

Payette's First Pack Trip
August 2011
Grandjean to Ardeth Lake
Sawtooth Wilderness, Idaho

On August 13, which was a Saturday, my herd mates and I started getting excited; something was going on with the humans at our ranch. Bill Selkirk and Bob Hamlin, who generally visit in the winter to ski, had arrived and Rob was getting all the camping and packing equipment out and sorted. It was a busy day, with a quickie packing and defensive horsemanship clinic for Bob who had not been on a pack trip before. I got fitted for trail boots for my front feet, the trailer was hooked up to the truck, and the equipment was loaded. I didn't sleep very well that night, to excited about the coming adventure and very unsure what my role was going to be. Rob had started riding me a bit during the spring and summer, but I had not yet been on a ride or project with the Back Country Horsemen this year so didn't know if I was going to pack equipment or be a riding horse.

Sunday morning after breakfast and a bit more packing, my herd mates and I were loaded into our big trailer. With five of us, there is not a lot of room to move around, but it didn't matter, as none of us wanted to be left at home.

The ride to Grandjean is about three hours with the last few miles on a very bumpy gravel road. We arrived at the camping area, were unloaded and stood around in the shade while the camp was being set up.

Other members of the trip started arriving and soon we were eight people and thirteen horses and mules. After a quick lunch, hay for us and finger food for the humans, we were saddled up for a short day ride. Rob put his saddle on me, so at least for today, I was going to try and be a tail horse. I was a bit nervous as I didn't have much experience yet,

but my herd mates were with me, so I was confident it would be ok. When we started out, I was third in line, behind Willow and Misty. Moosely was behind me, with Rob leading him, followed by Kestrel, then everyone else. Rob was trying hard not to let the lead rope touch me, but I could see it and I was sure Moosely was going to try and bite me, he does that when we play, so I spent my time with one eye on Misty, she sometimes kicks and one eye on Moosely.

On the trail between the trailers and the sign-in box I only tripped about a dozen times, a combination of my new boots and because I was too busy watching my herd mates and not the trail. When we stopped to fill out the trip ticket, the lead rope touched my rump and I spun around to see what that it was, which got us all tangled up. No wreck, but Rob knew I was not ready to be a lead horse yet and so made some changes in our order and jobs. I became the fifth in line, with Moosely following Kestrel. I could now keep my eyes on the trail and for the most part stopped tripping on every rock and pine cone, blame the new boots!

We rode for a couple of hours through big trees and crossing small streams and a bridge. I had done this trail before being lead, so knew I could do it, plus I got to watch my buddies before it was my turn. After we returned to camp and were unsaddled, we got a cold drink from the river and stood in the shade until dinner was served.

Monday morning started early with a drink and breakfast then getting the packing gear all organized, weighted and everyone saddled and loaded. The first day of a trip is always a bit chaotic, for me it seemed like hurry up, and then wait. But learning to be patient is an important skill for a mountain trail horse, one I will be working on for a long time.

The goal for the day was Elk Lake, you take the South Fork of the Payette River trail [TR-452] for twelve miles. The trail follows the river up a canyon that narrows and raises in elevation as you get closer to Elk Lake. The first eight miles the trail was in very good condition and is easy going with periodic streams to get cool drinks.

I was again in my number "5" positions with my herd in front of me, Sam and Robbin and their mule right behind, followed by Janine and her mule and then the Chick's (Charles & Lorraine) and their pack horse. This was a great place to see what was going on, at both ends of our pack train.

I think I did really well crossing the river and creeks, and going through a couple of boggy areas. I still was not paying enough attention where I was putting my feet and tripped a couple of times, but was getting better. The last few miles of trail to Elk Lake, climb beside a series of water falls. We stopped a number of times to take pictures. The trail was very rocky in places, where you had to be careful where you put your feet. One spot Rob got off and lead me, which turned out to be a good thing as a couple of the other more experience horses slipped and cut up their legs.

There were a number of big logs over the trail in this section that we have to find ways around because they were too big to cut with our saddle saws. Other smaller logs we cut so the going was a bit slower.

Everyone was happy to arrive at Elk Lake. There is a great horse camping area at the south east end, with a large swampy meadow that is full of great tasting grasses and it is easy to get cool drinks. After we were un-saddled and packed, Rob put a bell around willows neck, tied up our lead ropes so we would not step on them and let us go. I had not expected this! What fun, we zoomed from place to place trying the different grasses, rolled and just chased each

other around. I found it interesting that we horses didn't mingle, each group staying by themselves in the meadow. The humans set up camp, but didn't want our help, chasing us out every time we got to near. A bit before the sun set, they came and collected us and we spend the night in a good spot, although I would rather bedded down in the meadow then stand tied to a high-line all night.

Tuesday morning started as the sun was lighting up the western rock faces of the peak. Once the camp started to stir, all of us indicated that we were ready for breakfast, which in this case was more time in the meadow.

We got to graze while coffee was heated and oatmeal and fruit bars consumed. Then the tents were taken down and every thing was packed and weighted.

To get to Ardeth Lake we continued on [TR-452] to the junction with "Ten Lake Creek" trail [TR-463] which climbs up a canyon to the lake. The days ride was a bit over eight miles and was through some very pretty country. The camp site at Ardeth Lake is on the south west side and is set back a bit from the lake. You know it is a horse camp as there are hitching posts and good places for high lines. Water is provided by a stream that flows right by camp. The grazing was not quite as good as Elk Lake but we had plenty to eat.

The plan was to camp at Ardeth Lake Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Wednesday activities were up to each person, some choosing to stay around camp, others fished and three wanted go on a day ride exploring some of the other lakes in the area. Us horses didn't have a choice, what our human wanted to do, we did.

Wednesday started early again, but the pace in camp was much slower. Those going on the day ride, Janine, Bill and Rob, got going early and were on the trail by 09:30 while the rest of camp sort of took their time.

Today's ride was a bit over eight miles and was a loop that was going to visit five major lakes and a number of ponds. The ride started by back tracking to the north side of the lake to the junction with trail [TR-482] this trail climbs very quickly from 7500 to 9000 with a series of short and at time steep switch backs. I thought I was in good shape, but about 2/3 of the way up to the saddle, maybe a mile of trail, we have to stop while I caught my breath. Willow was also breathing pretty hard so I didn't feel as bad. Once we made the saddle between to 10,000 foot peaks we again stopped to catch our breaths and take some pictures.

The rest of the day was all down hill as they say. Right in the saddle is a pretty little lake with no name listed on the map, but great tasting water. For the next couple of hours we rode by and took picture of Vernon, Edna and Virginia lakes. We had lunch at Virginia, which also as a very nice horse camping area. All the lakes we passed but the first one had designated horse areas, but they didn't all have good grazing.

At Virginia Lake we connected back up with [TR-452] and took that trail back to [TR-463]. Everyone was happy to see us when we got back, the horses were allowed to graze and the people took a swim and baked brownies.

Thursday was a moving day and we packed up and moved back to Elk Lake for the night. We got to the camp site pretty early in the day so got to spend lots of time playing in the meadow.

Friday was our last day, but no one told me, I was having such a good time, it would have been fine with me if we stayed on the trip a month. After breakfast, the camp was packed up and we were saddled and loaded for the trip back to Grandjean.

We were making great time until we got to that tricky spot by the water fall. Misty caught one of her bags on a rock, it caused the load to shift 90 degrees, and she found herself with a bag hanging under her, the top bag on her side and the whole thing trying to tip her over. It is easy to say she was not happy but didn't panic and Rob and Bill got to her quickly and got thing straighten out.

Janine's horse Two Ton slipped and cut his leg and so did the Chick's pack horse. We did some doctoring, got all the pack saddles and loads back in place and continued down the trail to a great lunch spot at the top of one of the water falls. After lunch the trip back to the trailers was easy. We were quickly unpacked and saddled, all the equipment was stowed and a few hours later were standing in our home fields.

I really didn't know what to expect, but can tell you I had a great time and can't wait until I get another chance to go on a pack trip. Payette Adams (4 year old mustang)

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