



**BOB MARSHALL
WILDERNESS**
FOUNDATION

FALL 2022

The Journal



Greetings FROM THE DIRECTOR

I needed the bench I was sitting on for practical reasons. I had just lifted myself out of the saddle I had been in for two days. My knees were right out of an arthritis commercial – small lightning bolts dancing around the joints – and my neck looking like slightly burnt toast. The bench was a motionless seat, a sliver of shade, and a connection across time.

I had made it to Big Prairie!

In 1928, when Bob Marshall traversed the country that would eventually bear his name, he made the same stop at Big Prairie – no doubt spending time on a bench like the one I was perched on and enjoying the same shade of the Ranger Station’s front porch. For the first time I was occupying the common space as the man I had been chasing – I was just a century too late.

I became a tad obsessed with Bob before my wilderness career ever brought me to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and northwest Montana – when I was presented with a Forest Service honor bearing his name. I wanted to understand what this man brought to the wilderness movement. Who was the man behind the name etched in granite on my bookshelf? I have consumed his work and poured through his biography. I have made countless presentations about his role as a philanthropist, forester, and visionary – but for the first time I was standing on wooden planks that he too had strode across.

I wondered what Bob would make of his dream of preservation almost a century later. He no doubt would recognize the work. The soiled uniforms and broken axe handles of the exhausted ‘trail dogs’ rolling back into the station. He would probably have counted the number of loads that arrived on the mules from Spotted Bear (Bob loved numbers).

As you read the stories in this first edition of The Journal, I think you will recognize the number of ways that time spent with in the wildest swath of Montana can impact one’s soul and psyche. From barriers to access to thoughts of plentitude – The Bob can represent, and generate, a spectrum of emotions. For me it stirred deep feelings of connection and a conjured late-night conversation with Bob himself on a quiet porch bounded by the Flathead Alps.

As I wandered from that porch to my tent, wolves began to howl across the valley, reminding me just how timeless a place can not only feel – but be.

Enjoy!

Bill Hodge
Executive Director



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Bonding

by Christopher Moore, Volunteer

The email from our trip leader came a couple of weeks prior to our departure. On it were seven names – his, my wife and mine, and four more. Two had phone numbers with a familiar area code from our past. One name of a Great Falls participant sounded familiar and we wondered if it might be the same person we had worked with on our first BMWF trip many years ago. The last name was that of a “cheesehead” hailing, of course, from Wisconsin.

We all met the night before our departure in a campground a hop, skip, and a jump from the trailhead. We shared food, drink and stories as we began the process of getting to know each other. Our leader was a young buck(eye), mature well beyond his years, 22-year-old college student leading his sixth trip into the Bob for the season. Sure enough, we were happy to see that the man from Great Falls was, in fact, the same one we had worked with previously. The couple from our previous area code were on their first trip and still getting settled into their new life in Montana. The cheesehead, also a newbie, believe it or not brought cheese from Wisconsin to share at our inaugural dinner (and whiskey in a Smart Water bottle that we all shared each night moving forward). We contributed some wine (from that previous area code) and fresh raspberries from our Bigfork garden.

Over the course of the next six days we bonded and became *fast* friends. We joked, we philosophized, we cooked, we cleaned, we fished, and we worked hard. We were a team from the minute we hit the trailhead that first work day until our farewell meal at a restaurant not far from where we said thank you and goodbye to our packers.

We sawed our way through some 264 logs in three miles of trail. Everybody pitched in and did their fair share every minute of every working day. We all walked away with stories and pictures to share, a heightened understanding of the importance of teamwork, and, most importantly, an unforgettable bond.

Sign us up for next year...

This is the Backcountry

by Rex Koenig, 2022 Wilderness Conservation Crew Intern
Written as a volunteer in 2021

Over our trip Marty showed us the Bob
We learned about the country
about the Scapegoat Wilderness
about Bob Marshall and the dorky pose he made after traversing the whole Complex

We saw the cabin at Webb Lake with its sun faded lumber that ought not be still standing, but is
We saw the trail sift into those dirt mirages
We saw the turquoise sky

We saw the burned timber and gray hues that gave way
to the most verdant green young growth that shimmers with life
The forests slope low over these uncut hillsides
and they reminded us that this was no manicured forest of tourism and minivans

This is the backcountry

Where humans are themselves visitors and not residents
You could tell in the cold creek water that hurt our toes red
You could sense the solitude in the small glimpses between the timbers beside the trail
in the glimpses of the uncouth valleys emptying into ours
in the jagged curve of the sawblade
and in the 1920's entries of the Webb Lake's log

We are reminded of it in the simple view
across the lake's silver shine to the sloping burned forest
and the scarlet sky above

This is the backcountry

East of Lincoln and follow the dirt
If you've lost your mind, you'll find it there
Those two days of spraying and trail patrol
can't make us a part of this land permanently
but this land can become a part of us

In the air that we breath and in the spirits that we freed
and in the memories that we spin with such affection
and in the simple way that we feel that connection
Everything is one and we are part of it

Perhaps my tracks will cross this place again, and maybe not
But all it takes is four days and a few dozen miles to fuel an imagination for a lifetime
to fuel a conservationist's passion
to fuel eight young boys' desires to live a little longer and live a little stronger
May this place remain untrammelled to those ends for the generations in perpetuity
And may the land live on in kind.



Photo Essay

**PARTNER
PROJECT:
BHA'S
ARMED
FORCES
INITIATIVE**

1 | Looking into the Swan Range after dropping off the south side of Gordon Pass.

*Photos by Aaron Agosto, Volunteer
Introduction by Hal Herring, Volunteer*

It is just under fifteen miles to the Shaw Cabin, from the Owl Creek Packer Camp trailhead, up and over Gordon Pass, elevation gain and loss around 5000 feet. A long day, but well within the realm of the reasonable. Jane Armstrong of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation is out in front, honed from the past few weeks of trail-clearing and leading trips around the Bob. Photographer Aaron Agosto drifts up and down the line, shooting here and there, stopping to gauge light and angle, and to ponder an increasingly spectacular landscape as we gain altitude. DJ Zor is in the middle, hauling the long two-man crosscut saw that wouldn't fit on the packmules. We joke that the dark-bearded DJ looks like Odysseus carrying the famed "winnowing oar" (in the old Greek story, Odysseus is commanded to take an oar from his ship and walk inland until he meets people who mistake the oar for a farming implement). Trevor Hubbs and I linger towards the back of the pack. Trevor has only one kidney ("and that one is somebody else's," he notes) after a parachute-training accident cut short his planned career in the US Army. He is a former Ranger and studied in the art of stoicism. On very hot days like this one, in the civilian world, he takes high-mountain hiking trips at his own pace. For me, I have too many miles in my boots to plan on breaking any land speed records.

We gathered at Gordon Pass, awe-struck at the great yawning gulf of Gordon Creek fading into the distance to the even vaster yawn of the south fork of the Flathead River in the distance. Wilderness, with a capital W, writ large and magnificent. On the south side of the pass, Waldbillig Mountain, 8300 feet at the summit, with a snow-packed couloir shaped like a lightning bolt down its massive north face, cornices of snow on its shoulders melting in the July-heat, the snowmelt waters hissing over the stone polished by thousands of summers of the same. The downhill trail to Shaw Creek and the cabin is a muddy thread through miles of blooming beargrass, jungled avalanche chutes, thimbleberry bushes as high as our heads, shadowy groves of old-growth Doug firs towering to the heavens.

We are here as volunteers to clear trail, but it's also part of a larger project, and a larger partnership. Trevor, based in Wisconsin, is working for the public lands' conservation group Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA), heading up their Armed Forces Initiative, which is connecting thousands of military veterans and active-duty men and women with opportunities to fish, hunt, hike or work on the American public lands. DJ Zor, a former Navy submariner now living and working in Montana, is a volunteer with BHA and the Armed Forces Initiative, which he has been involved with since its inception. "I always need a mission," DJ explained to me. "Conservation and public lands has become that for me. There are a lot of veterans who feel that same way, and just need somebody who knows to show them the way to it."

Over the next few days, we'll clear miles of trail up Shaw Creek, fish some scarily-swollen waters for cutthroats (on Gordon Creek, flooded by all that snowmelt we saw pouring down Waldbillig Mountain), have some epic nights around a campfire swapping tales with the packers, Wendy and Bonnie, and be pretty soundly defeated by some next-level deadfall tangles and monster spruce logs on the trail into Doctor Lake (which we would never actually see). A wee bit of exhaustion, a couple crossing log mishaps, skinned knuckles and weary feet made it an adventure, and that is what we were looking for when we signed up. The partnership between Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the Armed Forces Initiative and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation was born in a lather, breathing deep, pulling the crosscut and swinging the axe, ready for a lot more miles of trail and a lot more of the adventure.



2 | The long slog up from Owl Creek Packer Camp past Holland lakes immediately becomes worth it upon crossing the wilderness boundary at Gordon Pass. The choked-in trail gives way to sweeping vistas and you can't help but stand in awe of the vastness of the world you are about to enter.

3 | Campfire tales. Horse packers, volunteers and our crew leader Jane Armstrong share stories around the fire during our final night in the wilderness.



4 | The misery whip in action. BHA Armed Forces Initiative leaders Trevor Hubbs and DJ Zor use a crosscut saw to cut one of many downed trees across the trail to Lena Lake.

5 | Cold water immersion the Bob Marshall way. DJ Zor takes a plunge in the snowmelt-fused waters of Shaw Creek after a long day of clearing trails.

6 | Hal Herring makes good use of a lunch break to throw a few casts into the creek running along the trail.



7 | The Crew. From left: DJ Zor, Trevor Hubbs, Hal Herring, Bonnie Pollock, Wendy Montfort, Jane Armstrong.

8 | Teamwork makes the dream work. Hal Herring helps packer volunteer Wendy Montfort load up a mantly onto one of her pack horses.



New Friends, New Hope
by Luci Rogers Yeats, Volunteer

How could it be possible?
On the longest night of the year 2021
I lost my love of forty-six years
A brain tumor took him from me
On the winter solstice
Literally time stood still

Through the dark days of winter
I grieved and remembered
The hikes, the hunting, the fishing
The berry picking and the forest drives
Life will never be the same

Spring came again
A ray of sun shone through
I signed up for National Trails Day
A time to clear the Tunnel Creek Trail
With the BMWF and Wild Montana

Meeting Meg, Matt, Jane, Sonny, Rebecca
And other volunteers
Working loppers to cut brush
Along a trail of hope
Winding through shadow and sun

Just into the Great Bear
A glimpse of the basin below Grant Glacier
Time to end the day with new friends
Rain on the hike out to refresh my spirit
Thank you

Anything is possible.





In late August, I tagged along with a Foundation trail crew as a guest of my friend, fellow BMWF Board Member, and mule-packer extraordinaire, Chris Eyer, for nine days in the Bob. While there, I noted something I was learning, noticing, or contemplating, each day. Call these reflections, or call them lessons or meditations, they are what came to me sitting on riverbanks, astride a horse, or watching the stars wink up behind Packrat Mountain – and I hope they get you remembering or thinking of the spectacular and special place we so affectionately call The Bob.

1. There's nothing like a Forest Service cabin on a cold, wet night.

I suppose what I really mean is: how quickly we take our creature comforts for granted! Our first day in the Complex was a 21-mile trek into the lush Danaher. The steely rainclouds we'd been skirting for hours split as we came through the meadows, and in a cool steady rain, we unloaded the stock. The trail crew, arriving shortly after us, started a fire in the cabin tucked in the trees, and the pleasure and relief of stepping across the stoop into its warmth reminded me that the spectrum between necessity and luxury is fluid and circumstantial; it was suddenly grand and lavish to thaw my hands on a cup of tea warm from the woodstove's surface.

2. The labor of packing is astonishing.

Yes, the physical labor – the hours it takes each morning to divide, weigh, wrap, pack, and strap the loads and prepare the string – but there is no doubt this work is also a labor of love. I watched Chris complete backbreaking tasks each morning, then sit for hours in the saddle and repeat that work in the evening, to provide the trail crew with their food, gear and equipment – all while talking to his mules like old friends. For Chris, and for the other volunteer packers who give their time and sweat to the Foundation's mission, these are acts of generosity and dedication almost unfathomable until you see them in action.

3. Wilderness amplifies vastness.

Edward Abbey wrote that, "A motorized vehicle, when not at rest, requires a volume of space far out of proportion to its size," and as we made our way 37.5 miles into the heart of the Bob, I thought about how many times I've

covered that same distance in Yellowstone between Mammoth and Madison, in a car, in forty-five minutes. But the Bob, at half the size of YNP, feels so much more remote, unknowable, challenging, and huge.

4. The sacred life of water begins here.

So many streams essential to wildlife and beloved by floaters and fisherman begin in the Bob, starting their clear, strong journeys within the protected bounds of the Complex, traveling over miles of time-worn, multi-colored stones. As Bob Marshall himself wrote, "Swift or smooth, broad...or narrow...every river is a world of its own, unique in pattern and personality. Each mile on a river will take you further from home than a hundred miles on a road."

5. Thinking like a wilderness isn't easy...

We are so tuned to think fast and future-focused. Whenever I spend time in wilderness, I find it slows my brain and heightens my senses. Time feels more generous and yet more strange; change and action manifest as natural processes – beaver-built wetlands, fire mosaics, rock slides, the ancient footprints of glaciers or the Milky Way riotously brilliant in the dark of a new moon.

6. ...but thinking like a fireweed I can manage.

I love the brilliant purple fireweed stretching across hillsides, meadows, and burned areas throughout the Complex. Fireweed thrives in the moment, arriving first in disturbed areas and blooming lushly, from the bottom to the top as summer passes, before losing its thousands of seeds to the wind.

7. The nose knows its happy place.

They say scent is the sense most tied to our memories. In mine, I'm holding: woodsmoke, wild mint, warm Ponderosa bark, petrichor, mule sweat, saddle leather, wet meadow grass, crushed juniper, Douglas fir needles, wild rose, coffee percolating on a rainy morning – and hoping they will help transport me back.

8. Wilderness is a practice.

Like meditation or music, wilderness takes practice. I admit, on our last day leaving the Bob, though I was lucky enough to be Chris' guest and have a spot on a horse, I turned in the reins and walked 21 miles, rather than ride, because my body couldn't take it anymore: I hadn't practiced enough. But I got there, however imperfectly, and that's what mattered.

9. The honoring is essential, and endless.

At the heart of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation's mission is the work of honoring – the place itself, but also our human connection to it, our hopes to heal and evolve with wildness, to better understand what it can mean, and to who. It takes returning again and again to those paths that allow us to know wilderness better, to be within it, and ask once more how we can honor and participate in its story.



Bob's Impact

by Casey Denson, Intern

As a lover of wilderness and all things outdoors, I often think of how I was intimidated just two years ago by the thought of being more than seven miles away from another person. I thought 'wild' adventures were for those more able-bodied or masculine than I, or I felt that the outdoor community wouldn't be as welcoming to queer folks like myself. The wilderness was gate-kept by everything I wasn't. Today, I'm proud to say that I don't think I could have been more wrong after I found myself lucky enough to be surrounded by the community I had once been so overwhelmed by.

Initially, I had a hard time asking for help just starting to learn many straightforward tasks like how to tie knots, navigate, and prepare food, and I was anxious to ask. I was even more unsure how to address my health and identity as a queer femme. I've had many experiences where outdoor groups were unwelcoming because of my identity.

I remember the first time I met a fellow backpacker with a disability and was surprised and comforted at the idea that things might be more within my reach than I had ever hoped. Was I going to be able to do something like Continental Divide Trail? Maybe not, but that doesn't mean I can't go out and enjoy a day or a week in the woods. The representation of other queer and disabled people was so influential to me that I hope to pass on all my positive experiences to another.

Bob Marshall wrote extensively about the generosity of villagers in Alaska during his tenure in the North. His time in Bettles was spent experiencing the wilderness and documenting the social interactions between groups in the village to conclude that many of the residents cared for one another and would pitch in to help when they could. Bob's lifelong social advocacy in the 1920s and 30s has not only made me feel more confident knowing there are people out there addressing underlying privilege and access issues, but it's also encouraged me to be even more outspoken about my experiences.

I am proudly writing today with sore feet and plenty of mosquito bites after guiding a four-day backpacking trip. None of this would have been achievable without the folks who embraced me, helped me out of my comfort zone, and encouraged me to find and share knowledge to help me adapt to what I needed. If I had been introduced to Bob's writings earlier, I'm sure I would have felt even more comfortable at a younger age. I'm here to share my journey and hope that I can honor Bob's legacy by helping others.

Bob was raised by Jewish parents and a father who advocated for justice as a lawyer taking on civil rights cases. He understood that he had access to many more things because he had the money to do so. Bob openly shared what he could to help others who had helped him through funds or other means. Bob had a friend he had known for a long time and always offered to help if he could. Her response was always that the most important thing to do was to raise the voices of others who needed it. To me, this is the true spirit of the backcountry: pay it forward. Cheer someone up with the joy of finding an uncrushed granola bar at the end of a trip (or hope they can absorb your joy when you need to eat it!). Let someone borrow a tent or assist in an affinity trip. Do what you can. Don't be someone who bums out a trip by being racist, sexist, homophobic, or ableist.

During his time with the Forest Service, Bob actively fought against discriminatory practices within public land policy and advocated for equity. As Bob stated in a letter to a friend, the second of his three major interests was the defense of civil liberties. Bob promoted accessibility to lands over privatization or charging fees so high they were exclusionary and fought against segregation in Forest Service Policy. Facilitating access to public lands and the outdoors is an important goal to welcome others who haven't had the opportunity or resources to recreate and feel safe outdoors. Along with his advocacy, Bob also donated money throughout his life to civil rights organizations and left trusts to promote the importance of wilderness and education to preserve areas for future generations. Bob saw that the solution to managing public lands was through public education and public use. To keep lands accessible and affordable, we all must act as stewards and care for the land as we do other people.

Bob passed away from a heart attack in 1939, and had his life not been cut short, would have fought for the inclusion of all people in the wilderness in contemporary times. From the legendary Bob Marshall Wilderness



Bob Marshall during his time with the Forest Service
Photo courtesy of US Forest Service



The author during a recent excursion

Complex to the modern movements for equity in all aspects of life, Bob had a major impact on the goals of preserving wilderness. Bob's activism extended past just wilderness issues and overlapped with his work as the chairman of Washington DC's ACLU chapter, Indigenous rights, and labor rights. He saw wilderness as a minority right, publishing essays bearing the title. In his short 38 years, Bob lived a life filled with activism we should celebrate and follow.

Wilderness is a place for all of us. Bob saw this and shared it so we could pass the message on. Backcountry folks are good at problem solving – if we weren't, we couldn't be there. Sometimes, finding the people that can help is the hardest part. I'll do my part now and offer any resources I have to help you to find what you need, to honor Bob – and just in case I need to ask you for that granola bar someday.

Melanin Base Camp (melaninbasecamp.com)
The Venture Out Project (ventureoutproject.com)
Latino Outdoors (latinooutdoors.org)
Disabled Hikers (disabledhikers.com)
Unlikely Hikers (unlikelyhikers.org)
Outdoor Afro (outdoorafro.org)
She Jumps (shejumps.org)

A Season "In the Weeds"

by Zack Schlanger, Invasive Plants Coordinator

Walking through montane grasslands is one of my favorite parts of being in the backcountry. The broad sky always comes as a respite after hiking through forested terrain. Trees sometimes feel too big, unrelatable. In the wide open space of a mountain prairie, the grasses and forbs hold my attention in a familiar way. As I crunch through dry bunchgrasses – fescues, timothy, needlegrass, the pasqueflowers, fleabanes, and blanketflowers almost seem to be staring back at me.

Early August and I am cruising off trail through Little Salmon Park, a mix of riparian floodplain and dry grasslands near the South Fork of the Flathead. I can only take passing notice of the native flora and fauna all around me – I am on the lookout for invasive weeds. Surely enough, after about twenty minutes of searching, I find an area in the upland with well-developed patches of Spotted knapweed and Yellow toadflax. I start searching for the edges of the infestation and thinking about how the weeds could be managed. If nothing is done, the diversity of plants well beyond this small three-acre patch will slowly decline. Someday this whole grassland could be dominated by just a couple of invasive plants, and it would likely remain that way into the indefinite future.

Invasive weeds are an unfortunate feature in many landscapes around the world, including the remote, wild ecosystems found in the Bob. Some weeds spread far and wide of their own accord, blown on the wind or carried by water. Other weeds tend to get a lift from humans, livestock, or wildlife. Regardless of how they get around, the threat of invasive species to native ecosystems is a human-caused problem and we have some responsibility to address it in special places like Wilderness.



Zack identifying invasive Sulfur Cinquefoil with BMWF volunteers



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