

# More than 46,000 miles on horseback... and counting



By Susan Bates

**E**d Anderson, known on the trail as **MendoRider**, is one of the few elite horsemen who have safely completed the PCT on horseback. On his return from every outing, his horses were healthy and well-fed and had been untroubled by either colic or injuries.

Ed's backcountry experience began in 1952 while he was still in high school, and by 1957 he had hiked the John Muir Trail section of the PCT. He continued to build on that experience by hiking and climbing in much of the wilderness surrounding the PCT in California. He usually went alone.

Ed was, and is, most "at home" and comfortable in the wilderness – more so than at any other time or in any other place. The writings of John Muir are his inspiration. Always concerned about environmental causes, Ed was a media spokesman for the **Greenpeace Foundation** in the 1970s.

Ed started his horse-riding endeavors when he was 5, dressed as a cowboy, sitting on a pony, posing for pictures. At 12, he was inspired to jump on a neighbor's horse – bareback, no tack. That lasted all of 10 seconds. When he was a high school senior, he and a buddy rented horses for a full hour.

As a freshman in college, Ed had a date with a pretty blond who loved horses and wanted to ride. So, Ed rented two horses from a nearby stable. They rode for two hours, she trotting and Ed following

– and suffering – but, of course, unwilling to admit it. By the end of the ride, the hair on the inside of his legs had been painfully pulled and rolled into little black balls. His skin was rubbed raw. He decided that other than his own two legs and feet, the only transportation for him had to have either wheels or a sail.

Ed and his wife, **Jereen**, once made ambitious plans to sail around the world. But the reality of financial issues halted their aspirations to purchase a suitable boat. They choose a more affordable option: they would travel and live in a Volkswagen camper.

Ed didn't like any of the VW conversions then available on either side of the Atlantic, so, he designed and built his own. He envisioned a self-contained, compact motor home with permanent standing room and a comfortable bed that could be folded away made-up. He made all of the cabinets at home in Highland Park, Calif. and shipped them – disassembled – to Liverpool, England. He did the conversion in the carport of a motel in Coventry.

The "Adventurer," as they called their new traveling home, carried them through 31 countries. They camped throughout Europe, including the British Isles and the islands of Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily. They reached the North Cape of Norway and headed south, passing through the Middle East as far as Saudi Arabia.

On their African leg, their ultimate destination was Cape Town, South Africa. But in Egypt in 1964, their planned route into Sudan

was not possible; the rising waters of the Aswan Dam had inundated the docking facilities of the Nile Steamer. So they continued west to Tripoli, Libya, planning to drive south across the Sahara. War in Congo stopped them. So, they continued west to Morocco.

They crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to Spain and found passage to Miami on what was to be the first ferry boat to cross the Atlantic Ocean. That original VW Adventurer was the origin of Ed's Adventurewagen Company, which converted VWs, and later, Fords, into compact motor homes.

Years passed, and Ed hiked, backpacked, ran and climbed but didn't ride again until his wife and daughter, **Michelle**, got the horse bug. He felt left out, so he purchased a small, tough, Tennessee Walking Horse named **Dandy**. One of Ed's first efforts to ride Dandy was little improvement on his early attempt on that neighbor's horse. Watching his daughter jump her Connemara while bareback, he hopped on Dandy and headed for the jump. He and the horse promptly parted company and Ed landed in a motionless heap in the pasture.

He added a saddle after that. Ed and Dandy went on to win a 100-mile race at Mount Shasta. Adding Arabians to his stable, Ed won more than two dozen 50- and 100-mile endurance races. Ed and Jereen also took wilderness horse-pack trips. Since they were also backpackers, they traveled light and never felt the need to use a packhorse.

Fueled by a love of wilderness, Ed's natural progression was to ride the PCT. The seemingly ridiculously impossible dream of section-riding the PCT solo from Mexico to Canada kept calling to him. He wanted to put together the love of the wild and the love of the horse. Finally, after retiring, he was able to face that daunting challenge.

As with the PCT hikers, he had to consider weather, fires and snow. He did not want to put his horse on dangerous snowy passes. He had to be prepared to find a way around hundreds of downed trees and other obstacles.

Ed rode alone, with no support crew. He resupplied himself. He would leave his horse in safe hands and drive his rig ahead, caching supplies along the route. He would then find a way back to his horse, usually by hitchhiking, sometimes by bus, and, when he was lucky, he was offered a much-appreciated ride from an angel. Then, he would saddle up and ride north, picking up his supplies as he went.

He rode two horses - **Primo** and **Neekalos** - courageous Arabians. They were strong, agile and sure-footed. With only a few incidents of note, Primo carried Ed for 2,000 miles between Mexico and Canada. In Washington, three llamas scared him enough to cause him to run off in a panic, leaving Ed two miles behind. On his next section, Ed decided he would take Neekalos instead.

In August 2012, after four years of section rides, Ed and Neekalos completed the last section (previously missed) of the High Sierra between Horseshoe Meadows and Sierra City. Ed rode into his final camp with dead batteries in his camera and no way to document hav-



ing finished the PCT. A group of **Back Country Horsemen** happened to be there and took pictures and toasted his accomplishment.

As a Back Country Horseman volunteer, Ed continues to work on the PCT Sections D and E north and south of Agua Dulce, Calif., where he lives. He's helped clear trees and brush and build a safe crossing of rock, located between the Interstate 14 tunnel and Vasquez Rocks Park. He spends untold hours answering questions and offer-

ing advice on the PCT-L online forum.

The PCT has hidden treasures for all of us willing to try to extract them. Ed Anderson, and his sage advice, ought to be sought out by any aspiring thru-rider. 🐾

*Previous page: Ed Anderson and Neekalos take on the PCT at Pinchot Pass.*

*Above: With Primo, Neekalos and his completion medal at Vasquez Rocks in Southern California.*

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