

Horses! Slow Down! Stop!

The last camping trip of the year, for the Squaw Butte chapter was held on the weekend of October 3rd, 2015 at Boiling Springs on the Middle Fork of the Payette River. Four members signed up for this weekend, Janine, LouAnn, Shelly and Rob. Members started arriving at the camp site in early afternoon with the last arriving at 21:00 in the dark. A number of other campers were taking advantage of the good fall weather expected for the weekend, clear cold nights and warm days. The weatherman got the clear cold night right, the stars were spectacular, and in the morning there was frost on the windows.



We camped on the north side of the road where there was plenty of space and good locations for our high-lines. On Saturday morning as the over-flow camping area woke up, kids started appearing and saw the horses. They were shy, but with mom's or dad's came over to see and pet the horses. After a bit of public outreach, we packed up and started up the Middle Fork Trail.



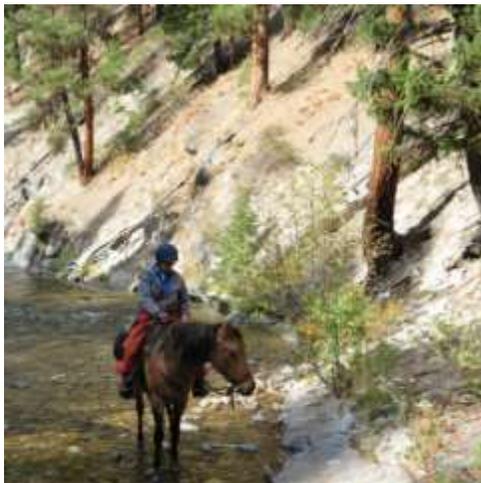
The Middle Fork trail is known for its many water crossings. The river was at a safe flow level. We crossed the river eighteen times during the ride and turned around after riding a bit over six miles. We could see the trail continuing, but it was crossing a crumbling steep hill side and dark clouds and thunder were filling the canyon.

We had not really expected much down fall on this trail, but we were wrong! Janine and Shelly were the sawyers on this trip and between them removed seven downed trees.



They both got to practice the skills they had learned at the USFS sawyer class they took in the spring. While the work was going on LouAnn was in charge of the

horses and Rob supervised the cutting and helped remove limbs and with moving of logs.





After many river crossings and downed trees we reached the place we generally stop for lunch. As it was 13:00 everyone was ready for a break.



Rob picked a questionable tree to lean against as Kestrel chooses that same tree to scratch on.





It started to rain lightly, and the clouds were building and getting darker so it was time to head back to the trailers. We were lucky it rained hard at the trailers but it had stopped by the time we arrived, so if we were wet it had more to do with splashing water on river crossings than it falling out of the sky.

Dinner was excellent, pork tenderloin and all the fixings. We enjoyed a camp fire around which we told stories and laugh a lot. Bed time was around 21:00 as it was getting frosty.

Sunday Morning was cold and foggy. There was ice covering the truck windows and the tables we had left out. Coffee and tea water was put on the stoves, the stock was feed and breakfast was prepared.

As we were saddling up for a ride on the Wet foot trail, the kids showed up again. Specifically they were visiting with Janine and Shelly. One of the bolder girl's ask if she could ride. As a parent was present and agreed, rides started and before long we had a large group of kids and parents taking rides and getting pictures taken with smart phone and iPads, doesn't anyone own a real camera any more?

Speaking of real camera's, mine had moisture between the lens and the filter producing these soft shots below!



The fun continued until 11:45 when we finally got started on our ride up the Wet Foot trail. This trail is totally miss-named as it is completely dry except for a small creek at about the halfway point where the trail joins a road for a bit.

The trail starts by going straight up a steep slope. In 2010 Squaw Butte had talked to the Emmett Ranger district about closing this section of trail and replacing it with some switch backs, but tight budgets and lack of trail crews in the following years put off that work, so we slogged up that steep climb. Once you get up the hill, the trail curves around the hill side in a big "C" and then turn onto a ridge line. The trail is about a foot wide and cut a crossed a 30 to 40 degree hill side with trees and bushes on the hill side.

Janine was leading the group with Shelly than LouAnn and I following. Above us we heard the sound of a motor cycle coming fast. We happed next could have resulted in a number of injuries or even the death of one or more members or stock. As Janine was leading the group, I will let her tell the story!

"Horses vs. dirt bikes on mountain trails:

If you know anybody who rides dirt bikes on multi-use trails, please pass this on. If you know dirt bikers who were riding the Wetfoot Trail at Boiling Springs up above Crouch today and were almost to the bottom of the trail between 12 and 12:30, they need to see this, because the one in the bright yellow outfit on the green Kawasaki (we think that's the bike he was on. it was hard to remember with all the excitement) need to know he almost caused a disaster.

Here's what happened: four riders and 6 horses were headed up this very steep trail and were on a very narrow trail across a steep side hill when we heard motorcycles in the distance. Rob had just 10 minutes before told us how motorcyclists like to ride UP the road, then come DOWN this steep trail at high speed. And sure enough, here they came. We, the horse group were almost to the top of the side hill trail where it made a hairpin turn onto the ridge. The biker was tearing down the ridge toward the hairpin curve, looking straight ahead trying judging how to maneuver the turn. I was in the lead of our group and as soon as I saw him, I started waving and yelling trying to get his attention to stop him before he came around the curve and plowed into us. He looked up and saw us just in time to skid to a stop right at the turn. I was about 20 feet from the turn, still trying to get him to turn around and go back up the trail, but instead of shutting down his bike, or getting off the trail to let us pass, he just sat there looking at us.

Our horse group were all stacked up one behind the other, on the narrow steep, side-hill trail with no place to go. I swear he was trying to figure out how to get around us, and I remember thinking, "Oh no, what are you going to do? Please don't try to go around us!" But he just sat there, belligerently not moving.

Kiger was okay with all this up until now, then the guy decided to turn around by spinning a cookie, and spewed dirt in Kiger's face. This caused Kiger to spin on the narrow trail, to the downhill side and he lounged off the trail. His spin caused me to lean to the outside of the spin and his downhill lounge threw me down hill. I remember thinking, "oh, it's a long ways down to the ground". I remember there were two branches I lit on that gave with my fall, it was a soft landing on a bed of pine needles, and that I hit my head and I was glad I had my helmet on.

When I stood up, the trail was above my head and I had to climb up hanging onto sticks and stuff to get up the hill to the trail. And I was cussing at the SOB on the bike the entire time. I guess after he spun around he also did a wheelie as he took off, but I was sort of doing my own wheelie and didn't see his.

So we stood there for a bit and took stock of ourselves, put a band-aid on my bleeding spot, and tried to determine if I was okay. I determined that I had hit my head but was probably fine to continue on, so we mounted back up and continued on. Then Rob's horse balked at something on the trail, I decided a 4 mile ride was too long, and we called it quits and went back to camp.

This could have been a terrible disaster, if that guy had come around that turn and plowed into us on our horses. It would probably have been a Life Flight moment!

Proper etiquette on a multi-use trail is that horses always have the right of way. Hikers should stop and step to the downhill side of the trail and let the horses pass. Motorcycles need to get off the trail, stop, and shut their bikes off. Bicyclists should stop and get off the trail, on the downhill side. Always talk to the equestrians so the horses recognize you as humans, because they have no idea what those contraptions are, and if you're a hiker with a backpack you look like a bear or a cougar or something. They think everything is a predator, especially if you are uphill from them.

These motorcyclists today did everything wrong. They were not watching for other trail users, they were going too fast, they did not get off the trail or shut the bike down, and he greatly compounded it all by revving up his bike, spewing dirt and riding like he did. We are all very lucky that there were not a lot of terrible injuries today. If there had been a family hiking with small children, that bike rider would not have seen them before he rounded that turn, and he would have run them all over. It could have been a terrible tragedy.

Please be observant and mindful of other trail users, especially horses. Our well being often times depends on the behavior of others!"

An email of the incident was sent to the Forest Service and hopefully Francis White the local law enforcement ranger knows these guys or at least keeps an eye out for them. Janine was pretty shook up from her head first flight down that slope and landing, but other than some very colorful bruises should recover. But it should never have happened. In the 16 years I have been riding these trails with BCHI, this is the first "BAD" experience I have had with back country motor cycle riders!

All made it home safely to our respective ranches and agree it was a good weekend.