

# 4-H Trail & Packing

By Hannah Boll



When I first started the 4-H horse packing project, there was only one issue: I disliked horses. In fact, I was scared of them. I could get kicked, stepped on, my fingers nibbled, or even fall off... The alternative was to sit at home while the rest of my family went to packing clinics. Except I was only thirteen and wasn't allowed to stay behind on my own, and so I had no choice but to watch the helmet safety video, pick out one to wear, and start learning how to pack.

As it turned out, the clinics weren't so bad. I had yet to go on my first real pack trip, but so far I had unwittingly started to appreciate the skill that went into each highline and the technique in every manly I helped with. People from the community were at each clinic to help myself and other members in the project understand horse safety, map reading, equine first-aid, and more. We put together and weighed loads and practiced trail etiquette. In my project book, I progressed from level to level with each new skill I learned.

My very first trip was camping at a trailhead in a wall tent with the horses on a highline outside. I didn't pack on that trip but still had plenty of responsibilities including making sure the three horses we had were fed and watered, tied correctly, and feeling happy with the new change from the pasture to the camp. By this time I still didn't like horses and came to the conclusion that they never stopped eating, either.

Soon my family's herd grew from three to five and we were ready to pack into the Bob Marshall Wilderness... Minus the fact that there were five of us and only five horses. Thankfully, the family we most often go on trips with had enough pack stock to carry some of our things into Silvertip cabin, which we'd reserved for about a week. Our group volunteered to dig a new pit for the outhouse and clean up blow down trees, and throughout the week we went fishing, hunting, and surprisingly I enjoyed being with everyone at camp who *didn't* get head lice that week. That was the trip I realized I could probably keep doing this and not be bummed there was no cell phone service in the wilderness.

Somewhere in between age thirteen and now, I saw more to what I was at first being reluctantly coerced into doing. I found a bit of purpose and an escape in horse packing. I've helped get gravel to areas of trail that needed it, repainted a Forest Service cabin, and even got cross-cut and chainsaw certified - all because of joining this 4-H project. There will be many future clinics and volunteer projects to attend, and I've even been taking the initiative to personally promote 4-H packing through 4-H events. As a youth member of the Northwest Montana Backcountry Horsemen and the 4-H packing program, I've helped with packing demonstrations at our county fair, participated in annual highway cleanups, and recently, I put on a table display at our county's 4-H project fair.

Now I'm seventeen and have been on many more packing trips. My horse and I have finally bonded and can tolerate each other even in a torrential downpour on the side of a mountain. I'm glad to have realized how lucky I am to get these opportunities; even in the worst weather I get to experience something most people can only imagine. Generation after generation of packers, dudes, outfitters, and trail riders have gone down the same paths as me, and hopefully people my age can keep that mountain tradition alive and kicking. I *did* end up getting stepped on, nibbled, and falling off... So in a way, my fears were founded. But being able to take my sweet time mastering horsemanship and having mentors who want me to succeed has far outweighed my old worries. To say I've come far as a 4-H backcountry horseman is quite an understatement.

## How Trail & Packing Impacted my Life

By Melanie Totten

It's hard to understand the importance of this program without understanding what we do. 4-H Trail and Packing teaches the next generation how to pack safely and efficiently.

Without 4-H trail and packing I wouldn't have fallen so in love with the Bob Marshall Wilderness. I wouldn't understand the importance of maintaining the wilderness or the impact it has on our daily lives.

Trail & Packing taught me how to take care of myself and others on the trail. Most of what I learned I carried over into my daily life on and off the trail. For example, I learned basic first aid for people and horses. This has helped me more times than I can count.

The program taught me to plan ahead and to make a list when I've got a big project I need to complete, without it I wouldn't be the person I am today.

I now plan to spend every summer packing in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. My knowledge and understanding of the importance of maintaining the wilderness areas was only made possible by 4-H Trail and Packing.

So a big thank you to all the teachers who helped me grow as a person.

## My experience in the Flathead County 4 H Trail & Packing Program

By Kaj Haagerup

Over the course of the past few years I have participated in the Flathead County 4H Trail & Packing Program. It has taught me everything I need to know about how to safely take my stock on pack trips in the backcountry wilderness. I am now 18 years old and have 4 years of pack experience on trips into the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness, Great Bear Wilderness, and Bob Marshall Wilderness. Using skills I learned in the Trail & Packing Program I was able to break my own horses to pack. I will be able to use these skills for a lifetime and I hope one day to pass them down to my own children.

Pack trips quickly became the highlights of my summers. The majority of the trips I participate in are volunteer trips for the Forest Service and Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. By getting to enjoy the wilderness that many others worked hard to persevere for me, I think it is my turn to do the same for the future generation. On my trips I have done work like, clearing trails, packing various crews in and out, staining a cabin, tearing down an old fence, digging a hole for an outhouse, assembling an outhouse, and building a corral.

My most memorable trip would be to Salmon Forks Cabin. We first rode 14 miles to Black Bear Cabin where we crossed the Black Bear suspension bridge. We stayed overnight, fished, picked strawberries, huckleberries, and chased elk out of the round pen after they hopped in to steal alfalfa from the horses. The next day we did a short 7 mile ride to Salmon Forks Cabin where we tore down the old perimeter fence and piled it to be burned later on. We stayed there for two nights, ate lots of fresh trout, and then rode 21 miles back to the trailhead. The views were incredible and it was also my first trip with my new gelding who had required a lot of work.

I would hands down recommend the 4H Trail & Packing program to other kids in the future. I had grown up with horses but I had no idea how to pack and never thought within a year I'd be packing and doing volunteer work for the Wilderness Foundation. I have met so many amazing people and learned so many valuable skills. I am very grateful for the instructors who started the program. I am now a mentor in the program myself and can give children the same opportunity I was given. Having the ability to phone a friend and take off into the mountains for multiple days on horseback is a feeling like no other. I hope many other kids get to experience the same thing.



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To whom it may concern,

My name is Richard Owens and I manage Wilderness, Recreation and trails program on the Spotted Bear Ranger District. Spotted Bear is the largest Ranger District in the lower 48. There are over 1,100 miles of trail on the District which includes 850,000 acres of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. We coordinate with a lot of volunteers not the least of which is the Backcountry Horsemen. Our partnership with the Backcountry Horsemen is our longest and historic relationship. In recent years there has been a sharp drop-off in active participation from the Horsemen. There are several factors for this drop-off but the biggest one is that the average age of membership is getting much older. Here at Spotted Bear we maintain the largest stock program in the Forest Service and part of our mission has always been to carry on the legacy of stock handling and other traditional skills in order to preserve the backcountry lifestyle. The Northwest Montana chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen has started a fantastic new program with their 4-H trail and packing program. The number of young people participating and receiving the training and experience of packing into the Wilderness has been very impressive. The District has been reaping the rewards of this group packing themselves in the backcountry and working on various projects such as rebuilding corrals. The 4-H Trails and packing program has been the most successful program I have seen trying to generate interest in traditional skills and I am ever hopeful that the program continues to grow.

Richard Owens  
Wilderness and Trails Manager  
Spotted Bear Ranger District



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November 30, 2021

John Chepulis  
2 Dovetail Lane  
Columbus, MT 59019

**Flathead County  
Extension Office**

Dear Mr. Chepulis and award committee:

I am writing to nominate the Northwest Montana Back Country Horsemen (NWMTBCH) for the BCHA Double Diamond Award.

I am the Montana State University Extension Agent in Flathead County, Montana. I have been working with the NWMTBCH to organize and implement the collaborative 4-H horse packing project for the past six years.

NWMTBCH have been providing exceptional educational opportunities for our 4-H youth. The number of volunteers needed for safety and hands on training around horses is very high compared to most 4-H projects. At least fourteen adult NWMTBCH members have become 4-H leaders to supervise the young people. Between 30 and 40 4-H youth participate in the packing project each winter and spring.

NWMTBCH developed the series of workshops and clinics, upgraded a 1994 4-H Packing Manual, invested thousands of dollars' worth of educational materials for the 4-H project and donated hundreds of hours to teaching the youth. After achieving competence in four and five levels of required skills, a number of

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young people are now packing and volunteering for the forest service and Bob Marshall Wilderness on their own. In just the summer of 2021, the 4-H youth tallied 1520 hours of packing worth \$82,979.61, according to the Forest Service.

These successful youth are now teaching the younger 4-H members that are joining at an increasing rate. They are able to accompany the other members of the NWMTBCH to clear trails, install outhouses and bridges, take crew members where needed in the wilderness and inspire more young people to enjoy the back country.

I cant say enough about this dedicated chapter. They have provided consistent, high quality instruction to the youth of Flathead County while always maintaining a professional and enthusiastic demeanor. I have been fortunate enough to join them on several activities. It is always a pleasure.

Neighboring state BCH chapters have contacted the NWMTBCH for advice on how to start similar collaborations with 4-H. These chapters are recognizing the benefit of this instruction, I hope you do to.

Respectfully submitted,



Patricia McGlynn, Ph.D.

Montana State University Extension Agent