



# Tails and Rails:

## *The Ringing Rocks Mineshaft Fence Story*



*At the mine site, left to right: MHBCers "Duster" Duesterbeck, Pat Ankelman, Frank Olenick, BLMers Mike Wetherbee, Kyle Lockwood, Alan Parker (in back), Carla Kinney, and MHBCer Ryan Velin. BLMer Vickie Anderson kneeling. Photo by Joan Gabelman.*

Combine posts, rails, horses, mules, Bureau of Land Management employees and Mile High Backcountry Horsemen volunteers with a BLM fence project, and what do you get?

Answer: a solidly-built jackleg-rail fence around a dangerous mineshaft that will protect the public and safeguard a cultural site, camaraderie among strangers, and new friends parting ways at the end of the day with promises to seek future opportunities to work together again.

The BLM's Butte Field Office held a workday June 9 near Pipestone to haul fence materials to



*Finished jackleg-rail fence around historic mineshaft. The Ringing Rocks site is the rock mound just above the fence in the center of the photo. Photo by Joan Gabelman.*

a remote abandoned mineshaft. Because the site was inaccessible by road or existing trails, Butte Field Office employees came up with the idea of using volunteers and pack animals from the local MHBC to help get the job done. Using pack animals would avoid creating a new trail in the popular Whitetail-Pipestone ATV area.

After a tailgate safety session, the MHBC horses and pack animals trailed to the materials staging area. That's when the real work began.

MHBC volunteers Pat Ankelman, Ryan Velin, and Jim Sladek brought four pack mules. All three knew their animals very well, which was crucial when they set out to tie 12-foot-long rails to each side of their mules. They knew just how far they could push their animals to accept the rails that hung beyond the mules' heads and extended farther than their back feet.

MHBC volunteers Frank Olenick and David "Duster" Duesterbeck and BLMer Jacob Greenwood knotted, unknotted, reknotted, hoisted, and stapled ropes to secure the loads. The loads needed to be very secure or they could injure people or animals during the hauling.

Ruby, Jim Sladek's young jenny mule, was inexperienced, but the soothing hands and voice of BLMer Carla Kinney helped Ruby accept that she had no choice but to participate in the festivities. Ruby decided to resist again while trailing and she lost her load, but doggone it, right back on it went and she persevered for four more trips.

Daisy, MHBC President Pat Ankelman's black jenny, was not impressed by the long rails threatening to tickle her long

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ears, but BLMer Jacob Greenwood provided comforting words to ease her worries.

Velin's young jenny, Jesse, was voted as the least impressed by the long rails. By the fourth attempt to negotiate terms with Jesse, she begrudgingly agreed to carry her share of the burden.

For Jigger, the "I-can-do-it-by myself" mule, the project was just another day at the office. MHBCHer Ryan Velin's 26-year-old roan mule is an experienced packer. And so, Jigger added packing 12-foot rails to his already impressive resume. Jigger made five trips up the mountainside to deliver the rails to a very appreciative fencing crew at the mineshaft.

BLMer Jacob Greenwood, not to be outdone by the pack mules, hand-carried two rails up the mountainside himself.

BLMers Alan Parker and Mike Wetherbee, enduring the hot, dusty wind at the mine site, expertly built the jackleg-rail fence as the materials arrived and provided levity at everyone's expense. Mike bestowed the nickname "Automatic" on Jigger for the mule's ability to trundle down the trail without being led.

BLMer Kyle Lockwood did just about everything to support the loading process except tie those pesky knots. At first a little uneasy being around the large animals, Kyle had made several equine friends by the end of the day.

Vickie Anderson, BLM Range Technician and member of the MHBCH, provided liaison and planning between the BLM and MHBCH. She headed the pack string and provided packing support.

BLM Geologist Joan Gabelman, originator of the project, watered and fed the MHBCH volunteers, calmed animals, sawed tree limbs, climbed the steep, rocky hill to the mineshaft five or six times to keep tabs on progress, and helped finish up the fence building. Her easy-going, genteel manner allowed seamless workability between BLM employees and MHBCH volunteers. Without Joan's motivation to increase safety on public lands, there would have been just one more open mineshaft that could ruin someone's day on BLM lands.

Hats off to all the hardworking individuals and equines. The "tails and rails" project was a great success!

*Vickie Anderson  
Range Technician  
BLM Butte Field Office*

*Photos by Joan Gabelman*



*MHBCHers Ryan Velin, Frank Olenick, Jim Sladek, and Pat Ankelman, and BLMer Jacob Greenwood pack Jim's mule, Ruby.*



*The haul: Mules Jigger and Jesse, MHBCHer Ryan Velin and BLMer Vickie Anderson on her horse, Hadley.*



*Jigger, the I-can-do-it-by-myself mule, going on "automatic."*



*BLMer Jacob Greenwood hauling his own load.*