

BACK COUNTRY STOCK BRIDGES SLAB CAMP – OLYMPIC NATIONAL FOREST

By Donna Hollatz, Peninsula Chapter Newsletter Editor

BCHW Peninsula Chapter completed the re-build of a 35-foot stock bridge along the Slab Camp trail in Olympic National Forest in August. This project was the culmination of about two years of planning and work.

There is no accessible recorded history of the bridge that was replaced. Most of the trails and roads in that area existed in the 1930s, which suggests that the bridge had been built by 1932. If it was that age, perhaps it had been replaced before or it may have been moved as trails were rerouted. Timber bridges can usually be expected to last 30 – 40 years. Those who dismantled this one reported that it was of very old construction. The cedar decking was held down with square nails/spikes and the stringers were attached to their sills with round rods.

The bridge was identified as failing two years ago as part of a two-year RAC grant proposal assembled by Rod Farlee. The planks for the bridge decking were cut from Douglas fir trees that fell at Dungeness Forks Campground in a windstorm in 2018. The contractor bucked them to the length we needed and hauled them to the Quilcene Forest Service Yard. There, the Gray Wolves trail maintenance crew used our Alaskan mill over the summer of 2018 to saw the planks. Del Sage, Peninsula Chapter vice president, hauled them to his place for storage and then to the trailhead as needed. Multiple pack trips were made by chapter members using horses and mules to pack the planks to the job site, where they were staged, beginning in November 2018 and continuing through spring and summer of 2019 (5 pack days). Each mule or horse could pack 2 planks along the 2 ½ mile switch-back trail down to the job site (elevation loss of about 1,000 feet). Two trips were made (June and July 2019) to fell the huge cedars that became the stringers for the bridge. A total of 35 planks were hauled. Some members rode in, while others lead their pack animals on foot.

The final construction of the bridge took place August 16th – 20th. A crew of about 25 adults and 15 Boy Scouts rode and hiked to the job site, packing all of the tools needed to do the job with the help of mules and horses. Two trips, using 4 pack mules each, were needed to get all the equipment in place. They carried in 1,000 pounds of rigging gear. (And had to carry it back out again at the

end of the project.) Workers and stock camped at the trailhead during the 4 days of construction and traveled to and from the site each morning and evening. A few camped near the bridge site for the 4 days.

The old bridge was removed, saving the side rails, which were still good. Peninsula Chapter crew leaders, Del Sage and Tom Mix (along with 6 or 8 BCHW volunteers) used an elaborate rigging system and a chain saw winch to move the three huge cedars (35ft x 23in, midspan) into place on the existing bridge sills. (Forest Service requirement is 18 inches midspan, so these exceed the standard.) Once those were in place and leveled, the planks were drilled and nailed down and the side rails re-mounted. The Olympia Mountaineers (who have learned chain saw techniques from our BCHW trainers) sent a crew of about 10 to assist and learn how rigging is used to move things to help build trails. A Boy Scout earned his Eagle rank by doing his project notebook on the bridge and securing donations of decking spikes and food for the crews. He was joined by 9 Scouts and 2 leaders who helped on the project. Rebecca Wanagel led a WTA crew of 6 or 8 that helped with the building, too. This new stock bridge should last for many years!



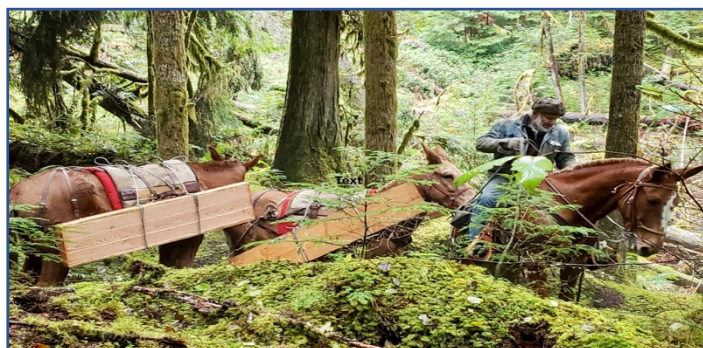
Bridge needing replacement



Gray Wolves milling lumber from trees that were blow down at Dungeness Forks Campground using BCHW's Alaskan mill.



Some of the planks cut by Mike Bonomo's Gray Wolves WTA trail crew.



Pack mules being used to haul bridge planks to job site where they were stock piled for bridge construction.



Removal of old bridge planks.



Moving large items with chain-saw winch requires focus!



Del Sage and Tom Mix maneuvering center support long into place with chain-saw winch.



One crew member is carving excess height from center log while others begin installing decking planks.



Bull rails being re-applied to finished



Tom Mix and his horse Dakota trying out the new bridge!