

# **Back Country Horsemen's Guidebook**





## DEDICATION

We would like to dedicate this book to future generations; that they, too, may find the same peace and beauty that we now enjoy in the backcountry, and to the dedicated people who are working diligently to keep it unchanged by human hands!



## **A Message from the First President of Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead**

Nothing—absolutely nothing!—illustrates the evolution of Back Country Horsemen as does their guidebook on “best” use of horses and mules in wild America.

Of that first group’s 43 charter members, none were writers. There were no editors, no designers, no professional copywriters or artists. Yet that handful of visionaries set out to produce a pocket-sized guidebook valued by trail riders everywhere!

Now, 45 years later, as a professional writer and publisher I might shake a head at that first effort. But after four subsequent editions, the evolution of that guidebook’s intent and content is clear—just as the idea and ideals of Back Country Horsemen itself has evolved from one club in remote Montana to 13,000 members in upwards of 200 chapters in local and state groups all across America.

I’m terribly proud!

Roland Cheek

Founder and First President 1973

## **A Message from the Current President of Back Country Horsemen of Montana**

The *Back Country Horsemen's Guidebook* enters its fifth edition for good reason.

The *Back Country Horsemen's Guidebook* is the distillation of the knowledge of so many BCH members over decades.

The *Guidebook* provides common sense guidance on: safety, preparation, horse-handling, comfort, and respect for the environment and others.

Rich Carl

BCH Montana Chairman 2018-19

## CREDITS

Back Country Horsemen is a family organization that was formed in Northwest Montana on January 17, 1973. The nucleus of the club had been active for several months before the formal organization. Genuine concern about continued horse use in the backcountry was our primary reason in forming the organization. What had always been our traditional rights appeared to be in question. We believed that continued horse use, in harmony with the capacity of our public lands, was in the best interests of the majority of Americans. The following from our constitution is the purpose of our organization:

**“The purpose of this organization shall be (1) to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in Montana’s roadless backcountry and (2) to assist the various government agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource and (3) to educate, encourage and solicit active participation by various members of the general public in the wise and sustaining use of horses and people, commensurate with our heritage and the backcountry’s resource.”**



The Back Country Horsemen of Montana has chosen to publish this fifth edition of the BCH Guidebook. We have kept it as close to the first edition as possible while updating some parts so it can remain relevant today.

The Back Country Horsemen hope to achieve their goals of continued responsible horse use, not as a pressure group, but as a service group to our back country resource. We've offered our time and equipment to various government agencies for such tasks as rolling up and packing out out-moded telephone wire, clearing trails, building end-of-road facilities and other projects, which will benefit both horsemen and non-horsemen. We feel that one of our main contributions can be educating people so that adverse environmental impact can be reduced or eliminated. To further this cause we have assembled this guidebook. We have used suggestions and information from a vast storehouse of knowledge: commercial outfitters and packers, backpackers, horsemen, professional foresters and resource managers.

The Education and Safety Committee of the Back Country Horsemen was charged with the responsibility of writing the first edition of this guidebook. This would not have been possible without contributions from many of our members. These people will receive nothing for their time and effort but our heartfelt thanks and the satisfaction of having contributed something constructive towards conserving our environment.

Although we cannot acknowledge all of our contributors because of space, we feel we must acknowledge these people because of their major contributions:

Dr. David Kauffman	Forest Hills Ranch
Dave Morris	Sunset Knoll Ranch
Owen Klapperich	OK Outfitters
Bud Ellman	Rocky Mountain Outfitters
Dulane Fulton	Horseman
Roland Cheek	The Skyline Outfit
Dennis Swift	Professional Forester

Roger Lindgren  
Cal Tassanari  
Kerel Hagen  
Keith Granrud  
Jan Cheek  
George Smith

Professional Forester  
Wilderness Ranger  
Seasonal Ranger  
Wilderness Guard  
Recipes  
Cartoons and Scenic Drawings

In addition, we'd like to give special thanks to Robert Miller, Associate Professor of Animal and Range Services, Montana State University, for his generous approval to use a portion of his book: "Suggestions for Using Horses in the Mountains."

Education and Safety Committee  
Ken Ausk – Chairman  
Dr. David Kauffman

Ron Prichard  
Arlene Knutson  
Owen Klapperich



## Foreword

The lure of the backcountry is an intangible quantity, generated perhaps by the pressures of our modern society. It has regard for neither age nor ability. Many of us have cherished the beauty and solitude of the mountains for years, while others have never had the opportunity to enjoy it. 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 in you an awareness of man's responsibility to his environment.

The backcountry is one of the few remaining sanctuaries for modern man. Away from everyday tensions a person can make an objective evaluation of self or a situation and gain a firmer sense of true values. Perhaps man needs an occasional reminder of what an insignificant creature he really is when viewed in comparison with the magnitude of nature. Today's young general will be the guardians of the resources of tomorrow, and we could offer them no finer course than a lesson from nature's schoolhouse on a backcountry trip.

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

There are various governmental agencies which are charged with the responsibility of managing our backcountry under different specifications and guidelines. It is their duty to guard these areas against adverse environmental impact. Adverse impact has forced the closure of a few areas to horsemen. 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 our environment, and discretion in the handling and use of our horses will help eliminate the need for any further closures.

The horse has earned a noble place in our western heritage. His usefulness and devotion have been second to none. Surely it is our charge, indeed our duty, to see that he is preserved in his rightful station. This can best be accomplished by our individual efforts to shoulder the responsibilities of wise horse use with minimum environmental impact.

This guidebook is not a substitute for experience, ability, or common sense; but it is a distillation of the combined wisdom of some of the most knowledgeable horsemen of our area. These people have adapted their methods from the experience gained through thousands of trips into such places as the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Glacier National Park, and countless roadless areas. Although it was our primary objective to provide information and guidance to the inexperienced person, it is certain that even an experienced horseman will benefit from this information.



## Preparation

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 that you include only necessary items. Many horsemen use checklists to help them travel light, while ensuring they have what they need when they pitch camp. A guideline for the required amount of stock would be one pack horse for two riders. Naturally you must consider the length of the trip and forage availability. On a short summer trip, one pack horse for three riders is possible if care is taken in preparation. Some of the lightweight tents and food might even reduce the number of stock further.

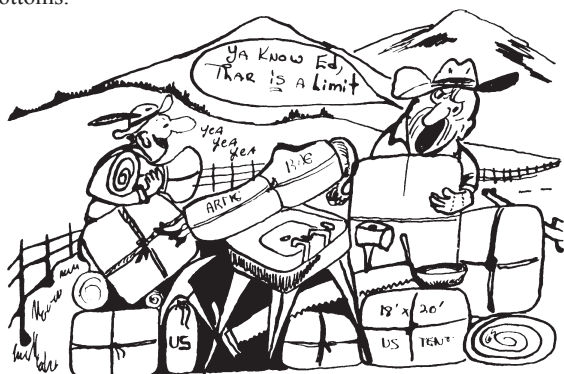
It would be advisable to contact someone who has recent knowledge of an area or the district ranger's office when planning a trip. The availability of horse feed and condition of trails must be considered. It may be necessary to pack in horse feed, especially in alpine areas. In country new to you, a 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.

Distance, the lay of the land, and the location of suitable campsites must be considered when planning a trip. In mountain country, ten to fifteen miles would be a good day's ride. Under absolutely ideal conditions and with good trail, you may be able to travel two and a half or three miles per hour. This speed can only be maintained with trained horses in good working condition, experienced riders, and horses packed well.

If you climb very high in rocky country, your horses will need shoes, unless it is a particularly short trip. If a horse has been shod within three weeks and the shoes are checked and are tight, extra shoes and farriers tools are unnecessary on a short trip. On a longer trip it would be advisable to carry a couple of spare shoes, a few nails, rasp, and hammer if you have the ability to nail a shoe back on. If not, easy boots are available. A

fence pliers could be substituted for the hammer and has many uses. If a horse throws a shoe be very cautious, some horses have very hard hooves and can go a good ways without a shoe. Other horses' hooves are much softer and can't go more than an hour without a shoe. If you don't replace the shoe, use the rasp to angle the outside of the hoof where it meets the ground to prevent chipping. A horse should have the load lightened if he throws a shoe. Shoes should be checked often. A loose shoe can be cinched tight and you avoid losing the shoe.

You must also consider your own feet. 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 as they tend to hang up in a stirrup. If tapaderos are used, they should have solid bottoms.



Unless you're using experienced mountain horses, there are a number of things your horses should learn before they leave familiar ground. A horse must be halter broke and accustomed to standing tied for extended periods. He 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 condi-

tions. 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 in your own pasture than in a rocky mountain meadow. A horse should also be trained so that he can be mounted from either side. It's almost impossible to mount from the downhill side on a sidehill trail.

Before you start your trip, all gear should be checked. For your own comfort your saddle should fit you, but it must fit the horse. Any leather such as breast collars or cruppers should be oiled so they won't cut into a horse's hide. Latigos, cinches and reins should be checked for wear. It is advisable to adjust all packsaddles before you leave on your trip. This will save time at the end of the road, and reduce the time a pack horse will have to stand loaded before the whole string is ready. Once adjusted, the saddles should be labeled so they are always used on the same animal. If you're using borrowed equipment, masking tape can be used for labels. If packs are mantied before you leave home, they should be labeled in pairs of equal weights.

A slicker should be carried on your saddle horse. Weather changes fast in the mountains. (Accustom your horse to you putting on your slicker, as many horses don't like them.) Nights are cool and a jacket should be carried even in warm weather. Chaps are very 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. Levis are hard to beat for trail riding, but whatever pants are worn, they should be snug enough so they won't bunch up under you. Always wear clothes that have been previously worn and washed. A western hat has many advantages in the mountains.

Besides the protection from the sun, rain or snow, the brim will turn small branches if you're stargazing a little. A straw hat is more comfortable in warm weather. Participants in sports where head injury can easily occur, including biking and skiing, are now wearing helmets. While many horse and mule riders wear felt or straw cowboy hats, increasingly backcountry riders are wearing helmets. Head injuries account for about

25% of horse related accidents but account for more than 60% of deaths. Helmet use results in a significant reduction in death and disability. Equestrian helmets are available in many forms including western hat styles. Gloves, preferably leather, are very useful. Besides protection, they'll help keep your hands free of pitch. A sharp knife should be carried by everyone in their front pants or chaps pocket. A cased folding knife with a locking blade is also a good choice.

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 pack horse. A knife with a leather punch, pliers, duct tape, and nylon and leather bootlaces, will make most emergency repairs.

Food for the trip should be planned on a meal basis and a complete menu made and checked along with staples and utensils. Make sure to make provisions for cooking, most people pack a propane or gas stove. If you're planning on cooking on a fire be sure there is firewood in the area you are going. If you use a gas lantern, include a pair of mantles for every move. A spare generator can be taped to the bottom of the lantern. Wood matches should be of the safety type and carried in a metal container. Paper matches are less bulky but harder to use.

A flashlight should be carried in your saddlebags. The batteries should be reversed or the switch taped in the off position. If both ends of the flashlight are removable, a spare bulb can be taped inside the spring. On a long trip a pair of spare batteries should be carried.

Another thing to consider is what are you going to do with your horse if he should happen to get hurt? In rare occasions a horse needs to be put down in the backcountry. Are you prepared to do so? Some people pack a lethal injectable they get from their veterinarian. Some people pack a pistol. To shoot your horse as humanely as possible, draw a line from one ear to the opposite eye, then draw a line from the other ear to the opposite eye. Where the two lines meet in the middle, place your pistol tight against your horse's skull and squeeze the trigger.

Food for yourself and your friends is one of the most important parts of any backcountry trip as you can't just run down to the local corner market for a loaf of bread. The principles of Light On The Land suggest lightweight, dried foods as an alternative to fresh foods. Besides being lighter in weight, which results in less pack stock needed, dried foods don't require special care to keep them safe to eat. In many areas of the West we must follow Grizzly Bear Sanitation Regulations which dictate how food is kept out of reach of grizzly bears. It is much easier to keep dry food safe from bears. There are several options available for obtaining dried foods. Many people buy a dehydrator and dry all of their own food. They can eat the same foods as at home, only the water is taken out. Carry a wide mouth plastic water bottle and the dried food for dinner in your saddle bags. Add the food and water to your water bottle at lunch time and by the time you set up camp that evening, your food will be reconstituted. All you will have to do is heat it up and dinner is ready. Another option is to buy freeze-dried food which is readily available in any outdoors store. Most of these you just add boiling water and dinner is ready.



## **Electronics in the Backcountry**

Many people pack into the backcountry to get away from the hustle and bustle which consumes our lives. If you feel you need to take electronic gadgets into the backcountry please be considerate of others who may be around you. They may not appreciate your satellite phone as much as you do. Also remember that often electronic gadgets don't work in the backcountry because you're either too far from cell towers or the satellite coverage is blocked by trees or high peaks. When going into the backcountry you should be prepared to handle situations which arise in case your electronics don't work.

## **Handling**

With the many books that have been written on the subject of handling horses, it seems amazing that it is necessary to add another to the list. The subject of horse impact on the environment and practical methods to minimize adverse impact has never been broached in depth. Most of us have had a lifelong love affair with the backcountry, and the horse has been our vehicle to enjoy it. The majority of experienced horsemen have developed methods which are compatible with the environment. We hope to educate the few who haven't, along with the inexperienced.

It seems that no matter how much knowledge you acquire concerning horses, you never quit learning. At one of the advisory group meetings that we conducted, we had people with over 30 years commercial packing and outfitting. In the course of our discussions, ideas and methods were presented that even a person of this stature would adopt. Everyone at this meeting was an experienced horseman with considerable time in the backcountry, and we all gained knowledge.

Because of space limitations, this guidebook is not intended to be a complete text on a given subject, nor was 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



guidelines for a safe and enjoyable trip, with a minimum of adverse impact. If additional information is needed for a particular problem, contact any member of Back Country Horsemen. If unfamiliar with the problem themselves, they will know who to contact.

Before we continue there are three things that should be stressed. 1. The use and training of a horse for the mountains differs considerably from pleasure riding and gymkhana events. A horse, or horseman, could be expert at one and a novice at the other. 2. A backcountry trip offers much pleasure, but sometimes there are hazards involved. A knowledge of acceptable methods is necessary to ensure safety. 3. Wet saddle



blankets are the best training aid a horseman can have.

Like people, horses are individuals, and although they usually follow general behavior patterns, they often react differently in the same situation. A horse that is completely reliable under any other condition may have an abnormal fear of something. Training, and the methods used, play 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 their particular disposition. Although we must accept the fact that everyone thinks his horses are the greatest, we should try to look at them a little more objectively. Under strange conditions, or unfamiliar situations, "Sweetie Pie" can easily be transformed into something suitable for the National Finals Rodeo. If you borrow a horse, you have the disadvantage of knowing little of the horse's temperament. If you know the bad habits of your stock, you can anticipate possible problems and avoid trouble.

An ideal mountain horse would have a quiet, gentle disposition, good performance and stamina, and be reliable under all conditions. Few of our equine friends possess all these wonderful qualities without considerable training. The genes which provide a quiet, gentle disposition are seldom conducive to performance and stamina. To be reliable under all conditions a higher strung horse will require more handling than one who is naturally quieter. If you are buying a horse for the mountains, it can't be stressed too strongly to select one with good withers, legs and feet, and with a disposition suited to your ability. It will help to develop confidence in a green horse if he makes his first trip with seasoned companions. Often a young horse can be led over and through obstacles that he wouldn't readily negotiate while ridden. A horse must develop confidence in people as well as people in the horse. Another important point is never allow 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 he realizes he must obey.

Like most domestic animals, horses have a descending order of authority or "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, hitch rail, or trailer 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 when in season, but if they aren't to be bred, can be given a shot that will eliminate their problem for the season.

Unless horses have had a bad experience, they are normally good travelers. If a horse is tied short there is no danger of him getting his foot over the rope. Hauling a load of horses requires extra driving care. Take corners slowly and avoid fast starts and sudden stops. Make sure your pickup has the towing capacity to pull the trailer you will be using. More important than actually doing the pulling is being able to stop your rig when someone pulls out in front of you when you are descending a long grade down a mountain. Too often people try to "just get by" using a half ton pickup to pull their trailer. This works until you kill a load of horses. Whatever you use to convey horses should have a floor with good footing. Rubber mats with a non-slip tread should be used in a trailer. Use care in placing horses to avoid trouble. Although we haven't the space to go into loading problems, we will state a few suggestions. A green horse will load better if preceded by an experienced animal. If in doubt about your horses loading, practice with them before you plan to start your trip. If practicing, just load and unload them the first few times, don't move the trailer. A horse must always have good footing when loading or unloading.

As mentioned previously, the tack used over long distances in the mountains must fit the horse and should fit the rider. A horse with a bad saddle sore isn't much of an asset if the trailer is still twenty miles down the trail. 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. On the other hand, many saddles made years ago are excellent with the possible exception that they were made for horses that were a little smaller, and built a

little narrower in the front with higher withers. 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 in the 3/4 position so the cinch is a little further back to prevent a sore forming 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 off the D rings and low enough so that there is no possibility of interference with the horse's breathing. A horse can be ridden with a looser cinch if a breast collar is worn. One of the chief causes of cinch sores is too tight of a cinch. 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 breast collars would be a good choice. A crupper or britchin' should also be used in the hills.

Regardless of what you see in the movies, never tie a horse by the reins. Use a halter under your bridle and always tie with your lead rope. Any good nylon or rope halter is adequate. Flat nylon has the advantage of not creasing a horse's nose and has a larger bearing surface over the poll. A rope halter is lighter weight and can be more comfortable for the horse on long trips. The halter should be adjusted so that it can't be rubbed off. Never turn a shod horse loose wearing a halter. The horse could get his hoof caught while using a back leg to scratch himself.

For most people, an eight to nine foot lead rope seems to be about right. Manila, half inch in diameter would be minimum, but soft nylon is much better. Nylon is stronger, won't rot, is more rodent proof, 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 halter and braid the other end back. Tie a break away onto your riding saddle in case you need to tie your pack horse to your saddle horse when adjusting packs. This will save your riding saddle from getting torn apart. A pack horse lead rope should always be held in the hand. In cold weather, the lead rope can be wrapped twice around the saddle horn with the free end tucked under your leg. On your saddle horse leave enough length in your lead rope for comfort. Attach a ring to your pommel to tie a quick-release knot in your lead rope or tie an overhand knot in the doubled rope and hook the loop over the horn. The free end of the rope can be pushed through the overhand knot before tightening to keep it from dragging. When stopping for water you'll have to lift the loop off the horn to allow enough length for the horse to drink. The majority of experienced horsemen don't use snaps in the mountains, but if you prefer them, use only the heaviest obtainable and make sure they are solid brass.

Many experienced horsemen tie a knot in split reins in the backcountry. If a rein is dropped and stepped on by your horse, it could be broken, or your horse may act up. You may be using one hand for a pack horse 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. A single rein with both ends attached to the bit is another good option.

There are many good saddle pads on the market to choose from for both riding saddles and pack saddles. Some pads are made of wool and others synthetics. The most important thing a pad does is move heat away from the horse's body. If heat

builds up sores start to form. Riding saddle pads are usually one half to one inch thick and pack pads are usually one to two inches thick. Don't ever lay a pad or blanket directly on the ground as it will pick up debris which could sore a horse's back. When in camp, a pole can be tied between two trees, your gear placed on it and a mantle thrown 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 other animals are fond of leather.

Probably the most important aspect in eliminating adverse environmental impact has to do with restraint. If graze is available, the horse must have the necessary freedom to consume adequate roughage. If feed is packed in, animals must be corralled or tied to keep them from straying. Horses grazing on good grass cause little adverse impact, but keeping them in the area where you want them and not heading for the trailer can be a problem.

On the other hand, tied horses can quickly cause ecological damage to bark, roots and ground cover.

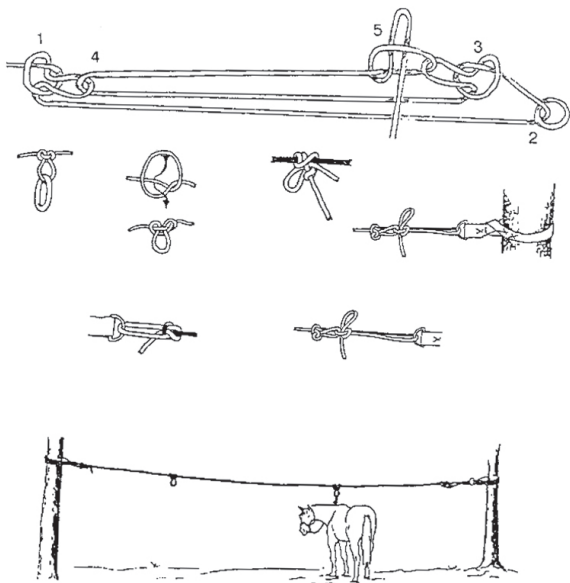
Hobbles are one method of restraining horses while permitting them enough freedom to graze but restricting their movements so that they won't travel great distances. Only a grazing hobble with at least a one inch strap should be used. An excellent hobble can be made from one half of a burlap sack if you know the method. 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 with a side line 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.

Picketing your horse is a satisfactory method in suitable terrain. The area must be free of obstacles for the rope to tangle on. 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 garden hoses. The hose prevents rope burns and the extra stiffness helps keep it from tangling. The pin or stake must be driven deep enough into the ground to stand considerable strain and must be moved frequently to protect against overgrazing and trampling. 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 of the grass within the picket circle.

The most widely used method of restraint in our area is by tying to a high-line, then turning the hobbled horses out to graze for a specified length of time. On good grass, a hungry horse usually will be content to graze for two or three hours and seldom lift his head. If possible the camp should be located between the grazing area and the trailhead. The horses should be checked frequently if they can't be seen from camp. Oats or concentrate should be fed morning and evening, with the grazing period just before the evening oat ration. This helps to hold the horses and makes them easier to catch. Another advantage of this method is that if water is available at the grazing area a horse can drink when he wants to. The old adage about leading a horse to water but being unable to force him to drink is certainly true.

Most people use a high-line for holding stock in the back-country. Ideally a high-line is about eight feet off of the ground. You can start with commercially available tree savers or use cinches around two trees. This protects the bark from being girdled and killing the tree. Tie one end of your high-line rope to one tree saver with a bowline. Run the rope through the second tree saver and use a Dutchman knot to secure it. This allows you to tighten the rope if it starts to loosen. Keep the first and last horse about ten feet from the tree so they don't dig up the



roots, and keep about ten feet between each horse. Use a good half inch rope for your high-line, or some people prefer to use a static climbing rope which will hold the weight of the stock and is lighter to pack. If you are using a high-line for a number of stock consider bringing three or four tree savers. Use the extra tree savers in the middle of your high-line to keep it from sagging. Use extreme caution if you tie saddled stock to your high-line. Saddle horns and D rings can get caught on the high-line.

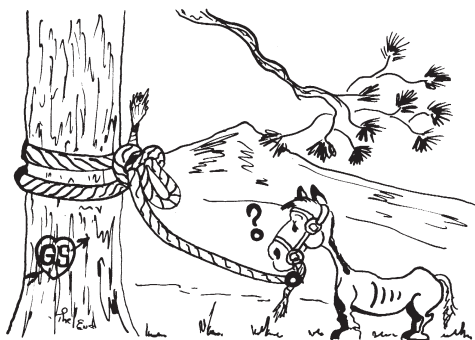
The high-line area must be located on a durable surface, off the trail and away from water or boggy areas. An area with hard rocky ground that catches enough breeze to discourage insects would be ideal. Some horses will become restless and paw while tied. A pair of hobbles will discourage this.



Any knot used around horses should be of the quick release type. The knot illustrated at the end of this chapter is excellent for tying horses. The two turns around the tree help to prevent bark damage and keep the rope from sliding. The knot is completely reliable and can be untied under strain. One word of caution: when forming the slip loop part of the knot, push the doubled rope through the turn rather than reaching your fingers through the turn and pulling the loop. If a horse would become frightened and pull back, your fingers could be caught.

Horses should be tied on a level with their nose and short enough so they can't reach the ground, to prevent them from getting a foot over the rope. When graining, the lead rope should be loosened so that the bottom of the nosebag can rest on the ground. Remember to shorten the lead rope after graining and never use a nosebag on a loose horse. Horses used extensively in the backcountry often learn to use the lead rope to rest the bottom of the nosebag against.

Unless you're particularly fond of walking, always keep a wrangle horse tied at camp whenever horses are turned out to graze. The wrangle horse must be rotated to ensure him 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 out for the night after the rest are tied for the night.

Good manners dictate that we should be cognizant of our neighbors when we're turning horses loose so they don't roam into someone else's camp.

Bells help to keep track of horses if the grazing area is close to camp and make strayed horses much easier to find. If using bells be very cognizant of your neighbors. When turning horses loose to graze, bell all mares, loners or animals that have a tendency to stray. Bells should fit reasonably snug to prevent the possibility of the strap 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.

There are many small portable electric fence options available that are lightweight and easy to pack. If you choose to use them remember to move them often so the area you're using doesn't become overgrazed and keep them at least 50 feet from any trail, so you don't interfere with a pack string coming through.

Reading this section won't make you an expert on handling horses in the backcountry. Besides knowledge, reflexes are necessary at times, and split second decisions have to be made. Reflexes and judgment are only taught through experience. This Guidebook will help you over the hard spots, hopefully without as many bruises as the people who wrote it.

### **Environmental Concerns**

There are increasing numbers of visitors experiencing the beauty, peacefulness and specialness of the un-roded portions of our public lands. With the increasing use and more families owning horses and using the backcountry, this section of the Guidebook – “Environmental Concerns” is offered as a bridge – a bridge to using the backcountry coupled with the responsibility and measures necessary to protect the natural resources of these backcountry areas.

## **Numbers of Stock**

In organizing your trip, plan to take the minimum number of stock needed to make your trip successful. The fewer the number of animals the less the impact on the land. There is a great variety of lightweight camp, cooking, and sleeping gear available; it reduces weight and bulkiness. In wilderness areas, parks, etc., it is advisable to check with administrative agencies to learn of limitation of stock numbers. As a guide, one pack animal per two persons is sufficient.

## **Short Cutting of Switchbacks**

The old saying goes, “the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.” When riding the trail it may be the shortest but probably not the best. Shortcutting across switchbacks in the trail should not be done. It creates a new tread, which is usually steep, often causing erosion and gullies. Shortcutting switchbacks also creates the unwanted ribbon effect – parallel trails.

## **Camps**

The camp area is the destination spot. We may think of it as our palace in the backcountry. On a backcountry trip a considerable amount of time is spent in and around the camp. For the reasons mentioned plus others, the campsite area is subject to wear and greater amounts of environmental abuse.

Let us explore some of the aspects of the camp environment, how they may contribute to unwanted resource deterioration, and more importantly what measures can be taken to minimize or eliminate the wear factors.

## **Selecting The Camp Spot**

In the backcountry many popular camp spots have been established and used for years. They are popular because they have attractions. The attractions may be a scenic setting, good fishing, grass for stock, and flat camping areas. However, when

selecting your camp spot it should be set back out of sight from the main trails. This helps to reduce stock and people congestion along the main trails, offering privacy and reducing the possibility of overuse immediately adjacent to main trails.

The camp spots should also be back from the edge of lakes, rivers and streams a reasonable distance – at least 200 feet is desirable. This helps reduce the chance of water pollution and overuse immediately next to lakeshores, streams and riverbanks.

Note: Some old, established camp spots may be closer to lakes, streams, rivers and main trails than desirable.

### **Firewood**

When gathering wood consider the following wood sources. First, gather smaller chunks of dead wood that needs no cutting. Second, cut wood from down, dead trees. And lastly, cut wood from dead, standing trees. When cutting dead, standing trees for firewood – remember – take only those out of sight from trails, lakes and viewing areas. In some areas the cutting of dead, standing trees is prohibited. Check with the managing agency if you are not sure. Green trees should not be considered for firewood. Also green tree boughs should not be gathered for any reason. The skidding of wood with stock is discouraged as this can lay the sod open and subject to erosion. Cutting wood into pieces suitable for packing by man or stock is preferred.

### **Camp Chores**

After the camp is set up in your own little heaven, the stock cared for, the wood gathered and supper is finished, there are a few kitchen chores. Yes, they seem to crop up, but in a mountain retreat they are a pleasure rather than a drag. There are a few environmental safeguards that should be followed. Dishes and cookware should be washed with biodegradable soap in a pan rather than directly in lakes, rivers and streams. Likewise soap water, bleach, etc. should not be dumped in lakes, streams or open water. Dump it on the ground at least 200 feet from

the water's edge or dig a sump hole. Always strain the food particles out of your waste water and pack them out in your garbage bag. Also, if staying for a longer period of time, the dumping location of dishwater and wash water should be varied. Concentrations of waste food particles tend to collect flies, bees and other insects.

### **Camp Sanitation – Disposing of Scraps and Cans**

With proper meal planning you can eliminate the need to be hauling out a large quantity of trash. Always pack out your trash. Never bury it and never expect someone else to pack it out for you. If you dry your food, it eliminates the need to pack cans or glass. If you do pack cans or glass, wash them out when doing your dishes to eliminate the smell and put them in your trash. A lot of dry food can be removed from the box and put into plastic ziplock bags, removing a lot of the bulk and eliminating trash.

Remember, if you pack it in – please pack it out. If you are so inclined to remove litter left by previous parties, good for you – you know you have done your part and more.

### **Sanitary Facilities**

When toilet facilities are not present, human waste can be disposed of by digging a small hole eight to ten inches in diameter and six to eight inches deep. After use, fill the hole with loose soil and replace the sod, nature will do the rest. If yours is a larger party or you plan to stay several days, dig a pit toilet. Save the topsoil and sod in a shady spot to be replaced when you break camp.

When the stay is over and camp is broken down, there are a few last minute items to check before heading out: all string removed from trees, extra fire wood scattered, and all fires dead out. Horse manure in the immediate camp areas should be broken down and spread out with our shovel or a tree branch. This aids in the decomposition process, reduces flies, and lessens the impact on other users. Before departing take last minute

glances to see that no debris is left behind and that the area is left in a condition you would expect it – neat, clean and inviting.

### **Grazing**

Popular camp spots, grassy meadows, and areas along the trails can be exposed to heavy pressure throughout the season. Overgrazing contributes to a reduction in the vigor of grass, a tramped out appearance of meadows, opportunities for unwanted weeds to grow, and unwanted degradation of an area. Avoid grazing grass down to short clumps. Rotate stock throughout an area, moving pickets frequently. Some areas may have insufficient grass, so it may be necessary to pack in feed. If hay or feed is packed in, the US Forest Service requires it to be certified weed seed free to prevent introduction of noxious weeds. During the planning stage of your trip consult with the responsible agency to learn of the natural feed situation in the area of your planned trip.

### **Confining Of Stock**

The nature of the stock, and the location and the method of holding all have an effect on the degree of tromping and soil disturbances that take place. Some horses are more prone to pawing, others not so. There are measures that are recommended to reduce abusive environmental effects when using stock in the backcountry. Wet, marshy areas are very susceptible to tromping. These areas should be avoided. Tying of stock in the immediate camp area is discouraged. The resultant pawing and tromping that may occur creates an overused appearance and dusty conditions in the camp area. Lakeshores and stream banks are subjected to trampling, overgrazing and caving in of banks if stock are confined close by. In view of this it is desirable to have tied or picketed stock at least 200 feet back from lakeshores and stream banks. High-lines are best to be placed on a durable surface where the soil is hard and rocky, where the impacts of pawing and trampling damage should be lessened.

## Precaution With Fire

During the summer and early fall season the grass is cured and twigs are dry. One should stop in a safe place to smoke rather than smoking while hiking or riding horseback. 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 campfire, douse the fire with water, mix, re-douse with water, and mix the coals and water thoroughly. Feel it to be sure the fire is dead out. In camp if there are suitable fire rings established they should be used. Never create fire rings. Instead of fire rings, learn how to use a fire blanket which is often available through your local ranger district office.

In closing it is hoped that the foregoing pages on "Environmental Concerns" will be of some benefit to protecting the backcountry we enjoy. The good Lord did His part in creating the beautiful mountains, the pure water, the tall grass, and the serene spots we treasure. He 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 un-abused by our visits and activities.



## Trail Courtesy

Trail courtesy is largely dependent upon the attitude of the individuals involved, but a better understanding of each other's problems is needed between different recreational use groups. 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 user groups. In wilderness areas, only the hiker and horseman are involved, but in other areas dirt bikes and mountain bikes may be encountered.

A dirt bike makes more noise than most horses will tolerate at close range. When meeting a string of horses, a dirt bike rider should immediately shut off his engine and move his machine as far off the low side of the trail as is practical. When overtaking a string of horses, a dirt bike rider should stay well behind the horses until the horseman can find a suitable spot to pull his horses off of the trail to allow him to pass. A few minutes' delay could well mean the difference between a minor inconvenience and possible injury.

Horse and mules are prey animals, if they feel threatened their first reaction is to flee. A fast moving quiet mountain bike can be far more dangerous to stock than a dirt bike. When meeting a string of horses a mountain bike rider should immediately stop and move his bicycle as far off the low side of the trail as is practical. When overtaking a string of horses a mountain biker should stay well behind the horses until the horseman can find a suitable spot to pull his horses off of the trail to allow him to pass. A few minutes' delay could well mean the difference between a minor inconvenience and possible injury.

Meetings between hikers and horsemen are common and should cause no problems if each respects the other. A horseman often has pack animals as well as his personal mount to control. Unless you have sat in the saddle and tried to regain control of a spooked pack string, take our word for it, it can get a bit hectic. 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 a trail, a hiker should make his presence known to the horseman as soon as practical in a quiet manner by speaking a few words of greeting. After the horses have seen him, he should then step off the trail on the low side and stand quietly. The horseman and hiker should talk until the pack string has passed so 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 him and don't become startled. A pack string over-taking a hiker owes him the courtesy of holding the horses 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.



There can occasionally be problems between different horse groups. Two basic rules are that you use the right hand trail in a divided trail system, and that 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 busted piggin' strings. Saddle horses should always give way to a pack string and usually a small string should give way to a larger one. Packers with more experience, please give way to those just starting out. From time to time it happens that upon meeting another string in an area where there is no safe place to pass one string has to turn around. Make sure to have a piggin' string on your last pack horse so you can tie to it if you need to.

### **Packing**

Many years ago, at a somewhat tender and inexperienced age, a friend and I decided to take a week or so pack trip along the crest of a rugged mountain range in Oregon, and fish some of the many, many lakes along this particular range's trail system. We planned to cover over thirty-five miles of trail and transport 150 popunds of food and gear including a 50 pound rubber boat. In our estimation, this called for a pack horse. Only thing was, neither of us had a horse! I did have a friend that did have one though, and my companion had a pickup truck to haul that horse in, so we figured we had all we needed. We built a make-shift stock rack and rounded up our sleeping bags, cooking equipment, fishing poles, rubber boat, etc. We threw in our pack boards and made arrangements to pick up the horse at a certain time. That was about the time my horse owner friend asked what kind of pack saddle we were goin' to use!

Off we went, to another friend who didn't own horses, but who did own an old packsaddle, as I remembered it. Thank God he did and thank God he'd loan it. The saddle was an old McClellan cavalry saddle rigged up with a whole bunch of straps I didn't know nuthin' about but figgered I could solve-given enough time. I do remember my old saddle owner friend saying something about the saddle bein' rigged for a mule but we was

in too big a hurry to listen to any idle talk!

A couple of days later we backed that horse out of the pickup and piled a bunch of equipment into a mound alongside her. Having had a pony as a tad, I qualified as the horse expert on this trip. I threw the borrowed blanket over the horse's back, then with a sure hand I grasped that ol' McClellan and flung it aboard. Now comes the learning process. What to do with all of them buckles an' straps? We spent a right smart time figgerin' out that one of 'em was s'pose to go under the tail and one of 'em around in front. The next thing I remember learnin' was, there just wasn't enough length on the straps to do either! That was just a temporary set back, though, 'cause we soon found out that we could forget the front one, move the saddle back, lift the old nag's tail high, then hook up the rear one. When we tightened up the cinch, it set a little far back but the borrowed horse didn't act up, so why should we worry?

The next order of business was to stick that mound of supplies on the saddle that was precariously perched on top of that poor horse's back. She didn't like it. I guess it wasn't all her fault either. You see, we didn't know a heck of a lot about how to go about it. We did have a lot of rope and a knife to cut it with and we used it frequently to cut off chunks to tie on first a sleeping bag, then another. We lashed on the gunny sack with our food, and used another chunk of rope to tie the rubber raft on top (when you're backpacking, the weight should be high... we figured that reasoning should apply to all packing). On top of all this, we lashed our camp kit and tucked in our nylon tent and a few clothes.

At last! Ready for our high adventure, we locked the pickup, slung our pack boards packed with a few light incidentals and turned to untie the horse, only to see the whole load, complete with the McClellan cavalry saddle, and horse blanket, swing under the horse's belly! She snorted and plunged a couple of times and served to help us do a little sortin' out. Wasn't much we could do but start over.

This time, we tucked that strap a little farther under her tail,

tightened the cinch a little tighter, used more pieces of lash rope and generally secured the load a little better. True, the mare was a might more skittish, but I kinda attributed this to her tender age. Again, we slung our pack boards and started merrily down the forest trail. We must'a made all of a hundred yards before the rubber boat fell off! When we hoisted it back up to lash it on, that ol' McClellan started to roll again. The thought struck my mind that maybe the saddle was packed heavier on one side than the other, so this time we lashed the boat on a little to one side. That worked fine.... for another hundred yards or so, until somethin' must have slipped. The whole pack settled a little and all our lash ropes were loose an' we was bein' threatened with loosing practically everything- all from different angles. Fortunately, we had plenty of extra rope, so we didn't have to unpack everything to tighten it....we just used more rope.

That's about the way the whole first day went. We'd go a few yards, then stop and tighten something here, a few more yards, then stop and tighten something there. The pack rolled once more a couple of miles down the trail and we had to start over. But we learned. We finally got smart where the trail was wide enough-one of us walked alongside the horse to help hold up the pack. It's a lucky thing for us that we only planned to go four miles that first day, 'cause the sun was goin' down when we hit the lower end of the lake where we intended to camp. Only a quarter mile now! Our spirits began to soar with the thoughts of a few minutes fishing before we enjoyed a good evening meal around a cheery campfire.

It was about that time the darned horse let out a big groan and collapsed into a big heap on the ground. I'm sure my face was chalk white as frightening thoughts raced through my mind. "We've killed a borrowed horse. What are we going to do?" Feverishly, we attacked the pack ropes with fumbling fingers and sharp knife while the horse lay with her neck stretched out and her eyes rolled back. At last the ropes were all untied or cut and the gear was laying scattered around the horse in an untidy array. I jerked the strap to the cinch loose, lifted off the saddle

and...the horse jumped up and started contentedly munching grass. If the horse hadda been mine, she wouldn't be long!

I gazed at my friend and he gazed back at me. Silently, we began picking up gear and trudging that last quarter mile to our campsite. Night was falling when we completed the task.

Next day we solved part of our problem by the simple expedience of putting more of the load on our backs. We were now carrying more than the horse, but we had a lot better time and picked up some pretty good fishing.

Along toward the tail end of the trip, having experienced nothing more serious than losing a sleeping bag and having to trudge five miles back after it, we were coming down to a beautiful basin, laced with lakes. We were pretty high on the mountainside and could see a beautiful meadow, chock full of good grass for horse feed. We could see the string of Forest Service horses and mules grazing in that meadow, just like we had been told by that fella in the lookout, just past. As we worked our way down the trail to that meadow and those lakes, the grim realization hit me that our packing was something less than professional and within just a few minutes we were going to be in the same basin with experts. I glanced, with a critical eye, back at the horse I was leading and concluded that an expert packer would probably pick out a thing or two wrong (by now, that horse was packing most of our load again) and I wasn't sure I was ready to be held up as an object of ridicule. By the time we were down to the basin floor, we had it all worked out in our mind... We'd get close to their camp, tie up our horse in the brush, saunter into their camp and kinda feel 'em out as to their feelin's toward a beginning packer, or two.

What we saw as we walked into their camp was two men: the first was a grizzled old fellow, with close cropped iron grey hair and deep wrinkles lining a sun and wind tanned face. He was smoking a crooked stem pipe and when he looked at us out of deep blue eyes, he never cracked a smile or said hello. The other guy was big-well over six feet and must have weighed 230 pounds. I'd guess his age as thirty-five. He had a moon

round face and you could tell he laughed a lot. He spoke to us as we walked up and asked if we'd like a cup of coffee. We would. Indeed! He introduced the two of them and we found out the grizzled old timer who puffed constantly on that crooked stem pipe while listening a lot and saying little, wasn't the packer like we figured. Instead, he was the District Ranger for that forest district and the smiling younger man was the packer. The packer asked if we were catching any fish and we said we had. We engaged in idle conversation for awhile and the big man asked where we'd come from. When we told him where we started out and how long we'd been on the trail, I noticed the old ranger perk up a little. Then he said, "Son, you surely haven't been out ten days with only what you've got on your back."

He had us and we stammered for a time before we admitted we had a horse.

He gently reproved us, saying: "Where is he? I don't see any stock out in the meadow except ours." When I murmured that our horse was tied up in the brush, he asked, "What in the world for?"

"Because," I blurted out, "We wuz afraid you guys would laugh at our pack 'cause we don't know much about packing!"

The old range continued to puff on that old pipe while he gazed levelly at us for a few moments. Finally he said, "Son, you go back and untie that horse from the brush and you bring him down here and unpack him. Then you stake him out in the pasture yonder, where the grass is green and deep, and I'll personally guarantee that neither of us will laugh at you, your pack or your horse."

With that kind of reproof and that kind of promise, I fairly flew back to the horse so I could lead her back. When I returned with her, the old ranger and the young packer came from their camp to look at the competition. They walked around me and the laden pack horse several times and the old ranger never missed a puff on his pipe. True to their word, neither cracked a smile. Finally they stopped the pacing, the ranger took a deep

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pull on his the eye and said:

“Well, son, I told you we wouldn’t laugh and we didn’t.... but it’s been an effort!”

It was in the hope that some of the unpleasanties experienced by those inexperienced youth may have been avoided by the less practiced readers of this guidebook, that the Back Country Horsemen assembled a composite group of their most experienced packers and long time mountain users into an advisory committee. Most of the material found in this packing section is a product of that assembled group and constitutes many years of hard lessons from that tough taskmaster - experience.

We’ll concern ourselves very little in this section with your saddle horse, but we’d like to talk about your pack horse, your pack saddles and pads, your tarps, ropes and other packing equipment in detail, as well as how to use them.

Let’s start with your pack horse. If he’s like pack horses most people use, he’s whatever you’ve got. He may be short legged and overfed, with a lot of bad habits or he may be young, rough broke and inexperienced in the mountains, but he’s the horse you’re going to use, isn’t he? Now, if a person was going out to buy a pack horse, he probably should look for a fairly tall horse (15 hands or more) with high withers and pronounced back bone. A little bit of a belly doesn’t hurt too much, either. When it comes to helping hold a saddle on top a belly will help hold it from sliding back. There are many good pack horses that are not tall; many good ones that are chunky and have little or no withers. But, with animals such as these, more care must be exercised when we fit the saddle to them and they require more attention after they’re packed.

Disposition and willingness is important in a pack horse, too, but so it is in any horse and we won’t dwell on it here.

There are many types of saddles used for packing, including riding saddles. The most widely used pack saddle in our country is the Decker. The Decker tree has two wooden side bars like the sawbuck, with which you may be more familiar; but instead

of wooden connecting crosses, the Decker is put together with one-half inch round steel bars with a generous rounded bend at the top that protrudes above the saddle to about the same height as the sawbuck x's. In addition to the saddle itself, the Decker is usually equipped with two-thickness, leather reinforced canvas, about 30" x 30", that fits down over the top of the saddle. This "half breed" usually has padding stuffed between canvas layers and wooden slats attached near the bottom of each side for better weight distribution along the horse's ribs. Now, the advantages of the Decker over the more widely known sawbuck is the fact that by bending the steel bars slightly, you can make the saddle fit any horse; the "half breed" offers better protection to horse and pack; while the wooden slat in the "half breed" gives better weight distribution. Disadvantages can be listed as initial price (the Decker is usually sold for one-fourth more) and the "half breed" does retain the pack horse's body heat- a factor that should be especially considered during warm weather. The sawbuck, of course, is the old standby and will continue to be used for decades to come, 'cause everybody had one. There's nothing wrong with it either...provided it fits the horse. Remember, unlike the Decker, the sawbuck is not adjustable. A proper fitting pack saddle should avoid digging into the shoulder blades or withers of your horse. The front and rear of the side bars should turn up slightly, especially in front, allowing the saddle to rock, just a little. There are many sawbucks around that were constructed originally for mules. These 'bucks have a much narrower tree and can be downright mean on an ordinary backed horse if used on a long trip or to carry a heavy load. Some sawbucks are equipped with extra wooden bars, below the tree bars. These wooden bars have the rigging ring's straps attached to them and serve to distribute pack weight along the horse's ribs in the same manner as wooden slats in the Decker's "half breed".

And then there's the McClellan cavalry saddle...like the one used by the kids in the story at the beginning of this chapter. Well, not exactly like that one - a well-rigged McClellan

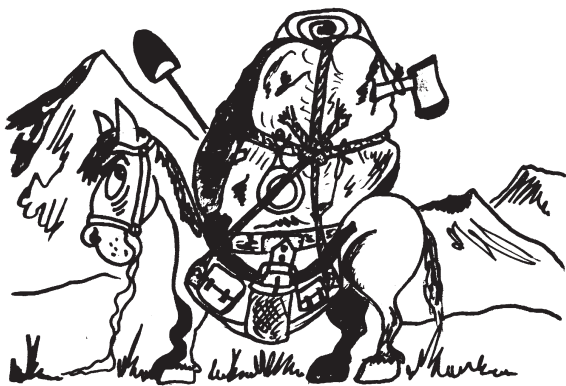
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(one with sound straps that fit the horse) can serve well as a pack saddle. The big problem using McClellans nowadays is finding them. They're becoming collector's items.

You've got your horse and your pack saddle, now let's talk about saddle pads. First off, there's a lotta different kinds.

There are many good saddle pads on the market to choose from for both riding saddles and pack saddles. Some pads are made of wool and others synthetics. The most important thing a pad does is moves heat away from the horse's body. If heat builds up sores start to form. Riding saddle pads are usually one half to one inch thick and packpads are usually 1 to 2 inches thick. Don't ever lay a pad or blanket directly on the ground as it will pick up debris which could sore a horse's back. When in camp, a pole can be tied between two trees, your gear placed on it and a mantle thrown 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 other animals are fond of leather.



As for halters, use one he can't or won't break (since you can't be sure he won't, we suggest using one he can't). Nylon, either rope or flat, is tough stuff and any horse would be hard put to snap one. If a fellow was going downtown to buy a halter, he ought to take a close look at the flat nylon. It's a little easier on the horse and not as likely to crease his nose or burn his head.

While we're talking about halters, we oughta spend a little time on halter ropes. In fact, we maybe should spend some time on all associated pack ropes. Half an inch should be the minimum diameter of a lead rope of either manila or nylon. Nylon, of course, is much stronger but generally costs more. However, length of wear should more than make up the difference. Nylon is also easier handled during wet, cold weather. Be sure your nylon is twisted fiber, and soft, instead of braided, or we're both in trouble. About eight or nine feet of halter rope seems about right for leadin' ol' dobbin around, although elsewhere in this guidebook, environmental considerations suggest that when necessary to tie a horse to a tree, two wraps should be taken to avoid tree damage. Supposin' we tied to an eight inch tree (we don't always have a choice), we've already used more than four feet of our rope and it'll take eighteen inches to two feet more to tie a good knot....so you see, the poor horse is bound to be forced into a love affair with that tree. That'd even make me nervous. What the heck is another foot, anyway.... make your halter ropes nine to ten feet long.

As for sling ropes (don't make them too short either) about eighteen to twenty feet a side should do it. Each sling rope can be braided to the Decker ring or the buck on a sawbuck, or an eye can be braided into the rope, the end ran back through the eye and connected to your pack saddle that way. An advantage to the eye is that the rope can be doubled for another use if needed.

Don't short yourself on many ropes either. Fact is, if we could give you a pearl of wisdom about packing, it would probably be: Never, never short yourself on rope of any kind.

Leastways, the kids at the chapter's beginning knew enough not to short themselves on rope, even if they never knew how to use it. We'd recommend thirty-two to thirty-five feet of 3/8 manty rope. That should give you enough to tightly wrap up a tarp fulla bowling balls. If you come up short with a long manty rope like that, you've got too much weight on the horse.... unless it's all toilet paper.

No manty rope is complete without a manty (manta is Spanish for cover) tarp to wrap your bowling balls in (or whatever else you may want to take on a pack trip into a wilderness). Manty covers out of white canvas duck, double weave and about 12 ounce, are pliable enough to fold and wrap easily, stout enough to ward off most of the limbs, trees and rocks to come their way and heavy enough to shed water when it rains in buckets. Some heavier canvas with a good treat seems better but tears easier an' nobody likes a wet bedroll. About seven foot square is a good size, but you'll sure 'nough hear a lot of arguments about that. There's lots of packers who'd rather have larger ones but, by and large, seven by seven will wrap around whatever you'd want to carry.

Most advice for beginning packers is to pick up a set of canvas panniers or pack boxes. Panniers and/or boxes generally have loops that'll fit over the sawbuck, or straps (sometimes adjustable) that'll buckle onto the 'buck or Decker ring. There's an advantage here for the beginner- no doubt about that. All you have to do is start packing your gear into them. Gear such as; cooking equipment, sleeping bags, tents, horse feed etc. (we don't name anymore for fear we'll scare you out).

Be sure you pad your rattles and protect your breakables. Lots of packers have had a pack horse fall on a dozen eggs an' never break any because the eggs are surrounded by a sack of oats. Besides offering protection from physical damage, oats or wadded up newspaper will resist temperature change well, allowing frozen meat and fresh vegetables to keep longer (be sure to encase in plastic). Be sure to put plastic bags around all of your liquids. Bread or bedrolls make good padding for

breakables and also provide insulation. Pack boxes probably give the best protection, if they are built stout enough, and they sure make good cupboards, tables or chairs back there away from civilization.

For gosh sakes, separate your gas, whether in lantern or out, from your food, or your cookies can take on a taste and aroma not pleasing to the belly or the nose. Pack your heavier items in the middle third of your pack, the weight will still be on your horse's back and above all else, make sure your packs are even in weight- never mind the size.

If you don't have panniers or pack boxes and you do have many tarps and many ropes, you can do like most of us; you can many your packs. One important thing to remember when manying packs is to build them long and narrow (like a bale of hay). They'll ride better when they're slung vertical, with the weight in the middle third. When starting the pack, lay your tarp flat out on the ground; assemble the material you think should be placed in this pack on the tarp diagonally, taking care to assemble it in a long, narrow pile and taking care to protect the fragile or breakable items. Fold the many tarp's corners tightly around the load- be sure nothing can leak out. Then take your many rope (build a loop) around your pack the long way and pull just as tight as possible, with the rope end paying out from the upper  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the pack and near the center from (from side to side). This rope, around the pack the long way, will hold loose supplies securely until you finish your tie. Now build four or five half hitches and slip around the pack, descending until the last is near the pack's bottom. Remember to pull every hitch as tight as humanly possible....then a little more. You should have enough rope left to go up the backside of the pack, wrapping the left over rope around each cross rope and pulling it tighter. Tie off anytime, with an easy-to-release slip knot and you've got a pack for one side of the horse ready to go. Seventy-five pounds per side is about the right pack for an average size horse in good condition. 'Course, your horse won't mind if it's less. When you get your second pack made

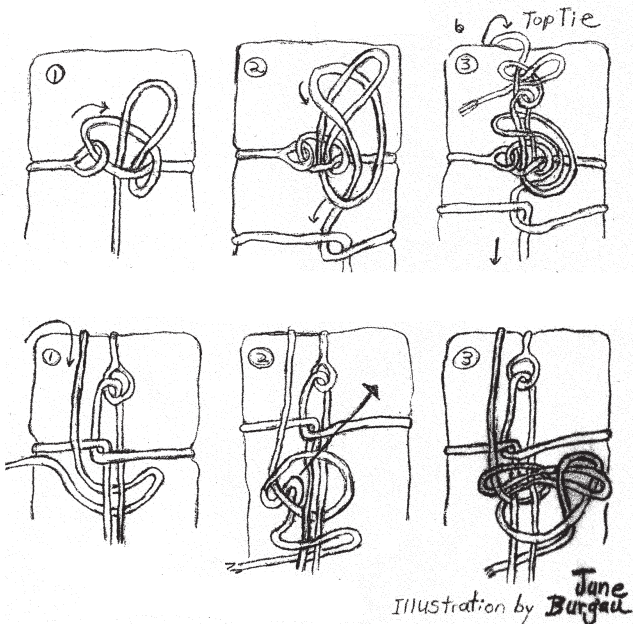


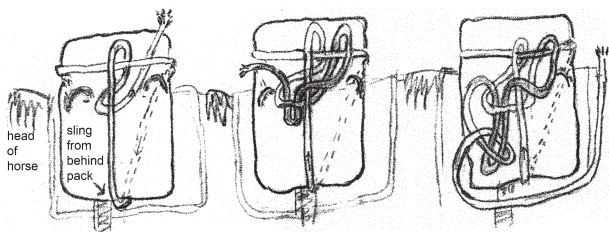
Illustration by **Jane Burgau**

up, weigh them. If they're not within five lbs. of each other, open one up and add to it or take some out, depending on how heavy it is. It'll simplify your trip if your horse's two packs are even in weight.

Most experienced packers manta everything, even their boxes. They reason they'll get there with everything that way. Once again, be sure your packs are mantied tight....that'll keep them from sagging and loosening the ropes. The time to be sure is before the pack is on the horse's back.

Now that you have your horse, packsaddle, pads, halter and packs figured out, let's see if we can hook 'em all together. First....catch your horse; we can't do a durned thing 'til that's done. Throw the pad (or pads) on him, being sure it's smoothed out with nothing under it that could irritate your horse. Now the

saddle; hooking up cinch, breast collar and britchen. When you tighten the cinch latigo and make the tie, run the loose end back through, leaving a handy eight-inch handle of latigo there that can be released in a hurry if the horse gets in trouble. Check your britchen and breast collar. They both should be pretty loose at this point (not inclined to come tight when the horse walks) and should only be snugged up when needed to hold the saddle from sliding ahead or back, such at the top of a hill before descending or bottom of a hill before climbing. The britchen straps should be adjusted to allow it to hang about a third of the way between rump and hock. The breast collar should be adjusted so that even if the saddle slips back, the collar doesn't cut off his wind. It wouldn't hurt a thing if most of your excess saddle pad was sticking out past the front of your saddle, too, on account of the natural tendency for these pads to work back as the horse works. Nothing is more frustrating than to have to stop an otherwise well saddled horse, with a well balanced, good riding load, because a saddle pad is working out from under the saddle. Just try to get it back into place without help or without taking your packs down-it's nearly impossible.



Take 'em down? Heck, we don't even have 'em up yet! Do you remember that one end of your sling rope is fastened to a Decker ring or sawbuck buck (usually, the front)? Now take the other end and feed it through the back ring or buck from the back side and pull all but a couple feet of slack out. Now slide your pack up on the pack saddle, under the rope leading from

one ring to the other. About one-fourth, or one-fifth of the pack should extend above the rope. While holding the pack in place- and that can be quite a job with the skittish horse- grasp the loose end of the sling rope and pull all the slack out (and I mean ALL the slack) pinning your pack to the saddle. Now, while still holding the pack, bring your sling rope down underneath the bottom of your pack, up the front to the rope pinning the pack to the saddle, feed your rope end around that section of rope and once again pull out every bit of slack before tying off.

You have just lashed on a pack with a basket hitch. Now do the same for the pack on the other side and you'll have one horse packed and ready to go. And if you don't hurry with that other side, or if you failed to tighten ol' Dobbin's cinch, the saddle, pack, and all, will roll under the poor horse's belly.

Here's a few additional hints that may help you with slinging packs:

If there is two people making the trip, one can help keep the saddle from turning by holding up the first pack while the other guy slings the opposite side.

No matter how hard you try, pack weights won't always work out even. A smart packer will always hold out an axe, shovel, saw or something like that, to add to the outside of the lighter pack. Another thing that will help here is to lash the heavier pack first. You can always get the first pack on a little tighter than the second. Then, after a few miles down the trail, your second pack will settle, helping to balance your load.

When you look to see if the horse's load is balanced, don't look at the packs- that'll just confuse you. Instead, look at the sawbuck's x's, or the Decker rings, to see if they're up on top. If not, grab your x's or rings and pull 'em back on top, then raise your heavier load or drop your lighter one.

Now, you're ready to go....unless you're planning on more than one pack horse. If you are, there are some additional things to consider. The best way used to connect one pack horse with another in our country is to braid a piece of 3/8 inch rope into one rigging ring, up over the saddle behind the back

buck or ring (leave a little slack), then braid the other end into the other rigging ring. This rope is called a piggin' string, an' it should have a loop in it on top. To this piggin' string, a break line of two strands of baling twine should be connected. When the second horse's halter rope is connected to the break line, you've got a string of horses lined up.

The piggin' string, by virtue of its connection to the riggin' rings, will provide an even pull on the saddle from the breast collar if the second horse pulls back and the break line will allow either horse to break free if the other horse gets in serious trouble.

The second horse's halter should be tied with a slip bowline or any easy-to-release slip knot, leaving about six feet from the hip bone of the first horse to the halter of the second. You can pull two horses, or ten horses this way, but we're here to tell ya that ten horses pulled in one bunch is a heckuva lot more than five times as much trouble as two. If you don't take our word for it - try it.

Probably the first place you'll have trouble when you're tying a packstring together is in the line up. If you haven't given any thought to the line up, you should. A barnyard pecking order don't seem to help either - some horses just don't seem to want to trail behind a particular horse but will be very satisfied behind another. Some horses would just as soon not be ahead of another horse, too, and if you're lucky you'll get the right order figured out before the saddle repair work starts. To cut down on some of the agony, it'll sure help if you split up the string between fellas making the trip. Ideally, three horses should be the maximum string for one man to pull and if you can place one that leads well right behind your saddle horse, most of your work will be done by him.

Looks like we're ready to go, don'tcha think? You're probably riding your most spirited horse, and strung out behind him is a whole bunch of broomtails packing one hundred and fifty pounds of fragile commodities apiece, just a-waitin' an excuse to get a front foot over a lead rope, or kick the horse behind



him, or take a wrong side of a tree, or lay down in a stream (pack and all). There's an old packer's adage that says, you'll have less trouble if you can keep your string's necks stretched out (keep 'em moving) and it's all true! Most of your trouble occurs when you stop for some reason or another, especially if it's before you've put in enough miles to tire them a little. But, stop you will. Very few experienced packers make it too far before a pack settles a little on one horse or the cinch needs to be taken up on another. The smart packer is the one who stops his string at the top of a climb, maybe where the trail is narrow between trees and the grass is poor. You've got a little better chance of making your adjustments with no trouble at a spot like that, with the broomtails blowing a little and no feed to tempt them to move, or reach. You'd probably do well to pick your first good spot like this and check your string's cinches and ropes, anyway. It may save a little agony later. Be sure and tie up your saddle horse when you do. One of the saddest sights to be seen in the mountains is a packer trying to catch a loose saddle horse while he's on foot, leading a pack string.

Anyway, check your string and their packs often when you first start out, and keep a wary eye on that saddle pad and the saddle x's or rings. Sometimes it's helpful to have someone riding behind to help watch packs, if they're not needed to pull part of the string. Watch your string at all the bad spots in the trail...a mudhole that your saddle horse easily negotiates can be real rough on the last pack horse, with the string's crack-the-whip effect. Slow your saddle horse down so that each pack horse, in turn, can pick his way over, around or through an obstacle. You'll have less trouble if you do.

You'll have less trouble if you try to set a fairly steady pace at a moderate speed for the terrain and trail to be negotiated. Say, about two and one half to three miles per hour, at best, for a conditioned string, packing reasonable loads over good trails. Yes, you'll hear about packers who can do better with their strings, over poorer trails, carrying heavier freight, for longer distances....but you'll likely never see one. We never have. If

all conditions aren't favorable and your horses aren't properly conditioned, you might be wise to figure less.

We've spent considerable time talking about how to get your load to that mountain campsite, in one piece; we've spent a good share of this chapter on how to get your horse there, too, but all these words are a waste of time if you don't make it, so let's spend a little time on how to get you there, safe and sound. First off, never tie a pack horse hard and fast to the saddle horn! Joe Back, in his excellent book on packing (*Horses, Hitches and Rocky Trails*), calls the saddle horn, "Gabriel's Horn," to those who insist on tying to it! Carry the lead rope in your hand or over your shoulder. If you can't carry it any longer, take a couple of dallies around the horn, then tuck the end under your leg. During cold weather, you can use the same method to keep your hands warm, or you can carry the rope's end under your chaps or in a mackinaw pocket. Always lead your pack horse with the lead rope on the downhill side- you'll have a better chance to get rid of it in big trouble. And if you've got a horse that's a little touchy about a rope under his tail, you'll have an interesting trip.

Well, friend, armed with a pair of pliers, a knife with a leather punch on it, a small roll of duct tape, a pair of leather boot laces, some small nylon rope, an extra cinch and latigo (all for emergency repairs), the knowledge between the pages of this pocket sized guidebook and about twenty years experience, you've got a good chance to make it.... You'll never know, 'less you try. We'll be rootin' for ya'.

**Back Country First Aid**  
**By Daniel A. Harper, MD**  
**Wilderness Medicine Certified**

Wilderness medicine is defined as dealing with medical problems two miles or more from the nearest trailhead. The distance from the road and trained medical professionals emphasizes the importance of prevention and preparation for medical emergencies, the lack of which can cause unnecessary problems. For example, plan on doing stock training at home, not on the trail. Wear a helmet. Make sure your saddle and tack are in serviceable condition. Know the abilities of your stock and the stock others in your group are using.

**Preparation**

Travel with a first aid kit. Know what it contains and how to use it. Look for the “just the right size” kit. Many common items can be considered a part of your first aid kit. A folding saw can be used to help make a split for fractures. A foam sleeping pad can be used to make a neck collar or for padding for a split. It can also be used for protection from loss of heat on the ground. A multi tool with pliers can be used to remove fish hooks and ticks as well as using the scissors to cut bandages. A tee shirt can be cut to make a bandage or a pressure wrap. A sanitary pad can be used over a bleeding wound. Take a communication device such as a cell phone, satellite phone or an emergency communication tool such as a “Spot” or “Garmin InReach”. Realize that electronic communication devices do not always work in the back country due to a multitude of reasons.

**The First Aid Kit**

At least one person on the ride needs first aid supplies and the knowledge of how to use them. The kit, commercially available or individually assembled, should include the following objects:

- A pair of medical gloves
- Several packages of 4x4 gauze pads
- A three inch elastic wrap
- A small roll of duct tape and adhesive tape
- An assortment of band aids
- A large 50 gallon strong plastic bag
- Moles skin or a blister kit
- A small reflective blanket
- A 10 or 20 cc plastic syringe for irrigation
- The compact triangular sling for shoulder and arm injuries
- A small pocket sized first aid manual

Several common over the counter medications can easily be included:

- Hydrocortisone 1% ointment
- Benadryl 25 mg tablets
- Aspirin 325 mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 200 mg tablets
- An antibiotic ointment such as Bacitracin or triple antibiotic ointment
- Loperamide 2 milligram tablets
- Ranitidine 150 mg tablets

Some prescription medications may be needed. Consider the following prescription medications.

- Asthma inhaler medications
- “Epi Pen” epinephrine injector for anaphylaxis
- Mupericin ointment to replace the over the counter antibiotic ointment
- Diabetic medications including a source of sugar for treatment of low blood sugar

Commercial kits often include unnecessary items such as scissors and tweezers. Instead the multi function tool with scissors can be used. There’s no need to carry liquid such as disinfectants or alcohol pads. Clean tap or filtered water and soap

works just fine to clean and irrigate wounds. Each kit should be individualized to include medications and instruments reflecting the experience and training of the provider.

### **Responding to an accident**

Always assure the safety of the helper. Take time to size up the situation. Evaluate the mechanism of the injury. A hit on the head with loss of consciousness, significant blood loss, or a horse kick in the abdomen or chest are among the types of serious injuries which will require prompt evacuation. A serious head injury may be associated with a neck or back injury. The victim should be moved accordingly with the immobilization of the cervical spine. Do not waste time trying to improvise a stretcher; do contact emergency medical service providers. Provide your name, location and describe the type of injury. Follow instructions on care for the victim and arrangements for transport.

For active bleeding use the gauze pads or tee shirt if needed and direct pressure. Hold the dressing over the wound using as much pressure as needed until the bleeding subsides. The elastic wrap can be used to continue compression. In a non-military setting, a tourniquet is almost never needed.

An open fracture should be dressed as carefully as possible, a splint applied and arrangements for transport made. Hip dislocation and pelvic bone damage require emergency evacuation.

In general the victim's comfort should determine how he is positioned. Elevation of the head and chest can help with labored breathing. Lifting the chin may help keep the airway open. Keep the person as warm as possible, ideally using a foam mat or saddle pad to provide insulation from the ground. The garbage bag can be used as a poncho or used in the construction of a cover to help keep the person warm and dry. Avoid unnecessarily moving the victim and always consider the possibility of neck injury requiring immobilization prior to movement. The person can be encouraged to drink water,

warm tea or broth to help maintain blood volume. Victims of a lightning strike or drowning may respond to cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The first aid response should be methodical and the initial focus should be on the airway, breathing, and bleeding. Refer to the pocket first aid manual for insight on how to proceed. Use good judgment and be reassuring.

Abrasions should be cleaned with soap and water prior to applying antibiotic ointment. Deeper wounds should be irrigated well using a syringe and clean water. The role of band-aids and mole skin for blisters are obvious. For a draining blister antibiotic ointment should be used. Using duct tape and scissors an effective butterfly bandage can be made and used to close a wound.

### **Using medications**

Before using any medication always secure permission and inquire about allergies and previous use of medicine.

Benadryl: 1 to 2 tablets can be given for allergy treatment but may cause drowsiness. It can be repeated in 6 hours.

Aspirin can be used for pain if no bleeding is involved. A single tablet should be given immediately for chest pain and suspected heart attack.

Antibiotic ointment is helpful for small cuts and abrasions.

Loperamide: a 2 milligram tablet can be given every 6 hours for treatment of diarrhea.

Ranitidine: can be given twice daily to help reduce acid related abdominal pain.

Hydrocortisone can be used to reduce itching and inflammation. It is also a good lubricating agent.

In summary back country horsemen have a responsibility to attain basic first aid/ CPR education and to have a first aid kit appropriate for the length of the trip and the size of the group. A "large and comprehensive medical kit" left at home because it's too big and heavy will not be of any value. Try to achieve a right-sized medical kit that will always be included. Life is not fair and accidents and injuries can occur to anyone. By focus-

ing on prevention and preparation the need for an emergency response can be reduced. When an incident occurs effective first aid will ameliorate suffering and improve outcome.

Daniel A. Harper, MD  
Wilderness Medicine Certified



## Summation

Basically we are environmentalists as well as horsemen and we cannot allow our resources to suffer the consequences of benign neglect, either by the administrating agency or an un-informed public. Our desire to reduce adverse impact while continuing maximum enjoyment leaves no room for either apathy or indifference. The Back Country Horsemen was organized as a service group to our roadless areas. To date we have constructed end of the road facilities for fellow horsemen and have cleared a trail for the exclusive use of hikers to help solve traffic problems between different recreational use groups. Additional projects we have scheduled include camp cleanup, out-moded wire roll-up, trail clearing and reconstruction.

The Back Country Horsemen started in the Flathead Valley of Montana in 1973. From here it has spread to 34 states with 174 local chapters as of 2018. We continue to be a service group focused on keeping stock use a viable option on back country, roadless, public lands. We work with land managers doing projects from packing supplies for back country trail work and resupplying US Forest Service cabins to clearing and re-building trails so stock has access to the back country. We also strive to educate the public, as well as stock users, in Light on the Land stock techniques so we can continue to use stock in the back country in perpetuity.

This guidebook in itself is a major effort to help reduce adverse impact and to bring a better understanding between different use groups. An awareness of the problems and practical solutions to a majority of them will reduce damage on a back country trip. The basis for a better understanding between different user 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 obligations to the environment and uses the abilities at his command to protect it.

There have been more than five hundred hours spent in writing this guidebook and we hope it will be judged solely on



intent and content. Repetitions will be found throughout its pages and this was intentional because of the importance of the message.

The guidebook was printed in this size for a particular reason -it will fit in your shirt pocket and is meant to be taken with you. It would be impractical for one person to interview a cross section of experts that have provided the methods and information contained herein. We have the expertise among our membership and were able to hobble a few of them long enough to get it down on paper. The financing of the printing was a different matter. For maximum effectiveness, we felt the booklet should be free, and our treasury is small.

Horse owner 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 organization and have members ranging in age from youngsters to ?.

If you would like to join us, our meeting times and dates can be found on the BCHMT.org and BCHA.org websites.

We hope that your next trip into "God's 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, they can be relived countless times.

### **Back Country Horsemen**











## Notes:





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Back Country Horsemen of Montana  
2130 9th Street West #109  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912  
[www.bchmt.org](http://www.bchmt.org)