



# Wilderness Rider History



Arch Rock Class

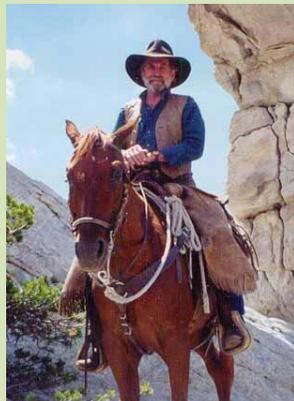
Backcountry Horsemen of California created an education program known as “Gentle Use” around 1992 to encourage its membership to accept, promote and follow the ideals and principles of wilderness ethics described as Gentle Use (GU) while enjoying their time in the wilderness areas of this great state. This name was suggested by the newly formed education committee which included: Ken Savage, Ralph Looney, Charley Morgan, Marily Reese and Dena Mercer. This program was an active part of the early Rendezvous held in the Porterville and Visalia areas.

In 1996, the Sequoia National Forest and Yosemite National Park hired a young college graduate by the name of Barb Miranda to the position of Wilderness Education Project Director. She was requested to promote the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles to two important users of the wilderness: the Boy Scouts of America and anyone riding a horse.



Barbra Miranda

She was looking for a partnership and found a horseman contact by the name of Larry Difani, the State Education chair of BCHC. The LNT program was accepted by the agencies and BCHC saw a great opportunity for the future partnership.



Larry Difani

In the early part '96, it was decided to have three members of BCHC attend a Stock LNT Master Course and create a similar course for members of our organization who wanted to encourage others to actively use the GU/LNT principles. Those individuals were: Larry Difani, Tom Stovall and Bob Olin (who would also be the Forest Service Representative).

These men held the first “Ghost Rider” course in Yosemite National Park in the fall of 1996. This name was chosen by Barb but was soon changed because of copyright claims by another volunteer group. The existing group of 10 with the instructors decided on the name “Wilderness Riders” which Bob Olin suggested.

The following spring a Wilderness Rider by the name of Ruthie Heuer would be the fourth Stock Master of LNT and was to evaluate the BCHC course compared to the Master course, suggest any improvements and bring more teaching ideas to the program.



Ruthie Heuer



Ken Graves

It was at this Master Course that Ken Graves was also a participant and would join BCHC in a few years as the Forest Service LNT Coordinator for the Pacific Southwest Region.

There have been many other individuals, not mentioned above, who have been instrumental or involved over the years in supporting and furthering this program throughout the state. They have acted as cooks, teachers, promoters, etc and are: Peggy Whitaker, Jerry Ledbetter, Sandy Newsome and Dave Moser. Those who are the acting instructors at this date are: Ruthie Heuer, Jo Johnson and Donna Meier along with agency personnel Ken Graves.

The agency personnel and Wilderness Rider Steering Committee of BCHC met in December of 2008 for a review and evaluation of the program. Both entities believed this program is one of the most successful partnerships involving volunteers in the state and will continue this important education program.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE WILDERNESS RIDER PROGRAM**

### ***What is the Wilderness Rider Program?***

The Wilderness Rider program is a partnership between Backcountry Horsemen of California, the National Park Service, the USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Wilderness Riders are trained stock users who have made a commitment to educating others about the value of wild lands and the importance of Gentle Use / Leave No Trace Skills.

### ***What is the Wilderness Rider Job Description?***

Wilderness Riders represent the BCHC, the Park Service, Forest Service and BLM. Their duties are weighted equally between work in the field and workshop presentations.

The Wilderness Riders are mounted volunteers who ride high use areas educating stock users and others about the value of wilderness and the importance of GU/LNT Skills. They may also be called upon to monitor trail maintenance needs, maintain trails, conduct on site restoration, trailhead education, field based GU/LNT instruction and other duties as requested by the agency contact.

Wilderness Riders schedule and deliver educational sessions on how to practice GG/LNT Skills in or out of doors, and could involve hands on demonstrations, skits, slides, videos, and other multi-media presentation tools.

The Wilderness Rider must be able to maintain relationships with the agency partners and community members, schedule their own trips and educational sessions.

### ***What are the Wilderness Rider Job Requirements?***

- Must be committed to practicing and teaching GU/LNT techniques.
- Must possess demonstrated skills in public speaking; including the ability to interact with individuals, groups, and diverse audiences.
- Must possess demonstrated skills in riding and stock management and within two years of completing course demonstrate packing abilities.
- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Must provide own stock.
- Must be accepted into and successfully complete a five day Wilderness Rider training course.
- Must annually submit project report forms
- Must perform two mounted field sessions, trailhead education, or backcountry GU/LNT training.
- Must fulfill two GU/LNT speaking/teaching workshops per year.
- Must be able to schedule and deliver workshops on GU/LNT Skills.
- Must be able to establish and maintain a working relationship with contacts from the agency partners.
- Must attend a refresher course, once every two years.

### ***What is the Wilderness Rider Selection Process?***

- Submit a Wilderness Rider application at the BCHC Rendezvous, or by April 20 of the course year.
- You must be interviewed by the selection committee, preferably at the Rendezvous.
- The selection committee reviews applications and calls references.
- Wilderness Rider selection committee chooses successful applicants.
- Successful applicants are notified by the selection committee by June 1 of the course year.
- If selected the participants must join Backcountry Horsemen of California.
- Participant must complete Wilderness Rider Training Course
- Participant must be accepted into the Wilderness Rider program by the training course instructors.

***Other questions concerning selection process:***

- You do not need to be a member of BCHC to apply, but if selected you must join BCHC for insurance purposes.
- The selection committee is decided by both the Wilderness Rider Steering Committee for each course year.
- You must be interviewed by the selection committee, preferably at the Rendezvous.
- The selection committee reviews applications and calls references.
- Wilderness Rider selection committee chooses successful applicants.
- Successful applicants are notified by the selection committee by June 1 of the course year.
- If selected the participants must join Backcountry Horsemen of California.
- Participant must complete Wilderness Rider Training Course
- Participant must be accepted into the Wilderness Rider program by the training course instructors.

***What are the questions on the application form?***

- Please describe your riding experience, packing and stock management skills.
- Please describe your public speaking experience with individuals and groups.
- Why do you want to be a Wilderness Rider?
- Name three references, their phone number and affiliation, who can verify your qualifications for the Wilderness Rider program.
- What wilderness area(s) do you usually ride in?

***Questions concerning fieldwork:***

- For the most part, WRs should ride to fulfill the field commitment. The program is based upon the concept of mounted stock users talking and visiting with other backcountry users.

- WRs are encouraged to work in pairs. Ideally this would be a WR and a companion. It is acceptable for WRs to ride together.
- Safety gear and helmets are a participant's personal preference.

#### ***Graduation Requirements:***

- A participant may choose not to become a WR.
- At the discretion of the instructors a participant may not be in the program. Reasons are based on the participant's ability to fulfill the basic job requirements.
- All participants of the WR program will receive a certificate of completion and 100 points towards the Gentle Use Program.

#### ***What is the Refresher/Update Course?***

- WR must attend a weekend course once every two years. This course will include any topic which the WRs feel will improve their skills and any update from National Outdoor Leadership School. Classes specifically pertaining to packing skills have been requested and given along with many other topics. Members of the WR Steering Committee and Education Steering Committee organize this course.

#### ***Can a WR be put on probation?***

- A Wilderness Rider may be put on probation by not fulfilling the minimum field/educational workshops, by not following the guidelines established by the WR Steering Committee called the Code of Conduct and Uniform Code, by not meeting the agency expectations, or by not filing their yearly project reports. After one-year probation without improvement, the WR will be requested to step down and return their badge and name plate.

#### ***Can a WR be removed from the program?***

- If there is a complaint, there is a WR Complaint Form, which is available and must be filled out within 3 months of the occurrence in question and returned to the WR Steering Committee for review and investigation. If the complaint is found accurate, the Steering Committee has the ability to find a solution to correct the problem or remove the WR from the program and have the badge and nameplate returned.

#### ***How does a WR retire?***

- We ask the WR to serve for a minimum of three years. The WR may notify the State Education Chair of this decision and keep their vests, badge and nameplate.

#### ***Factors for adaptation to the WR program?***

- The agencies or change in regulations may cause an adaptation to the program. Mother Nature may change things and there is the continual improvement to the Wilderness Rider Course.

#### ***Other Questions?***

- Most other questions can be answered by reading the WR Code of Conduct and the FSM 1800—Senior, Youth and Volunteer Programs Chapter 1830. Both of these are available from any WR or the State Education Chair.

#### ***Packer vs. Non-Packer History***

In 1998 the State Education Committee asked the question; Why are the WR's not required to be packers? At this time the Education Steering Committee did a few major research projects:

1) One project was the "Trail Rider" Program, which would include all who did not pack. We made a complete outline for that program to be taught. The challenge of this was availability of teachers, time factors and another host location, etc. The conclusion was to teach the Course half packers and half non-packers. Half would be known as WR and the others as TR but they BOTH had the LNT training.

2) We realized there were several challenges to this plan: a) We would need a definition of a "packer". The number of miles, years, experience, abilities, etc. b) We would need to "test" and authorize them as approved packers, where, when, etc. This would have to be accomplished before any of the interviews took place.

3) We talked to the agencies about another program. There was significant resistance from our agency contacts. The main reason being was that this other program would be doing the same thing: teaching GU/LNT. The cost and effort to maintain another program did not make sense and a lot of the WR already cover or could cover the areas that a TR program would cover --- we were trying to keep the quality high and the cost and effort to a minimum. It was also hard enough to educate their personnel with the one established program.

By 2001 we came up with these conclusions:

- 1) We would keep the WR as is. The applicants would be accepted by who was the most qualified. (Therefore no 1/2 packers and 1/2 non-packers)
- 2) Of course if you have more packing experience or more teaching experience you are more qualified. This was approved by the BCHC Board of Directors in October 2001.
- 3) The state has never restricted our membership to ONLY packers. The state also realizes that many areas in California which do not have wilderness areas that allow for people to overnight and to use a pack animal. But the LNT message is the same.
- 4) Could we include a "packing " class in the course? No. Given the time constraints and already full curriculum, we have been limited in the past to a time during the course for introduction to packing skills and theory.

At Rendezvous 2007 a decision was made again:

The motion made at Rendezvous stated:

“Leave the Wilderness Rider Program as is with the caveat that all Wilderness Rider’s have packing ability within two years of completing the program”.

“Ability” was asked to be defined by the Education Steering Committee and the Wilderness Rider Steering Committee and was brought to the Directors at the '07 Fall State meeting. The following was approved:

### ***Webster's Dictionary***

**Ability:** being able, have talent, skills or aptitudes, capacity to do or act, competence in an activity because of one's skill.

A Wilderness Rider will show ability by demonstrating in a satisfactory manner the following 5 Packing Skills.

1. Demonstrate the ability to properly saddle a pack animal.
2. Demonstrate the ability to properly balance a load. (Note: the use of a spring scale or similar device is permitted)
3. Demonstrate the ability to properly adjust packs on a pack animal.

4. Demonstrate the ability to properly tie a hitch including the mante. (Note: the use of a reference manual is permitted)
5. Demonstrate the ability to lead a pack animal, while mounted on a lead animal, through a designated course which will consist of both left and right turns, clock and counter clockwise circles, figure eights and navigating obstacles representing trees, logs, boulders or rocks.

Those who successfully graduate from the Wilderness Rider Training Course may demonstrate the required 5 packing skills during the course or have two years to achieve the abilities listed by taking a packing course from a local college, a unit, a professional packer/pack station, from the "state course" when developed or other training venue.

Existing Wilderness Riders who consider themselves non-packers may utilize the same educational venues listed above.

A letter of achievement from one of the afore-mentioned courses will be accepted by the Wilderness Rider Steering Committee in lieu of a formal demonstration of the 5 packing abilities at an annual Rendezvous.

*BCHC will NOT certify members or non-members as packers*

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