

# Backcountry Horsemen lend a hoof in trail clearing



*Nancy Bare and Bob Sestrich, members of the Mile High Backcountry Horsemen, ride through the Humbug Spires Wilderness Study Area as they support the trail clearing crew from the BLM's Butte Field Office. Photo by David Abrams*

*Story and photos  
by David Abrams  
Western Montana BLM*

The three-mile trail leading to the Humbug Spires in southwestern Montana is normally a gentle, smooth-going walk through postcard-perfect scenery in an old-growth forest braided with a clear-running creek. However, a series of microburst storms earlier in 2014 left the area riddled with downed trees, making the path challenging for even the most high-stepping hiker.

That's why, on a late-summer morning, employees from the BLM's Butte Field Office and members of the local chapter of Backcountry Horsemen were busy clearing a way toward the Spires. The granite outcroppings, part of the Boulder Batholith, rise up to 600 feet above the forests like cathedral towers.



The Humbug Spires Wilderness Study Area is especially popular with rock climbers. Outdoor Recreation Planner Brad Colin wasn't going to let anything stand in their way—especially the trees which were scattered like jackstraws across the foothills.

"This trail gets cleared every year," Colin said. "In the past, we've had maybe 10 to 20 trees down. This year, it's well over 100 trees down."

The annual work day was also part of the Wilderness 50 celebration, as well as a National Public Lands Day.

To assist in the Butte Field Office's trail-clearing project, six members of the Backcountry Horsemen volunteered to

spend the day with their pack animals, hauling food, water, and hand tools for the workers. Some of the equestrians had already seen the trail's condition first-hand.

"The club had taken a pleasure ride up here in August and we found it was impassable," said Nancy Bare, a three-year member of the BCH. "So when the BLM came to us and asked for help, we said 'yes' right away."

Her riding partner, Bob Sestrich, agreed. "We use these trails all the time, so we were happy to help."

After a day's work on the trail, Mile High Backcountry Horsemen President Pat Ankelman sent this report in an email to his fellow members: "The crew that went to the end to start back counted 138 trees down on the trail on

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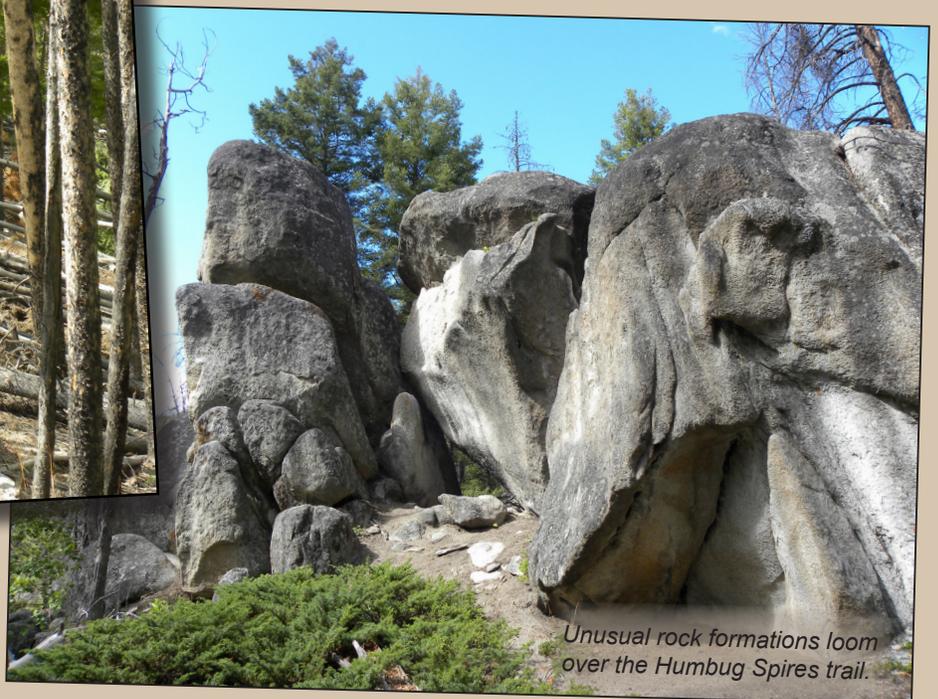
their way up to the top. So with saws in hand the crews cut the original 138 trees...an additional 40-50 dead and leaning trees were cut as well, plus over a dozen water bars and several trail repairs (were done) by the swampers in just one day. Wow! What a day!"

Colin said he hopes to make the Humbug Spires trail day an annual event with BCH.

"Partners like this are the future for the BLM," he added.



*Kyle Lockwood, a seasonal employee with the BLM's Butte Field Office, clears downed trees blocking the Humbug Spires trail.*



*Unusual rock formations loom over the Humbug Spires trail.*