

Just For Fun



Back Country Horsemen's Peninsula chapter members took part in their annual Miller Peninsula "Rhody Ride," timed when all the Rhododendrons are in full bloom. (Linda Morin)

HORSEPLAY: Volunteers make trails more accessible for horse riders

Back County Horsemen Peninsula Chapter widens parking area for horse trailers.

A LOUD SHOUT of hooray to the Four Horsemen of trail movers and shakers — Dan Dosey, Tom Mix, Del Sage and Jim Hollatz — who are members of the Back Country Horsemen's Peninsula Chapter.

Their most recent finished project involved changing an existing small car turnout at the corner of Happy Valley Road and River Road to an extra long and wide space that provides parallel horse trailer parking for those riding in the new multi-use, non-motorized trail system called Dungeness Trails.

Located Southwest of Sequim just outside city limits on River Road, the 400-acre park is owned by the state Department of Natural Resources and includes 10 to 15 miles of existing trails built by the Olympic Peninsula Bicycle Alliance. Trails are well-marked and rated from easy to very difficult.

The idea for a horse trailer parking area began in mid-July with an email from fellow member Kris Phillips, asking what could be done to provide a safe parking lot for horse trailers. Phillips lives close enough to Dungeness Trails to ride her horse, so her concern was for other riders to have a safe parking area.

The primary trailhead parking area is on River Road about three-quarters of a mile south of Happy Valley Road. It's too small for trucks pulling trailers to park, and even if they do, the driver will have to back the trailer out from the trailhead parking lot on to River Road at least once to turn around.

“We looked at this and at the end of River Road on Otter Way,” Mix said. Otter Way is owned by the tribe and has a conservation easement through North Olympic Land Trust. There wasn’t enough room to turn around without moving a lot of dirt and re-grading. That permitting process, if allowed, is much more difficult when a land trust is involved, he said.

When scouting locations, he consulted with NOLT, the Clallam County permitting office and DNR. When considering the current location, he spoke with OPBA President Ken Stringer, who oversees the DT trail system.

OPBA has been working with DNR, the county and Washington Conservation Corps on developing and maintaining the trails since 2018.

Stringer thought partnering with the Peninsula Chapter to build and maintain trails was a good idea, so in August, Mix submitted his site plan to the county. There’s also a dedicated group of volunteers, Dungeness Trail Stewards, who help maintain the trails.

The existing berm was in place to discourage people from illegally dumping their trash in the woods — an ongoing problem — which made it difficult to remove. So Mix said the county told them the berm had to stay but allowed them to move it 18 feet farther back.

That meant Mix, a retired Boeing engineer, had to design a new grade and drainage system to keep the area free from sinking tires during the rainy season.

To move the berm 18 feet back, widen, reshape and put in a new drainage culvert Dosey hauled his dozer over and Sage brought his excavator. Hollatz brought his chain saw, because, as Mix said, “No BCH work party is complete without a chain saw and its sawyer.” Hollatz used it to cut the new culvert drain pipe to size.

After grading, they put down 3-inch rock and topped it with 5/8-inch minus, rolled and compacted it to make a smooth surface as well as a safe place to park year-round.

Their finishing touch was adding a solid hitch-rail for horses.

Circle

The parking area has a trail connecting to the Highland Ditch maintenance road. From there, users have a choice of two paths that lead to River Road crossings to enter the DT. Those paths also connect users to the east and west parts of the system, along with offering the nice option of a looping trail.

“DNR is getting ready to add a water retention pond,” Mix said of a planned off-channel reservoir that will cover 80 acres. “When that happens, this property will be turned over to the county to become a Clallam County park.”

“My first sketch of the plan to the county was submitted the second week in August,” he said. “The county was very quick to reply, helping us and giving us good information. Because we’re non-profit and trying to maintain community trails, they didn’t charge us for the

grading permit, so that was nice, and we got the OK to grade.

“The county gave us until Dec. 1 to get it graded, but we just decided to get it done while the weather’s good. Now we’re reseeding the vegetation to keep the dust down, and then we’re done. So, from start to finish will on this project, was just two months.”

I agreed with Mix wholeheartedly when he said, “This is a great front country trail-riding system.”

These are the trails I now ride straight from my home in Happy Valley. Thanks to the trail work by the bike club, there’s already a variety of scenic trails to choose from with just a couple hours of riding.

I applaud this four-man BCH Peninsula Chapter crew, whom, I think, are among the many “git ’er done right and proper” Olympic Peninsula volunteers who help make this area such a wonderful place to live.

In my next column Oct. 11, I’ll share some of the problems Mix and Sage have come up against, along with some other happy and successful endeavors.

Bull elk

Last Tuesday my friend Stephanie Jaffee told me she was riding a trail through Robin Hall Park with her friend, Kat Drovdahl. This was the first time Drovdahl was riding her young Norwegian Fiord mare outside the arena and on a trail. She asked for Jaffee to accompany her with her

seasoned trail horse, knowing it would have a calming effect on her mare.

“As this guy walking toward us passed by, I hear someone yelling and then we heard this intense rustling in the bushes next to us,” Jaffee said. “I knew it was too loud to be a deer, so I thought it was a dog or something, when suddenly this huge bull elk with a full rack on his head just bolted out of the bushes in front of us! Thankfully, it ran up the side of the trail in front of us and then turned a sharp left.”

That’s good news, because if he had run toward the two riders, the bull could have easily gored one of the horses with an antler. I knew a gal whose horse was gored and killed by a bull elk in her own pasture — scary stuff.

She said both horses reacted by quickly spinning around and trotting off in the other direction. There they ran into what could have been another upsetting situation for Drov Dahl’s young mare: Kris Phillips on her horse followed closely by Kayla Kosel on her horse, Kosel’s dog and goat (yep, Kosel’s goat is a frequent sight on her trail rides), and they were followed by some young friends of Kosel’s riding their bicycles.

They stopped to talk and asked them if they’d ever seen an elk at Robin Hill Park. Neither had, but Phillips added, “Never mess with a bull elk, especially during rutting season. They are big and scary dangerous.”

Jaffee and Drovdaahl continued on the trail home when they suddenly saw an entire family on their mountain bikes rapidly riding toward them.

“Stop!” Drovdaahl yelled. She wanted to ask them to stop and stay in place, talking in a calming manner, until she and Jaffee walked past (which is correct trail protocol.)

She never got the chance. Even if the bikers didn’t hear her, they certainly saw Drovdaahl’s frantic body language, so, thankfully, the riders immediately turned around and headed back. Another scary encounter averted.

The question is: Is it common to see elk at Robin Hill Park? Inquiring minds would like to know. If so, please email me at the address listed below.

Karen Griffiths’ column, *Peninsula Horseplay*, appears the second and fourth Sunday of each month.

If you have a horse event, clinic or seminar you would like listed, please email Griffiths at kgb@olympus.net at least two weeks in advance. You can also call her at 360-460-6299.