

2010 PNW BCL Rendezvous

Cutsforth Park on the sunny and warm final weekend of June was the new setting for the 2010 annual Pacific Northwest Backcountry Llama Rendezvous organized by Rattlesnake Ridge Ranch. Situated along the serene Blue Mountain Scenic Byway between the towns of Heppner and Ukiah in east central Oregon, this wooded camp offers a large grass area, developed camp areas, horse corrals, meeting hall with commercial kitchen, stream, fishing pond, playground, and hiking trails. We were granted the run of the place with no restrictions on where we could go.



This year the pack trials are split from rendezvous, with rendezvous in the Spring and pack trials in the Fall, providing an increased focus on each activity.

Friday's introductory dinner was a taco/burrito bar with a variety of ingredients to build your own and huckleberry cobbler. Camelid Theater on the big screen included a recent Llamas @ Latitudes four part series on DVD from Jacob Bell's Filming the Rockies channel. Featured were llama treks into the poposure region of the Wind River Range in Wyoming, including Cony Mountain, followed by the Flathead Valley in Montana to convey more details about llamas and a trek into the Swan Range of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and finally a picturesque llama trek into the remote Alaskan wilderness. This was followed by three videos of llama treks into the southern Wallowa National Forest of Oregon, each starting at a different trailhead and to different destinations, two of which were provided by Wallowa Llama Treks. In all, we saw many beautiful llama trekking choices in the western US, while relaxing and enjoying the homemade root beer.

Friday night concluded with smores around the campfire.

Saturday morning began as it should with a hearty breakfast of pancakes, eggs, bacon, fruit, juice, and more. In conjunction with Q&A on basic llama packing, participants in the llama training poker run bravely geared up and set off into nearby Hell's Half Acre. The high point, quite literally, in Hell's Half Acre is the Earth Quake Shock Waves – an isolated collection of cottage-sized boulders strewn about in random positions among the trees. The 2.7-mile circular route had a 650' elevation gain (roughly 500' per mile with no switchbacks), though some seemed to be convinced it was considerably more than that. The GPS Treasure Hunt and a build-your-own lunch awaited everyone's return, offering a variety of tasty options. The children's poker run followed, with youngsters leading their llamas through the in-camp obstacle course and a group of special needs kids participating by riding in llama carts between obstacles.

During the children's poker run, a group set off to see Gibson's Cave – a short drive and hike away. A full time resident occupied this cave in the 1930's by walling off the opening with a door and installing a small wood stove and lamps. Officially, he made his living selling firewood to Heppner residents. Unofficially, there were much more lucrative business opportunities during prohibition.



Llama driving on the camp roads occurred periodically through the day, and Joyce O'Halloran conducted a seminar on llama conditioning. She actively exercises her llamas going into packing season as most of us should but do not and shared her tips and methods.



Debra Langley-Boyer shared some of her camp cooking secrets and demonstrated various cooking equipment, with group participation to practice the use and techniques such as Dutch oven cooking, plank cooking and much more. Several dishes were prepared during the seminar just in time for dinner, including cobbler, baked potatoes and a mess of freshly caught trout from the nearby pond and stream. These were added to the prepared spaghetti dinner and the other potluck contributions to the meal such as BBQ chicken. As is typically the case at rendezvous, there was plenty of good fresh food to go around.

A “cool camp equipment” presentation followed dinner, with several people showing off some of their more useful and unique gear – some bought and some made. Awards and prizes came next, with all the successful poker run and treasure hunt participants getting an opportunity to choose a prize from the prize table. The evening wound down with a relaxing sit around the campfire and of course more smores and root beer.

Strawberry Falls 1

Sunday was pack-up and clean-up day, and more llama driving, with a group then traveling a couple hours South to the Slide Horse Camp near the Strawberry Trailhead for a Monday morning pack trip into the Malheur Wilderness area for a relaxing couple of days. Daytime temperatures were in the high 70's (F) but with the cooler than normal springtime weather the snow melt-off was still in high gear providing much higher stream flows and spectacular waterfalls than is seen in the Fall. Although the skies were generally blue and sunny, a thundercloud passed through one afternoon dropping some moderately heavy rain and marble sized hail lasting about ten minutes, then was gone. Fortunately, camp was established and the people were sheltered, though any llamas not under a thick tree canopy got pelted some. The hail quickly melted in the daytime heat.



Strawberry Lake 1

On the return trip home, we stopped at Cutsforth Park where a large tri-county 4-H camp-out was taking place. We were added to the activity agenda and handed an outdoor microphone for a formal question and answer session about llamas, while King Asher, Marley O'Joy and Pharaoh were pressed into PR duty – not their normal line of work but they handled it with grace. The 4th through 6th grade kids asked many questions and those who wanted to got to pet Pharaoh – a former 4-H llama himself.

This year's rendezvous was fun and educational, while providing a bit more free time for fishing and other activities for those so inclined. Many thanks go out to the participants and all the helping hands that make rendezvous possible! Go to <http://www.rattlesnakeridgeranch.com/rendezvous10.htm> for more details and photographs. Feedback is welcome. Don't miss out on next year's gathering, and be sure to check out the October PLTA pack trial.