

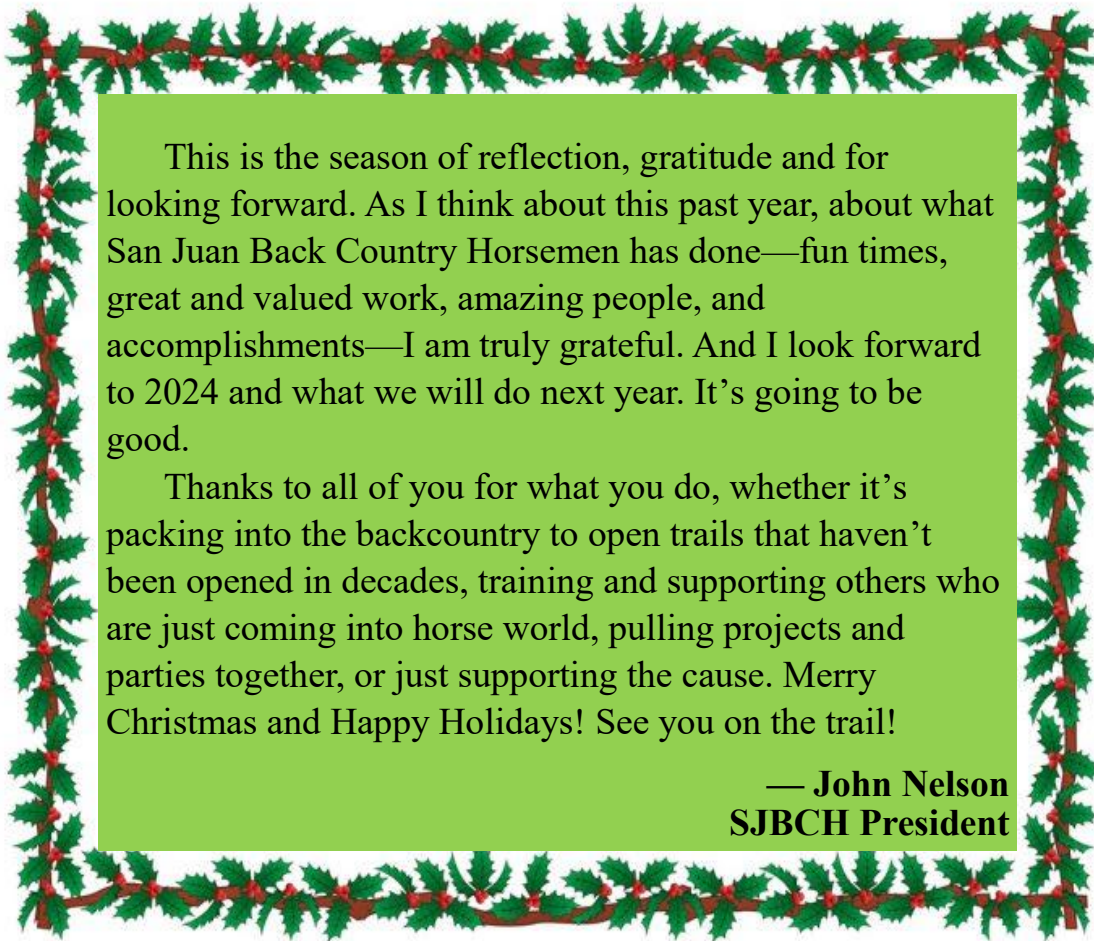


Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

November/December 2023



This is the season of reflection, gratitude and for looking forward. As I think about this past year, about what San Juan Back Country Horsemen has done—fun times, great and valued work, amazing people, and accomplishments—I am truly grateful. And I look forward to 2024 and what we will do next year. It’s going to be good.

Thanks to all of you for what you do, whether it’s packing into the backcountry to open trails that haven’t been opened in decades, training and supporting others who are just coming into horse world, pulling projects and parties together, or just supporting the cause. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! See you on the trail!

— John Nelson
SJ BCH President

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‘Tis the Season . . . for Chapter Dues

It’s time to renew our San Juan Back Country Horsemen memberships for 2024, which are due by **January 31**. Please note that current members also need to submit a 2024 membership application, because we need to have an updated disclaimer each year for all members. (All you have to do is type your initials on the disclaimer line in the application.)

Renewing your membership is easy and quick by going to our website at sjbch.org and click on “Membership.” From there you can either join online by filling out the information and paying by PayPal or credit card, or you can download the membership form, fill it out and mail it in with a check to San Juan Back Country Horsemen, PO Box 682. Pagosa Springs, CO 81147.

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San Juan Back Country Horsemen welcomes new board members: Chris Boyd, Gabe Candelaria and Justin Frie.

We also welcome the board’s first-ever Youth Ambassadors— Jenavieve Betts and Elle Candelaria.

(Chapter Dues cont.'d)

If you have either joined or renewed your membership since September, you are covered for 2024.

Your membership dues support national Back Country Horsemen of America goals that are in the interest of stock users in the backcountry, and also our local chapter's direct on-the-ground trail and resource work. Your chapter got a lot done this year, including trail clearing and repair on a number of trails, National Trails Day cleanup at Treasure Falls, reopening of trails in the South San Juan Wilderness that haven't been opened for

years, social rides and gatherings, a backcountry skills workshop, partnering with the San Juan Mountains Association in a grant request for a crew to open 17 trails in 2024, connecting with other trail user groups to further better understanding between us and improve our public lands trail systems, and other good work. Benefits of membership include receiving our *Pony Tracks* newsletter and the national BCHA newsletter and bulletins, important local updates about all-things trails and public lands, social riding and events.

Christmas Party Makes Spirits Bright

Once again Santa Annie (Pack) and her elves—Alice and Steve Gradwell, Donna and Jim Fait and Tonya Lambert—put together a wonderful Christmas celebration for the chapter at the Timber Ridge Clubhouse on Dec. 11. The chapter provided turkey and ham, and our members brought an assortment of delicious sides, salads and desserts. It was quite the feast, and it was great to visit with everyone!



SJBCH is always a fun group! (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



Annie Pack (far right) visits with Alice and Steve Gradwell. (Photo by Kelli Day)



Katie Betts' mom Carol Wright (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



Lining up at the dessert table are (from left) Tonya Lambert, Jo Ann Senzig, Katie Betts and Stephanie Fluke. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



Homemade dishes fill the buffet table. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

(Christmas Party cont.'d)



The Christmas dinner is a great way to learn more about each other. Sharing stories were (from left) Betty Collins, Gianna Marino and Ted Wortman. But wait...where did Betty's husband Frank go? No worries, we found him at the popular dessert table (inset). (Photo by Kelli Day)



(Photo by Lisa Nelson)



Children really do help "light up" (pun intended) the Christmas holiday. Thank you Evley Candelaria. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



President John Nelson recognized members for their extra efforts this year. Pictured from left are Lisa Nelson, Ron Toland, Kelli Day, Jo Ann Senzig, Nelson, Katie Betts, Donna Fait, Rocky Day and Annie Pack. (Photo by Gabe Candelaria)



Ron Toland (left) and John Nelson recap the many accomplishments of the chapter in 2023. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



Jo Ann Senzig strikes a pose with her gift from Shane Burriss for the great work at the Burriss and Sons Rodeo ticket booth each summer. Shane makes a generous annual donation to SJBCH in support of our mission to keep trails cleared. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



It was great seeing Gabe and Jenny Candelaria at the Christmas party with daughters Elle and Evley. Their son True was at home recuperating from an injury suffered while snow boarding. We all wish True well. (Photo by Kelli Day)



Kelli Day (left) offers tips on how to tie a wild rag to Jo Ann Senzig. The wild rags were presented in recognition of their service to the chapter. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)



The dessert table is a perennial favorite at the annual Christmas party. The group sure has some excellent cooks. (Photo by Kelli Day)

Merry Christmas to All!

Forest Service to Revise Trail and Recreation Planning Approach

By Lisa Nelson

The Pagosa Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest is looking at a broader, more integrated approach to trail and recreation planning in the future, Paul Blackman, recreation program manager, told a diverse cross-section of trail user-groups at a Pagosa Area Trails Council meeting on Oct. 24.

“We need to look at trail and recreation planning in a larger sense and look at where we have opportunities or don’t have opportunities. We need a longer-term view than just three to five years,” Blackman explained to the audience of hikers, bikers, runners, skiers, motorized recreationists and San Juan Back Country Horsemen.

“We want a facilitated working-group approach,” he said, that would involve recreation groups, private landowners, environmental groups, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and others. Blackman said this was the “No. 1 relative priority” of District Ranger Josh Peck.

Bob Milford, president of PATC, noted that the trails council plans to conduct quarterly meetings with the Forest Service. At the October meeting, Milford and the Forest Service provided a recap of 2023. Milford told the group that 95 percent of trails were cleared this year. In the past five years, he said the Forest Service and volunteers cleared 30,000 trees on a total of 450 miles of trail.

Tyler Albers, the district’s trails program manager, said the number of downed trees was lower this year, but the district also had a lower number of trail crew members available. This year the district worked with a crew from the nonprofit American Conservation Experience, and Albers said, “They knocked my socks off with their performance.” The district also worked with a youth crew from Durango to re-bench two miles of the Piedra River

Trail. The district again worked with a Southwest Conservation Corps crew but did have some performance issues.

Albers said the district previously had an A, B, C ranking of trails to clear and maintain, but with all the deadfall from the spruce-beetle infestation, the district now works on all the trails each year.

He also noted that PATC was awarded a Colorado Parks and Wildlife grant of \$71,000 to purchase an excavator for the Forest Service to use on OHV (off-highway vehicle) trails.



The Forest Service anticipates Opal Lake will become more of a marsh.

Blackman updated the group about other activities on the Pagosa Ranger District. Work is underway on a winter travel management planning process for the forest. An environmental assessment is slated to begin in 2025 regarding over-snow travel. In addition, the district is working on a management plan for designated,

dispersed camping along the East Fork corridor.

He informed the group that a toilet will be installed next year at the Piedra River trailhead. A toilet also is planned at the Opal Lake trailhead. Blackman further shared that the creek that once fed Opal Lake no longer runs into the Opal Lake Basin. Because the area is designated wilderness, the district cannot do the work required to reroute water back into Opal Lake. Consequently, Opal Lake likely will become more of a marsh.

Milford concluded the October meeting with a slide show of the volunteer work by all the user groups, including SJBCH.

SJBCH President John Nelson encouraged the various user groups to work together on projects, and some were quite interested in helping with painting weather-beaten Forest Service signs.

Journey of a Lifetime

Editor's Note: In September, 23-year-old Jake Harvath began a journey to travel 7,000 miles across 30 states in one year with his wild horse companions Bella, Eddy and Denver. His goal: to help raise awareness of the dilemma of managing mustangs on public lands and to urge more adoptions of wild horses. If successful, Jake's "Year of the Mustang" journey from his home base in Heber City, Utah, to the New Jersey coast and back across the country to the California coast and, finally, returning home to Utah would be the longest pack trip in the United States in a year's time. Jake rode into Pagosa Springs in early November. Word of his arrival quickly spread, and several SJ BCH folks jumped in to help Jake and his mounts with food, accommodations, logistics and good ole TLC. The following story by Jenny Candelaria offers insight into Jake and his mission. Jenny also produced a wonderful calendar with photos of Jake while in Pagosa. The net proceeds from the sale of the calendars will support Jake's venture through his GoFundMe account. Click [here](#) for calendar ordering information.

By Jenny Candelaria

Who's the guy on the horse? Anyone know his story? Those were the questions someone posted on Facebook that my nail technician texted me after I saw her on Nov. 2. I have been going to Caroline for years, and naturally I tell her all the happenings while getting my nails done. I had filled her in on the latest—that a complete stranger was on his way to our place and that my "town day" was being cut short because of it.

I explained how (SJ BCH member) Edie Brogan called my husband Gabe earlier in the week because some guy was riding his horse across the country, and she was helping to line out helpful horse people along his Southwest Colorado-and-into-New Mexico path. Gabe is a helpful horse person, and our place below Chimney Rock was a welcome detour off the highway after his overnight stay in Bayfield and before heading to Pagosa.

Jake Harvath and his three horses crossed the Piedra River from Fossett Gulch and onto our family ranch that evening. It had become real to the kids and me that they were coming when we saw a man in a black hat on a white horse, with two in tow, along the shoulder of 160 about five miles east of Bayfield when we were heading into Durango that morning. I had told my son True that if



Jake Harvath with his mustangs Bella, Eddy and Denver
(Photo courtesy of Jake Harvath)

Jake was headed our way, we should see him...and sure enough! It isn't everyday (or ever, actually) that we see a pack string on U.S. Highway 160. We knew that he was our guy. We also knew that at three miles an hour, it would be close to dinner time before they arrived.

A little before dusk we were able to look beyond the river from the bridge and see them heading our way on the county road. Gabe walked out to meet them and show them where to cross the river. I stood on the other side

with my phone to film the mystery man with the horses who had Facebook all a buzz. After the horses took a nice, long drink, they forded the river effortlessly. Gabe and our friend Hamilton got acquainted with Jake and his mustangs. After untacking and getting Bella, Eddy, and Denver settled for the night, Jake came up to the ranch house

and visited with us over dinner.

It was during dinner that we learned that Jake is a 23-year-old horse trainer and farrier from Heber City, Utah. The love he has found for horses—and mustangs in particular—is his own. It doesn't come from growing up with them. It was cultivated through experiences he sought out from the age of 14. He learned about them by working for and with a horse trainer, who ultimately gifted Jake his very first horse at the age of 15. The horse given to him was Bella, the white mare he rode in on.

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(Journey of a Lifetime cont.'d)

As Jake spoke about these things, he began to come alive. I had been worried about the young man who seemed like he might be swept off by a breeze, as he quietly led his horses into the round pen before dinner—not because he seemed physically frail but because something about him seemed fragile. He had needed to eat. The food undoubtedly contributed to his coming alive, though the real fuel for his excitement was talking about the horses. He shared that each of his three horses are mustangs, adopted from Bureau of Land Management holding facilities, and that he has trained each of them. Denver, his big black gelding, was wild a mere year ago.

Jake began planning this trip, a more than 7,000-mile journey across the United States, years ago. His purpose and goal is to show people that mustangs are as good a companion as any and that wild horses can be trained. When asked if he believes that all wild horses can be trained, he was optimistic in his reply—without making a claim to knowing how long it would take. He seemed sensitive to the fact that each horse and situation is unique, while maintaining confidence in wild horses as good horses.

Jake was about six weeks into his year-long adventure during his stay with us. He was new to the trail you might say, never expecting the “trail” to include so

many highway miles. He had pushed through discomfort and isolation, finding himself needing to be more adaptable than he might have expected. He didn’t expect so many trails to just sort of dissolve, and he didn’t seem to expect so many fences and “no trespassing” signs. I might have sensed that he was fragile because he was. He seemed to be growing through the unthinkable right before our very eyes, recalling some of the challenges that had been presented to him and those unknown on the horizon.

Jake’s bravery, persistence, determination and love for his three mustangs had gotten him this far. For the next four or five days, SJ BCH and other locals in the horse community showered Jake and his mustangs with much needed support and guidance, helping to see that he and his horses advanced south into New Mexico as comfortably and safely as possible. I think it is safe to say that now we all know who the guy on the horse is and a little bit about his story. I also have a feeling that he will remember all of us here in Southwest Colorado and that he will continue to depend on Back Country Horsemen of America as a valuable resource!

The very best way to learn more about Jake and to follow along with his journey is on YouTube. He is accepting donations via his [GoFundMe page](#) with a goal of raising \$20,000. You can find him everywhere on social media by searching “Year of the Mustang” or Jake Harvath.



The calendar Jenny Candelaria created includes a photo she took of Jake Harvath riding through this area with Chimney Rock in the background.

SJBCH Folks Lend Helping Hands to Cross-Continental Traveler



Aurora Peters, pictured in the foreground with friend Angela Dunbar, provided warm meals, boarding, support and friendship for Jake and his animals for a few days during his stopover in Pagosa Springs. (Photo courtesy Aurora Peters)

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(Journey of a Lifetime cont.'d)



Edie Brogan provided a safety escort for Jake as he headed down Highway 84 toward Chama, and she lined up lodging with some friends.



Kelli and Rocky Day offered help with saddling and packing tips and horse care. (Above) Kelli does some filing on a pack saddle for better fit and helps relieve pressure points on the horses. (Photos by Aurora Peters)

Then and Now



Forest ranger loads horses at Treasure Falls Guard Station
U.S. Forest Service, circa 1940s



Treasure Falls Guard Station
U.S. Forest Service, 2023



Thank You Shane Burris

Shane Burris (right) of Burris and Sons Bucking Bulls and Rodeo presented SJ BCH President John Nelson with a check for more than \$2,800 in November as a donation to the chapter to support its work to keep backcountry trails open for all. This is in addition to a donation of \$1,200 from Burris at the Pagosa Thursday Night Rodeos this summer.

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

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Rocky Day, Ex-Officio member

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Katie Betts, Secretary

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Lisa Nelson, Communications Lead

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Annie Pack, Social Committee Lead

Gabe Candelaria, Ex-Officio member

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Kelli Day, Ex-Officio member

Jo Ann Senzig, Rodeo Committee Lead

Larry Smith, Past President

Jenavieve Betts and Elle Candelaria — Youth Ambassadors