

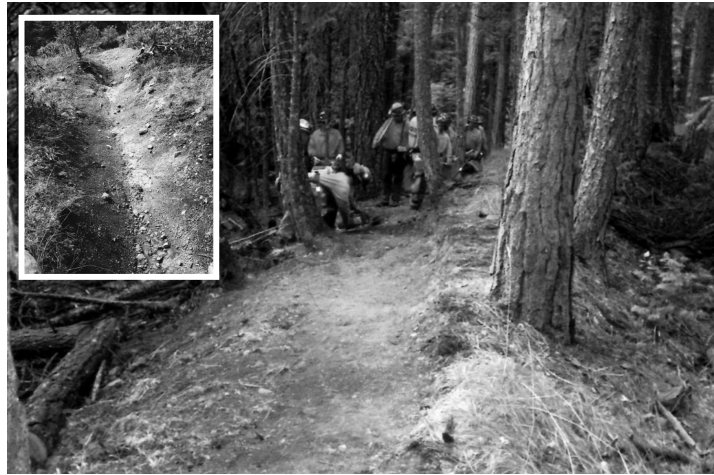
Pioneer Trail Relocation – California



AERC Trails Grant, completed 2012

An AERC trails grant allowed the Gold Country Trails Council to relocate a portion of Northern California's Pioneer Trail

by Melissa Ribley, DVM



Trail crew at work on the Pioneer Trail in Northern California, site of the Wild West Ride. Inset: the old, deteriorated trail.

As every endurance rider knows, access to trails forms the very basis of our sport. Open trails allow us to train, condition and enjoy all that nature has to offer with our horses. Open trails also provide us with the opportunity to experience areas all over the country on horseback while participating in endurance rides. The AERC Trails Grants Program assists with the creation and maintenance of existing trails and trail heads.

In the spring of 2012, the Gold Country Trails Council, a nonprofit association that develops, maintains, and protects non-motorized recreational trails in the Sierra foothills of Northern California, applied for an AERC trails grant. The grant was to be used to relocate a portion of the Pioneer Trail, a trail extending from Nevada City, California, for approximately 50 miles east through the Tahoe National Forest.

The trail is used by equestrians, pedestrians and mountain bikers and is the trail used by the Wild West Endurance Ride, held every year since 1998. Many local endurance riders use the trail for conditioning their horses.

A section of the trail extended through a prehistoric lava flow and had deteriorated to a degree which made continued equestrian use only marginally safe at best. The proposed trail relocation moved this section of the trail to a nearby canal berm, providing a level trail pad free of boulders and other obstructions.

Since the trail project was located on public land, the Tahoe National Forest, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) report was required. The AERC trails grant in the amount of \$1500 was put towards the NEPA report. The Gold Country Trails Council donated the remaining funds for the trail relocation project and donated 50 hours of volunteer labor for supervision of the trail crew.

The relocated section of the Pioneer Trail continues to be used and enjoyed by endurance riders and recreational trail riders. This is a good example of how effectively AERC trails grant funding is used for the purpose of providing maintenance and continued access to trails.