

# PARTNERSHIPS

By Janine Townsend

I recently had the opportunity to be on a pack team that packed in a volunteer group to clear trails. Squaw Butte Back Country Horsemen partnered with a group from Parks and Recreation to clear a trail up at Marble Creek, which is up over Monument Summit, past Stibnite. This section of trail happens to be part of the Idaho Centennial Trail system that stretches from the Idaho-Nevada border to the Idaho-Canada border.

SBBCH's side of the partnership was to pack in food and cooking facilities for a group of ten people who volunteer to clear trails. We would pack the food, etc, and they would each pack their own personal belongings, i.e. tent, sleeping bag, etc. Once at camp we (three of us from Back Country Horsemen) would cook and prepare the meals and have all the ingredients for them to make lunches to take down the trail; they would hike down the trail with all their tools and remove fallen trees and brush, or repair rock walls that had originally been built way back in the '30s (?) by CCC workers. To me, this partnership seemed ideal: us horse people could do our horse thing, and those hiker people could do the work of clearing trails, and give us a little break from our normal routine of riding and clearing trail as we go.

As it turned out, us horse people had to make two trips from the trail head to the first camp to get all the food for the week to camp. We ate very well---we had salad at every supper, creamer for our morning coffee, fresh fruit every day, deli meats and bread for lunches, and plenty of snacks for hungry trail-clearers. We stayed at the first camp, which was about 3 miles (an hour and a half ride, downhill) from the trailhead. As the crew worked their way down the trail, it became quite a distance for them to hike between camp and where the work was to be done on the trail, so on the third day we moved camp another 3 miles in, so they wouldn't have to spend half the day hiking to get to where the work was.

The partnership with the volunteers seemed to go pretty well. We got our system worked out for all the meals, and they were a very good group to be in camp with. Good camaraderie among all.

Us horse people had our own partnership going; we had to figure out how to get all of the perishable items and all the food into camp and how to pack all our own gear and the kitchen on three pack animals. Hence, two trips everywhere we went, and a lot of carrying of each other belongings in order to balance out loads. Two of us Back Country Horsemen are experienced packers and have their own way of doing things and packing loads; one of us is sort of a newbie who is trying to learn all that she can, and develop her own method of packing. No

two people have the same method or way of packing stuff; no two people have the same idea on how things should be done on the trail, or in camp. Between people packing stuff into the backcountry, it takes a lot of working together and give and take on everyone's part. And it takes patience and willingness to help each other out and do what's necessary for each other. This partnership was a learning experience for me; I not only learned about packing, I learned a lot about people and horses.

There is a Rite of Passage among Back Country Packers. It seems like everybody that's ever packed into the backcountry has a story to tell about "the time I had to walk out 8 miles after my animals". I swear it's like your folks, when they were little, having to walk 5 miles in the snow to school, and it was uphill both ways. Well, now I can say I walked out 6 miles after my horse and mule, who decided they didn't like that second camp and would just go on home now, thank you very much. So I hiked out after them, six miles and it seemed like it was uphill the whole way, but it was only uphill the last mile and a half; the rest was up and down. And rocky. And about ten creek crossings. I was hoping real hard that they'd stop at the first camp and graze. But no, I could tell by their tracks that they didn't even glance over at where they were used to grazing; it's straight on to the trucks. So I hiked and hiked and slogged through creeks, following two sets of hoof prints going 'upstream' from all the other hoof prints. But then I lost their tracks. They were no longer on the trail! I didn't know what else to do except keep hiking back to the trucks at the trail head, thinking maybe they'd gone cross-country. When I got to the trucks and trailers, there were no horses. I was beside myself thinking that my horses were lost—I was up on the top of a mountain looking down into a valley, wondering which draw they might have gone up, and how I was going to find them, if I ever found them. I was beginning to take stock of my resources and plan what to do next; it was about 7:00 in the evening and had taken me over 4 ½ hours to hike out, so I knew I would have to spend the night at the trucks. Then I heard 'clip-clop, clip-clop, chink clink', and looked around the trailer to see Phil leading my horse, with my mule moseying along behind. That cowboy on top of that tall horse leading those horses was the prettiest sight I've seen in a loooooong time! I couldn't keep the emotion out of my voice as I answered Phil's two questions: Yes, I was alright, and no, I hadn't drunk all his beer.

Well, to make a long story short.... My mule has tough feet, and wasn't feeling any pain, but my saddle horse was unshod, and was already getting a little sore on the way from the first camp to the second camp, because parts of the trail were total rock slides. When we got to the second camp I was glad to give One Shot a rest and let his feet recuperate. But his voluntary hike back to the trail head took its toll on his feet, so after riding from the trailhead back down to the first camp, I decided it would be best if I would just pack up and go home. One Shot was in no shape to go another 3 miles back into the second camp, and I needed to get myself out of

the wilderness and treat an injury suffered on the ride back down the hill, so we packed up and started the climb back up to the trailhead.

Of all the different types of partnerships that were in play that week, it's this partnership that is most meaningful to me: The partnership between me and my horse and mule. For the most part, those animals are willing to take me any place I want to go. Yes, they are horses, and don't have the power of reasoning that we do, so they can't figure out that walking out of camp by themselves isn't the best or proper thing to do. I don't fault them that; it was my mistake that allowed them to do that. But they are willing to do whatever I ask of them.

On the trip back out, One Shot was obviously tired and sore, and kept walking slower and slower and wanting to rest. So I finally got off and lead him to give him a break from carrying my weight, even though I was tired and sore as well. He would stop every few hundred yards to rest, then every hundred yards, and finally he looked at me with his big brown eyes, imploring me to not have to go any farther. I'd coax him another few yards and ask him for just a little ways farther. We did this time after time, and it seemed like the only reason he'd start up again is because I'd ask him to. I even considered unsaddling him, then coming back down with Bubba to get all the tack, but I couldn't bear to think about going up and down that mountain any more than necessary, so we struggled along. Eventually, I just let Bubba go, to tag along on his own, and somehow he ended up in front of One Shot and me. So I grabbed his tail and let him pull me up the hill, which didn't seem to faze him at all. Every once in a while I'd let go and he'd get ahead of me, and I'd wish I hadn't let go, but then he'd stop to eat, I'd catch up and grab on, and away we'd go again. And that is how we came out of the back country that day; Bubba pulling me with his tail, and me leading One Shot.

To me, that's what partnerships are all about; everybody working together to get the task accomplished. Sometimes you lead, sometimes you carry a heavier load, and sometimes you need to let another member of the partnership pull you along. Everybody plays a role, and those roles constantly shift. It's partnerships like this that get us through life, and out of the back country.