



# Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

June/July 2024

## President's Message



John Nelson

Our summer is off with a bang with lots of things going on, including some interesting and innovative trail work getting done, cleanup and maintenance of Treasure Falls, forest sign repair and painting, the Fourth of July parade and critical meetings with the Forest Service. Making all this go is certainly rewarding on several levels for your board of directors and team leaders, and it takes those leaders to plan and conduct these activities. But frankly, there are never enough leaders to go around for all that we do or would like to do.

Leaders are not necessarily a special breed. Some people are born to lead; others learn to lead. Either way, we need leaders

from the ground up. While our country is pretty much split down the middle in terms of politics, one thing I think we'd all agree on would be that we could use some good leadership at the top. Good leaders typically start at the bottom, though, and I think most of us will agree that starting from the bottom and working up is a good thing. So, if you're someone who has a few skills—or not—but would like to get involved with trail work, sign painting, or any of the other good things we're doing, let us know, will you? We will work you in at whatever level you're comfortable.

## Record Turnout for Treasure Falls Cleanup



Write-up and photos by Lisa Nelson

A record-breaking 35 volunteers from several different groups in Pagosa Springs that enjoy using—and caring for—area trails joined together on June 8 at Treasure Falls east of town to spruce up this “treasure” of a site in celebration of National Trails Day. Volunteers of all ages

continued on page 2

## Inside This Issue

- Treasure Falls (cont.'d).....2
- SJBCH Rides in Fourth of July Parade.....3
- Chapter Initiates Contract Trail Work with Amish Crew.....3-4
- Hardhats, Hardheads...4-5
- Safety Corner.....5
- Hole in One for SJBCH at Community Foundation Fundraiser.....6
- Mark Your Calendars for July Events.....6
- Hard-working Crew Helps Clear Archuleta Creek Trail.....7
- SJBCH 2024 Elections Coming Up Soon.....7
- Thank You to Our Generous Donors.....8
- Your Board of Directors...8



## Take Note

There will *not* be an SJBCH general meeting in July. The next general meeting would be Aug. 19 at 6 p.m. at the United Methodist Church. We still need a volunteer to help organize our monthly meetings.



(Treasure Falls cont.'d)

bagged up litter, brushed and pruned Falls Trail and the parking area, weed-whacked the island area along the roadway, pulled invasive weeds and cleared gravel material that had washed down the main trail to the parking area. They also used brush material and logs to block cutoff trails along switchbacks and constructed two large rolling dips on the trail above the parking lot to

lessen erosion. Groups represented at the event included the San Juan Outdoor Club, DUST2 mountain bikers, Boy Scouts and San Juan Back Country Horsemen. Annie Pack of SJBCH, who organized the event, told the volunteers, “I can’t thank you enough for the hard and valuable work,” noting, “the camaraderie was fantastic, and the beautiful site looks great.”



At left—Randy Betts saved the group hours of work by using his skid steer to remove compacted dirt and gravel that washed down the trail. At right—Workers (from left) Steve Earle, Randy Senzig, John Nelson, Ron Toland and Rob Lambert construct one of two rolling dips on the trail to minimize future erosion.

Gabe Candelaria (foreground) and Eli Nehring (left) and Heath Ellis haul material to block trail cutoffs.



Chris Boyd makes a *clean sweep* of the sidewalk along the Treasure Falls parking area.



Boy Scouts (from left) Skyler Zarate, Bennett Walterscheid, Ashton Zarate, Assistant Scoutmaster David Zarate and Scoutmaster Jennifer Walterscheid cut back encroaching vegetation.



Tonya Lambert gives the Falls Trailhead a much-needed trimming.



On hand to greet the public are, from left, Tara McElhinney, Alice Gradwell, Donna Fait, JoAnn Senzig, Annie Pack and Cathy Kuffler.



Sweeping, weeding and trimming are, from left, Rocky Day, Katie Betts and Annie Pack.



A family begins a walk on the newly spruced-up Treasure Falls Trail.

Nice work everyone!



## SJBCH Rides in Fourth of July Parade



Special thanks to Tara McElhinney for organizing the SJBCH parade entry and to the SJBCH riders, banner carriers and poop picker-uppers. Thanks also to Gabe Candelaria for the photos.

## Chapter Initiates Contract Trail Work with Amish Crew

By Ron Toland

Clearing the staggering number of trees that fall on backcountry trails each year requires Herculean efforts from the Forest Service and volunteers alike. When groups like Back Country Horsemen clear a trail, we know we'll be back next year doing the same thing on the same trail; it's like the movie *Groundhog Day*. And while we're all focused on trail clearing, the tread steadily degrades—ruts form, wildlife activity erases switchbacks, scree washes over the track, hillsides collapse—as nature seeks maximum entropy. To avoid losing trails to disrepair, we need to get creative.

Hiring contract trail crews to help with trail maintenance has been on the SJBCH agenda for several years. Starting last fall, we began a proactive fundraising program that will yield around \$15,000 to put toward contract trail maintenance. Finally, on June 6, a crew of three sawyers from Monte Vista saddled their horses, packed chainsaws and crosscut saws in pack panniers and headed up Fish Lake Trail with me in tow. As we headed out, I opined that "...a strong back and a weak mind are favorable attributes for a good crew, and you boys are shaping up just right!" Took them hardly any time at all to appreciate my keen sense of humor!

Tim Graber and crew are from Monte Vista's Amish community. I don't know much about the Amish and



Tim Graber of the Amish trail crew packs tools on his mule as he and the rest of his crew prepare to clear Fish Lake Trail. (Photo by Ron Toland)

hope I don't say the right thing the wrong way. One thing I do know is "Worth the Drive Bakery" in Monte Vista makes the best fried pies ever! I was popping those things like pills and had to wean myself from a serious addiction...but I digress. Tim and crew proved their mettle and impressed me with their horsemanship and sawyering (if that's a word). They engineered cuts with textbook precision; I watched them use the root ball of one downed tree to raise another off the trail—impressive! They removed more than 80 trees from three

**(Contract Trail Work cont.'d)**

trail miles in a day and a half. Then, on June 20, in spite of a heavy rain forecast, Tim brought in a crew of six to not only clear trail but also work on tread. We brought them a couple rock slings and, since they only want expenses reimbursed (no wages), we gifted them two Silky saws compliments of SJBCH.

Come Friday afternoon (a day early), Tim and crew pull up in the driveway to return the rock slings and let us know they cleared 75 trees on Fish Lake Trail to the tree line and 18 trees on a little less than a mile of Fish Creek. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, mother nature took it upon herself to do some of the rock work for us; they had no issues getting livestock up the trail where obstacles could be found last year. Finally, after riding out in heavy rain, Tim tells me he can't wait to come back and cut more trail (refer to my comment about "...shaping up just

right!") Well Tim, we'll have you all back any time and welcome!



**Tim Graber and crew cleared more than 170 trees on two trips in June to Fish Lake Trail.**

**(Photo by Ron Toland)**

## Hardhats, Hardheads

### By John Nelson

For one reason or another, some people don't like to wear hardhats. Maybe because they think they look dorky or maybe because it gives them "hat hair." Never mind that they protect your noggin and are required PPE (personal protective equipment) for doing trail work under the terms of our volunteer agreement with the Forest Service.

Several of us in the chapter have long discussed the merits and drawbacks to wearing hardhats. All of us understand we should wear them, but some don't because they just don't like them. This has become a little problematic, because any pictures we use of chapter trail work done by folks who aren't wearing hardhats can't be used in anything BCH-related, including articles we'd like to submit to the national newsletter showing all the good work we're getting done.



**Randy Senzig (left) and Bill McElhinney**

When it comes to wearing hardhats or other PPE when doing trail and other work, some of our folks say they'll assume the risk themselves; that if they get hurt "it'll be on my own nickel." I think folks who feel this

way should maybe rethink that and consider what the costs both physically and to the pocketbook might be if they were to be hurt, which we hope never happens to any of our members.

Chapter leadership has been trying to figure out how to get our folks to wear hardhats, similar to how some of our members now wear cowboy/cowgirl style riding helmets. We're hoping that if we explain how good hardhats are and how cool they can be, maybe our members will start wearing them. And if you think a hardhat is a hassle to haul up the trail—with no convenient place to put it after you finish your cut, put your Resistol back on and head up the trail to the next tree to cut—well,

**continued on page 5**



**(Hard Hats cont.'d)**

consider that they are very light and you can easily stuff them in a pannier or bungee them on top of a pannier, or tie them behind your cantele bag.

Own your own hardhat. Wear it with pride. Buy one (a good one, six-point suspension inside, meets [ANSI Z89.1 standards](#), is comfortable, etc.), or ask for one for Christmas. If you Google ANSI Z89.1, you'll see a variety of vendors who sell hardhats. Get whatever color you want and personalize yours with your name and a decal or two. Consider getting either a full-brimmed round hardhat (my favorite—good sun protection) or a ballcap style. A good one may cost \$50 or more. Cheap ones aren't worth the money. When you get your new

hardhat, take a picture of you wearing it and send it to us so we can brag about you!



**Full-brimmed round hardhat**

## Safety Corner

**SAFETY**  
IS  
**EVERYONE'S**  
RESPONSIBILITY

***Note:** At a recent meeting, your board of directors discussed the occurrence of a few close calls involving some of our members. The board decided it would be a good idea to regularly share information about such situations and what measures might be taken to mitigate or prevent mishaps. Board member Chris Boyd, who has extensive experience in public safety, will spearhead a new feature in the newsletter titled "Safety Corner." The intent is not to embarrass anyone but to share "lessons learned" about how we might all stay safe as we ride our horses and also work on trails. Everyone is encouraged to share their experiences so we can all benefit. A special thanks to Allan Netzer for the first "Safety Corner" article.*

## There's Danger in Them Waters

**By Allan Netzer**

A few weeks ago Donna Fait, Colleen Netzer and I were riding the Murry Homestead trail working my young mustang Sundance through the many river crossings—great experience for him. As we approached one crossing, Sundance was excited to get back in the water, and I was pleased with how well he was doing. Along the riverbank was a fair amount of sticks, branches and other debris that had washed up during the previous couple of days' rain. Sundance easily stepped over it and we plunged into the water, followed by Colleen on Mocha.

Unfortunately, Mocha became entangled in barbed wire that was in the water under the debris, and the resulting jackpot ended with Colleen sitting in the mud on the other shore and Mocha's leg bleeding badly. The barbed wire had washed downriver with the rain, and what could have been a serious situation turned out ok. Colleen had a helmet on so all that was seriously hurt was her pride, and Mocha's bleeding was all from superficial cuts. Donna had stayed on

dry land and pointed out: whenever you come across debris along a shore, particularly following a big rain or flood, expect hazards and clear them prior to crossing. Lesson learned

The following points come from your board of directors who learned of some recent close calls:

- Group leaders make sure everyone is comfortable with the plan before moving ahead.
- Recognize peer pressure even when you think it's not going on, with responsibility for such things falling on each individual in the party, not just the leader.
- If you're not comfortable with something, don't do it.
- Make sure you're familiar with the horse you ride.
- Consider wearing a riding helmet, especially when riding a strange horse.
- Ask people with loose dogs to always have them under control.
- Remember to always expect the unexpected when riding. Their senses are sharp, and we need to team with them—thinking ahead and observing our surroundings. The idea being to see and hear potential dangers before them or as they sense them, and thus better manage potentially unsafe situations.
- Keep your head up and on a swivel and be tuned in to your surroundings. Watch behind you as best you can, understanding that new technology is out there that can impact you and your animals—technology like very quiet electric motorcycles and side-by-sides driven by children who maybe aren't as aware of safety considerations.

Have you had a close call lately? If so, please share a few details with Chris Boyd so we can all stay safe.

## Hole in One for SJBCH at Community Foundation Fundraiser



The weather cooperated, and the evening was dry and mild for the final 19th Hole Concerts fundraiser on July 11, sponsored by the Community Foundation serving southwest Colorado. SJBCH is one of four nonprofits that will share proceeds from the event series. At left, attendees enjoy the music by the featured band, San Juan Mountain Boys. At right, SJBCH Vice President Ron Toland describes the mission of the chapter. To Ron's right, board member Katie Betts presents a gift bag to a young winner during a drawing. Special thanks for the clever gift bags that included a branded aspen round and color notecards featuring paintings by cowboy artist Rick Unger. (Photos by Lisa Nelson)

### Mark Your Calendars for July Events

**July 20-21**

#### Thirty Mile Trail Project

Work with youth on 0.3 mile trail at Thirty Mile Stock Unloading Area on Rio Grande National Forest

Camp out overnight

For info, contact Ron Toland at 970-585-4109.

\*\*\*\*\**weather dependent*\*\*\*\*\*

**July 27**

#### SJBCH Group Ride

##### Kenney Flats

8:30 a.m.— arrive for safety meeting

9 a.m.—ride out

noon—group lunch

For info, contact Annie Pack at 210-215-9566.



JoAnn Senzig couldn't resist a photo op with Smokey Bear at a recent SJBCH meeting at the Pagosa Ranger District.

(Photo by Lisa Nelson)



## Hard-Working Crew Helps Clear Archuleta Creek Trail

By Ron Toland

On July 13, seven SJBCH members, one saddle horse, one pack horse and eight individuals from Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and Divide Ranger District met at the Archuleta Creek Trailhead for a trail clearing project.

About 35 trees needed to be cleared for a San Juan Mountain Association crew to get in for some trail tread work beginning July 22. We took out the first tree about a half mile in and had to clear the horse crossing at the bridge—both good candidates for a chainsaw, but we only brought crosscuts for the wilderness work.

Then we came across a two-footer requiring four cuts and had to heft each section over a three-and-a-half-foot embankment. By 1:30 we were played out, and some dark clouds started to form. After being informed only three trees were left in front of us and a six-man crew to cut, we turned around and started the four-mile hike out. Back at the truck, we agreed cutting trees is an exhausting yet satisfying occupation. What a good crew!

The SJBCH crew included Rob and Tonya Lambert, Bill McElhinney, Allan and Colleen Netzer, Randy Senzig and new member Jeff Potter and his horses.



Following a safety meeting, the crew went to work on clearing downed trees. Their sweat equity really paid off by helping to open this trail that goes through some beautiful country. (Photos by Ron Toland)

## SJBCH 2024 Elections Coming Up Soon

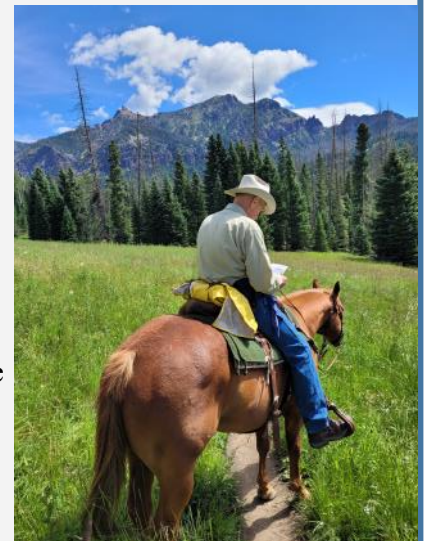
By John Nelson

I am so proud of our chapter. I really am. I'm glad this is the last article in this newsletter, because now you have seen all the neat things we're doing together.

Will you join us in a leadership position with the San Juan BCH chapter and help us grow to the next level? We need you—your experience, skills and abilities, whatever they are. Our annual elections are coming up in September, and your board of directors hopes you'll consider getting more involved in chapter activities. We have a great slate of officers running for election: Ron Toland as president, Larry Smith as vice president, Katie Betts as secretary (with me as her minion alternate) and Allan Netzer as treasurer.

Would you consider serving as an elected or appointed officer of the board? We need new voices on the board to help with several things, including the Social Committee and Fundraising Committee, so we can advance our mission of keeping trails open for all and to perpetuate the commonsense use and enjoyment of horses in the backcountry and wilderness.

Please come join us.



# Thank You to Our Generous 2024 Donors



John and Jane Mancuso



San Juan  
Veterinary Hospital

Ash and Trish Tully  
Sundown Outfitters/Rio Grande Outfitters



Sherwin Williams

Justin Frie  
Backcountry Outfitters

## Your Board of Directors

John Nelson, President

Rocky Day, Ex-Officio member

Ron Toland, Vice President and Trails Lead

Donna Fait, Volunteer Hours Coordinator

Katie Betts, Secretary

Justin Frie, Outfitter and Guide Liaison

Allan Netzer, Treasurer

Janie Gray, Membership Coordinator

Randy Betts, Ex-Officio member

Lisa Nelson, Communications Lead

Chris Boyd, Safety and Training Officer

Annie Pack, Ex-Officio Member

Gabe Candelaria, Ex-Officio member

Dick Ray, Outfitter and Guide Liaison

Kelli Day, Ex-Officio member

JoAnn Senzig, Rodeo Committee Lead

Larry Smith, Past President

Jenavieve Betts and Elle Candelaria — Youth Ambassadors