

# Remote, abandoned outfitters camp gets beautified by BCHA New Mexico chapters

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Members of the BCHA Jemez Chapter, plus the president of the Santa Fe and Hermits Peak Chapters combined their enthusiasm, route finding skills, and problem-solving ability to ride cross-country ten miles into the San Pedro Parks Wilderness northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, to pack out an abandoned outfitters camp.

One year ago, the US Forest Service asked the Jemez Chapter to pack out the garbage located on the west side of the wilderness, a location without trail access. But the request was tabled as the chapter focused on clearing trails.

At a July chapter meeting at Resumidero Campground in the wilderness, Chapter President Keith Kollarik mentioned the Forest Service request, and Linda Sofia immediately asked, “What are we waiting for?”

A few weeks later, a group of six members including Dan Key the president of Santa Fe and Hermits Peak chapters and an avid outdoorsman, Bob Raught who has been packing for friends (buddy hunting) for over forty years, and Steve Percival, vice president of the Jemez Chapter, along with Linda Sofia, Bud Twilley and Debra LaComette were ready for the excursion.

Earlier the Forest Service had provided the chapter with the location coordinates. Bob and member Angie Duebel spent hours looking at maps using the onX Hunt app to figure out how to best navigate through thick stands of mixed conifer and burned downfall, and cross the multiple boggy meadows.

In August, armed with the exact location, trail apps, mules and packing panniers, the enthusiastic group headed out, the three backcountry-savvy men route finding out front, and the three others following. Dan rode a mule. Bob also rode a mule and led a string of three mules and Steve was horseback ponying a mule.

One meadow proved especially challenging because it was cut with a foot-wide stream, colored black by mud and ominously silent, looking like a bottomless crevasse. The horses easily stepped across the rivulet, but the mules would not. Bob’s mules all side stepped, balked and refused. Finally, Linda got behind one of them and Bob yelled, “Whack ’em!” She did, and they all stepped over.

There was one final challenge just a half mile prior to the camp: a maze of downed, crisscrossed trees. The equines had to go back and forth, hop over and backtrack to finally make it to the other side. Even Steve, who is generally unflappable and has seen it all admitted, “That last half mile was a bugger. I was starting to wonder if we were ever going to find the camp. But we were confident that we were in the right area, and near it.” And suddenly there it was—the site the group had been searching for— a clearing strewn with scattered junk.

The group quickly dismounted, made piles of trash, then started loading them into the panniers and hoisting them one-by-one onto the mules. They wondered why anyone, hunters or outdoors people, would leave such a mess of busted chairs, two huge, bear-chewed plastic tables, and heaps of metal. “Nothing made sense,” said Steve. “It looked like it had been abandoned for several years in a row.”

“It made us mad, but it also made us wonder if there was a snowstorm or hardship,” said Linda. “Why would they leave it like this, looking like they just up and left?”

But the reason it was left as a trash heap didn’t matter, the group concluded. “Good, ethical hunters never would have done that,” said Steve.

After the mules were packed, the group started to head out of the camp but quickly realized that the metal in the packs would bang around and clang for the entire ten-mile return trip. Bob readily admitted that he had forgotten to bring manties and lash ropes that would have quieted the load. He knew leading a string of three mules loaded with panniers packed with metal on an hours-long bushwack trip was not wise.

To avert a mule cluster, Dan, riding a mule who had never ponied, offered to lead out one of Bob’s mules. At first the three danced around in circles with Dan twisting to maneuver the lead rope. But after a few minutes, everyone calmed down. Except for the mules again refusing to cross the muddy creek, one mule getting loose, and some route-finding confusion, the return trip was glitch free.

When they arrived at Resumidero, they were elated but exhausted. They had departed at nine that morning, and now it was seven. Over dinner, members thought about the day. Dan reflected, “The wilderness should be kept pristine. People packing stuff in and leaving it is inappropriate. You pack it in; You pack it out.”

And, although Bob said he was initially irritated upon seeing the abandoned camp, he was now satisfied. “I feel good about cleaning up the wilderness and helping the Forest Service,” he said.

Members estimate they packed out at least half of the debris. They could have returned the next day to retrieve it but when that possibility was presented at dinner, the answer was a unanimous no. They are planning to pack out the remains this fall.