

Best Friend of the Packers **Jan Almquist**



Jan Almquist

When Jan Almquist learned that she'd been named 2004 Best Friend of the Packers, she reacted, "But I am a Packer!"...and there is certainly truth to that! Since 1987, Jan has covered hundreds of miles of High Sierra backcountry trails from Cottonwood Pass in the south, to Leavitt Meadows in the north of the eastern sierras, and served hundreds of eager folks as a backcountry cook and guide on the

crew for most of the Eastern Sierra Pack Stations. Her self-possessed joy is in helping visitors to the sierra backcountry awaken to and appreciate the wonders of the wilderness and profoundly experience their kinship with God's creation. To date, Jan's youngest "guest" was 5 years old, and her eldest was in his 80's.

However, packing has not been Jan's primary profession. Jan is an Attorney; graduate of UCLA School of Law. She interned for Presiding Justice Vaino Spencer, CA Court of Appeal, and then practiced in the health care business departments of two of southern California's largest firms until 1987, when she moved to the Eastern Sierra to pursue her interest and love of Packing.

Jan has had a private law practice in the Eastern Sierra for most of the time since she moved to the area, serving two terms as Inyo County Bar Association President. She also served as Inyo County Deputy County Counsel in the 1990's working closely with many County departments and affiliated entities. Prior to practicing as an Attorney, Jan Almquist was a Cancer

Information Specialist for the UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, a management intern at the National Library of Medicine, a middle school resource center Director, and a high school biology teacher (based on her undergraduate degree in Biology with Chemistry at Baylor University and her subsequent Masters Degree in Library and Information Science). Whew! That's quite the resume!

Shortly after moving to southern California in 1976, a friend of Jan's took her on her first trip into the Eastern Sierra – a backpack venture over Kearsarge Pass and eventually into Vidette Meadows. For years afterward, Jan continued to backpack solely in the Kearsarge area because, as she says, "I couldn't imagine there would be any more beautiful place on earth. The vista before me always took my breath away when I topped out at the Pass."

If it had not been for her backpacking buddy being diagnosed with a balance disorder just before summer one season, Jan may never have discovered packing with mules and horses into the backcountry. They could go into the

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backcountry, but only if there were no backpacks being carried, according to the physician. Glacier Pack Train in Big Pine came to the rescue, and Jan and her buddy rode up to Summit Lake with all their gear carried by a pack train of mules. That summer was the beginning of Jan's love affair for horses, mules, and packing folks into the High Sierra.

Over the years of working with Pack Stations and packers, Jan has been a backcountry lawyer of sorts: whether it was a crew member who needed a little advice, or the entire High Sierra Packers Association, Eastern Unit who could use the 'ear of a lawyer' to help them with complex regulatory issues. Jan has been there. And to think she says she has no idea why she would be chosen by the Packers as Best Friend of the Packer! Jan has been there whenever and however she could; whether it was a night time call about a legal situation, short-notice fill to get breakfast for the hungry crew, a trip to the store for the last minute 'forgotten' item by a guest, helping the UC Davis Veterinary Medicine School rescue an injured mule or listening to the anguish of many Pack Station owners and long-time crew members over the accelerating regulatory pressure pushing packers - and the people they serve - out of the high country and snuffing out the Eastern Sierra's light of humanity's connection with traditional earth and animal-bound living with the wilderness.

Jan, you are truly a best friend to the Packers, and always will be. You are honored and revered for all that you have done for us over the years, and we thank you.