

National Trails Day Squaw Butte Style



In celebration of the 2012 National Trails Day theme: “America’s Largest TRAILgating Party,” members of the Squaw Butte Back Country Horseman of Idaho set out to conquer a minute section of the 200,000 miles of America’s national trails system. Sixty feet of bog and waterlogged trail corduroy would challenge the small group of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers.

Set within the Payette National Forest along the base of Cuddy Mountain, Boundary Trail is an over-looked and under-utilized trail, according to Mike Mullin, PNF West Zone Recreation Specialist. The trail is open to hikers, motorbikes, mountain bikers and equestrians. Our mission for the weekend would focus on sixty feet of corduroy that spanned a section of bog

that had long since saturated, rendering the crossing unsuitable for hikers, bikers and horses alike.

This would be the first project for me as West Payette NF project coordinator. I wasn’t sure I’d even make the project, let alone coordinate it. I had spent the previous week and a half in Wyoming with the birth of my newest granddaughter. Apparently, the trail gods were on my side. The baby came a few days early at almost 10lbs – none too soon for my daughter. Twenty four hours before the project start date, I began the 12 hour drive toward home.

There was little to do but hook up the trailer and load my horse. The camper was already on since I’d been living in it for the last ten days in Wyoming. Rob had taken care of much of the coordination of things since I wasn’t sure I’d be back in time. It was probably a good thing – even if I hadn’t been out of town. I am new at this coordinating thing – and wasn’t sure I knew what to do exactly. I’d worked with Mike on a location for the project. We had gone up ahead of time to check out the area and see what was involved, but that was about it. Was I supposed to feed everyone? Was there adequate room for parking? Water for the horses? Graze? “The devil is in the details,” Rob would say.

Janine met at my place in Weiser about 2:00PM. Boundary Trailhead is just over 50 miles from my driveway. We arrived at the trailhead to find Robbin S. sitting by his trailer looking anything but happy. A mishap had occurred during the unloading of his big roan, Rigby. A jagged cut ran from just beneath the horses’ pole, down the center right of his forehead and



across toward the left eye. We gathered our arsenal of veterinary supply's and offered them to Robbin. I had Vetericyn, Bute in powdered form, Iodine and a Furocin free salve. Janine offered up a general antiseptic wash and a light nudge of support to get the horse to a vet. We were surprisingly able to get cell service. Robbin left a message with his vet and gave Rigby a dose of Bute paste. It was close to five o'clock in the afternoon. By the time Robbin loaded up and got on the road, he would be into an after-hours vet call. I gave Robbin the number to my vet clinic in Weiser. With quick directions on how to get there, we helped a shaken Robbin finish loading and sent him on his way. Fortunately for us, Robbin had the presence of mind to leave us with the ribs and corn-on-the-cob he had prepared for Saturday's dinner. Oh, we wouldn't have starved, but I doubt the rest of the crew would appreciate Beanie Weenies the way I do.

Friday night's dinner consisted of whatever Janine and I could scrounge from our campers. We managed to rummage up minestrone soup, chips, coleslaw and smores for desert. I had caught one of the worst head colds of my life while in Wyoming. I had downed every imaginable cold medication known to man. Nothing was working. I read the back of the Nyquil packaging, "Alcohol may intensify its effect." Hell yeah. I eagerly accepted a "glass" of Janine's "bag-o-wine" and downed it in record time. Had there been a table to support me, I'm afraid Rob may have had the unfortunate experience of witnessing me dancing upon it when he pulled into camp a couple hours later. Instead, I gathered up my supper dishes, giggled a fare-thee-well to my fellow members and staggered a not so straight line back to my camper for bed.



Saturday morning brought with it the smell of scrambled eggs, sausage and coffee as Rob puttered beneath the awning of his camp kitchen. This beats the heck out of oatmeal and a granola bar any day of the week! Doc Shannon's arrival the previous night would complete our crew. At least I think she arrived the previous night? I'm not entirely sure – seems the cold med and wine induced coma had a greater effect than I thought!

Later in the morning, Mike Mullin, our Forest Service contact, arrived in a white fleet rig. Mike would drive to the trailhead via a private road while Rob, Janine, Shannon and I would ride three miles from the trailhead to the project area. We geared up our horses and readied for the ride in. Rob would try out his new tool carriers. Large grey garbage can totes served to carry the shovels, axes and my soon to be best friend, the Pulaski.

Misty, Rob's little mustang pack horse, was less than thrilled about carrying the awkward and noisy load. The harder she bucked in a circle, the harder those totes crashed against her sides. After a few minor



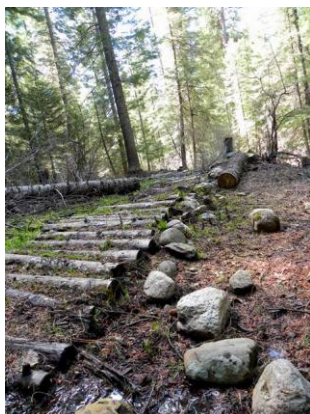
adjustments, the pack string settled in nicely as Rob lead the way.

A quarter of a mile into the ride and Janine's horse, One-Shot, began to balk just ahead of me on a steep section of trail. He refused to go forward and instead, attempted to back down the steep incline. Janine tried to encourage him to move forward when he began to rear. Shannon was directly behind me on her Arabian, Sar. The third or fourth rear and horse and rider bolted off the side of the steep incline. My horse, Jack, spun a dizzying 180 in the confusion and I lost track of Janine. By the time we whirled around again, Janine was rolling down the hill underneath a blur of hooves. Shannon and I bailed off our horses to assist Janine. Janine was not seriously hurt and had avoided being stepped on, thank goodness. Mounted once more, we attempted to navigate the steep slope. Again, One-Shot balked and began to go ballistic. Something was wrong – this was not natural behavior for this horse. With some discussion, Janine decided she would sit out this ride, take One-Shot back to camp and either hike in or we would send Mike after her in the truck. In the meantime, Bubba, Janine's mule, wandered aimlessly up and down the trail presumably wondering what the hell we were all up to. Shannon went after Bubba while I tied Jack and Sar. Janine needed help readjusting her saddle which kept slipping sideways. All of this would have been difficult enough, the steep terrain made it worse. We removed One-Shot's saddle and found the answer to his bizarre behavior. Two patches of raw scrapes across the paints back. The sores were horse bites that were not as healed as they looked earlier. The steep inclined causes the saddle and pad to rub, reopening the wounds.

Shannon had managed to capture Bubba. She would walk back with Janine, Bubba and One-Shot while I stayed with Jack and Sar. We would send Mike back in the truck to pick her up.

I squatted on my heels under a tree by Jack and waited for Shannon to return. It wasn't that far to camp, but the trail was steep and Shannon had already hiked all over the hillside chasing Bubba. I knew it might be awhile before she returned. I closed my eyes against the drowsy effects of the "non-drowsy" cold meds and hoped that Janine was ok. I knew from previous experience that Janine could be stoic when it came to her well-being. It was comforting to know that Shannon, a family practitioner, was escorting her back to camp.

Jack's knicker roused me from my sleepy doze. When we had not shown up at the project site within the expected time, Rob had come looking for us. Shannon arrived at almost the same moment that Rob crested the hill. We explained the situation to Rob, mounted up and started once again toward East Pine Creek where our project awaited.



Uh...that's not at all what I expected. Looking down at the work in front of us, I shook my head. I thought a crew was coming in ahead of us to remove the old corridor, trench the edges and lay the bumpers. I thought our part was to fill in the newly laid foundation with sand and gravel from the local area. I had either misunderstood the intended scope, or the scope had changed since my original visit to the site – for in front of me laid the entire corduroy intact. We would

need to remove the old logs, dig a trench on the high side, line it with large rocks and fill it all in with the sand and gravel from a creek bed 100 yards downstream. Apparently, the funds needed to pay the crew of teenagers to do the prep work had fallen through. No matter – work was work. It was National Trails Day damn it – and we were going to do our part in promoting the awareness of America’s trails and furthering the enhancement and use of those trails, even if it meant getting a little muddy.

It meant getting a lot muddy. The constant runoff from the hillside meant working in a giant mud puddle of primordial goo past your knees if you are Rob and further for the rest of us.

While Mike went after Janine, Rob, Shannon and I disassembled the old corduroy. It wasn’t long into the work when we knew we had to try something different. Fighting the constant goo and runoff was



getting us nowhere. Surely a computer geek, a physician and an engineer could come up with a more productive way to play in the mud. Rob’s ingenuity won out and we dug a temporary trench to divert the water away from the logs we needed to remove. Using the Pulaski, we pried each log from its mud-bogged resting place. The logs that were between the size of your arm or leg proved easy enough to remove – those that were bigger around than my waist took more convincing.



By the time Mike arrived with Janine, we had all the logs removed. We weren’t exactly sure what Mike had in mind for the design of the trench, so we had stopped there for fear we would end up moving rocks twice. With a few changes in the angle of the trench walls, we were ready to start hauling fill. Enter, the “Muck-Truck.” A 160cc commercial grade, four wheel drive, 5.5 hp, Tecumseh peerless transaxle power wheelbarrow with a ¼ ton carrying capacity that would have made Tim the Tool Man Taylor grunt, “Arooough.”



Our crew took turns arranging rock, widening and cleaning the trench, shoveling sand and operating the muck-truck. It was hard, dirty work that strained our backs and shoulders. Everyone was covered in mud from their boots to the tops of their head. Instead of

complaint, anytime I looked up from shoveling, hauling or digging, it was to gaze upon faces that seemed to be in perpetual grin from ear to ear. It was like watching a delightful bunch of kids playing in the mud.



Dinner was to die for. Rob finished preparing the ribs and corn that Robbin left, Janine had made a Jell-O salad, Shannon a delicious bean dip and I prepared a garden salad and beans, without weenies, I would like noted, thank you very much.

My cold was only getting worse and no amount of medicine seemed to help. Rob sent me to bed early with a dose of dissolvable Benadryl he warned tasted like shit. I didn't care what it tasted like, I just wanted to get a few hours of decent sleep I'd not had in a week. I crawled beneath my covers, fired up my kindle and read myself to sleep.

Rob once again had breakfast ready in the morning. I added a batch of fried potatoes and tortilla's. I have a theory that everything is better wrapped in a tortilla shell. Hmmm...I wonder what Beanie Weenies would taste like wrapped in a tortilla shell?

We bade farewell to Shannon as her and Sar pulled out of camp shortly after breakfast. Rob offered to do a little chainsaw training for Janine and I. The hillside just above our camp provided great opportunity for just that. The hill was littered with downfall. Rob picked various logs for us to practice on based on different tensions and level of difficulty. Two hours well spent, for sure.

After saw training, we saddled up and went on a short ride. Rob wanted to clear a downfall that had blocked the trail about halfway up the trail to the project site. Using a hand saw, he cut the

log back far enough to easily get around it.



The horses made quick work of the ride back to the trailers. Although this was an easier trip on them than their humans, they seemed as anxious to call it a weekend. I waved goodbye and

proceeded down the dusty dirt road toward Weiser. I wondered what the others thought of my first project that I semi-organized for the chapter. It didn't exactly turn out as I had planned, but it seems plans seldom do! I certainly learned from it. I learned that for my next project, I should plan to cook breakfast for everyone and that it should probably not include Beanie Weenies. I learned that it might be a good idea to get the scope of work in writing BEFORE you show up with a shovel. I learned that next to a good horse, a Pulaski might be a girl's best friend...and I learned that no matter what your age, you are never too old to play in the mud.