

## Four Corners Back Country Horsemen, Durango, Colorado From the President

By Elizabeth Testa

### *What We Are About*

**I**n the past two weeks, I've had occasion to mention BCH to three different couples, all trail riders, none members. After finishing my saddle speech, their response set me back on my pockets: —Oh, they said—every last one of them—We don't like big group rides. No amount of protest could dislodge the notion that the mission of the Four Corners Back Country Horsemen is to promote nose-to-tail, slogging down the well-worn path, choking dust and annoyed horses, trail rides.

How does this happen? I really don't know, but it's a public image we have had to deal with since our early days when we DID host some of those massive events. We encourage riding, we promote the Yahoo communication tool to share ride information, and we (just this past week, for example) teach mountain horsemanship. And let's not forget our trail work—which supports it all: without cleared trails we wouldn't be able to get where we're going, physically down the road, or metaphorically by earning our right to be heard by public lands managers. If we weren't so interested in horses or mules and riding (and more particularly, the rights of all horsemen to ride the back country) what would be the point? But we are much more, and much better, than a group that stages huge —fun rides. Besides, who thinks those giant rides are fun, any-way?

Let's take a moment to look at our purpose statement: To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses & mules in America's back country and wilderness. We honor our mission by paying attention to public affairs—that would be —perpetuate. We teach riding skills and safety—falling right in line with —use and enjoyment. And we pay attention to the stewardship of our back country and wilderness with LNT principles and low impact camping practices.

We have room in our chapter for many kinds of enjoyment, many kinds of uses, of horses and pack stock in the back country and the closer-in public lands. But we all find a common denominator in our belief that keeping the public lands open to riders and stock users is a worthy cause, one that unites us and drives us forward. Let that be at the heart of our —saddle speeches this summer, and make some converts who add their efforts to ours. Have a grand Fourth. See you in July.