



Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

# Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

September 2023

## President's Message



John Nelson

You never know how things will turn out.

Over Labor Day weekend, I had the bright idea to suggest that we go for a nice ride, and for some reason I thought things might not be as busy over on the other side of the Divide at Trout Creek. When we got to the trailhead it was busy, and finding a place to park the trailer was tough, so we ended up pulling through and back out on the highway. We went down the highway a ways and ended up turning around and going back to the Trout Creek Trailhead because we saw someone pull out of there. We finagled a bad parking spot and got the horses out between cars and a Mercedes camper bus, started to saddle up

and thought “this is crazy,” so we started to get ready to load back up and go somewhere else—or home.

About then, as I was grouching pretty loud about things, a pickup truck pulled through and two people got out and walked toward us. We said hi, while the woman started saying “Oh, Oh” as she looked at the horses, walking right up to them and stroking their faces. Our horses were okay with this for the most part, and the woman kept saying “Oh, Oh” with a huge smile on her face. The man then told us they are from Colorado Springs and that his wife is recovering from two cerebral hemorrhages. He said she was slowly recovering, and while her thinking functions are doing better, her speech is only very slowly coming back. We stood there and chatted for the better part of half an hour. While her speech is impaired, she spoke volumes with her smile and tender caressing of the horses. They then went for a short hike, and we drove home...with me not grouching so much.

Listen, I won't bother to tell you the moral of this story because you know it. Feel lucky, wherever and whatever your situation. I hope to see you out on the trail this fall. The leaves ought to be good!

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## Mark Your Calendars

### Oct. 16 General Meeting

**Time:** Potluck 6 p.m.; general meeting 6:45 p.m.

**Location:** United Methodist Church, 434 Lewis St.

## Fall Color Ride Planned Oct. 7

San Juan Back Country Horsemen have the opportunity to ride with new and old friends and welcome the fall season at the annual SJBCH Fall Colors Ride on Oct. 7.

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**(Fall Color Ride cont.'d)**

Members can choose to ride either the Lower Weminuche Trail or Burro Park Loop, which are accessed by a common parking area about 22 miles north of town on Piedra Road. (See directions below.)

Riders need to be saddled and ready to hit the trails at 9 a.m. After the ride, members will be treated to grilled burgers with all the trimmings around noon. Members are asked to bring a side dish or dessert to share and also should bring their own chairs and beverages.

**Please RSVP to Color Ride organizer Annie Pack (210-215-9566) so the chefs know how many burgers to grill.**

**Directions for Color Ride:**

- Take Piedra Road (Forest Service Road 631) from Hwy 160 for about 22 miles
- Go past FS Road 640 (to Williams Creek Reservoir) about 1/2 mile, and parking will be on the left.

## Guest Speaker Shares Search and Rescue Tips and Info

**By Annie Pack**

Our speaker this month was Stan Okazaki. I'm sorry if you couldn't make it to this meeting, as he was very informative and gave the group lots of information on what happens when the call comes in for help.

Did you know that there are only three paid employees in Upper San Juan Search and Rescue? Well, believe it or not, that's it! They run a well-orchestrated team of 50 volunteers, however. The three employees are deputized and carry badges and firearms. Their duties include responding to lightning and grass fires, bomb threats and, sadly, body recoveries. The mountains are very unforgiving at times.

Stan discussed the importance of carrying satellite phones (such as Garmin inReach). Once that little red SOS button is activated, the call is received and routed to his department. Important details need to be to the point and concise and should include location, the victim's age and preparedness of the individual. How long ago did you hear from them? Where did they park, as sometimes they may drive to another trailhead and may not be lost at all, just in a different location.

If you are with an individual who gets hurt, describe the situation. Keep the patient still if at all possible until the team arrives so as to not cause further injury. At that point, they will assess how to transport the patient out. If you have called in and then self-rescue, please call them back so they don't waste valuable time. They also cover Hinsdale and Mineral counties—that's a lot of area! Now here's something that we learned, if a helicopter is called in and they drop you at trailhead, there is no charge. It's when they bring you to a medical center that the charge can be a real whopper. It was mentioned by a member that

Garmin offers insurance coverage up to \$50,000 for air flights in these situations for approximately \$30 per year, which is tagged onto your plan. I think I will check that out myself.

Stan mentioned that City Market and La Plata Electric Association have a place on their websites where you can sign up and donate 1 percent of the cost of your purchases/electric bills to Search and Rescue. Please, let's all sign up!

One last thing that was discussed was sign-in sheets at trailheads. Sign in. This is easy to do and helps out incredibly in locating people.

Just a quick summary of what Stan covered for us. I'm glad I was able to be there!



**Stan Okazaki (far right) of the Archuleta County Sheriff's Office Emergency Management Team, visits with SJBCH members (clockwise from foreground) Jo Ann Senzig, Nancy Seay, Ron Toland and Donna Fait.**

**(Photo by Annie Pack)**

## Chapter Discusses Trail Conditions with Forest Service

By John Nelson

On Sept. 19, several board members met with Pagosa Ranger District staff and Pagosa Area Trails Council President Bob Milford to discuss ideas on how we can get beyond clearing dead trees from trails and start addressing the looming issue of deteriorating trail tread due to long lack of maintenance.

Ron Toland, Lisa Nelson and John Nelson initially had planned to ask the Forest Service to consider contracting private companies and individuals to get this important work done so we don't lose any more trails and because the Forest Service has been unable to get enough crews out on the ground to keep up with clearing trails of downed trees—much less do any dirt work to fix trail tread.

We told the Forest Service that Back Country Horsemen of America's mission is to perpetuate the use of the backcountry by stock users and that disappearing trails was a problem, stressing that our hope is to see a healthy trail system in our area in the future. We told the group that SJBCH stands ready to partner however we can to help make this happen.

In the meeting, the Forest Service told us that hiring private crews at this time is too problematic and would take too much time to set up but that perhaps this option can be considered longer term. District Recreation Staff Officer Paul Blackman told us that with the funding they

have now for trails and some new ways of hiring conservation corps trail crews and others, they believe we can start to work on trail tread and maybe stay ahead of



Maintaining stock access in the backcountry is the core mission of Back Country Horsemen of America. (Photo by Kelli Day)

the problem. He noted that the Forest Service will be able to hire a permanent part-time trail crew of five for next year. Blackman acknowledged, "We need to expand our options."

Blackman committed to having some answers and plans for this matter for 2024 when the Pagosa Area Trails Council meets in October.

## Stock Driveways Capture Area's History

By John Nelson and Ron Decker

A lot has changed around Pagosa Springs over the years, including how we used to access the backcountry. Some of us are old enough to have known people who were alive a hundred years ago and witnessed old-time Pagosa and understand the depth of change this area, and indeed all the West, has seen over the years. One of those people is retired forest ranger Ron Decker, a third generation Pagosan. He and I recently spoke about the Piedra Stock Driveway, a partially forgotten old trail in our area. Some of our group does work on portions of this trail yet today, and for them some of this will be familiar. Of course, Ron and my conversation strayed a little and we talked about other stock driveways in the area, too.

According to Ron, 100 years ago (and even less) there were few roads that went from U.S. Highway 160 to the north in the Pagosa area. And there were only two until about 50 years ago. Piedra Road was a mostly rough, two-track road that went north to the Piedra River, then into the Weminuche Valley and also to Cimarrona Creek, where there was a Forest Service station. The second rough road was Turkey Springs Road, a two-track road that went north from the current Turkey Springs store area in Aspen Springs to what is now Turkey Springs and then to Piedra Road, where it intersected at about Jack's Pasture. Otherwise, if you wanted to access the country north of Pagosa you did it on horseback or maybe in a wagon on a few less developed wagon roads that went into the country north of Highway 160.

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(Stock Driveways cont.'d)

Imagine Pagosa Springs and this area a hundred years ago—1923—when the town and area was far less populated, and U.S. Highway 160 was narrow and just being considered for pavement in a few sections. Much of 160 was a lane-and-a-half-wide gravel road back then. In those days, cattle and sheep (mostly sheep) were driven in the spring from lower winter country (like near Arboles, Allison and along the lower Piedra River) northward to summer pastures in the high country. As was the case across the West, these stock drives were important for our country's economy.

To avoid conflict between cattle ranchers and sheep raisers, the U.S. Forest Service designated stock driveways for people to move their animals through various grazing areas to their permitted summer grounds. The driveways typically were at least about 100 yards wide—often wider—and were marked every 100 yards or so by metal “Boundary Stock Driveway” signs on the right and left and “Center Stock Driveway” signs in the middle of the driveways, so it was abundantly clear where animals were allowed to pass.

Every year sheep and cattle were driven north after a long winter, and then south again before winter. Many a western story—some true, some fiction—have been written around these old drives.

There were two major stock driveways in this area back then that went north from Highway 160. One was the Pine Piedra Stock Driveway that went from the Saul's Creek area near Bayfield, north and east through Beaver Meadows, and then up East Creek and over Slide Mountain past the East Creek Trail. From there, it traversed over Graham Peak and Ore Mountain and past the Sand Creek Trail to end at the junction of Sierra Vandera Trail and Falls Creek Trail.

The other major stock driveway here was the Piedra Stock Driveway (Trail No. 583) that started at today's Turkey Springs Store in Aspen Springs along Highway 160 and then went north paralleling the Turkey Springs Road to the counting corrals at Turkey Springs just south

of the current Turkey Springs Guard Station. From the Turkey Springs Guard Station, the Piedra Stock Driveway



Sheep pens near Turkey Springs circa 1930.  
(Photo courtesy Ron Decker)

continued north over Flat Iron Mesa and down to the Piedra River Trail. The first log bridge across the Piedra River for moving

livestock was built in the early 1900s. The Piedra Stock Driveway then went up Trail Creek, over Trail Ridge and down to Williams Creek near the current Williams Creek Campground. Then it went through Burro Park to Poison Park and up the Weminuche Trail toward the high-country summer range (*Note: in those days the Weminuche Trail started at the Carroll Ranch in the*

*Weminuche Valley, now owned by the Lindners*). In total, this was a trail drive distance of roughly 40 miles from the highway (about 30 miles as the crow flies).



Jo Ann Senzig (left) and Tara McElhinney riding at Burro Park.

There are several other old trails in our area called stock driveways, such as Coal Creek, Cold Water, Navajo Peak and Fourmile, but the Piedra and Pine Piedra were the major driveways around here. Just past the Turkey Springs Guard Station, a minor stock driveway, known as the Fourmile Stock Driveway, went to the east by the cross-country ski area at Coyote Hill through the Jack's Pasture property, up the hill across Plumtaw Road and then into the Lost Valley of the San Juans (the old Cade

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(Stock Driveways cont.'d)

place), accessing the country around Fourmile Lake and the Turkey Creek area.

The original Navajo Peaks trail and driveway started off from US 84, where the Buckles Lake Road is today, and ended at the Continental Divide by Blue Lake as it originally went through Banded Peaks, which was not private land at that time in history.

While there's not much evidence left these days of the old stock driveways other than the well-preserved section of the Piedra Stock Driveway around Turkey Springs, some things from those days are still around, including a very nice old wooden forest entry sign north of Turkey Springs. And sometimes when you're wandering through the woods,

you may find an old, rusted, yellow "Boundary Stock Driveway" sign nailed to an old tree.



Historic U.S. Forest Service entry sign north of Turkey Springs. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

While knowing this history is interesting, it's important because it is tied to the heritage of this area when Mexican, Spanish American and Anglo shepherds drove sheep to the high country. Many families from Pagosa Country herded sheep in this area for a lot of years, and even today you can sometimes find their carvings in aspen trees along the stock driveways. Back Country Horsemen play a role in protecting this history with the trail work we're doing and maintaining signs like the forest entrance sign at Turkey Springs.

Perhaps the information in this article can whet the appetite of SJBCH chapter members to plan a commemorative pack trip along the historic Piedra Stock Driveway. Any takers?

## Memorable Photos from Members



Gabe Candelaria and nine-year-old Evley (and their faithful dog Lettie) went on a 5-day, 60-mile trip into the backcountry to enjoy some fishing and father-daughter time. They traveled to the Pine River from Poison Park Trailhead. (Photos by Gabe Candelaria)



Kelli Day captured this striking black and white aspen portrait while on a trip with Rocky above South Fork in their side-by-side.

## Thank You to Our Generous 2023 Donors

**Burris and Sons**  
**Bucking Bulls and Rodeo**

**John and Jane Mancuso**

**Julie and Greg McCallum**

**Tim and Cindy Plate**

**Ash and Trish Tully**

**Laurie and Dieter Volk**



## 2023-24 SJBCH Board Officers Election Results

The following slate of officers for the San Juan Back Country Horsemen Board of Directors was approved by the chapter membership at the Sept. 18 SJBCH general meeting: President, John Nelson; Vice President, Ron Toland; Katie Betts, Secretary; and Allan Netzer,

Treasurer. A huge “thank-you” to both outgoing and incoming board members for stepping up and supporting the chapter with your ideas, diligence and commitment.



### Your Board of Directors

**John Nelson**, President

**Ron Toland**, Vice President and Trails Lead

**Katie Betts**, Secretary

**Allan Netzer**, Treasurer

**Randy Betts**, Ex-Officio Member

**Kelli Day**, Ex-Officio member

**Rocky Day**, Ex-Officio member

**Donna Fait**, Volunteer Hours Coordinator

**Janie Gray**, Membership Coordinator

**Lisa Nelson**, Communications Lead

**Annie Pack**, Social Committee Lead

**Dick Ray**, Outfitter and Guide Liaison

**Jo Ann Senzig**, Rodeo Committee Lead

**Larry Smith**, Past President