

When I thought about doing this ride, I decided to invite only friends who met 2 criteria – they had to have a sense of humor and their horses had to be trail savvy. I invited 4 women ranging in age from 45 to 74 yrs. Tracey Potter, Jeanne Wallace, Kimberly Gustafson, and Janet Peterson.

On a general basis, we really enjoyed several special things -- the trails & trail treads were in great condition - the rock formations of Old Boney seen from Blue Canyon Tr and Chamberlain Tr in Pt Mugu - the views seen at the same time of the ocean and the valley from the top of Corral Cyn - riding up through the rocks and massive boulders of Saddle Peak Trail in Malibu Creek State Park - the wonderful friends who previewed the trails for downed trees and removed them - the friends who drove the trailers from campsite to campsite every day - the friends who brought our horses & us water – the friends who let us camp at their ranches - Calamigos Ranch for an amazing stay with our horses high lined, cocktails, fabulous buffet, cabin with shower & beds - and all the other friends who helped in myriad ways.

It was wonderful to have the support of National Park Service, California State parks, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for this historic ride to publicize the Backbone Trail as a National Recreation Trail. We greatly appreciated the many small and big things that State Parks and NPS did for us – especially SP putting up corrals at Trippet Ranch in Topanga State Park and NPS doing all the media and press.

I did the ride for several reasons: I am grateful that at 81 years I can ride that distance and enjoy it. I wanted to help publicize the Backbone Trail as a new National Recreation Trail. I hoped to inspire others to reach for their goals. I wanted to show land managers the great need for trail camps.

The main challenge was having places for camping overnight.

Suggestion: In the future, when people are camping at Danielson Ranch and do not have horses, if a group with horses wants to camp there, then the equestrians ought to be allowed to share the campsite and use the corrals. Additionally, the corrals that are in great disrepair at the Sycamore Multi-use campsite should be moved. When they were installed more than 20 years ago, there was not the heavy biking, hiking and vehicle traffic on the roadway that is now present. The corrals, campsite and restroom should be relocated to a place much farther off the roadway that will afford some sense of privacy and relief from the traffic.

Biggest challenge on the ride were the overhanging low branches, especially on some of the trails: Old Blue, Chamberlain, Boney, Mishe Mokwa, Latigo, Newton, and Hondo.

NPS: Need BBT sign where trail comes from Mishe Mokwa & meets Yerba Buena and U-turns, as there are 2 trail options there.

Need BBT sign pointing left on Saddle Peak Tr after boulders & after Boundary sign where a stick is across the BBT so that people know it is correct to turn left regardless of the stick.

SP: Need Sign - HORSES COMING UP & GOING DOWN - Top of Piuma & Saddle Peak Tr in addition to the “no bike” signs.

The rock slab on Hondo Cyn could be improved for horses if the surface was roughed with a jack hammer/pick.

Camping Sites are needed about every 10-11 miles. We averaged 2 to 2.5 mph depending on the terrain and the distance, as well as the weather; and we averaged 11 miles per day with lots of climbing. We rode the BBT west to east as it's more climbing in that direction which I personally find easier than going downhill due to my hip. I also prefer the views in that direction.

Days & miles:

#1- 8 miles #2- 13 miles #3- 11.5 miles #4- 14 miles #5 - 12 miles #6 -10.5 miles

Camping places we used:

Started at Ray Miller Trail from La Jolla Campground in Pt. Mugu July 18th at 10 am Monday

#1 - Danielson Ranch in Pt. Mugu SP- corrals – water – restroom

#2- Private ranch on Yerba Buena – high lined – no water – own restroom

#3- Calamigos Ranch – high lined – water – restroom – cabin with shower available – Café restaurant

#4- Private ranch on Piuma – corrals – water – restroom

#5- Trippet Ranch in Topanga SP – corrals - water – restroom

Ended at Will Rogers State Historic Park July 23rd at 4pm Saturday

Need a Campsite especially along Yerba Buena as Circle X Ranch is too short a distance from Danielson.

Need a Campsite in area of Tapia Park near Piuma Rd or along the BBT south of Piuma Rd.

Need a trail from BBT to Calamigos Ranch, which is an ideal camping place for all users – we had to trailer the horses to Calamigos at the end of the ride Wed and then trailer them back to Kanan on Thursday morning –

Water Support Locations:

Mishe Mokwa parking lot on Yerba Buena

Encinal Canyon Rd at Camp 13

Top of Corral Canyon

Bottom of Mesa Peak Motorway at Las Virgenes Rd

Overlook at Stunt / Schueren Rd

Dead Horse Parking lot – optional

Temescal Ridge Fire Rd

Horseback Information:

- 1- Horses need breast collar & tight cinch to prevent the saddle slipping & soiling backs for climbing steep hills
- 2- Most people underestimate the condition of their horses & themselves – few are honest as to whether they can handle long hours (12-14 hrs) in the saddle in the hot sun with humidity and possible smoke from fires
- 3- Support for water at road crossings is crucial for horses and some riders
- 4- Camping sites accessible for vehicles for hay & water
- 5- Rocky trails need consideration for horses' feet – I only shoe front feet of my horse & she was fine
- 6- Carry a folding bucket for water at hose bibs – Danielson Ranch, Sycamore Cyn Rd, Dead Horse parking lot
- 7- Lots of bees around hose bibs at Sycamore and Danielson
- 8 -Rocks & boulders on Saddle Peak Tr are quite technical & only for trail savvy horses
- 9- Horses must be used to high lining

Now that the Backbone Trail is a National Recreation Trail there will be many more people interested in traversing it. The needed trail camps are the main priority, as you know. We were able to do the ride by using two private places but they will not be an option for future travelers. I recommend a distance of 10-11 miles between campsites, as I believe that can work for most users. Having just 8 miles between campsites forces riders to have some very long days to get through the whole trail in several days or else they have to add another day to the ride.

We did the ride in 6 days and 5 nights. The first day was just 8 miles from La Jolla Campground in Pt. Mugu SP to Danielson Ranch, where there were corrals, water and restrooms. It was ok to have one short day with a good campsite to start the ride. Fortunately, for the second day we found a place to camp with permission that was 13 miles distant. Although there was no water there, we were fine as we had plenty of water in the trailers; we had a portable restroom; and we high lined the horses.

Trail Camps and Campgrounds are different, and their access and use are different. Trail camps need just poles for high lining, some water and a restroom. They do not need vehicle access to the site except for servicing the restroom. It is ok to have access a short distance away for support of friends bringing hay, people supplies or visiting. High lines are better rather than corrals at equestrian trail camps. Camping with horses requires that the horses be familiar with high lining. By high lining, horses can be separated farther apart to minimize interaction. Also, it will cost you less to install poles than to maintain corrals. Some horses are not friendly with others, and the corrals are damaged when horses are kicking at others, and the horses can be more easily injured. Each campsite should be able to handle 6 to 8 horses. You would need to erect four (4) poles, and the visitors would bring their own ropes. I'd be glad to offer further information on the various ways to handle high lining. Campgrounds need a place for vehicles and rigs - truck & horse trailer, and a place for turning around. At campgrounds it is common for some people to tie their horses to their trailers overnight. Some people use a Hi-tie, which is attached to their trailer and extends out so the horse can move around more, eat from the ground and lie down; it is similar to high lining.

Horses can lock their knees when sleeping standing up, and they often do so especially during the day. They do not always close their eyes when sleeping, so people must always talk when approaching a horse and not assume it sees or hears you; when startled horses will move quickly and often kick out. Their reactions are about 10 times quicker than humans. Yes, it's amazing considering their size!

Since people can haul water in support vehicles, it is helpful but not necessary to have it at every campsite. A non-potable container / water buffalo for the horses might work at some places.

The manure at campsites could be handled in 2 possible ways. One is to bag it and put it in the horse trailer. If riders have no support vehicle, then the best way to distribute this organic material is to send it into the brush so that birds, rodents and small animals can enjoy it. It is bio-degradable, and many people use it as compost for their gardens. Riders with pack stock may not have a support vehicle as they can pack their own feed, and someone can meet them with water along the trail or at a campsite.

The most amazing thing was our favorite vet, Dr. Merle with Conejo Equine Vet, surprising us with ice cream Tuesday night and again surprising us with electrolytes early Saturday morning. The scariest part of the ride for Tracey, Jeanne and me was crossing the bridge at Chicken Ridge in Will Rogers State Historic Park.

Donors

Calamigos Ranch – fabulous dinner for 35, cabin available for riders

Harrison Maps – set of maps of Santa Monica Mountains

West Valley Horse Center

Bright Star Saddlery

Dr. Merle, Conejo Equine Vet

Numero Uno Pizza, Agoura

Pollo Loco, Agoura

ParkWatchReport – shirts for volunteers

Non-Profit Supporters

Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council – website & FB

Recreation & Equestrian Coalition – fuel

Media & Press

Ventura County Star – Acorn & Topanga newspapers – PBR KPCC – KTLA channel 5 -

Many thanks for the help and support from all the parkland agencies on our achieving success on the Backbone

Challenge Ride. We greatly appreciated all you did in every small and big way and you made a difference.

If anyone has questions about the ride, contact: Ruth Gerson 818-991-1236 ruthgerson@aol.com

We had a great time and really laughed our way across the Backbone Trail.

Ruth Gerson