

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN HANDBOOK

Prepared and Provided by the Back Country Horsemen of America

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BACK COUNTRY HORSEMAN OF AMERICA

Concern about the possibility of losing the traditional right to use horses in the backcountry was the primary reason in forming the organization. What has always been our traditional right appears to be in question. We believe continued horse use, in harmony with the capacity of our public lands, is in the best interest of the majority of Americans. The following, is the purpose of Back Country Horsemen of America:

1. To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness.
2. To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
3. To assist the agencies responsible for the management of public lands.
4. To educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustaining use of the backcountry resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage.
5. To foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.

We as Back Country Horsemen hope to achieve our purpose as a service group to the backcountry resource. We offer our time and equipment to government agencies for such tasks as packing out trash, clearing trails, building trailhead facilities and other projects, which will benefit both horsemen and non-horsemen.

Our main contribution is educating people to reduce environmental impact. To further this cause we have assembled this guidebook. We have used suggestions and information from the following storehouse of knowledge: commercial outfitters and packers, backpackers, horsemen, professional foresters, resource managers, and individual state Back Country Horsemen organizations.

The horse has earned a noble place in our Western heritage; its usefulness and devotion have been second to none. Surely it is our charge, indeed our duty, to see that horse use is preserved in its rightful place. This can best be accomplished by our individual efforts to shoulder the responsibilities of promoting wise horse use with minimum damage to the backcountry.

FORWARD

The lure of the backcountry is an intangible quality, generated perhaps by the pressure of our modern society. This lure affects us regardless of age or ability. Many of us have cherished the beauty and solitude of the mountains for years, while others have never had the opportunity to enjoy them. It is our fervent hope that this guidebook will provide the basic foundation for an inexperienced person to acquire the knowledge necessary for an enjoyable trip, and to instill an awareness of our responsibility to our environment. For those experienced, it is never too late to teach an old hand new techniques.

The backcountry is one of the few remains sanctuaries for modern man. Away from everyday tensions a

person can make an objective evaluation of oneself or a situation and gain a firmer sense of true values. Perhaps we need an occasional reminder of what insignificant creatures we really are when viewed in comparison with the magnitude of nature. Today's young generation will be the guardians of the resources of tomorrow. We could offer them no finer course than a lesson from nature's classroom on a backcountry trip.

In our nation today, there has finally been an awakening to the true value of our resources and recognition of our responsibility to preserve this wealth for our children and future generations. With the proper guidance and discretion, backcountry resources could last forever, but if neglected and misused, they may be only memories in a short time.

PURPOSE

This guidebook is not a substitute for experience, ability, or common sense, but it is an aggregation of the combined wisdom of some of the most knowledgeable horsemen of our time. These men and women have adapted their methods from the experience gained through hundreds of trips into our back country and wilderness areas. Although it was our primary objective to provide information and guidance to the inexperienced person, it is certain even an experienced horseman will benefit from this information.

There are various government agencies, which are charged with the responsibility of managing our backcountry under different laws and regulations. It is our duty to guard these areas against adverse environmental impact. Adverse impact has forced the closure of a few areas to horse use. The necessity to close the majority of these areas has been the result of horse misuse rather than overuse. The education of horsemen, the proper regard for your environment, and discretion in the handling and use of our horses will help eliminate the need for further closures.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

There's an old saying that the success of a trip depends on preparation. This is especially true of backcountry trips. On a pack trip you have your animals and camp to consider as well as your personal gear. Concern for the environment dictates you include only necessary items. Many horsemen use checklists to help them in traveling light, while insuring they have what they need when they pitch camp. A checklist is provided in the appendix of this guidebook.

It would be advisable to contact someone who has recent knowledge of the area or the land manager's office when planning a trip. The availability of horse feed and firewood, and condition of the trails must be considered. It may be necessary to pack in horse feed, especially in alpine areas. Dead wood for fires can be scarce in high country. A gas stove may be required for cooking. In country new to you, a topographic map and the ability to read it are a tremendous help. A compass should also be included in your gear. There are many excellent books available on both map reading and compass use. The USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region puts out an excellent document, recreation aid No. 2, "Map and Compass."

Storms come up quickly in the mountains. Snow or cold rain can be expected any time of the year even though the sky may have been blue and clear when you started out. The bottom line is to be prepared and have a plan.

It is important to always carry a good knife, a flashlight, and fire starting material whether you are out for one day or many. Always be prepared for cold, wet weather. On pack trips an axe, a shovel, and water container is useful and are required by the USDA Forest Service. A saw may be necessary if larger blow downs are expected. Finally, carry good first aid kits for both horse and rider.

In organizing your trip, plan to take the minimum number of stock needed to make your trip successful. We must use minimum impact techniques or we will be regulated out of the backcountry. The least number of animals cause less impact on the land. There are a great variety of lightweight camps, cooking and sleeping gear available. The right selections will reduce weight and bulkiness. In wilderness, parks, etc., it is advisable to check with administrative agencies to learn of any limitation on stock numbers. As a guide, one pack animal per two persons is sufficient. Naturally you must consider the length of the trip and forage availability.

STOCK

An ideal mountain horse should have a quiet, gentle disposition, good stamina, and be reliable under all conditions. Few of our equine friends possess all these wonderful qualities without considerable training. To be reliable under all conditions a high strung horse will require more handling than a quieter animal. A high strung horse may also cause more damage due to pawing and trampling. In the interest of continued use of the backcountry, we must consider the long-term consequences this type of horse can cause. If you are buying a horse for the mountains, you should select one with good withers, legs and feet, and with a disposition suited to your ability.

Like most domestic animals, horses have a descending order of authority of "pecking order". Usually a mare will be the leader of a herd unless a stud is present. Caution must be used in the placement of horses in a pack string, at a hitch rail, or in a truck to avoid trouble or injury. Some horsemen prefer geldings over mares, while many feel that individual disposition is more important than sex. Some mares can be troublesome during estrus.

Like people, horses are individuals, and although they usually follow general behavior patterns, they sometimes react differently in the same situation. A horse that is completely reliable under any other condition may have an abnormal fear of one thing. Training, and the methods used, plays a large part in shaping a horse's behavioral patterns. Due to the individuality of the horse, methods of training must often be tailored to its particular disposition. If you borrow horses, you have the disadvantage of knowing little of the horse's temperament. When you know the bad habits of your stock, you can anticipate possible problems and avoid trouble.

Shoes should be checked often. In the spring, they tend to loosen more because the hoof grows faster. It would be advisable to carry a couple of spare shoes, a few nails, rasp and hammer. You also need to learn how to nail a shoe back on. If you don't know, carry an "Easy Boot". If a horse throws a shoe and you don't replace it, use the rasp to angle the outside of the hoof where it meets the ground to prevent chipping. A horse should have his load lightened if it throws a shoe and the shoe is not replaced.

TRAINING

Before we continue, the following three things should be stressed:

The use and final training of a horse for the mountains differs considerably from pleasure riding and gaming events even though the basic early training of a young horse will not differ substantially. A backcountry trip offers a great deal of pleasure, but sometimes there are hazards involved. Knowledge of acceptable methods of dealing with these hazards is necessary to insure safety.

1. Lots of miles and "wet saddle blankets" are the best training aid a horseman can have.
2. If you're using inexperienced mountain horses, there are a number of things your horses should learn before they leave familiar ground. A horse must be halter-broken and accustomed to standing tied for extended periods. Tie your horse in the corral at home for a few days before a trip as practice. The horse must be acquainted with any type of terrain you may encounter, including bogs, creeks, deadfalls, trees and narrow trails. Even a gentle horse can become nervous and unpredictable under strange conditions. It will help to develop confidence in a green horse if he makes his first trip with seasoned companions.
3. Often a young horse can be led over or through obstacles that it wouldn't readily negotiate while ridden. A horse must develop confidence in the rider, and the rider must develop confidence in the horse. Another important point is never allowing a horse to refuse to do something he is capable of doing. The extra initial time spent in training will eliminate many problems later if the horse realizes it must obey. On the other hand, we shouldn't ask a horse to do something that it is not capable of or trained for.
4. An animal should also be trained in whatever method of restraint you're planning to use. It's far safer to teach a horse to hobble or picket on your own corral or pasture than in a rocky mountain

meadow. A horse should also be trained so it can be mounted from either side. It's almost impossible to mount from the downhill side when on a hillside trail.

5. Your horse should be trained to accept a rope around or under its tail. This is a common occurrence when leading a packhorse. If your lead horse is not trained to lift its tail and let the rope fall out, you are in for an unexpected rodeo, the consequence of which may be serious. A good way to being this training is called "rodding". With the horse in a stall or corral, take a short section of a broom handle or dowel, lift the tail, place the rod sideways under the tail. Normally a horse will clamp its tail down on the rod. Leave it there. Eventually the horse will learn to lift its tail letting the rod fall out. When the horse will no longer clamp down on the rod, continue the training using a rope.

In summation, a good mountain horse needs to be trained to deal with whatever it is likely to encounter in the back country, including, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- loading & hauling
- standing tied
- hobbles
- picket rope
- crossing water and streams
- rope under the tail
- crossing downed trees and other obstacles
- crossing boggy areas
- crinkling noise of maps or plastic rain gear
- fly repellent spray bottles
- sudden movement of birds, wildlife and dogs
- sudden appearance of hikers with large bright packs
- motorcycles
- tolerating other animals on the trail, including Llamas

HAULING STOCK

Unless horses have had a bad experience, they are normally good travelers. Horses being transported should be tied short and lower than is usual in other situations. This will prevent them from rearing or getting a foot over the rope. Horses should be tied to the sides of the truck, alternating head to rump. Hauling a load of horses requires extra driving care. Take corners slowly and avoid quick starts and sudden stops. Whatever you use to convey horses should have a floor with good footing. Two inches of sand works well in a stock truck, while rubber mats with a non-slip tread should be used in a pickup bed or trailer. Never haul a horse in a pickup truck with a meal floor without using a rubber mat or sand. A green horse will load better if preceded by an experienced animal. Practice with them before you plan to start your trip. In practicing, just load them the first time, don't move the truck. A horse must always have good footing when loading or unloading, never leave a crack that it can get its foot through. The important point to remember about loading is to practice at home, again and again...

SADDLES AND TACK

Before you start your trip, all gear should be checked. Your saddle should fit you and the horse. All leather should be oiled periodically to protect it. Latigos, cinches and reins should be checked for wear. It's advisable to adjust all packsaddles before you leave on your trip. This will save time at the trailhead, and reduce the time a packhorse will have to stand loaded before the whole string is ready. Once adjusted, the saddles should be labeled so the same animal always uses them. If you're using borrowed equipment, masking tape can be used for labels. If packs are mantied or boxed loaded before you leave home, they should be labeled in pairs of equal weights.

Tack used in the mountains must fit the horse and the rider. A horse with a bad saddle sore isn't much of an asset. A saddle tree with quarter horse bars is made for a broad backed low withered horse and would probably be unsuitable for a slim horse with Thoroughbred-type conformation. Many of these problems

can be corrected with extra pads, but a saddle must have adequate clearance over the backbone and be built wide enough so the lower edges of the tree don't dig into the back.

Double-rigged saddles have some advantages on mountain trails. They should be rigged so the cinch is a little farther back to prevent sores behind the front leg, the strap between the cinches should be adjusted and the back cinch in contact with the horse's stomach to prevent sideways movement and to help keep the pads in place. Some people prefer a saddle with a high cantle for mountain use. However, the higher cantle shouldn't be used to brace against when riding uphill, keep your weight forward and help your horse.

Stirrups should be adjusted so that you can place just three fingers between your crotch and the saddle when standing in the stirrups. Ride relaxed but alert, with the ball of your foot in the stirrup and about 1/3 of your weight on your feet.

A properly adjusted breast collar is an advantage when riding in rugged country. Breast collars should be fastened to the rings installed for that purpose or off the 'D' rings, and in a manner so there is no possibility of interference with the horse's breathing. A crupper or britchin can also be added and is recommended for a horse with poor withers or round back. A horse can be ridden with a looser cinch if a breast collar and crupper or britchin are used. A cinch that is too tight is one of the chief causes of cinch sores. On a properly saddled horse, you should be able to insert your fingers between the cinch and the horse's body without undue trouble but you should feel pressure from both. Breast collars must be kept soft so they won't cut. Roper style breast collars are a good choice.

Fabric covered foam pads or "Kodel" fleece pads are excellent and have the advantage of being washable. They should be a firm consistency and two inches thick. If hair pads are used, a packhorse should have two pads and a saddle horse a pad and a blanket. Don't ever lay a pad or blanket directly on the ground as it will pick up debris that could sore a horse's back. Any good nylon halter is adequate. Flat nylon has the advantage of not creasing a horse's nose and has a larger bearing surface over the poll. The halter should be adjusted so that it can't be rubbed off. It's unsafe to turn a shod horse loose wearing a halter, it could get its hoof caught while trying to scratch with a back leg.

For most people, a nine-to ten-foot lead rope seems to be about right. If ropes are attached through the halter ring and around the animal's neck they must be longer. Manila 1/2" in diameter would be minimum, but soft nylon or multi-filament polypropylene is much better. These ropes are stronger and won't rot, and can be stored when wet. Make your lead rope from a length a little over a foot longer than the finished product. Braid a small eye in one end for attaching the snap and braid the other end back. If pack stock are used, a spare cinch, latigo and lead rope should be carried. In an emergency, the lead rope from your saddle horse can be used on a packhorse. A knife with a leather punch, pliers, small rolls of stove wire and electrical tape, and nylon or leather boot laces will make most emergency tack repairs.

PACK SADDLES

At first, man packed his animals without the use of a saddle, but as time passed different types of saddle were developed. Today the two most popular styles are the "sawbuck" and the "decker". Which one is best? There are arguments for both, but what works best for you is the type to use. Either type usually has a britchin and breast collar, which must be adjusted so the tree is held in the proper position, just behind the withers. Each should have two straps (called "quarter straps"), one from the britchin to the tree and the other to the cinch. "Quarter straps" keep the britchin from hiking up under the tail of the pack animal. The rigging should never be adjusted so tight that it galls the animal.

The sawbuck usually has two girths (double rigged). There are two basic types of sawbuck trees. The "Tehama" which is wider and fits mules and quarter-type horses the best, and the "Humane" which fits slimmer horses. A sawbuck saddle is less expensive, lighter and a bit more stable on the animal's back because of the double rigging. It does not have the wide range of adjustment found on the decker since there is no adjustment on the placement of the rigging rings nor on the angle of the bars of the saddle. The decker has a padded cover (called a half-breed) that is placed over the "Ds" of the tree. Near the

bottom of the half-breed there is usually 1" x 4" board that helps to spread the load on the side of the animal. Usually single rigged, the latigo passes over the sideboard in cinching the single girth around the animal. The rigging ring may be moved forward or backward on the animal, and the "Ds" may be heated and bent to achieve the optimum fit of the wooden bars to the backs of individual animals. The decker is usually heavier, and more expensive than a sawbuck.

The appendix lists books that are a good source for additional information on how to select the right packsaddle for your use.

PACK EQUIPMENT

The equipment used to pack horses and mules varies from region to region, and it would be impossible in the space available to describe it all. This selection will be devoted to the basic equipment.

Side loads on pack animals use one of the following four basic kinds of equipment:

1. **Pack Boxes** - are used in almost all systems of packing. They are used in pairs, and vary in size with an average of about 22" in length, 11" in depth and 16" in height. Larger animals can carry proportionally larger boxes. They are hung from the pack tree either with loops or hooks or in suspended with slings of rope or "pack slings". Boxes are used to protect breakable items, to provide better organization of small items, to provide storage while in camp, and to be used as tables or seats. Pack boxes made of aluminum or steel with locking lids can be used for bear-proof storage of food.
2. **Pack Slings** - May be of rope as in the decker packing system or made of leather straps attached to a bar that is slung from the pack saddles with loops. At the bar they are usually 22" wide and have straps up to 7' in length. They are useful to sling pack boxes, duffel bags, bales of hay and anything else too large for pack bags or boxes.
3. **Pack Bags** - made of leather, canvas, man-made fabric or a combination of these, and use loops to suspend them from the pack tree. They may be open-topped or covered. Pack bags are soft sided, making them more flexible to use than a box. They are useful for packing small items, duffel bags, sacks of grain, etc.
4. **Mantied Packs** - Usually used on decker saddles - are bundles of camp gear and equipment that are wrapped in canvas and tied into equally weighted pairs to be slung with rope from the pack saddle. Unusual shaped items, bales of hay, and wide assortment of items may be side loaded in this manner.

Other equipment needed for most systems follows:

1. **Lash Rope** - A rope with a lash cinch that is used to tie the "diamond hitch" to secure loads to pack animals. Depending on the kind of hitch tied the rope can vary in length from 35' to 50' and usually either 3/8" to 1/2" in diameter. Manila, multi-filament polypropylene, nylon or cotton may be used. Nylon is the strongest and stays soft when wet, but tends to stretch when new. Cotton is easiest on the hands, but is least durable and is miserable when wet. The lash cinch is made with a ring in one end and a specially designed hook in the other. The cinch body can be made of leather, canvas or mohair; they may vary in length from 25" to 35".
2. **Pack Cover (Manty or Mantie)** - This is used to protect the pack from water or dust. It is usually made of canvas or cotton duck and varies in size with the smallest about 5' x 7'. They sometimes have grommets in corners to facilitate use in setting up camp. A mantle is also useful to cover saddles and pack equipment while in camp.
3. **Integrated System** - There are several packing systems on the market that integrate side load and top load together in a combination of boxes and bags that are secured to the animal with a system of nylon straps and buckles. This system can be useful to those who do not wish to master the various rope hitches used.
4. **Over the Saddle Pack Bags** - There are two pack bags that are fastened together at the top and are designed to be used with an ordinary Western saddle. They usually have openings for the pommel and cantle. Over the saddle pack bags are handy to use when an additional riding saddle is needed after camp is set up.

The appendix lists several useful books that list equipment in much greater detail, and also illustrates the various hitches used in packing animals.

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

The comfort and well-being of the horseman is fundamental to a safe and pleasurable trip into the backcountry. Clothing and personal effects must be adequate enough to protect from weather extremes and practical enough to serve one's needs well.

Wear clothes that are soft and will not rub. A Western hat has many advantages in the mountains. It will protect you from the sun, rain, or snow, and small branches. A straw hat is ideal in warm weather, a felt hat in cold weather. A plastic hat cover is useful. Gloves, preferably leather, are a must.

A good plan for your clothing is to use the "layering" method used by mountaineers. This allows you to remove or add clothing to suit weather conditions.

A slicker should be carried on your saddle horse. Weather changes rapidly in the mountains. Accustom your horse to you putting on a slicker. A warm jacket should be carried even in warm weather, chaps are useful; they'll turn a lot of water, protect your legs, provide warmth, and have the added advantage of not bunching up in the saddle. The nylon rain chaps worn by hikers are handy because they can be rolled up and kept in the saddlebag when not being used. **Remember:** don't wait until you are wet to put on rain gear.

Wear some type of boot with a riding heel. If much hiking or mountain climbing is planned, extra footwear should be taken for the purpose. Tennis shoes are handy around camp but should never be placed in a stirrup. Vibram soles are also dangerous because they tend to hang up in a stirrup. If tapaderos are used, they should have solid bottoms. Tapaderos are advised for all youngsters.

A sharp knife should be carried by everyone in his or her front pocket or on his or her belt. A cased folding knife with a locking blade is a good choice.

HORSE CARE

Your horse will provide many pleasurable trips into the backcountry. It deserves consideration and care to keep it healthy and satisfied. There are many fine books on the market which provide excellent tips and instructions in keeping and caring for stock. In this section we will only cover a few items which pertain to horse use in the backcountry.

Insect repellent for both you and your horse is a must. An animal can't rest or stand quietly when being eaten by insects. There are many good products on the market. If you use a spray, your horse must be accustomed to its use.

If you carry salt for your animals or to keep the deer from eating your tack, use a little caution. If it is put on the ground, some of it will leach into the ground and the deer will dig a hole searching for it. Place it on a rock and block it there. Salt isn't necessary for your animals if they have it available between trips. During the early part of summer your horse will be shed-out and short haired. It is common to have frost at night and occasionally snow. If space permits on a pack trip or if you are camping at the trailhead, your horses will rest better and feel better if they are blanketed.

ON THE TRAIL

The old saying goes "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line". When riding the trail it may be the shortest but not the best. Shortcutting across switchbacks in the trail should not be done. It creates a new tread, which is usually steep, causing erosion and gullies. Cutting switchbacks also constitutes abuse of our resource and the hoof prints that remain are a signature of who is to blame. Many experienced horsemen tie a knot in split reins or otherwise fasten them together when in the backcountry. If a rein is dropped and stepped on it could be broken, or your horse may act up. You may be using one hand for a packhorse lead rope, and your reining hand for dodging limbs occasionally. If you stop to adjust a pack, split reins must be secured or they will end up under the horse's feet. One way to secure them is to take a wrap around the horn and shove them through the latigo keeper slot.

Caution must always be used in handling the lead rope of the packhorse. Either carry it in your hand or take one wrap around the horn and place the under your leg. The safest is to keep the rope in-hand.

Never tie a lead rope to the saddle horn hard-and-fast!

Regardless of what you see in the movies, never tie a horse by the reins. Always tie or lead with a lead rope which is either fastened to a halter under the bridle or passed under a bosal and tied around the horse's neck.

There are several good books listed in the appendix which cover more detail on packing, camping and trail riding techniques.

TRAIL COURTESY

Trail courtesy is largely dependent upon the attitude of the individuals involved. It's infrequent that a person has a problem with someone using the same mode of transportation, but most of us know little of the problems of the other users. A better understanding of these problems will be helpful. In wilderness areas, only the hiker, horseman and Llama user are involved. In other areas motorcycles or mountain bicycles may be encountered. The only aspect that we can write on with any degree of authority is that concerning the horseman and hiker or motorcycle rider.

In all cases common sense and courtesy are more important than who has the right of way. Usually the horsemen will hear a motorcycle approaching before it comes into sight. Look for a chance to pull off the trail. A motorcycle makes more noise than most horses will tolerate at close range. When meeting a string of horses, a cycle rider should shut off his engine and move his machine as far off the trail as practical. When overtaking a string of horses, a cycle rider should stay well behind the horses until the horseman can find a suitable spot to pull his horse off the trail to allow him to pass. A few minutes delay could well mean the difference between a minor inconvenience and possible injury.

Encounters between hikers and horsemen are common and should cause no problems if each respects the other's situation. A horseman often has pack animals as well as his personal mount to control. The necessity for a firm hand and fast action leaves little time for social amenities. In the excitement of the moment a horseman's concern can easily appear to be arrogance. One thing that the horseman must remember is that the horses are his responsibility and that the hiker has every right to be on the trail, and deserves common courtesy. Another point that is probably not understood by most hikers is that a horseman leading a pack string can seldom afford the luxury of stopping to chat. Pack strings have an affinity for getting into trouble when stopped.

When a string of horses meets a hiker on the trail the hiker should make his presence known to the horseman as soon as practical by talking to the rider. This will let the horses know there is a person in that big package of nylon. The hiker should step off the trail on the low side. Few hikers know this, so be patient. The horseman and hiker should continue to talk until the pack string has passed so that the horses will be aware of the hiker's presence. Some hikers feel safer if there is a tree between them and the trail, but there is little danger if the horses are aware of the hiker and don't become startled. A pack string overtaking a hiker owes the courtesy of holding the horse in check until the hiker can find a suitable place to step off the trail. If a pack string is overtaken by a hiker, the horseman should find a good spot to let the hiker pass. The horseman should remember the following: The hiker is packing a load, may be tired and it requires extra effort for the hiker to move off the trail. It may require little effort on the horseman's part to move aside. Be considerate.

There can occasionally be problems between different horse groups. Two basic rules are you use the right hand trail in a divided trail system, and the loaded string has the right of way. However, we can't always choose the places where we must pass and discretion will save a lot of broken halter ropes. Ridden horses should always give way to a pack string and usually a small string should give way to a larger one. Naturally, children and novices deserve extra consideration.

On high rocky trails it may be necessary to backtrack a considerable distance to find a suitable place to pass. Turning your string around may require you to turn each animal around separately and reverse the order. Remember to turn the horse with its head to the down hill side. In this manner it can see where it places its feet on the trail. Patience is a true virtue in these situations.

HOLDING AND TYING

The best method to graze livestock is free roaming either in public pastures or in selected locations where

stock can be contained by drift fences or natural obstacles. However, this method is not practical under many circumstances. Therefore, the most widely used method of restraint is by alternately tying and turning the horses loose to graze for a specified length of time.

The nature of stock, the location, and the method of holding all have an effect on the degree of trampling and soil disturbance that takes place. Some horses are more prone to pawing. The following measures are recommended to reduce environmental damage when using stock in the backcountry. Wet, marshy areas are very susceptible to damage and should be avoided. Tying stock in the immediate camp area is discouraged. The pawing and trampling that may occur creates an over-used appearance and dusty conditions in the camp area. Lake shores and stream banks are especially subject to trampling. Overgrazing and caving in of banks may occur if stock is confined close by. All land management agencies require stock to be tied or picketed away from lake shores and stream banks.

A hitch rack or high picket line is the recommended method of confining stock. Hitch racks should be placed where the soil is hard and rocky. Either method should be back in the trees where the impact will be less noticeable and less damaging to the ground cover. Horses should be tied so they can't reach the ground. This will help prevent getting a foot over the rope. When feeding, the lead rope may be loosened so the bottom of the nosebag can rest on the ground. Remember to shorten the lead rope after feeding. Never use a nosebag on a loose horse. If it gets to water it may fill the nosebag with water and drown.

A preferred method of tying horses is with the use of a "high picket line". This is a line stretched (approximately seven feet above the ground) between two trees. Lead ropes are tied along the high line so that the halter snap is two feet from the ground. This allows the horse to lie down yet not get tangled. A rule of thumb is tie horses shorter when you will not be nearby or be able to see them such as at night. Horses seem more relaxed and content when tied to a high picket line than with other methods. They seldom pull against the line because there is nothing solid to pull against.

THE HIGH PICKET LINE

Where the high line goes around the tree, the bark should be protected by padding, such as a cinch or gunnysack. A 2" wide nylon "tree saver" strap is a good choice. Never use your lash cinch to fasten one of a tether line, most lash hooks can break easily as well as the canvas portion.

The high picket line prevents the horse from getting around the tree, damaging the bark or root system. As with other methods of restraining horses, the high picket line should be set up away from the immediate camp area - away from the trail and back in the trees where the least ground cover will be disturbed.

The lead rope may be tied directly to the high picket line as shown in figure (A), or a loop knot, figure (B), can be tied at intervals along the high line. A 2" ring or swivel snap can be placed on the line before the loop knot is tied. This is handy because the loop knot has a tendency to tighten on the lead rope making it difficult to untie.

The loop knot can always be loosened and moved to suit any spacing or situation. If the lead rope is tied directly to the high line as shown in figure (A); a half hitch thrown over the loop will keep it from working loose.

There are three things to be cautious about when using the high picket line:

1. There must be a swivel in the lead rope or it will become twisted or unraveled as the horse moves around.
2. If the lead is tied too long the horse may get a leg over the lead or may become tangled if it rolls.
3. If the high picket line is too low, a saddled animal may catch the saddle on the high line and damage the saddle.

Again, the high picket line is to keep stock from damaging trees or their root systems. If the lead rope is allowed to slide along the high line, it defeats the purpose of this method.

Half-inch hemp rope makes a good high line. Nylon is too stretchy. Multi-filament polypropylene rope is

best. It will stretch more than hemp, but is stronger, lighter, and will not soak up water. Many horsemen use the lash ropes from their packsaddles for the high picket line.

A hitch rail can be easily constructed by tying a solid pole between two good-sized trees. A deadfall pole should be used. The horses should be tied on the opposite side of the tree from the pole so that the strain is against the trees rather than the rope-ties. The hitch rail should be trimmed closely.

The tying area must be located off the trail and away from water or boggy area. An area with hard rocky ground that catches enough breeze to discourage insects is ideal. Some horses will become restless and paw while tied. A pair of hobbles will discourage this bad habit.

Another method of holding horses which may be particularly useful where feed must be packed in is a temporary corral. A corral allows the horses some movement while still keeping them contained. Select a spot for your corral away from trails or water and if possible on hard rocky ground. Temporary corrals should be made as large as practical. The size will depend on tree spacing, but a thirty-foot diameter corral would be about right for five horses. Corrals can be made of rope and usually should be made from two ropes. The top rope should be at least belt high and the bottom eighteen inches lower. Mantle and cargo ropes can be made by tying poles to trees. Leave the branches on all but the inside and make sure there are no short limbs to injure a horse. Don't corral strange horses together. Corrals should be taken down and poles stored when you leave. Portable electric corrals are good for stock familiar with electric fences.

A ration of grain, evening and morning, will help teach a horse that camp is "home". Carry extra grain or pelletized feed in areas where graze is sparse. The effort to stop the spread of noxious weeds into the backcountry has caused the prohibition on packing hay or unprocessed grain into some wildernesses. Processed grain or pelletized feed is an excellent substitute. Processed grain has been rolled, ground or otherwise treated so that it will not germinate. Alfalfa pellets are a good substitute for hay but you must accustom your stock to eating pellets, before the trip. Contact the local land management to determine if hay is allowed.

GRAZING

Horses grazing on good grass cause little adverse impact, but keeping them in the area where you want them and not heading for the truck can be a problem.

There are several methods of limiting travel during grazing. Loose grazing or hobbling are the best choices. Picketing should be used only if the other two choices are not feasible. Picketing is hard on range area, potentially harmful to horses, and is not allowed by some land management agencies. However, picketing is satisfactory in suitable terrain and may be the only alternative.

Unless you're particularly fond of walking, always keep a wrangle horse tied near camp whenever horses are turned loose to graze. Tying two wrangle horses is better than one. Most horses get nervous and excited when left alone and may paw the ground or cause other damage. Usually two horses will remain relatively calm even if the other horses are out of sight. Also a single horse is more likely to break loose. Then you are on foot. (The tied or picketed wrangle horses must be rotated to insure an adequate grazing period.) Almost any group of horses has at least one animal that wouldn't leave the rest under any condition. If time is short, this horse could be used as a wrangle horse and turned loose after the rest are tied for the night.

Bells help keep track of horses and make strayed horses much easier to find. When turning horses loose to graze, bell all mares, loners or animals that have a tendency to stray. Bell straps should fit reasonably snug to prevent them from getting caught. Bells with a higher pitch seem to carry farther in the woods. If several horses are belled, bells of different pitches should be used. Weather conditions vary the distance that sound travels.

Hobbles are one method of restricting a horse's movement so it won't travel great distances, yet permit enough freedom to graze. Only a grazing hobble with at least a one-inch strap should be used. Hobbles

are more effective on some horses than on others. Some horses soon learn to travel quite rapidly wearing hobbles. These horses can be slowed down by placing a half hobble on a rear leg and a sideline fastened to the hobble in front. When horses are turned out to graze, all should be hobbled if any are hobbled. A hobbled horse will sore himself trying to keep up with horses running free.

On good grass, a hungry horse usually will be content to graze for two to three hours and seldom lift his head. If possible the camp should be located between the grazing area and the direction of the truck. The horses should be checked frequently if they can't be seen by camp. A bell in the lead horse will be helpful. The grazing period should be just before the evening feeding. This helps to hold the horses and makes them easier to catch. An advantage of grazing is that if water is available a horse can drink when it wants.

Picketing horses is a satisfactory method in suitable terrain. The area must be free of obstacles so the rope won't tangle. You will have fewer problems if you picket by a front foot rather than from the halter or neck. A half-hobble with a swivel, or snap and swivel should be used to attach the picket rope. The other end of the rope should have a loop tied with a non-slip knot so that it will rotate around the picket pin rather than wind up. Some people make up special picket ropes which are pulled through discarded plastic garden hoses. The hose prevents rope burns and the extra stiffness helps keep it from tangling. The pin or stake must be driven in deep enough to stand considerable strain and must be moved frequently to protect against over-grazing and trampling. Picket stakes should be removed when breaking camp. Some horsemen picket the leader of a string with the idea that the other horses won't leave the leader if turned loose. In that respect this method usually works well; however, in a severely "herd-bound" string, the other horses will eat all the grass within the picket circle.

Popular camp spots, grass meadows and areas along the trails can be exposed to heavy grazing pressure throughout the season. Over-grazing contributes to a reduction in vigor of grass, tramped-out appearance of meadows, opportunities for unwanted weeds to grow, or degradation of an area. Avoid grazing grass that is down to short clumps. Rotate stock throughout an area. Move pickets frequently. Some areas have insufficient grass so it may be necessary to pack in feed. Processed grain, alfalfa pellets or hay cubes should be used. Hay is not allowed in some wilderness areas because it may contain weeds. During the planning stage of your trip consult with the responsible agency to learn of graze availability in the area of your planned trip.

THE CAMP SPOT

In the backcountry many popular camp spots have been established and used for years. They are popular because they have an attraction. The attraction may be a scenic setting, plentiful water, good fishing, grass for stock, or a flat camping area. However, when selecting your camp spot it should be set back out of sight from main trails. Don't set up camp in a meadow, as traffic in camp will beat the vegetation flat. Choose a spot in or near trees that can sustain traffic. This helps to reduce stock and people congestion along main trails, offer privacy, and reduces the possibility of overuse immediately adjacent to main trails.

Camp spots should be at least 200 feet from the edge of lakes and rivers. This helps reduce the chance of water pollution and overuse immediately next to lakeshores, streams, and riverbanks. Some old established camp spots may be closer to lakes, streams, rivers, and main trails than desirable. When planning a trip, select camp spots that are not heavily used. These will give you better grazing and more privacy in addition to reducing impact.

A well-organized camp is set up to be convenient, efficient, and neat in appearance. An established campsite should be used if available. If not, select a spot that can handle some use without being damaged. In some areas, like National Parks, ONLY established campsites can be used. In any event, some common sense should prevail. Do not drive nails in trees. Don't dig ditches around tents. Do not cut green trees or boughs, and remove underbrush sparingly. Select a spot to obtain water where you won't be caving in the banks leaving a permanent scar. Tether your stock outside the immediate campsite. In bear country, food must be stored so bears can't get to it. Metal cans or boxes are available in some areas. Check with local management agencies for food storage requirements or problem areas.

In camp, if there are suitable fire rings established, they should be used rather than creating additional fire

rings. If there is no fire ring and you build one, remove the organic material down to the mineral soil. Put it aside to refill the fire pit when you break camp. Put the rocks that you ring the pit with back where you found them when breaking camp. What you pack in you should pack out. There should be nothing left to indicate you have been there.

When in camp tie a pole between two trees, place your gear on it, and throw a mantle over everything. When a pole isn't available, stand your saddle on the horn with the pad on top. Be careful with your equipment - porcupines and deer are fond of leather.

When the stay is over and camp is broken down, there are a few minute items to check before heading out. All tent poles and frames should be taken down and stacked, rope and string removed from trees, extra fire wood piled up, and all fires dead out. Fill in and smooth any paw holes and scatter any horse manure.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

There are increasing numbers of visitors experiencing the beauty, peacefulness and special nature of the undeveloped portions of our public lands. With more families owning horses and using the back country there is a need to impress a sense of responsibility on the user to help protect these special resources in back country areas.

Impact on the environment and practical methods to minimize adverse impact have never been examined in depth. Most of us have had a lifelong love affair with the backcountry and the horse has been our vehicle to enjoy it. Fortunately, the majority of horsemen have developed methods compatible with the environment. It is those who abuse the environment that we must educate.

This guidebook is not intended to be a complete text on a given subject, nor is there always-unanimous agreement on every subject. Different methods work for different people and for different animals. However, it was agreed that these methods are the best known to provide a safe and enjoyable trip, with a minimum of adverse impact. If additional information is needed for a particular problem, contact any member of the Back Country Horseman. If unfamiliar with the problem themselves, they will know whom to contact. Handling horses in a manner that will have little or no adverse impact is a bigger challenge than is "No Trace Camping". Much of our backcountry is in the National Wilderness System. Actions that are detrimental to this resource cannot be permitted to continue. ALL HORSEMEN must adjust their horse handling techniques to minimize the impacts of horse use.

Many land management decisions are reached based upon comments by the public on proposed management plans. In areas of horse abuse, the public has demanded that these areas be closed to horse use. We must adjust our use so that these management decisions are not necessary. There is no single act that brings the horsemen poorer marks and leaves more lasting result, than tying horses to trees. Every backcountry camp has dead or damaged trees that indicate abuse. Practice and learn to use the methods described in Section 15.

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN COMMANDMENTS

1. THE HORSEMAN SHALL NOT KEEP HORSES LONGER THAN IT TAKES TO UNPACK OR PACK THEM IN ANY CAMPSITE NORMALLY USED BY HIKERS. (WE SUGGEST THAT HORSEMEN STAY AWAY FROM SUCH CAMPS IF POSSIBLE).
2. THE HORSEMAN SHALL NOT TIE HIS STOCK, FOR MORE THAN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME, DIRECTLY TO A TREE.
3. THE HORSEMAN SHALL NOT CUT SWITCHBACKS.
4. THE HORSEMAN SHALL NOT LEAVE A CAMPFIRE UNATTENDED.
5. THE HORSEMAN SHALL NOT LEAVE HORSE MANURE OR HAY IN CAMP AREAS, TRAILHEADS, OR LOADING AREAS.
6. THE HORSEMAN SHALL ABIDE BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE RULES AND REGULATIONS AFFECTING THE AREA HE IS IN.

7. THE HORSEMAN SHALL RECOGNIZE THE FRAGILITY OF THE BACK COUNTRY ENVIRONMENT AND PRACTICE MINIMUM IMPACT TECHNIQUES AT ALL TIMES.

In closing, it is hoped that the foregoing pages on "Environmental Concerns" will be of some benefit to protecting the backcountry we enjoy. Nature did its part in creating the beautiful mountains, the pure water, the tall grass, and the serene spots we treasure. It provided the setting for the memories we treasure long after the trip is over. Let us do our part to keep it beautiful, clean, and not abused by our visits and activities.

A SHADOW CAST

*I hate to admit to the company I'm in
But a backcountry jerk too often I've been.
You have seen the shadow on the mountains I cast
Because the marks I have left there last and last.
When you see that lone tree with its root laid bare
You know me and my string have often been there.
But really, does tying up to a tree overnight spell its doom?
I've done it often you know, even when there is other room.
Wait a minute, I seem to recall a high mountain pass
With its cool clear water and lush green grass,
And there in the middle of this picturesque scene
Is a tall line fir tree that's lost all its green.
What could have killed it I thought, hikers, bears, or ...
Then it hit me, my god, I've been here before.
Mother Nature mad that tree to stand the wind and the snow,
It has stood the test of time and continues to grow.
She made that tree to take the worst of her work,
But she didn't plan on me, the back country jerk.
Dan Plummer*

FIREWOOD

Wood is the most common fuel for cooking and heat in the back country. When gathering wood, consider the following wood sources: first, gather smaller chunks of dead wood that need no cutting; second, cut wood from downed, dead trees; and lastly, cut wood from dead standing trees. When cutting dead standing trees for firewood take only those out of sight from trails, lakes and viewing areas. Cut them low to the ground so the stumps are less noticeable. In some areas, the cutting of dead, standing trees is prohibited. In some areas campfires are prohibited. Check with the managing agency if you are not sure. Green trees should never be used or their boughs should never be gathered for camp bedding. Skidding wood with stock is discouraged because it disturbs the ground cover and generally leaves a mess. Cutting wood into pieces suitable for packing by man or stock is preferred. The use of light gas stoves is gaining popularity. Their use has merit in areas where firewood is scarce.

CAMP SANITATION

There is always "garbage" to care for - paper, meal scraps, cans, bottles, tinfoil, you name it, that needs to be burned or packed out. Burnable items can be burned in your campfire. Other unburnable items (cans, bottles, tinfoil, plastic) must be packed out. Odorous food cans are messy and attract flies and bears. A little trick to solve that problem is to place cans in the fire. The odor and food particles will burn out. When the fire is cold, remove cans and smash them flat. The flattened cans and other unburnable items can be packed out. Plastic or Visqueen used for shelter should be taken out of the back country. If it is not removed it will eventually be torn up into small pieces and become a subsequent litter problem. Remember, if you pack it in - please pack it out. If you can remove litter by previous parties, good for you. You will know you have done your part and more.

If toilet facilities are not present, human waste can be disposed of by digging a small hole (6 to 8 inches deep). After use, fill the hole with loose soil and replace the sod. Nature will do the rest. If you have a large party or you plan to stay several days, dig a toilet pit. Save the soil and sod to be replaced when you

break camp. Any of these facilities must be at least 200 feet from water sources.

After camp is set up, the stock cared for, the wood gathered and supper finished, there are the kitchen chores. Dishes and cookware should be washed in a pan rather than directly in lakes, rivers or streams. Soapy water, etc., should not be dumped in or near lakes, streams, or open water. Dump it on the ground a short distance from camp areas. If staying for a longer period of time, the dish water and wash water should be dumped in a small pit and covered when you leave. Make sure to run your dish water through a sieve, screen/mesh or an old t-shirt and pack out the remaining food particles. Concentrations of waste food particles tend to attract bears, flies, bees and other insects.

Horse manure in the immediate camp areas should be spread out with your shovel, collapsible rake, or a tree branch. This aids in the decomposition process, reduces flies, and lessens the impact on the area for other users. Leaving horse manure in camp when you leave brings bad publicity to all horsemen. Before departing, take a last minute glance to see that no debris is left behind, and that the area is left in a condition you would want to find it - neat, clean and inviting.

PRECAUTIONS WITH FIRE

During the summer and early fall seasons the possibility of wild fire is high. One should stop in a safe place to smoke rather than smoking while hiking or riding horseback and make sure that ashes and cigarettes are dead-out. **DON'T FORGET TO PACK OUT YOUR CIGARETTE BUTTS AND MATCHES!** Thoroughness must be exercised when extinguishing campfires. Water alone without mixing will produce a crust over the coals and fire will continue to smolder. When extinguishing a camp fire, douse with water, mix, re-douse with water and mix the coals and water thoroughly. Then feel it for remaining heat.

SUMMATION

As horsemen and environmentalists we cannot allow our resources to suffer the consequences of neglect, either by an administrating agency or by an uninformed public. Our desire to reduce adverse impact while continuing maximum enjoyment leaves no room for apathy or indifference.

This guidebook in itself is a major effort to help reduce adverse impact and to bring about a better understanding between the different use groups. An awareness of the problems and practical solutions to the majority of them will reduce damage on the back country trip. The basis for a better understanding between different use groups is also contained within these pages. There are many conclusions that can be drawn by any agency administrating a back country resource on practical methods of handling horses. The message in this booklet can only be effective if the individual recognizes his or her obligations to the environment and uses the abilities at his command to protect it.

Horse owners or not, we invite you to become a member of our organization. The only requirement for membership is that you believe in the goals set forth in our **PURPOSE**. We are a family oriented organization and have members ranging in age from youngsters to 90+.

We hope that your next trip into "The Back Country" will be more enjoyable and have less impact through reading this booklet. Leave only your hoof prints in the mountains and return with only your memories - they are the ultimate reward as they can be relived countless times.

APPENDIX

Following is a list of books on packing information that are available in many local book stores or tack stores:

HORSES, HITCHES AND ROCK TRAILS, by Joe Back, Printed by Johnson Publishing Co., Boulder, CO 80302 (Back, on old Wyoming packer, filled this book with good humor and good information. It is currently out of print, but keep checking as we are searching for a new publisher.)

[HORSE PACKING IN PICTURES](#) (1975) by Francis W. Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York (The best diagrams on knot and hitch tying)

[PACKING IN ON MULES AND HORSES](#) (1980) by Smoke Elser and Bill Brown, The Mountain Press Publishing Co., 283 West Front Street, Missoula, MT 59801 (Smoke is a Back Country Horseman. His book has more good information than most of the others)

[PACKER'S FIELD MANUAL](#) (2005) by Bob Hoverson. Stoneydale Press, PO Box 188, Stevensville, MT 59870. An excellent packing reference, with an emphasis on packing with a Decker Pack Saddle. Bob packed for the USFS into Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness for years.

[HORSE CAMPING](#) (1981) by George Hatley, The Dial Press, 1 Dag Hammerskjold Plaza, New York, NY 10017 (A very good book by the founder of the Appaloosa Horse Club)

[MANUAL OF PACK TRANSPORTATION](#), (2007 reprint) by Charles Johnson Post, originally published in 1914. (The old Army Manual, very interesting)

CAMPING CHECK LIST

This list contains most of the things one might want to take on **any** type of camping trip. It is **not** the intent that you take all of these items, but just those items that suit your particular outing. **Remember** - Pack it out, take it home, leave all camps cleaner than you found them.

CAMP

Tent
Grill
Can Opener
Ground Cloth
Coleman Fuel/Propane
Spoon (Large)
Tarp
Stove
Potato Peeler
Funnel
Plates
Axe
Newspaper
Bowls
Hatchet
Kerosene
Hotcake Turner
Saw
Clothes Hangers
Table Cloth
File and Wedge
Ice Chest
Silverware
Shovel
Tape
Cups
Hammer and Nails
Fry Pan
Dish Soap
Water Bucket
Griddle
Scouring Pad
Folding Rake
Kettles & Lids
Dish Pan
Lantern
Butcher Knife
Dish Towel
Chairs
Paring Knife

GRUB

Paper Towels
Table
Coffee Pot
Dish Rag
Salt and Pepper
Butter
Fruit (Canned/Fresh)
Sugar
Catsup
Vegetables (Canned)
Flour
Mayonnaise
Vegetables (Fresh)
Hot Cake Mix
Jam
Onions
Biscuit Mix
Honey
Potatoes
Crisco
Bacon
Oatmeal
Coffee
Eggs
Juice
Tea
Meats (Fresh/canned)
KoolAid/Tang
Cocoa
Lunch Meat
Candy
Milk (Canned/Fresh)
Cheese
Snacks
Syrup
Soup
Beverages

PERSONAL

Money
Soap

Camera & Film
Sleeping Bag
Toothbrush
Alarm Clock
Cot & Mattress
Tooth Paste
Flashlight
Pillow
Toilet Paper
Batteries & Spare Bulbs
Clothes
Prescription Drugs
Thermos
Shoes/Boots
First Aid Kit
Hand warmers
Rain Gear
Matches
Tools
Gloves
Knife
Ash Mask
Towel
Binoculars
Insect Repellent
Wash Cloth
Sun Glasses

FISHING

License
Leader
Lures/Bait
Fishing Laws
Sinkers
Small Pliers
Punch Card
Hooks
Net
Pole/Reel
Fish Eggs
Creel

HUNTING

License/Tags
Hunting Laws
Knap Sack
Guns/Ammo
Map(s)
Meat Bags
Hunting Knife
Compass
Block and Tackle
Cleaning Kit
Packboard

Halter and Lead
Breast Strap
Lash Cinch and Tarp
Warming Blanket
Britchin/Crupper
High Hitch Line
Hoof Pick
Rifle Scabbard
Feed Bags
Comb and Brush
Hobbles
Grain/Pellets

Bridle
Lariat
Hay
Saddle Chaps
First Aid
Saddle Pad
Pack Saddle and Pad
Fly Repellant
Saddlebags
Rope
Mantles

HORSES

WHOA, HORSEMEN!

Do you want to keep public lands and trails open for horse use in years to come? It's up to you!

Back Country Horsemen of America was formed with a three-fold purpose:

- 1. to volunteer service in the backcountry,**
- 2. to educate horsemen on minimum impact horse handling**
- 3. to get involved in land use planning**

LEAVE NO TRACE - Horses (mules, burros, and llamas too)

- Take only the minimum number of animals needed.
- During short stops, tie horses to trees at least 8 inches in diameter.
- For long periods, tie horses to high line stretched between two sturdy trees.
- If you picket horses, move them often.
- Keep tied, picketed, and hobbled horses well away from camp and from lakes and streams.
- Tie, picket, or hobble horses only in dry areas to minimize trampling damage.