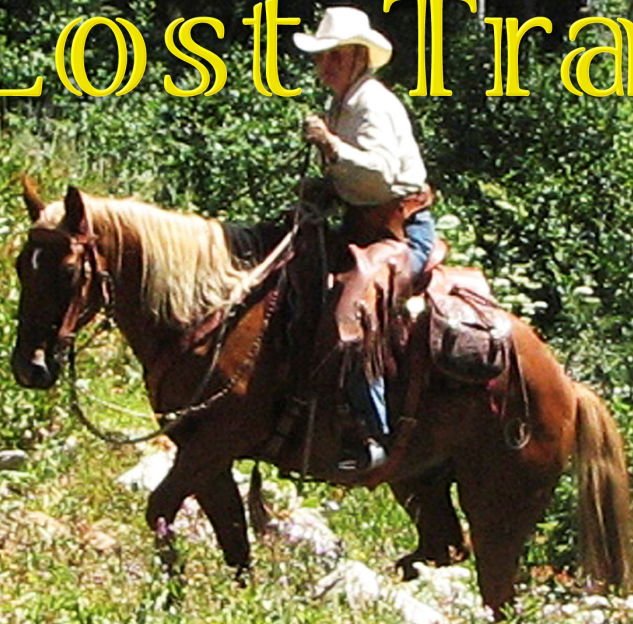


SQUAW BUTTE BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN

PO Box 293, Emmett, ID 83617

July, 2007

Finding the Lost Trail



THE DEVILS SLIDE BY THE DARK OF THE MOON & MORE

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by Robbin Schindele

Over the Fourth of July week my wife Sally and I camped at Jungle Creek on Council Mountain. We had chosen the spot 'cause we had been told how pretty the basins up near the summit are, there are three of them, Bucks, Lake and Granite. Though the map shows the trail to Bucks Basin leaving from exactly where our camp had been, we spent two days trying to find it and never did. We even had instructions from Rob Adams.

"Ride up through the meadow 'til you strike an old logging road. Go left on the road and then strike another old road heading up the mountain and you'll find the trail." We couldn't even find the way out of the meadow. But we did find the right road, though we didn't know it, a wholly different way. So when the July 28th Lightning Ridge project was cancelled because of the fires I emailed Rob and asked if he wanted to go up to Council Mountain and

show me the way to Bucks Basin instead. He said yes and so there we were back in the same spot on Jungle Creek. You can get there from both sides of the mountains, the Donnelly side or the Council side. In fact, it's a darn good road, for Idaho, that cuts through the mountains between the two towns. Sally and I had come the Council way because our place is west of Emmett and Rob was coming the Donnelly way 'cause his place is east of Emmett. We got there first and were saddled and waiting when he drove up. It was about 10:30 AM and the day was heating up already, even at 5,000 feet. He quickly saddled up and put the bags, saws and other tools on his mare Mesteña. "She hasn't done anything all summer but stand in a sprinkler so I thought she should come today." he said as he swung into the saddle. He rode by me and Sally and I followed towards the top of the meadow.

The same way we had gone on our first day of looking for the trail. There's an old road that goes that way and we had ridden it to the top, crossed Crystal Creek and wandered around up there without finding a thing. As we got near the place we had given up we encountered four head of cattle. They looked at us and headed away up the old road and when the road disappeared they went through a less brushy spot of willows with a boggy patch under it. Rob followed the cows and we followed Rob.

About 100 yards beyond that we encountered another old logging road and turned left. Sally and I had been on this road too in our search, but we had gotten there a whole different way. We rode down this about a quarter mile and passed an even older road heading up the mountain. Rob looked up it and kept on going. At the next such hint of a road he said, "I think this is it." And headed up it, it was pretty steep

and brushy but it had obviously been a road. Soon even those traces wore out but there was a suggestion of a trail so we followed it winding back and forth up the side of the mountain.

This area had been logged in the not too distant past and was all brush, few trees. A lot of this country belongs to Boise Cascade and is still active, logging is still going on, but there's a lot of the Payette National Forest too. Looking uphill it was easy to see where the boundary was and as we approached the trees Rob shouted "This is it, there's a blaze. We have found the trail."

As we rode into the under story of large old pines the temperature cooled and there by the blaze was a distinct and certain trail. In fact the trail from that point to Bucks Basin is pretty darn good. We did no sawing and the trail was easy to follow. It is a steady, uphill ride right up the side of the mountain. You're almost always in the shade, there are a few small streams to cross, most of them just wet spots after this hot summer and it's steep in some spots. But the tread is good with only a few rocky spots.

Once you enter Bucks Basin the story is a little different. The basin itself is a two tiered structure with scattered meadows and groves of pines and quakies. Here the trail is more indistinct and there are many cattle trails that look like

the real thing. To follow the "real" trail you have to watch for the rock cairns. Someone has built two and three foot high cairns that will guide you through to the other side.

Crystal Creek originates here and winds through the basin. It's a pretty enough spot with enough trees to make it cozy.

It had only taken a couple of hours to get up there and Rob's objective was actually Lake Basin. He had been there before and said it was worth the trouble so we kept going even though by all accounts we had run out of trail. The cairns had stopped and not much sign. Pointing indistinctly northeast Rob said, "We ride up over that saddle then down into Lake Basin. I know there's a trail high on the basin wall. That's how we got there before." So we set off to find it.

We wandered around for awhile in a generally northeastern direction. Pretty soon we found a trail and followed it. It soon petered out but we were higher on the basin wall and had been going in the right direction. For the next half hour we worked our way up the basin wall without benefit of trail. Here the mountain was mostly sagebrush and other low shrubs so the horses had easy going as we wound our way to the summit.

Then we were on the top of the saddle looking down into one of the prettiest little Alpine basins I have ever seen. High, steep rock walls on all sides, scattered

groves of trees here and there, a couple flowing creeks and the rest all lush mountain meadows with plenty of green, green grass, a really beautiful spot. We rested a bit and then rode along the ridge top to a well defined trail leading down into Lake Basin.

It was a short ride down on good trail and after crossing the small, clear creek we pulled up and let the horses free graze while we ate oranges and trail mix in the shade. A half an hour later we were back in the saddle heading up the way we had come down. But when we got to the top Rob took off to the west, the opposite way we had come to the ridge top. There was a trail, a pretty distinct one, so I followed and it stayed good right back into the upper tier of Bucks Basin. Now the upper and lower tiers of this basin are separated by a steep rock wall a couple hundred feet high. Our trail had led us to the upper level and continued heading over the south wall of the basin. I had seen that trail on the map and it goes to Cabin Creek, the next drainage over. We could get out that way but it was far, far from where we wanted to be. We also knew that there was a trail leading down to the lower level and back the way we had come. We just couldn't find it.

We rode back and forth a few times, looking for a trail down with no luck. Finally I took out my GPS and told Rob, "I marked the junction of these two trails as a waypoint before

we left home. Its telling me the trail down meets this trail 300 feet back the way we came. Let's go over there and look for it." So we did and just before we got there we found a trail marker and started down. The trail is indistinct at best and it was blocked by a brushy limbed fallen tree. We worked around it and pretty much worked around the whole trip to the lower level making our own trail through the brush. But as we got most of the way down we again picked up a good trail. We followed it for a while and I spotted something obviously mad made in a bare spot. "What's that?" I said as we got nearer, "Looks like an arrow."

Rob was there first, "It's the old signs." It was, old trail marker and direction signs lying on the their sides in the dirt, their posts rotted away at ground level, any trace of paint long gone. We rode on.

As usual we made good time heading back the horses recognizing the way home. When we got to the edge of the forest and entered Boise Cascade land again we headed straight down on yet another old, indistinct logging road. Not the same one we had rode in on and much steeper but we made it to the least old road and then back to the meadow and our trailers. It was hot down there. According to my GPS we had

traveled nearly 3,000 vertical feet and the difference in temperature was palpable. We unloaded my dogs from my trailer and took the horses to water in the Weiser River. Shady and cooler yet 'cause of the water we sat comfortable as they drank their fill. Back at the trailers we unsaddled and talked about the day. We all enjoy that sort of a ride, where half of it is just riding around trying to get where you want to go. Trying to find a way, any way to a place in the back country you want to be. Its fun and a challenge, it's good for the minds and skills of both horse and rider.



Lake Basin

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By Rob Adams

On June second, after completing the national trails day project and a great steak dinner provided by the Emmett Rangers, members of Squaw Butte BCH were sitting around the campfire. Ranger Francis White was talking about the Middle Fork of the Payette area, the fires from last August and various projects and trails he had been working on or were in the queue for this year. Francis mentioned that he had a project he had been working on during his off time. The project was a trail that starts just north of the Silver Creek guard station and goes through some old growth forest before climbing a ridge and joining the Tranquil Basin / Peace Creek trail. We asked for more details. Francis said he had gotten a lot of work done on it last year because the fire crews used the trail as a fire line during the August fires. As it turned out, the fires didn't get that far north so the old growth area was not burned. He said that there were between two

and three miles of trail yet to rehab. We asked Francis if he would like us to help finish this trail project.



Rob Adams

We arranged to meet Francis at the Peace Creek trail head on Saturday July 14 for detailed information about the Devil's slide trail and to start working on the trail from the North end. Ellen and Charles arrived there on Friday night, Kelley Creamer and Rob Adams arrived on Saturday morning. Francis arrived around 8:30 and told us that he could not work with us on Saturday due to fires. He

gave us detailed information and told us he would meet the group where the trail started by the guard station. After getting saddled up and the tools packed, we rode the mile or so from the trail head to the guard station along a gravel road. We were not exactly sure where the trail started as it doesn't have a sign yet. We started investigating likely spots and did find a couple of well defined trails, but they were not the right one. After about 30 minutes Francis found us and got us pointed at the right trail.

The lower part of Devil's Slide trail is a comfortable ride through an old growth forest with large fir and ponderosa pine, some meadow and an easy to follow trail. The sun was shaded, the air cool and a light breeze was blowing. It was perfect. Francis had said we would cross a stream and that would be the last water on the trail. There was not too much work to do on this lower section. We removed some downfall and trimmed some limbs that overhung the trail. After



Sally Schindele

crossing the stream the trail starts its climb. This is the section of the trail that we now refer to as the slide. It is approximately a one mile 20 to 30 degree climb. This is where you find out if your stock is in shape or, if you choose to get off and lead your horse, if you are.

This section of trail goes up the spine of a ridge, with no switch backs. After this climb, we stopped for some lunch and to give our stock a rest. We then worked on the trail for another mile, still climbing. Then, hot and dirty, the team turned around and rode back to the campground. I can tell you going down the slide is a lot easier than going up.

Sally Schindele greeted us at the campground. She had gotten in about noon and had a nice ride on the Peace Creek trail. We shared tales of the "Oh my goodness" aspects of the day's ride. We had a nice dinner of glazed pork tenderloin, rice, and pasta salad. We spent some time around the cold campfire (burning ban) talking and reading and went to bed as the sun was setting.

Sunday morning was clear and cool. A hearty breakfast of sausage,

potatoes, cheesy scrambled eggs, and fruit was first on our agenda. Francis and Jim Ciardelli joined us for melon and coffee. We saddled up the stock, packed the tools and headed up Peace Creek trail to work the Devil's slide trail from the top end. Jim was aboard Kestrel (Adams) and Francis was well mounted on Amber (Knapp-Lox). Rob led Moosely with his customary load of chain saws, fuel, trail signs, wedges, hammers, and the kitchen sink. Sally brought Waco (the naughty mule) to teach her horse John W how to lead. The Peace Creek trail had changed quite a bit in the few weeks since we had last ridden it. A lot more green had entered the burned areas. The forest has really dried out also, so the trail was noticeably dusty. We rode to the top of the ridge, taking the right fork in the trail. This gave a good view of Tranquil Basin and Deadwood Reservoir.

We stopped for a snack and to give the stock a break. Francis scouted around for a connection back to the main trail. Finding none, we rode back to where the trail had forked, placed a couple of trail signs and rode to the saddle that you would cross going to the Basin.



Jim Ciardelli



Francis White

The Devil's Slide trail forks off this saddle. We added a couple more signs and then the work really began. For the next four hours and three or four miles, we walked a lot more than we rode. We removed a lot of burnt downfall, cut a lot of small heat bent trees that crossed the trail, added blazes and performed all the other tasks that rebuilding a long neglected trail passing through a burn area requires.

Someone watching from the hill side would have seen a group of people covered with dust and soot, walking along with tools, being followed by a string of nine horses with a rider at each end. Along with other trail restoration tasks Ellen and Sally kept the stock with us, the rest of us swapping saw duty and limb trimming. During the day we fueled two chain saws three times. That is a lot of cutting. About 16:00 we came to the section of trail we had worked on Saturday. We loaded up the tools, tightened the cinches and rode down the slide. Remember that stream I mentioned. Our stock was so happy to see that stream after coming down the slide. They all

Squaw Butte Back Country Horsemen

tanked up and the humans washed some of the dust and soot off.

The ride out was uneventful except for one incident. We had gotten to the gravel road and were riding back to camp. Some horse flies were buzzing around; every one was tired and just relaxing in their saddles. Nova, Kelley Creamers horse exploded. Not so much bucking as more cutting. All the action was in his front feet. On the third or fourth bounce Kelley came off and landed on his back. The impact knocked the wind out of

him. Francis was at his side in a flash and I gathered the stock. After some assessment Kelley got to his feet and sort of walked it off. Francis called a ranger patrolling in a truck that picked Kelley up and took him back to camp. Sally further checked him out and it was determined he was in good enough shape to drive himself home.

After a poor night's sleep Kelley checked himself into the Mountain Home AFB hospital. They did an x-

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ray and determined that he had three broken ribs and a partially collapsed lung. They gave him some great drugs, re-inflated his lung and he went home Wednesday afternoon.

If you're camping at Peace Creek and want to take a great ride, check out the Peace creek – Devil's slide loop, you will enjoy the ride.



It has been a while since I have written about my adventures. As readers of my musings have noted in the past, my role when we go to the mountains is to carry stuff, for trail work or camping. While my buddies are "riding horses", they tease me, saying that all I am is a "pack horse". I know that Rob really values my work, but I have always hoped that I would get a chance to be a "riding horse" too.

Earlier this summer, after Joanne's mare got hurt I got my chance, but as I had no experience, Joanna and I had a bit of trouble communicating with each other. I found out that a "riding horse" is not the same as being on "autopilot" when packing. There all I have to do is make sure I keep up with my herd buddies, stay on the trail and take care of my load. As a riding horse, you have to do a lot more, like go where the human wants, lead the group or go alone, and sometimes trot or lope and of course stop when they want to. Riders don't seem content to just follow the tail in front of you.

Rob wanted me to become more versatile and knew I wanted to learn so he arranged that I could stay at Cassie Nielsen's ranch for a couple of weeks. First I want to say that a couple of unfriendly horses live there and tried to pick on me through the fence. I tried to give as good as I got, and the hide I lost will grow back.

Cassie and I are great buddies. She took me on a number of really fun rides, taught me what various cues mean, and how to run, well trot barrels. I hope I get to compete in the Packers Play Day in October. We went to the Owyhee's one day and I got to lead the group, it sure was fun, and on another ride, we when loping across the pasture. That is something I never get to do while packing! When Rob and Linda came to pick me up, Cassie and I showed them some of the things I learned, including me doing barrels and my great stop. To show how much I had learned, Cassie rode me bareback which felt kind of funny, but was just like my ancestors were ridden by the Indians in Nevada on the reservations that my parents came from.



Presidential Ponderings

Dear Members,

I can not believe it is August already. The summer is simply flying by. Of course, I am still in the June timeframe; when it was somewhat cooler as well. Our chapter has not been shirking the hot weather, though.

For National Trails Day in June, Charles, Robbin, and I got our Sawyer B certification from the Forest Service. That means we can fall standing trees. The training was GREAT and was provided by the Emmett Ranger District personnel. It is really fascinating how one can use the physics of the process to control the felling. Since I was so fascinated with the process (I am a process engineer in my work), I'm going to relay the process here. That also helps me remember it for next time. You look at the tree and determine its natural lean. You also choose 2 escape routes, each at 45 degrees to the direction you will fall the tree. Safety is a huge factor.

Saws can be replaced, we cannot. And, we are only volunteers. We need to assess the situation carefully and act in accordance with our training and our comfort level. We were 'forced' to cut from only one side of the tree; to practice for that inevitable time we would NEED to cut from only one side. The first cut is horizontal to the ground. Since the saws were heavy, we are not in the peak of physical condition, and it was hot, we were not trying to leave 12" stumps. We can always go back and clean up the stump. The main point was to be able to control the saw with minimal fatigue. I learned some good techniques, since I do not have the upper body strength to hold such a heavy saw such as placing my elbow on my bent knee to help hold the saw level. First, you sink the dogs in at 1/3 of the diameter of the tree. Then you allow the saw to cut in until the gunning sight lines up with where you want the tree to fall. Make sure the cut is horizontal; that was difficult with such heavy saws. The saws we have on loan from the FS for this season are at least 1/3 smaller than what we used for this certification. Then you make an angle cut from above to meet that horizontal cut EXACTLY. The exactness of that angle is very important. If inexact, it will cause the face to close prematurely and the holding wood will be broken behind the closure. A bad thing. Felling control will be lost and stump kick back is highly likely. Placing a small stick in the corner of the far horizontal cut helps you line the saw up for exactness. Once the dogs were set and the cut committed, this cut was not too bad as gravity took over and helped pull the saw through the wood. The back cut starts 2" up and 2" away from the initial horizontal cut. That 2" square is the holding wood that allows for control of the fall. Maintaining that holding wood is the key to safe and effective felling. Set the dogs just behind that mark so that the saw cuts exactly at the 2" mark. Allow the saw to walk around until the gunning sights line up with where you want the tree to fall. The tree should begin to fall. Remove your saw. If the tree doesn't start to fall, use wedges. You should no have to cut any more. All 3 of us felled 3 trees that day. We each had to choose our own trees. I was trying to choose trees that I did not have to clear other trees out in order to fell it and that were not greater than 15" in diameter. That saw was heavy. The tree I chose last was one that would soon come down over the Peace Creek trail. However, I made the mistake of (1) choosing that tree, and (2) choosing it last when I was tired. It came down exactly where I wanted it and exactly across the trail. I then had to cut it up in

pieces that could be removed from the trail. I made a lot of work for myself. All in all, though, it was fabulous training and I am glad I did it. I learned a lot.

So now that I have either bored you to tears over the details of basic felling or you are laughing so hysterically you can't catch your breath, let me continue with this tale. Charles and I attended the second Peace Creek work weekend where we were to work on Francis' trail – Devil's Slide. Well, Friday eve, one of the first things we neophytes said to Francis is that we wanted to 'practice' our felling technique and would he please give us trees to fell Saturday and Sunday. He, wise man that he is, said little in response to that request. We however, did not understand how profound his silence was. After Saturday's vertical ride (of course my horse refused to move and even refused to be led, so I had to walk up and down the slide) and hot, sooty trail clearing we wisely kept our respective mouths shut for Sunday.

On another note and abruptly changing subjects, our chapter is going to put the newsletter in our www.sbbchidaho.org website each month and not send a hardcopy to folks that, according to our records, have at least an email address – presupposing with that internet access. Other chapters are moving that way and we thought we might pilot this concept. We will continue to send hard copies to our gracious advertisers for display at their respective businesses, the other chapters (since we do print in color), any of our members who do not have an email address, and any of our other members who request it. You only have to request a hardcopy once and you will receive it for the rest of the year. If you have a dial up connection, I strongly suggest that you will want to receive a hard copy mailed to you. Just contact Robbin (365-2373 or robbinschindele@yahoo.com) or me (398-7279 or spirithorse@gotvi.net) to receive a hard copy via the mail. As always, I do welcome your comments, criticisms, suggestions, and feedback regarding providing our newsletter on line.

One final note, I did send out a draft proposal of a knowledge matrix for skills within our chapter membership. I did not receive any correction, additions, or comments so I am going to assume it is OK as published. Please contact me if you would like a hard copy version of it. I am hesitant to publish it on our website for privacy reasons. As I receive updates, I'll send updates out via email. Updates will come hardcopy to those that have requested hardcopies of our newsletter, list, etc.

As always, I welcome feedback, input, concerns, criticisms, ideas for meeting speakers, and general thoughts. I will soon be soliciting volunteers for our annual co-sponsored ride to benefit the Gem/Boise 4-H Horse Program. I'll have the details of how you can help soon and I hope you will help. Today's 4-H our some of tomorrow's BCH members.

See ya on the trail,
Ellen



MORE ON THE LOST TRAIL

The pink line on this image shows the trail to Bucks Basin as indicated on the map. The white line is the path we actually rode. Where the white line extends beyond the end of the pink line indicated our path into and out of Lake Basin.



By Phil Ryan

This July, I loaded my animals and headed to Wyoming for a two-week pack trip. My friend, Perry Kaufman lives in Riverton, Wyoming on a small ranch and I've packed with him several times in the Wind River Mountains. This year, we headed for North Central Wyoming and the Big Horn Mountain Range. Our first pack trip lasted three days where we fished lakes for Cutthroat Trout. The second day it rained and hailed so hard it covered the ground like snow. The poor horses had no cover so they dropped their heads and turned their backs to the storm. The thunder and lightning lasted well into the night, but the next day was bright and sunny. The horses weren't the worse for wear.

We packed out at the end of three days and headed for the

2007 Wyoming BCH Rendezvous which was held 14 miles east of Bear Lodge in the north end of the Big Horns. Wyoming BCH has been putting on a three day rendezvous for years instead of a state convention so I wanted to see if it might be something that the Idaho BCH might want to do. The event was July 20th through July 22nd in the Bighorn National Forest. Wyoming's Cloud Peak Chapter was the host and the cost was \$40.00 which paid for a catered dinner Saturday evening and a catered breakfast Sunday morning. Everyone started arriving Friday evening and my friend introduced me to most of the 89 guests, at least the ones he knew. There were BCH members from Wyoming, South Dakota, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas and Idaho. The person driving the farthest was from Kansas, 1040 miles away!

Saturday morning everyone was saddled and groups rode in every direction, to timbered peaks, grassy meadows and rocky canyons. That evening door prizes and raffles were held after a great BBQ dinner. They also had some great entertainment on Saturday night with cowboy singer Jim Ainer and cowboy poet Charlie Cook. They both are true western cowboys and told many stories of their younger days punching cows in the Big Horn Mountains. Everyone had a great time and we all headed to our trailers or tents filled with the knowledge that there is still room in this country for cowboys.

The Big Horn National Forest representative also attended. Her name is Sherri Jones and, wouldn't you know it, she spent time in Idaho in the Locksaw area. She knows our State

Chair, Raenette Didier and her husband Steve and we had a great chat. I also met the past head of BCHA, Al Sammons and got to ride with him Saturday. It seems that Wyoming's concerns about BCH and those of Idaho's are pretty much the same, new blood, more participation, and more funding.

On Sunday morning many people rode again but everyone broke camp by noon and headed their separate ways. My friend Perry and I headed back to Riverton, cleaned up and the next morning we were on the road to Brooks Lake in the Absaroka Mountains of the Washakie National Forest. We rode the Continental Divide trail from Brooks Lake to the South Fork of the Buffalo Fork River. The trails were quite good and the switch backs made travel for the horses easy. The first night we camped at Nawlin Meadows. The grass

was knee deep and there were no bugs! Oh ya, we were now eating Marybeth's famous meals from her company. Great vittles to come back to at night after a busy day. The next morning we packed up and rode to Pendergraft Meadows just below Pendergraft Peak. We made camp, high lined the pack animals and then rode to some lakes to try our hand at catching fish. No luck, but I did catch some Brook Trout in the Buffalo Fork River that evening. The next day we rested the stock and ourselves. I'm finding out that at 9600 feet elevation, I seem to wear out faster than I used to.

Our fourth day we headed up the Buffalo Fork River where we met the packer for the area. Now I've seen packer camps before, but this one was like a small city. We headed up the river and over the pass to Cub Creek. There we got some wonderful views of the

Absaroka Range. The sheer vertical cliffs of the Mountains reminded me of pictures I've seen of the China Wall in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Did I mention the rain? Well, it poured...off and on...for two days! Maybe the rest of the west is in a drought but the mountains of Wyoming are lush and green. Anyway, we saddled up wet horses and packs and sloshed our way out to the trailhead the next day. Thank goodness the trails were well maintained and we didn't have any difficulty other than just lots of mud. The five day loop trip was about 40 miles, good exercise for the horses. I made it home Friday evening, that was eight hours in the trailer for the horses but all is well. I would highly recommend this ride for everyone if you every get the chance.



West Mountain Weekend-Saturday, August 11, 2007- Poison Creek / Squaw Creek Trails

Be ready to ride by 09:30 Saturday Morning

Pot Luck dinner Saturday, Saturday & Sunday Breakfasts are communal. (Provide your own lunches for the trail, carry plenty of water.) Camping weekend with two trail rides. Trail restoration / maintenance of West Mountain north trail Saturday, fun ride on Poison Creek trail on Sunday. [DIRECTIONS](#) [PICTURES FROM OTHER TRIPS](#)

Trail Weekend-Saturday, August 25, 2007- Wilson Corral / Gabe's Peak (loop ride)

Be ready to ride by 09:30 Saturday Morning

Pot Luck dinner Saturday, Saturday & Sunday Breakfasts are communal. (Provide your own lunches for the trail, carry plenty of water.) Camping weekend at the Wilson Corral trail head. We will be doing one of the better loop rides on Saturday. Up the Wilson Corral trail and down the Gabe's Peak trail. [DIRECTIONS](#)



by Robbin Schindele

It was the last day of June, it was 9:30 PM on a warm Saturday night, and in very unusual fashion I led my saddled horse into the trailer. Sally followed with hers, closed the door and stood back to check the trailer lights. She climbed inside the cab and off we went for Squaw Butte's first ever Full Moon ride. As ever SBBCH projects coordinator Rob Adams' quest for new and fun things to do had led us to this.

We headed down Highway 52 towards Emmett just as the sun was settling behind the foothills in the west. The idea was to get to the trail on Brad Little's land east of the Gem County Cycle Park just as the light began to fade. Final preparations and grouping up should take us to dark and by the time we would

get on the trail as June's full moon would be rising in the southeast. Good plan, good fun, many people have never ridden at night, many horses have never been ridden at night, and this was a good, easy and familiar place to do it for the first time.

As I drove into the parking area I spotted Rob in the headlights. He came up to the window and said, "Am I glad to see you. There's a ton of people here and I don't know any of them." Ahead I could see ten or fifteen trailers parked in the sagebrush and more were coming in behind me. It seems the idea of a night ride had appealed greatly to our 4H friends as well. I recognized a few rigs, a few faces.

As we unloaded I saw the Howard's rig parking off a ways. There were people all

around us saddling up or in the saddle already, a palpable buzz of excitement was in the air.

All Sally and I had to do was cinch up and slip on steering wheels so we were soon in the saddle as well. I rode over and chatted with the Bobs and Karen Farnese as they got ready, then rode out to the edge of the parking area towards the trail. There were already a bunch of people on horseback waiting there. Rob came up and said, "Robbin why don't you lead off the first bunch and I'll follow with another."

So I did, hollering to the waiting bunch, "Alright folks, let's ride." They followed.

The trail starts about a quarter mile after crossing the road from the parking spot, by the time we got there the Bob's and Karen had slid by me so I hung back to watch for stragglers or

problems. By now it was full dark, you couldn't see anybody exactly, just indistinct shapes a darker shade of black than the night you knew were horses and riders 'cause they were moving. The sounds of hooves on sand, horses breathing, creaking leather and the smell of horses were more informative than anything you could see.

Everyone had been advised to bring headlamps or flashlights. But some people had been more clever than that, they had those glowing emergency light sticks taped to their breast collars and cantles. So among the dark moving shapes, eerie green, pink and orange lights flickered and shifted through the dark at different heights, with erratic motions, like giant one winged fireflies.

The trail starts in a deep narrow draw, barely wide enough to a horse to move through. It winds between the foothills in meandering washout fashion. The sky was a deep, hard indigo blue, the stars coming on slowly as the last light faded from the sky. The hills were a soft, inky black and seemed closer than they were. People talked and laughed but quietly, the dark seeming to press their words back into them.

The trail runs on like this for about a mile then begins to rise. The closeness of the draw fell away and there was a brightening glow behind the hill ahead. Mostly you felt the angle in your saddle bones as the

horses started up a fairly steep climb. Being in the back I soon heard a holler, then a whoop and louder excited chatter from ahead of me. When I topped the rise there it was, the full moon looking bigger, brighter and closer than it does from the familiarity of your front porch. The group stopped and bunched up talking about how cool it was, how exciting and fun the riding was. I heard someone ask "Where to now."

I answered, "Bear to the left across the top of this hill, we'll drop down some then to the top of the next hill." It should be easy cause you could see the trail in the moon light. So we moved on again people talking louder now that we were in the open and could see ranch yard lights and an occasional pair of headlights off in the distance. But the loom, that glow in the sky cities make, of Boise was overshadowed by the moonbeams and you couldn't even tell it was there. When we did get to the top of the next hill you could see even farther and because it was dark it seemed forever. Again we stopped until someone asked again, "Where now?"

Having appointed myself guide I said, "We can go down here and once at the bottom just follow the canyon back to the road to the trailers. Or we can ride along the ridge top for another mile, mile and a half, and go down there."

Someone answered "We came for the moon. Let's stay up top."

"Okay by me." I replied. "Lead on Bob." And we started away again.

It was a warm evening, a light breeze blowing there on the ridgetop and Pancho walked along like always following quietly. Once Sally's horse John sounded off looking for him, not loud, but low and kind of personal like. Pancho had answered the same way. Night riding is different 'cause, of course, you can't see much. You kind of feel your way through your horse, I believe you ride more balanced, more sensitively. You're letting the horse guide you and you're not constantly giving off little signals of anticipation. You're pretty much "just along for the ride."

When we got to the end of the ridge we started down on a two-track road. This part of the trail is safe and wide but it is steep. There's a little sliding involved sometimes and I saw a few headlights snap on about halfway down. But every one got to the bottom OK and from there it's a short ride in the canyon bottom and then onto the road and a half mile to the trailers. We had been the first bunch to leave so we were first back. People started to dismount, trailer their stock but I was pumped up, having a good time. I stayed aboard and rode around talking to people.

In awhile Rob rode up and said. "Our group did just fine but I think there are some people

Squaw Butte Back Country Horsemen

behind us and I'm not sure who or where."

I said, "I'll go take a look." and headed Pancho toward the road. I had just reached it when a group came out of the dark towards me. I recognized Erica Webb's white horse and asked. "Erica are you the last bunch?"

"Yeah."

"You got everybody you left with?"

"Yeah, we're all fine."

"Great!" I shouted and turned Pancho for the trailer. By the time we got unsaddled, loaded and drove home it was after 1:00 AM. It was a great ride,

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fun, challenging and exciting, and just about the only thing I know worth staying up that late for. Just about.



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