

## 2011 PNW BCL Rendezvous

Cutsforth Park on the sunny and warm first weekend of July was the setting for the 2011 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, cabins, horse corrals, meeting hall with commercial kitchen, stream, fishing pond, playground, and hiking trails. As before we were granted the run of the place with no restrictions on where we could go. The weather was perfect with nothing but sunshine and daytime temperatures in the 70's F.



### Start of Poker Run 1

Thursday was set-up day for the organizers, with trail clearing and camp preparation. All went well until a llama slipped away in the afternoon at the planned beginners overnight llama packing campsite. Shahisha ran off dragging a long tie-out lead. A search resulted in a brief sighting back near Cutsforth Park but she again ran off and the evening came with no further contact.

Multiple search parties continued throughout Friday as participants arrived, with no sightings. There were concerns that she may have snagged somewhere in the woods, plus there are known to be cougar in the area. Nevertheless, as the saying goes, the show must go on... Friday's dinner was a special meatloaf with salad and other delicious offerings from participants, and of course the homemade root beer was available throughout rendezvous. Camelid Theater on the big screen included a recent llama trek near Santa Fe, New Mexico in the serene and beautiful Sierra de Cristo mountains. It

presented a very positive portrayal of llama packing and llamas in general. This was followed by a colorful and entertaining llama trek, Caravana de Llamas, in Tilcara, Jujuy, Argentina.

Friday concluded with smores around the campfire as the stars shone brightly in the moonless night sky.

Saturday morning began as it should with a hearty breakfast of biscuits and gravy, eggs, sausage, fruit, juices, and more. 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). Some had to turn back when an unhappy llama went into a screaming fit, but most completed the run. A build-your-own lunch awaited everyone's return, offering a variety of tasty options.



#### Llama Meet and Greet 1

With the focus this year on introducing newcomers to llama packing, Scott Noga provided a basic pack seminar followed by a ground tying seminar by Gwen Ingram. Debra Langley-Boyer put on a tasty live demonstration of Dutch oven cooking with plenty of audience participation creating main course and dessert fare, which morphed into dinner featuring fresh Steelhead, accompanied by even fresher trout caught from the nearby pond minutes before (yes, Gwen and Danielle are quite the fisherwoman). Julie Waters showed an impressive hand-crafted sleeping hammock she made. Some took the opportunity to drive their llama.



#### Jackie 1

Meanwhile, members of the Mid-Columbia Folk Music Society had showed up to share their musical talents. Jim Krowka and Gwen Ingram impressed us all with their guitar and banjo skills.

Saturday night again concluded with smores around the campfire along with the rendezvous tradition of flexible glow sticks decorating kids and llamas alike. Impromptu lighted llama parades broke out.

There was still no sign of the missing llama despite repeated searches throughout the day and leaving llamas staked out in the area Shahisha was last seen.

Sunday morning following breakfast was cleanup day and preparation for the overnight pack trip. Due to the large size of the group it was split in two, each with an experienced leader to show the way and many green llamas and handlers, fully loaded. Although the hike in was only a mile and a half, it included a number of advanced natural obstacles one may encounter on the trail – jump and step-overs, some rough bushwacking around large deadfall, narrow passages, mud, water and more. None of the llamas required anything more than an occasional bit of encouragement. With experienced llamas setting the example the rest impressed everyone with their skill and confidence. All arrived at camp and picked out a favored spot in the grassy meadow near a stream.

Once settled, a camp tour was conducted with the group going from campsite to campsite to share camp tips and answer questions. The evening came to a relaxing close around the campfire.

Monday after breakfast, most campers packed up for the trek back to Cutsforth. That same morning, the few campers that stayed at Cutsforth Sunday night had heard a llama alarm call Monday morning from the area the lost llama was thought to be. Multiple search teams with llamas set out to simultaneously converge towards each other from opposing trailheads, travelling many miles. Sadly, there was still no sign of her. Most people had to leave for home, leaving a smaller contingent to maintain the search. A breakthrough occurred on Wednesday when a searcher travelling cross country on a hillside happened upon a fresh pile of llama beans. Looking around very carefully Shahisha was spotted standing nearby, very nonchalant and unconcerned about all the commotion she had caused. A capture strategy was formulated and with extensive work to obstruct potential escape pathways she was lured into a herd of contained “bait llamas”. She’s now back home, safe and sound.

So all’s well that ends well. Despite the worry about the wayward llama, everyone appeared to have a good time and afterwards feedback was received from new llama packers that they were pleased with their llamas performance and now “hooked” on getting serious about the hobby and having fun with their llamas out in the wilds. With the goal of this year’s rendezvous helping others to get off on the right foot, mission accomplished. Many thanks go out to the participants and all the helping hands that make rendezvous possible! Go to <http://www.rattlesnakeridgeranch.com/rendezvous11.htm> for more details and photographs. We hope to see you at next year’s gathering, and be sure to check out the October PLTA pack trial!

