Phil, Robbin and Bill had everything packed up, most of the stock saddled and were ready when I was to start loading for the trek back to Snowshoe Cabin. After a quick wash up in 44 creek and refilling my water bottle, I was ready to start tying on loads. I switched horses, from Willow to Payette. Bill is 50 pounds lighter and I figured Willow needed a break.

We packed kestrel with 60 lbs mantie's that contained four backpacks. These were bulky and somewhat awkward loads and he is not an experienced pack horse. He was not a happy camper and proceeded for the next three hours to intentionally run into every log, rock or tree he could along the trail. His goal was to knock his load off, all he did was knock it off balance. This required me to get off and straighten it a number of time. In the end I found that instead of leading him, if I rode behind him I could re-direct him every time he made a bee-line for a tree, thus limit the number of time I had to get off. At the trail head I noticed that his breast collar was E string tight, and the saddle was at least 4 inches back from where it started.

We quickly unpacked the stock, enjoyed a beer from a cooler we had left at the trail head, which still had ice after five days, said goodbye to the members of the trail crew team and started the ride down Sand Creek trail to the trailers.

Once there, we let the stock graze, and Phil and I took a truck up to Snowshoe Cabin to pick up the gear we had unloaded there. Dinner that night was the steak's we had planned for Friday night. They were great! When the sun went down everyone headed for their sleeping bags. As I was drifting off to sleep, I did a quick calculation of the miles in the saddle I had covered since leaving the trailer on Sunday morning and it was a bit over 65. No wonder I was stiff and sore!

Thursday Morning: We packed up the trailers, loaded the stock and headed for Cascade. The plan was to let "Grandma" cook breakfast. She did a great job, and after paying our check, we all headed for our respective ranches.

Mary Kay:

**Subject:** Mary Kay here!

That was a good call you made! Thanks for making sure that I got the medical help that I really did need. I had received one bag of saline plus a little of a second bag by the time I reached Cascade Hospital, and I felt so much better. I also received medication to help with nausea, which did return the following morning. I believe I will be 100% very soon. I will view this as a positive experience because I certainly learned a great deal. I also got to ride again! Now that was an unexpected joy for I had nearly forgotten what that was like. I've a better perspective on trail work too. I think I'll be able to "see" what needs to be done much more clearly.

So, THANK YOU SO MUCH for your help.

I must stop my babble and sign up for Life Flight.

Mary Kay

To: Ron Parks

Subject: Mary Kay's Med-a-vac

I'm Mary Kay's husband and a retired fire captain from Ohio (did emergency medical work for years as part of my fire service). We moved to McCall 11 years ago. Please tell the horse guys "thanks" for me. From what I've heard from Mary Kay, they are one solid, prudent bunch of guys. The fellow who brought Mary out on horseback was a wise, good dude. I'll see that Mary sees this. Thanks again, Jim