

## *The 2 Man Trail Crew*

The year was 1972. We had just returned to the mountain town of Field from my work with the Avalanche Research team in Rodgers Pass. Grace and I moved into our small house along side the CPR tracks in Field.

We were preparing to re-open our horse stables at Emerald Lake for the summer when I was approached by Andy Anderson the Chief Warden in Yoho Park.

I knew Andy well when he was the Park Warden at Cyclone District near Lake Louise. Our family had a Guiding and Outfitting business. We were neighbors in that remote area of the back-country where we managed Skoki Lodge. Andy knew that I had a lot of horse experience and was introducing a mobile trail crew using horses to do trail work in Yoho Park. I applied and got the job as lead hand for the '2 man trail Crew'.

My partner was Chris Schober, an Austrian who had spent a lot of time around Lake Louise. I knew Chris from his days at Lake Louise. He worked at various jobs in the mountains including waiter, tour bus driver, ski instructor and mechanic.

Chris wanted to work with horses. He often helped my sister Faye at her Horse Stable at Lake Louise. He would shovel manure, haul hay and fix broken machinery just to be around the horses.

Chris was an excellent skier and he would often be seen with an entourage of local children following him down the hill. My niece Debbie was one of his ski team.

He laughed as he told me that sometimes he would drive his tour bus up the steep switchbacks on the Yoho Valley road. He got all the people on the downhill side of the bus to get up and crowd over to the uphill side of the bus to give it less chance of tipping over the side.

Chris had worked as a Fire Crew foreman in Yoho park during the huge Amiskwi and Mt. Hurd Forest Fires in the preceding year, 1971.

Bill Walburger was the Park Warden in charge of the horse herd for Yoho. He was also to be the manager of the 2 man trail crew.

The first thing that Bill did was check out our skills with chain saws and horses. Chris and I went to the Ottertail Warden Station where Bill lived. He brought out a chain saw for us to cut a log or two. Chris and I both had experience with chain saws. I caught a twinkle in Bill's eyes when I noticed that the chain was put on backwards. Chris found a match in the intake valve. We passed that test!

Next was a horsemanship test. I gave Chris a quick horse packing lesson the day before so when Bill asked us to pack a horse it went OK. He then had us truck some horses up the burned out Amiskwi Valley for a ride.

Bill gave me a little mare that he said may buck. She did a couple of crow-hops but that was the end of her rather limited energy. When I was young I had rather weird double jointed knees and could turn my toes 180 degrees. While we were riding along I turned my legs so that the toes were pointing backwards in the stirrups. Bill finally noticed and exclaimed - "What in the hell!"

I said that I hadn't been on this trail before – so I didn't know which way to go! He laughed and said "You are hired".

We had a busy summer. The large fires in the Park had kept the Trail crews busy the year before so there was a lot of windfall on most of the trails. The winter of 1971-72 had a record setting snowfall and avalanche cycle, followed by flood waters in the spring.

The Yoho Valley was plugged with huge avalanche debris. The bridge next to Twin Falls Chalet was taken out by an avalanche. A huge slide stripped the forest above the Youth Hostel at Takakkaw Falls, taking out some of the buildings. The Wapta Slide was about 30 feet over the access road. I remember cutting trees out of that slide by being lifted up in the back-hoe bucket like an elevator.

The Spring floods took out more bridges and threatened to close the highway near Kicking Horse Pass. It was June and we were expecting a baby any day. We drove to Banff in case we got caught behind a flooded road. Grace gave birth to our little daughter Flora the next day in the Banff Hospital.

Chris and I spent many long days cutting entanglements of mature trees off many trails. It was like cutting through a tangle of huge pick-up sticks. The horses stood patiently close by while the saw dust piled up. Chris was standing on a bent tree and cut through another one – which acted as a spring board sending him through the air. Luckily he landed on a pile of moss and the chainsaw went the other way!

We took pack horse loads of boards, cable and a drill to Twin Falls. Our mission was to put a temporary cable bridge over the creek at the Twin Falls lodge and to put another cable bridge at the top of the Falls. We were able to drag the cables across the creek with a saddle horse and put up the rather scary looking cable bridge, which hovers over a roaring waterfall.



*Don on cable bridge above Twin Falls*

One of our projects was to help the main trail crew put in a new hiking bridge on Goodsir Creek. The spring floods took the old one out. We arrived at the crossing with our horses, including Bonnie, our skid horse.

Chris packed a 'lunch-box' radio in his saddle bag. One of the 'Hippy' trail crew guys walked by as someone was talking on the radio. He said “Cool man – a talking horse”.

We started skidding the log towards the stream.

Chris decided to play cowboy and put his rope on the log. His saddle horse hit the end of the rope and Chris was catapulted into the swift moving glacier fed stream. He never missed a beat and stood up to assist maneuvering the log while he was in midstream. I said "Chris you had better get out of there – the log is going to hit you". Chris waved me that he was fine. The log hit the stream, took Chris under the water and against the bank. There was a hollow spot on the edge of the bank and we saw Chris' hand come up, followed by a rather soggy Chris. Many hands helped him back up on the bank. Once all the trail crew spectators knew that he was OK – laughter was echoing throughout the Goodsir Valley. Chris and I got into the rum bottle at the Ottertail Warden cabin that night!



*This photo was taken shortly before Chris took his diving lesson!*

The adventures continued throughout the summer and fall. Chris was a great guy to work with. We were good friends. We teased each other. I called him a stubborn square-head and he called me a few things that are not printable.

Chris did not have much luck when he tried to skid logs from his horse! We were skidding out firewood in the Yoho Valley for the Little Yoho Warden cabin.

Chris was riding a skittish horse named Elva and I suggested that it would probably be a good idea to just let me do the skidding with my steady mount named Lady. The next thing I knew was Elva charging down the trail with a lariat bouncing along behind her. I caught up to Elva and met Chris stumbling down the trail picking up his rope and hat.

Chris passed away suddenly in the early 1990's. He was missed by his many friends and by our family. I will always have fond memories of working with Chris in Yoho Park and our '2 Man Trail Crew'.





*Chris on the 'Skyline Trail' – The President Glacier in the background*



*End of the Season*

## *END OF THE TRAIL*



*by Don Mickle - 2019*