

Backcountry Horse Association convenes in Sisters

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

The Sisters Rodeo grounds served as the site of the Oregon Back Country Horseman's Association annual meeting on Saturday, February 18. The event provides an opportunity for members of chapters from throughout the state to come together to conduct a business meeting, participate in a skills competition, partake in fellowship and listen to guest speakers.

Buck Davis of Bend, president for the East Cascades chapter, welcomed the change of location to Sisters after previous year's meeting at the Crook County Fairgrounds.

"The Rodeo clubhouse and grounds turned out to be a perfect spot for us to gather," he said. "People like coming to the Sisters area, so everyone seemed happy with the choice."

With nine chapters in Oregon, members literally representing all corners of the state attended the event.

"It's a good turnout," agreed President Jerry Bentz, of Canby. "We have people from every chapter represented."

Saturday included meetings and updates on the goals of the association, which includes the mission to educate on ethical stock use and "leave no trace" horse camping. A crosscut saw competition during the afternoon brought out some stellar performances by pairs of sawyers, while underlining one of the practical actions the association is known for: trail clearing.

According to member and guest speaker Jim Akenson, the association includes volunteers who, in cooperation with the Forest Service and other agencies, help to clear and maintain trails in Oregon used by horses and mules. In fact, the local chapter volunteers of the year, Peggy and Lee Fischer of Sisters, traversed nearly 400 miles of trails in 2016 on behalf of the

association.

One of the association's mottos is "Dedicated to keeping Oregon's Trails open to all."

Holly Akenson, Jim's wife and one of the seven Oregon Fish and Wildlife commissioners, commented on the crosscut saw competition in which pair of sawyers raced the clock and other teams for bragging rights until next year's meeting. The crosscut saws are the best tool for removing downed trees in the wilderness, where gas-powered chainsaws are not allowed.

"I was really impressed with the enthusiasm of men and women of all ages in the crosscut saw competition," she said. "It brought a spirit of competition as well as camaraderie to the afternoon."

The winners in the men's division cut through a log in about the same time it would take to do it with a chainsaw, without the noise, smell, and pollution.

Dinnertime took on the look of a truly Western gathering of cowboys and packers, as members used Dutch ovens to prepare many of the main courses for the potluck meal. Friends old and new gathered around the cookout, swapping stories and sharing some good-natured ribbing about the results of the crosscut saw competition.

After dinner, the Akensons, who now reside in Enterprise, delighted the crowd with stories of the 21 years they spent working in the backcountry of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness at a field station operated by the University of Idaho. The area surrounding their station at Taylor Ranch is considered one of the most rugged, remote and biologically rich places in the lower 48 states.

The couple recently published a book, "7003 Days: 21 Years in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness," which chronicles their experiences there, including encounters with

old-timers, the re-introduction of wolves to the area, and a harrowing escape from a tremendous wildfire. With a love for the history of the place, the wildlife, and the people that came before them, the Akensons clearly expressed their passion for the area, their hope that some vestiges of "Old Idaho" will always remain, and the gratitude they feel for how unique and rare their experience there was.

The tie-in to speaking about their Taylor Ranch experience with the Back Country Horsemen members stems from the fact that being in the center of a wilderness area meant using stock (horses and mules) on a daily basis. The couple became quite proficient in using mules and horses for packing, cutting the grass on the air strip, hauling firewood, and other endeavors. Part of their talk emphasized their opportunity to pass on these skills to young people in a time period where fewer and fewer people are exposed to that lifestyle.

Jim Akenson, who just turned 60 and now works as the conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, said afterwards that he has been encouraged by younger folks stepping forward to get involved in the association's work.

"Those younger guys and gals can clear trail much quicker than guys my age. I hope all of the chapters can continue to attract younger members."



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Cross-cut sawyers demonstrate skill and stamina.

The couple plans to return to Sisters this spring to do a reading and book-signing at Paulina Springs Books.

At a time when trail use, especially in Central Oregon, is mushrooming, Akenson says it is more important than ever for all users — bikers,

runners, hikers, and horse owners — to work together to not only maintain the trails, but share them in a way that keeps all users safe, while also protecting wild areas.

"Everyone needs to keep working together for the common good," he said.

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While the best things in life are free, as the saying goes, some of life's great experiences do have a price tag. If you're considering fulfilling your childhood dream of hiking the Appalachian Trail or you're offered tickets to see your favorite team play in the championship game, you know these experiences can be costly. Yet these opportunities can be within financial reach if you have a plan and sufficient funds set aside. The following do's and don'ts can help you take the right steps to make these dreams a reality.

Do calculate the total cost of the experience. Many opportunities have upgrades or additional options that can make the experience memorable. Think about what the ideal experience looks like for you, and factor those extra costs into your budget. Be sure to include the cost of accommodations and airfare if participating requires you to travel.

If you're traveling with family or friends, discuss your expectations before you go. That way, if your friend wants backstage passes or a seat upgrade, you can prepare your budget accordingly. You'll also avoid an emotional decision in the moment that could derail your finances.

Do make saving a priority. Start by looking at your recent spending and identify ways to allocate money to fund your dream. If you have a recurring subscription or a cable package you don't use, consider eliminating the expense and funding your dream instead. Next, create a savings goal, or the amount you'd like to earmark for those VIP tickets each month. Having a goal may help you reign-in impulse purchases, because your financial priorities will be top-of-mind.

If you're still tempted to spend the money elsewhere, consider establishing a separate savings account. Many accounts allow you to set up an automatic transfer into the dedicated account each month. If you have the option, automatic transfers could help make the process of saving easier.

Don't spend your emergency savings. While you may be tempted, avoid tapping into your emergency fund. This money should be used to meet a sudden unexpected expense or to fill the gap in case of a job layoff. If you fund your scuba vacation instead, you do so at a possible risk to your long-term financial security. Unforeseen expenses can occur at any time, so you want to have sufficient money in place.

Don't forget to keep funding other financial priorities. As you save toward your dream, make sure you continue to fund other long-term financial goals, such as your retirement or your child's college tuition. If you want help balancing your priorities, consider meeting with a financial professional who can work with you to develop a strategy that addresses your unique situation.

Do enjoy the experience without the financial guilt. If you take the time to create a plan and be diligent about saving, chances are that you'll be able to enjoy the experience without thinking about its impact to your budget. Your dream will feel even more fulfilling if you feel good about the financial decisions you made to get there.

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