



Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

April 2024

President's Message



John Nelson

Spring is here, our snowpack is a little above average, and our trails folks are champing at the bit to get out into the high country! For the last month I've been thinking about the end of winter and looking forward to riding the trails, and because last month I "celebrated" my silver anniversary birthday, I was left wondering how I'll feel this year when I get out on the trail and am pulling on a crosscut saw or swinging an axe. Then I realized that unless I'm struck by lightning, I don't care if I'm sore or not. I'm going to be out there doing that. Period. And while I think the old-ish saying "The three things I enjoy most are to watch water running in a brook, to watch a campfire burning and to watch other people work" is funny, I also know that horses, mountains, and trails—and a little bit of work—are good for all of us. So, I hope you can join us out there this summer.

I've said it before. There's a job for everyone in the chapter's trail work, and each to their own ability. We have an active field season planned with several organized

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A Member Making a Difference

By John Nelson

Ron Toland says that when he got involved with San Juan Back Country Horsemen five or so years ago, "The only reason I wanted to help clear some trails was so I could ride and fish. I don't know what happened."

What happened was he started helping to clear downed trees from clogged trails, then he started organizing BCH trail-clearing work trips, then he took over as our trails lead, and now he's doing that and serving as our vice president and our chapter's fundraiser...and a bunch of other things.



Ron Toland enjoying one of his favorite pastimes. Nice catch!

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Breaking News

See story on page 9 about the newly established Pagosa Area Recreation Coalition—a community-based approach to defining recreational use on the national forest.

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daylong and overnight trail and camping training trips, our annual Treasure Falls work day on National Trails Day in June, our third annual South San Juan Wilderness weeklong trail trip, sign painting days, a work day or two on Anderson Trail and Archuleta Creek Trail (our adopted

trails) with an organized trail crew, the Fourth of July Parade, and a can’t miss overnight trip to Thirty Mile Stock Unloading Area near Creede for our youth grant work trip. So come on out and join us!

(Making a Difference cont.’d)

Getting involved with a volunteer organization like SJBCH can become a big job if you let it, if you have a passion for the mission of Back Country Horsemen of America and if you see what the potential is for the chapter. Ron sees that and has gotten himself involved.

Along the way to this “job” he got crosscut and chainsaw certified by the U.S. Forest Service and took first aid and CPR so he could lead work trips. As our trails lead, he began coordinating with the San Juan

National Forest and Rio Grande National Forest on trail maintenance and backcountry land-management projects (having to learn how the Forest Service works along the way), and each year he negotiates new volunteer agreements with the two national forests. He serves as the chapter’s go-to person for all things computer-related for the board of directors and general membership meetings. In the absence of a Fundraising Committee chair, Ron has taken that job on in 2023 and

2024 and raised close to \$6,000 that will almost entirely go directly back onto the ground for much-needed trail work.

again this year, hoping to get the last of the closed trails—Canon Rincon—opened again.

Along with keeping all of that going, Ron is currently pushing to get grants started to get more dirt work done on trails so we don’t lose them, and all for the sake of stock access to the backcountry— which is the primary mission of Back Country Horsemen of America.

Ron grew up in Pueblo, served in the Air Force as an officer, and then spent a career

working for a large company in Phoenix where he was a computer expert. Then he retired to Pagosa to ride his horses and fish, met his wife Diane, joined San Juan BCH to help clear a few trails, and here we are.

We are very lucky to have Ron involved with our chapter. Looking back a few years, before the COVID outbreak, the chapter was having a tough time, and we actually had a board meeting one time when we discussed what we would do if we folded, what we would do with the



Ron Toland has made a huge difference in the South San Juan Wilderness Area, where he has taken a crew deep into the backcountry to open trails. (Photo by Donna Fait)

He recently joined the Pagosa Area Trail Council board of directors as a representative from SJBCH. He loves all the land around Pagosa, but the South San Juan Wilderness has a special place in his heart, and for two years now he’s organized weeklong, eight person trail work trips in August going up the Fish Lake Trail 22 miles back into the far reaches of the Wilderness, opening tree-clogged trails that haven’t been opened in decades due to Forest Service staff shortages. He and the crew will do it

(Making a Difference cont.'d)

money in the bank, who we'd give it to. But the board of directors hung in there and pulled things together, people stepped up, and none more than Ron Toland.

This is no small deal. We're running strong today because of Ron and the board of directors and our members, and together, we're making a difference. That's extremely

satisfying for me personally—it's the reason I'm involved with SJBCH. And I hope anyone reading this understands that what Ron is doing through his many hours of work is perpetuating the commonsense use of stock in the backcountry. This comes in an age when mountain bikes, motorized vehicles and scads of people coming here who don't ride

horses are out in the mountains in ever-increasing numbers, They are demanding more and through that are threatening to displace stock use in the backcountry. So what Ron's doing is a big part of our protecting our privilege to use stock on our own public lands.

Thank you Ron.

May 20 General Meeting to Feature Speaker and a Few Changes

The SJBCH general meeting on May 20 will feature guest speaker Chris Boyd, a retired 30-year law enforcement veteran from San Diego County. He will discuss "Situational Awareness in the Backcountry." Chris is an SJBCH board member and a member of the Upper San Juan Search and Rescue with a lot of relevant experience for the backcountry.

The chapter also is trying something new at the upcoming general meeting. In lieu of our traditional potluck, we are asking members to place orders online from Subway downtown, 510 San Juan St. Here's how it works:

*Order and pay online. Your first name should be SJBCH - Ron or SJBCH - Diane, etc. Also, schedule pickup time for 5:45 and **do not order drinks**...that would be impractical for the anticipated number of orders; please bring something to wash down your sandwich. Ron Toland will pick up all orders at 5:45. Note: Ron doesn't think this process works in the cell phone app unless name can be changed to SJBCH - xxx.*

As an alternative, members are welcome to bring something on their own—a sack lunch or whatever strikes your fancy.

Upcoming Events—Mark Your Calendars

National Trails Day Cleanup at Treasure Falls June 8

8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

Meet at the Treasure Falls parking lot (Please carpool, if possible, as there are always sightseers stopping to take in the view of the falls.)

SJBCH board member Annie Pack will lead the annual Treasure Falls cleanup, which is always as much fun as it is work. This year, we may have some folks from the Pagosa Area Trails Council joining us to help pick up trash, remove overgrowth from the trail, spruce up the trailhead and paint signs. With enough people-power, we can also tackle some much-needed trail maintenance. Annie will provide more details as the event approaches, but if you have any questions, call her at 210-215-9566.



(Upcoming Events cont.'d)

19th Hole Concerts Fundraiser

June 6, 13, 20 and 27

5:30-7:30 p.m.

Pagosa Springs Golf Club

The Community Foundation serving Southwest Colorado has selected San Juan Back Country Horsemen as one of four local nonprofits that will benefit from the 19th Hole Concerts each Thursday in June at the Pagosa Springs Golf Club. **SJBCH will be highlighted June 20**, and the featured band is the San Juan Mountain Boys. The cover charge is \$10. It's important to have a good turnout to show our appreciation for this philanthropic effort that supports local nonprofits. Let's all show up to spread the word about SJBCH, enjoy some food and listen to a great musical duo! We also need volunteers to help staff an SJBCH information table at the event each Thursday in June. Please contact SJBCH board member Ron Toland at 970-585-4109 to lend a hand.



SJBCH Group Ride and Breakout Party

June 22

9 a.m.—ride out; noon—group lunch

Kenney Flats

Enjoy an easy-going ride in some nice country and get to know some of your SJBCH cohorts a little better at a communal lunch after the ride. Annie Pack is coordinating this event. Contact her at 210-215-9566.



Fourth of July Parade

July 4

10 a.m.

Downtown Pagosa Springs

SJBCH helps keep the western heritage alive with a strong showing in the parade. Everybody loves the horses! The chapter's "Parade Queen" Tara McElhinney will organize the SJBCH parade entry. She already has a couple of folks volunteering to help. Not everyone has to ride—you can walk along with the group if you prefer. Tara will be sending out notices as the parade logistics are finalized.



Archuleta Creek Trail Pack-in

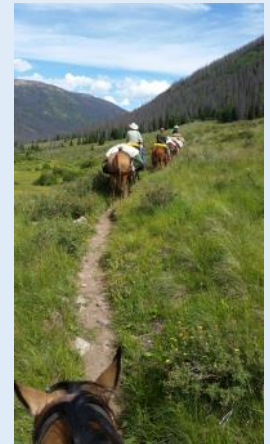
July 13

SJBCH will provide pack support for the Forest Service and San Juan Mountains Association trail crew to work on Archuleta Trail. This is not a riding trip—horses will be used for packing tools and supplies. Ron Toland will provide additional details as available.

(Upcoming Events cont.'d)

Thirty Mile Youth Grant Project July 20-21

SJBCH is sponsoring a youth-oriented project to repair Trail #817 on the Rio Grande National Forest. Trail #817 is a 0.3-mile connector trail from the Thirty Mile Stock Unloading Area west to the Weminuche/Grizzly Creek trailheads inside Thirty Mile Campground. It's important to maintain the trail so horses can safely ride to the trailheads without incurring often heavy traffic on the Rio Grande Reservoir Road. The group plans to brush out the trail, pack in gravel where necessary and build rock cairns to clearly mark the trail. This event is designed to involve local youth in a real trail maintenance project, get some good work done and have fun doing it! The group will camp Friday and Saturday night—complete with campfire cookouts.



Riding Grizzly Creek Trail from Thirty Mile Campground.

On Sunday, July 21, Rachel Hosna, a botanist with the Rio Grande National Forest, will conduct an in-the-field program on noxious and invasive weeds and what we can do to minimize their impact.

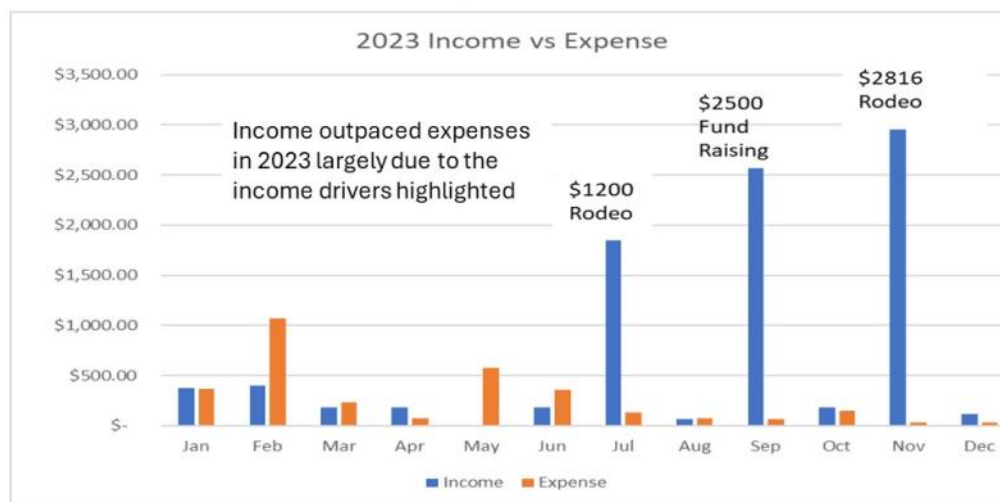
The Thirty Mile Project is made possible by a Back Country Horsemen of America grant that was awarded to SJBCH Youth Ambassadors Elle Candelaria and Jenavieve Betts.

For more information, contact Ron Toland at 970-585-4109.

Financial Analysis of SJBCH Chapter

SJBCH Treasurer Allan Netzer provided the board of directors with a financial analysis of the chapter for 2023. The information will help inform the board as it discusses a potential increase in chapter dues by Back Country Horsemen of America to support its national legislative efforts on behalf of all BCHA chapters. The chapter will share information as it develops at upcoming general meetings.

Income and Expense Summary



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Income	\$ 373.35	\$ 398.11	\$182.58	\$183.40	\$ 10.00	\$ 179.98	\$1,847.00	\$ 67.00	\$2,571.00	\$183.29	\$2,952.87	\$ 114.33	\$ 9,062.91
Expense	\$ 367.22	\$ 1,073.00	\$235.16	\$ 71.33	\$574.27	\$ 358.31	\$ 135.55	\$ 77.22	\$ 65.00	\$153.64	\$ 35.00	\$ 35.00	\$ 3,180.70

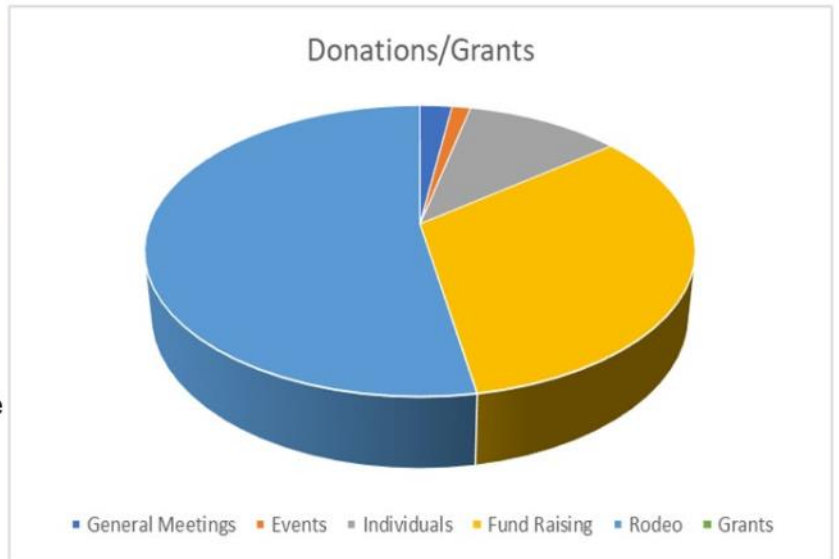
(Financial Analysis cont.'d)

Income Break-out

- This analysis categorizes donation income sources as below:

Donations/Grants Break-out		
General Meeting donations	\$	171.00
Events Donations	\$	99.00
Individuals Donations	\$	826.20
Fund Raising	\$	2,500.00 Does not include Rodeo
Rodeo	\$	4,016.85
Grants	\$	-

- Fund Raising category includes funds donated by a company or entity vice an individual member
- Rodeo income is broken out as a unique event primarily due to the relative size



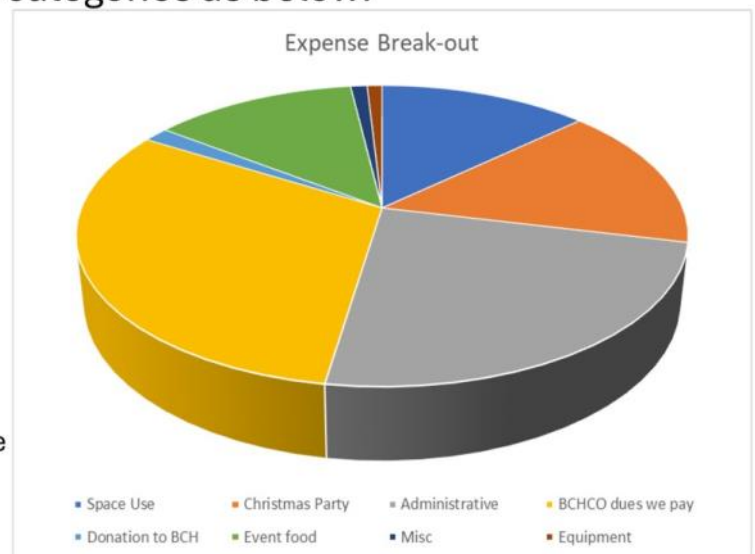
Please Note: Donations are primarily directed toward on-the-ground trail work.

Expenses in 2023

- Our expenses in 2023 break-out into categories as below:

Expense Break-out categories	
Space Use	\$ 420.00
Christmas Party	\$ 491.22
Administrative	\$ 758.22
BCHCO dues we pay	\$ 990.00
Donation to BCH	\$ 50.00
Event food	\$ 408.11
Misc	\$ 33.15
Equipment	\$ 30.00

- 'Space use' if for the United Methodist Church
- Donation to BCH was a one-time thing
- Misc was the parts for the GPS we gave away
- Contracted projects would add directly to expense
 - None in 2023



If Ever There Was a Wiz...

By John Nelson

When you live in Pagosa and like to get out and cut trees off the trail so you can ride or hike in the Wilderness, it doesn't take long before you learn the value of a sharp crosscut saw. Cutting with a dull crosscut saw—what old-time loggers called a “misery whip”—takes double and triple the muscle, sweat and time than it does with a properly sharpened crosscut saw.

Sharpening a crosscut saw is an art, though, and unless you have the touch and are willing to learn how to do it right with the special tools required for the job, you need to find someone to sharpen your saw. And that can be a challenge. Fifty years ago, every little town had two or three retired loggers who sharpened saws in their shops, but they're all gone now. So now, people have to ship their saws out of state for sharpening or put up with a dull or poorly sharpened saw—costing them extra time and effort.

We are lucky in the Pagosa area to have a couple of people who sharpen crosscut saws. One of those people, Mike Cianciolo, is a master at his saw sharpening work. A few years ago, he was so interested in learning how to properly sharpen a crosscut saw that he attended world-renown crosscut saw sharpener Dolly Chapman's school in California to learn how to do it right. Watching Mike work on a Pagosa Ranger District trail crew saw recently shows that he paid attention to Dolly's teaching. His extraordinary attention to the fine details of jointing, sharpening, and setting the saw are obvious. And he seems absolutely in his element when he's doing this masterful and tedious work. He uses a flashlight and magnifying glass to check each tooth after sharpening to make sure everything is just right.

“Mike has sharpened crosscut saws from our cache for the last



Mike Cianciolo sharpening Forest Service saw. (Photo by John Nelson)

several years,” says Tyler Albers, Pagosa Ranger District trail crew supervisor. “His attention to detail and willingness to maintain our saws in the best possible condition has not gone unnoticed. The Pagosa Ranger District trail crew prefers to use saws sharpened by him, and they are always the first saws to leave the cache. Sharp crosscut saws improve efficiency and reduce crew member fatigue. We are one of the luckiest crosscut saw programs to have Mike right here in our community.”

When you talk with Mike, you learn that his background set him up nicely for this skilled crosscut saw sharpening work. You see, Mike spent a career at the Harley Davidson headquarters in Wisconsin as an engineer and machinist helping design and produce prototype motorcycles. That means Mike and his team took drawings of a new Harley Davidson motorcycle and the raw metal components and milled each part of the new motorcycle—including the motor—and put it together into a working machine. Think about that.

Mike says that for each project at Harley Davidson, security was high—top secret like in the military. His work group was sworn to secrecy, and the combinations on the door locks were changed every four days. Not even his friends who worked in other departments knew what Mike was doing.

He says the production of the first Harley Davidson water-cooled motor in the early 2000s (a partner project with Porsche of Germany) was especially challenging. At one point, Porsche questioned the measured power of a motor Mike and his team had built from scratch, so Mike made a trip to Germany with company engineers for side-by-side comparisons with the German-made motor, and Porsche learned that their motor was off, not Harley's.

After a career of doing this special work, Mike and his wife Janna retired to Pagosa Springs and built their dream home west of town, complete with a large shop where Mike can keep doing the specialty work he loves to do. When they moved, Mike brought several large machines along (“Moving literally tons of machinery was interesting,” he says), and today he uses those computer-controlled machines to do things like build and drill special metal plates for a large sled towed behind a snow tractor in Antarctica, or, as we learned recently, to route a

(If Ever There Was a Wiz... cont.'d)

nice new wooden trailhead sign for the parking area at the end of West Fork Road. One machine that weighs a ton or more, a 60-plus-year-old Bridgeford adjustable industrial drilling and metal routing machine, has a CAD CAM (computer aided design/computer aided machining) computer hooked up to it, along with electric motors and servos Mike attached for the computer to drive what were the old hand-spun adjusters on the Bridgeford machine. Mike's routing of that beautiful new wood sign saved the



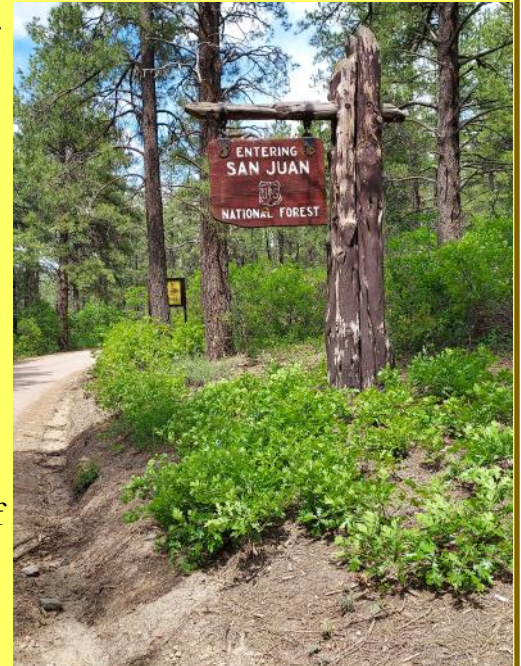
The brand new sign at the West Fork trailhead milled, routed and painted by Mike Cianciolo. (Photo by John Nelson)

Forest Service and partners several hundred dollars, which means a lot these days.

Mike and Janna are members of the San Juan Outdoor Club, and Mike has started working with the Pagosa Area Trails Council sign group that paints and refurbishes old, wooden Forest Service signs. The group does this so the aged, weathered signs look good again,

and so when the public sees the maintained signs, they are more likely to take care of the land. Not only will Mike help replace signs that are too far gone to fix, he also will help rebuild some signs that are older than just about everyone in town.

One sign is thought to have been made and put up in 1939! It's been shot at and hit, has seen a lot of harsh winters and is worth saving at least for preserving some of our history. Mike will mill a new piece for the shot-off corner, the sign group will sand and paint it, and it will be re-hung in the forest where generations to come will see it and perhaps admire it. And that matters.



This historic sign (circa 1939) is next on the list for the volunteer sign group to refurbish with Mike Cianciolo's help. (Photo by John Nelson)

The Sign Work Continues



At left, Pagosa Area Trails Council volunteers (from left) Bruce Andersen, Mike Cianciolo, Steve Earle and Bill Milner restore signs from Buckles Lake and Fawn Gulch. At right, the Forest Service entry/exit sign at Buckles Lake has been added to the growing sign-repair list. (Photos by John Nelson)



Future of Recreational Use to Take Community Approach

At the February Pagosa Area Trails Council meeting, which several SJ BCH board members attended, the outcome of a long discussion about the status of trails in our area was that we would partner with PATC and other trail user groups to help set the wheels in motion for conducting community trails planning. The purpose of the planning would be to get at how we should proceed in the future with trails, the maintenance of our existing trails system and ensuring existing trails aren't lost due to lack of maintenance.

Over the last few weeks, that idea/process has morphed into PARC—the Pagosa Area Recreation Coalition—which is meant to get at larger general recreational use questions rather than just about trails. PARC—representing all community interests related to recreational use of national forest lands in the Pagosa Springs area—intends to submit a grant request of about \$150,000 to the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Partnership

Initiative. CORPI is a state agency under Colorado Parks and Wildlife charged with assisting Colorado communities in sound planning for the future, with a mission to protect natural resources while providing quality human recreation opportunities. This is a big bite for Pagosa, of course, and will involve a lot of community involvement run mostly by the Forest Service with the potential to develop a broad-based plan that outlines the direction we all will go in the next 10 years and beyond. That will be a good thing for a community that is growing as fast as Pagosa is growing.

If PARC gets the funding, a professional facilitator will be hired to bring the community, including citizens and local government, together to bring ideas to the table and form a common vision for the future. Of course, we will want to make sure SJ BCH's interests—your interests—are reflected in the plan/vision, and you are invited to participate as things unfold.

My Bond with Victor

By Annie Pack

A novel could be written about how I even came to acquire my sweet buckskin Victor.

Ten years ago he came to me—my very first horse. I was 55 and it took me 50 years for my dream to come true. I had never even saddled a horse before, much less trailered one.

Nonetheless, Victor accepted the fact that I was a newbie. He never got upset when I would put the bridle in his mouth upside down, bend his ears...and you don't even want to know about the saddle mishaps.

I have been told by more than a few how fortunate I am to have a horse like Victor, as most never have this in a lifetime—this bond I mean. Yes, there are many, many

wonderful horses/mules out there, but it's this bond I am talking about.



Annie and Victor

He has taken care of me on scary trails when I started out riding. Friends thought I grew up riding...it was Victor that always made me “appear” to be this rider. I have done “emotional” experiments with Victor to see how deep this connection really is. It is real. When my mother passed, I was sitting in Vic's paddock very sad, and he came over and stood over me. Yes, I was under him. He stayed over me for some time, and as he walked away, not so much as a hoof touched me.

On another occasion he literally tried to pull me close to him when I played “dead.”

This past week I had a lot of work in the pasture. I was so tired. I noticed he was lying down in the pasture next

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(My Bond with Victor... cont.'d)

to where I was working. Hmm, great idea, lie down and rest a bit. I crawled under the fence and crawled over next to him. He was laying his head in my lap and then had his nose under my straw hat with his lips open on my cheek as we both were lying on the ground. Okay, so most of you men won't be moved by that, but you women,

oh yes, you know how I felt!

Sometimes as humans we just don't know what's around the corner. It is my hope that everyone finds their "Victor"—whatever that may be—and never, never give up on your dreams.



Just for Grins



Thank You to Our Generous 2024 Donors



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