

Blue Creek Outfitting



Trail Riding

Packing & Training

BLUE CREEK OUTFITTING'S

COMPLETE

TRAIL RIDING,

PACKING AND TRAINING

MANUAL

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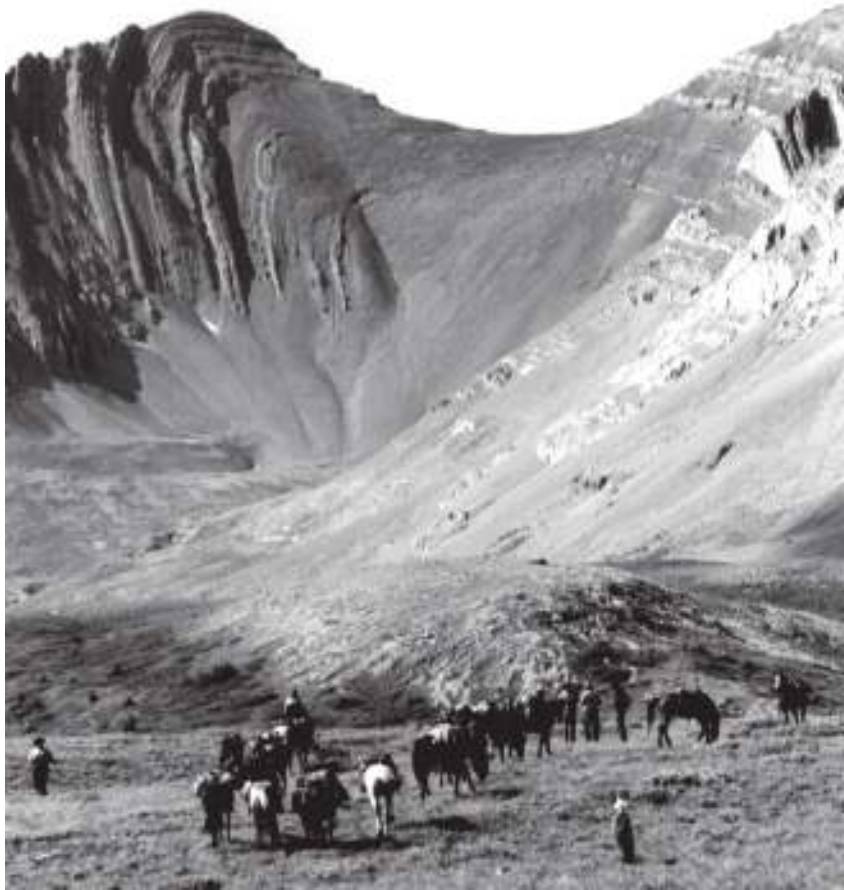
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FORWARD



A PERFECT PICTURE

Here is a picture of a happy a trail rider - a day in Gods country with horses that are well behaved, well packed, and moving efficiently and safely.

This book is dedicated to this picture - a guide to help create fulfilled trail riders, packers, trainers, and wilderness travelers. It is a book for all horse people, a recipe book full of step by step ingredients - the knowledge and techniques needed for horse travel.

Several books have been written that are full of good information on packing. They often focus on equipment choices, knots and hitches - but there are more important issues that we need to focus on if we expect happy days on the trail. Our choice of

horses, training and handling methods, and the procedures we follow while on the trail, are far more important than the saddle types we use or the hitch that we throw.

We believe this to be the most complete manual of its type ever written. Whether you are a backyard trail rider, trainer, or an aspiring wilderness traveler, we believe this guide will prove very valuable. We hope you enjoy using it and that it proves useful. If you have questions or helpful ideas, please write or phone:

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USING THIS MANUAL

You do not need to read this entire book to find it beneficial. It is designed with clear headings and subheadings so that it may be handy as a reference book - just pull out tid bits as you need them.

The entire book does not need to be memorized before enjoying a trail ride or a self made pack trip. You have choices of hitches, equipment, etc. Enjoy!

CONSIDER THIS

Our one week program will provide the hands on practice and confidence you need - as well as an opportunity to ride the mountains and have fun with other horse enthusiasts. Call us for more information (information at the back).



THE RIGHT HORSE



Choosing the right horse or mule is a great place to start. The alternative -choosing the wrong horse - can provide mountains of grief. You may have heard the saying “There are no problem horses, just problem people.” Like most generalizations, this statement is partly true and partly false. Horses, like people, are not created equal. They are given a blue print to work with - a genetic gift from sire and dam called DNA. The blue print varies greatly so likewise, the confirmation, minds, and behavior of the

horses vary.

Training plays a major role in the behavior of the mature horse but choosing the wrong horse for the trail is a costly mistake - it can sour the hours of enjoyment we expect and worse, the wrong horse may lead to injury or even death. It is our opinion that choosing the wrong horse leads to difficulty on the trail more than any other single reason. A poor choice is like shooting yourself in the foot and later wondering why your foot hurts.

THE HORSES MIND

Genetics

Like humans, the minds of horses are not created equal. For thousands of years breeders have bred for temperament and intelligence as well as conformation. To believe that the horses behavior is only created through experience and not genetics is ridiculous. Behavioral traits including intelligence, stubbornness, trust, sensitivity, patience and fear, are all traits that can be passed from mother to foal. The genetic blueprints can, of course, be effected in various ways by experience. The job of the trainer is to provide an appropriate stimulus to encourage a desired, habitual response. A calm and forgiving horse by nature makes training enjoyable and provides for years of safe use.

Calm And Steady

In our herd of twenty-four trail riding and pack horses we have several breeds including Morgan, Quarter horse, Fjord, Percheron, and Belgium. Most of these horses are crosses. There are steady calm minds in all breeds but you will find that the working breeds, including mules, generally show a calm nature.

We need race horses, cutting horses, and jumpers to have speed and energy. We need our trail horses to be calm. Unless you welcome trouble, and some people do, a calm mind is essential. Here are some situations that can and often do arise - situations where a calm mind will bring you through safely and an erratic mind can create difficulty and injury.



This rider is halfway through a one week, one hundred mile pack trip. She is able to thoroughly enjoy her trip in part because the scenery, weather, and company is great - but mostly because her horse is a calm and steady trail companion.

1. You drop something, a glove or hat, and you have to get off and retrieve it.
2. You are opening a noisy lunch, map, or rain slicker, on the back of your horse.
3. A grouse flies up, a dog jumps out, or a biker or a bear suddenly appears.
4. A lead rope gets jammed under your horses tail.
5. A wasp bites your horse.
6. Your horse steps on a beer can left by previous riders.
7. One of the above occurs to a loose pack horse and he crashes up the line like a pin ball.
8. A strap or cinch breaks, or a load slips, and the saddle is suddenly under the horses belly.
9. A vehicle rounds the corner.
10. The list continues...

Fear And Memory

Fear is a necessary component for survival in the horse psyche. It is interesting that new born foals as well as adults show varying degrees of fear. As we familiarize, desensitize, and use our horses, we become objects of trust and reliability. As the horses mind becomes comfortable with our presence, and respectful, it loses fear and allows for the training process. It is that time before familiarity, when a horse's mind is full of the instinctual fear for survival, that we need to be careful of imprinting the wrong behavior in our trail horses. It is a matter of survival through the centuries that a dozen good experiences with you as a friend, may not erase the memory of one bad experience.

As we noted earlier, the degree of fear

and the impression from a negative experience varies with individual horses. The best trail horses are forgiving by nature. These horses are less traumatized by negative experiences and easier to retrain or problem solve once they have had bad experiences.

Here are situations we need to treat carefully in order to avoid giving the horse bad habits that it may keep for life.

1. If the horse has had little or no handling and is fresh off of the field, allow it a couple of days in a corral with friendly human and yard activity. Feeding treats during this initial contact is acceptable.

2. Do not chase the horse around with a rope, trying to lasso it. The last thing you want is what you have just created - a fear of the rope and running away as a successful means of escape and a release from your presence. You want the horse to respect the rope and the fact that the rope has complete control. Use a squeeze, a gate turned back, another quiet horse, or the foal's mother, as a confining factor that allows you to slip a rope or halter around its head or neck. See the section on training horses.

3. Sometimes it is necessary to haze horses through gates, into corrals, etc. but try to minimize or eliminate chasing horses. Develop a familiar, friendly relationship, even in an open field, before you haze horses.

4. Never abruptly and aggressively yank on halters and bridles, especially with young horses. This can make a horse head shy quicker than a snake in a vaseline jar.

5. When you want to desensitize a horse to noisy objects; tarps, ropes, etc. start slow. Progress by rubbing your hand first, then a towel, a soft rope, a garbage bag, etc. Use days to work up to the noisy objects, not



Early in a trail horses training we need to avoid creating fearful circumstances, including being chased with a rope. Using a squeeze is a good way to slip on a rope or halter for the first time.

minutes.

6. Approach young, afraid, or nervous horses to their shoulder first. Do not begin your relationship by sticking your hand out to its face or ears - the most vulnerable part of its body.

7. Train the young horse to give its feet properly, do not struggle with feet or use ropes to tie up feet during its first lessons.

Age And Use

How much a horse's mind changes with age is a matter of debate among horse people. Horse enthusiasts often echo that a horse is not mature, sensible, or worth its salt until five, six, or seven years old. Some maintain that a horse should not begin training at all until it is five years old.

A concern for trail riders is that we allow for poor behavior and justify serious faults by arguing that the horse will change and improve with age. As a rule, more use is more valuable than more age, and the inherent mind affects behavior more than both. A three year old that is calm, friendly, and agreeable will probably be a joy to work with at three, seven and seventeen. A seven year old that has nervous energy and startles easily will benefit from training and use, but will likely show these tendencies at three, seven, and seventeen.



This solid looking Morgan is a good trail horse who is displaying excessive dominant behavior. A dominant mind set can result in difficulty during training and on the trail. First impressions are important. If the horse is cranky towards our initial contact - its ears are laid back - it is often our last impression as we drive away.

Dominance

A horse that displays dominance nearly always works against the horse owner-rider. Because a horse's life is part of a social fabric and pecking order, the horse's mind and behavior is affected by the status of the horse in the herd. A horse that is in a dominant position has fought for his status and demonstrates his superiority daily. Because the owner/trainer needs the horse's attention and respect - in a sense becoming the dominant or "alpha" horse - it often takes more effort to work with these horses and they often create more problems on the trail.

Although a mare is often the true dominant figure in the herd, geldings assume subordinate dominant status, for example, assuming dominance over other geldings or lesser mares.

Whether at home or on the trail, many people have been caught in between bickering horses and found themselves kicked or hurt. Dominant horses often create the most trouble at feeding time as well. A dominant mind that has not been trained properly often results in stubbornness and control difficulties while on the trail.

Dominant horses are often the most herd bound. Horses that have been foaled in a herd and risen through the ranks to rule the herd, are often the most difficult to take out on rides away from the herd. With training, use, and a determined rider, these horses can become good independent horses, but with another rider and another day, they often continue the battle. Consider avoiding these horses.

Quitters And Loners

Horses are social animals and lasting bonds are created between individuals. These bonds provide the incentive for horses to keep up while on the trail and also to find a comfortable place in line. Generally, a horse's worst nightmare is to be left behind while its buddies head up the trail. Some horses, however, never seem to fit in. They prefer to be left alone and often have a difficult time being in close quarters with others - especially the dominant horses in the group. If a loose packhorse constantly falls behind or heads off in the wrong direction, you could be dealing with a loner or quitter. Of a greater concern is turning out a hobbled horse for the night and knowing that because it is a loner you may not find it with the bunch when they are wrangled in the morning.

Sometimes older horses get tired of the bunch and prefer to be alone. Sometimes it takes a new horse a year to feel like it belongs to a group. Often it is a relief to sell a horse when you worry daily if you are going to find him with the group or not - or find him at all!

Stress

Trail riding, especially longer journeys, provides varying degrees of mental as well as physical stress. Long hours in a stock trailer, feeding irregularly, long hours of work under loads, the abrupt change of environment from farm field to strange country, all contrib-

utes to mental stress and often prompt a change of behavior in a horse.

Some horses have a common sense, a calmness about them, and they accept and adapt to changes very well. Other horses seem to be missing a "ground level" when dealing with stressful circumstances and it manifests itself in these behaviors:

1. At the end of a long day on the trail the horses should be resting and eating - building energy reserves for the coming days. Instead some horses feel "insulted" by their situation and sulk, or act agitated and goofy, using energy unnecessarily.

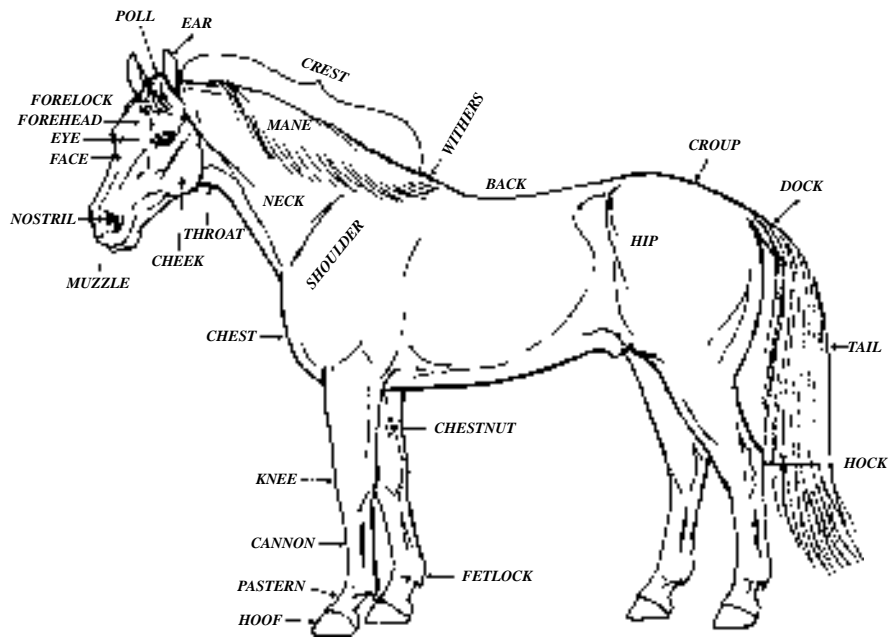
2. After a few days of hard travel the stress makes the horse cranky towards other horses and people.

3. The horse begins to look for ways out of the situation and balks at trail obstacles like water or debris that it would normally cross, and when hobbled, looks immediately to head out of the country - usually the way it came. The sensible choice would be to rest and eat but the irrational horse under stress looks to go on a long walk immediately after travelling twenty miles.

4. Weight loss from the above.

Many horses experience these behaviors temporarily and become trail wise after a few days, but if a horse continues with these mannerisms and does not retain body weight or calm behavior we usually sell the horse. Most calm, sensible horses adapt to long days on the trail very well.

CONFORMATION



CONFORMATION

The perfect mind and the perfect body are ideals we strive for - not reality. Our favorite horses will likely have some quirks and body parts that are less than ideal. However, we know that the closer we come to sensible ideals the fewer problems we have on the trail, or at home.

It makes perfect sense that experienced riders should disagree when discussing ideals for trail and pack

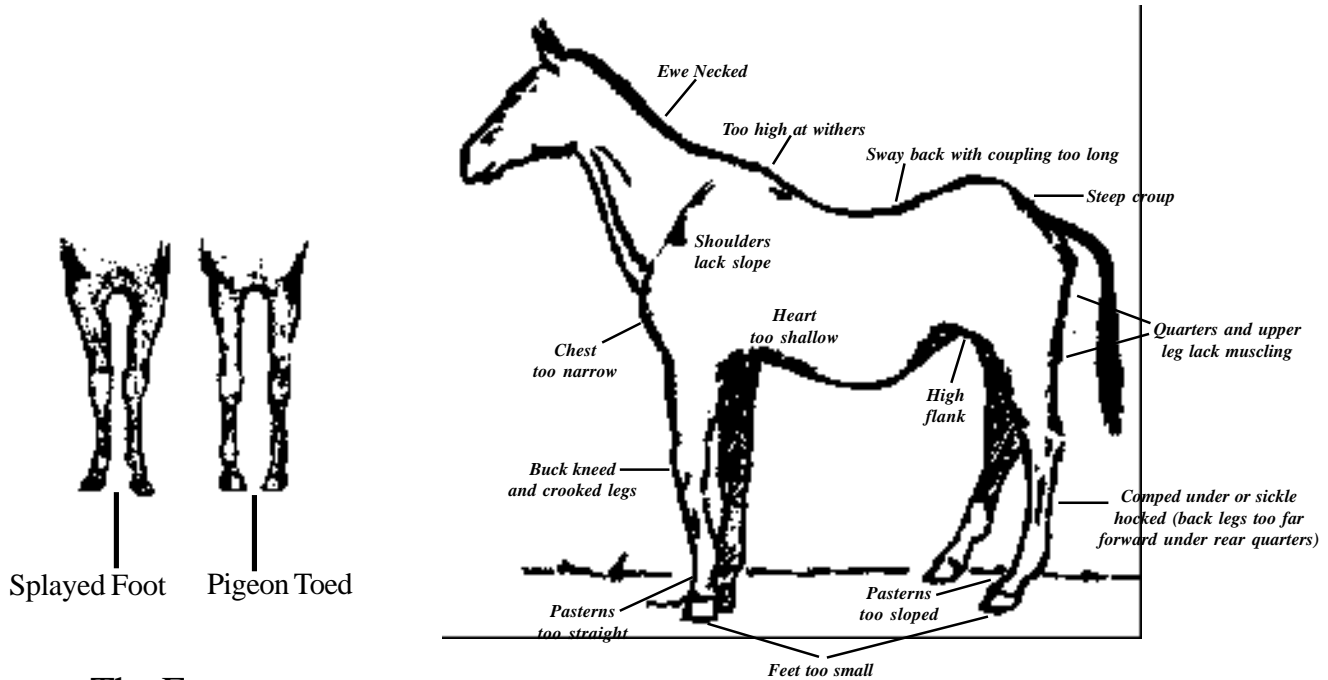
horses. The ideal horse or mule for an endurance trail ride in New Mexico would be quite different than the ideal outfitters horse in an Alaskan moose swamp.

If you love your horse - but you can see by looking at him through the window that his body type falls short of the ideals in this book, keep in mind that recreational use and a yearly one week pack trip will not require the standards an outfitter may require for two months of punishing mountain use.



This trail horse demonstrates many good conformation qualities including good bone, a good sized foot, good but not excessive musculing on the upper leg and quarters, solid coupling, good withers, and a great mind.

Poor Trail Horse Conformation



The Foot

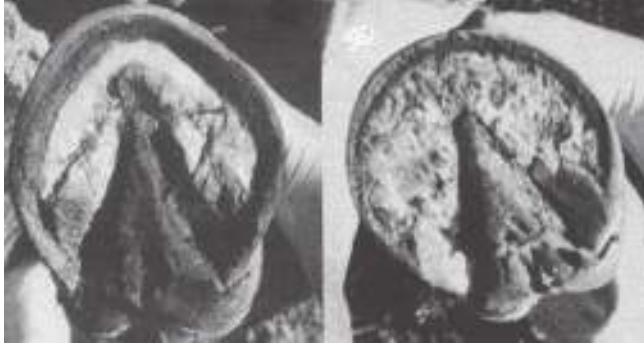
People involved in the horse performance world are well versed in medical terminology - especially problems associated with the foot and leg. Founder, navicular, dropped sole, splaying, bowed tendon, shin splint - are a few conditions that horse people are well versed in - and they should be! Horses feet have been bred out of many horses. When you breed for movement, conformation, color, etc. the foot may not receive top billing - no question.

In a trail horse a good foot is imperative. Small feet, thin soles, thin walls, cracked walls, ripple splayed walls, soft walls and inadequate shoeing job all contribute to problems on the trail. Feet will make or break your journey. Consider this.

1. Do not cover up a faulty foot with excuses or possible salves and remedies. Buy a horse with good feet. You can get by with less than durable feet for pleasure riding or performance, but rugged trail and hours of rock pounding, mud sucking use demands tough durable feet. Would you climb a mountain wearing high heels?



Although this hoof has a crack running from the coronet band down to the sole, it is still a great foot with a good thick wall. Unless the coronet wall is damaged, shoeing this foot will help the crack grow out. See page 214.



Note that between these two untrimmed hoofs, the hoof wall on the left is thicker and therefore, most often, more durable. You really need to compare trail horses to understand their conformation faults and strengths.

2. Good size feet are generally more durable than smaller feet. We like to see a size one to two shoe on the front foot of a one thousand to one thousand two hundred pound horse.

3. Thick walls are preferable to thinner walls. Black feet are usually more durable than white but not always. How soft or hard and how thin or thick a hoof wall is becomes very important on rugged journeys or extended use - even at home. It is not uncommon for some outfitters using thick walled, hard footed horses to ride trails all season and not even put shoes on the horse. On the other hand horses with soft, thin walled feet have thrown a shoe on a rocky trail and within a few hours the foot is worn down, limping, and the horse retired for the season. Maybe you have to see it to believe it.

4. A big foot does not mean it is a good foot. Beware of a flattened, splayed out wall with a dropped sole. Proper trimming and shoeing can tidy up this foot but you should trim these hooves and check them for separation between the sole and the wall. A concave look to the bottom of the hoof is better than flat.

5. Do not confuse a poor foot with a good foot that has been ignored. Over grown, chipped and cracked feet may be brought back to life. However, ignored feet may be more subject to founder, separated wall, etc. Cracked feet need attention. Feet that are cracked the entire length of the hoof wall need shoes to allow the wall to grow out sound. Proper feed, vitamins and minerals reduce cracks. It has been shown that specific nutrients, notably biotin, calcium, zinc and amino acids improve hoof conditions. Noticeable improvement may occur within a few months of increased nutrient intake.

6. Be sure to compare back feet. Many horses have adequate front feet but very small back feet. The working breeds - cold blooded horses, tend to have good size back feet.

7. A slightly burred tendon, old shin splint or slight founder is probably no reason to throw away a good horse. Save yourself the trouble and buy a great foot.

Bone

Outfitters from the RioGrande to the Yukon can tell you about good bone. Good bone means heavier bone rather than lighter bone. Some feel that an angular or flat look to leg bone is better than a round look. The more stress and use you place on a horse's legs and feet, the more chance of leg and foot problems. Carrying a load with larger bone is like carrying a load with a bigger truck - there is simply more there to take the load. Tendons and joints are also bigger and tougher.

There are times when we tend to overload a trail or pack horse, even for a short ride. Hefty wither bone, rib bone, and hip bone make this temporary "abuse" safer for the horse. Hefty boned trail horses and

mules usually maintain their weight better for longer periods than lighter boned horses.

When assessing the bone on a horse, go beyond looking at how big the front foot, ankle and knee appear. Look at the circumference of the cannon bone (the narrow section between the ankle and foot) and also the size of the back foot. We could say that the cannon needs to be an eight inch circumference but you need to compare horses to each other, or several, to appreciate good sized bone. The pasterns should be shorter, stout, and a moderate slope.

Under similar working conditions you will experience less occurrence of shin splints, ring bone, sprains, tendonitis, navicular, and other problems with heavier boned horses and mules.



Pay attention to the back feet as well as the front as many back feet are excessively small and thin walled. This horse displays great bone and solid back feet.

Coupling

Shorter coupling on a horse (the distance between its front and back legs) can be an advantage. These horses are generally easy keepers - they require less feed to maintain body weight. They appear to handle rugged terrain better, especially on soft, boggy ground. Shorter horses may also be able to handle more weight - relatively speaking. It is generally believed that shorter horses are rougher to ride but you may be surprised by the smooth ride that a chunky, short backed Fjord horse can offer.

It has been said that a load on a shorter backed horse is more likely to sore the kidneys but it is unlikely that a saddle sitting in the proper position will sore kidneys. A longer backed horse is more likely to stress vertebrae and develop sway back.

Withers

The withers on a trail or pack horse should be well defined but not too high or too narrow. Because we often choose horses that are well boned, well muscled, and shorter backed, we need to be careful that they are not mutton withered and flat backed.

The wither stabilizes the bars on the saddle and therefore secures the load. With no wither, the saddle rolls side to side, increasing the chance of sores and creating a packhorse that may require constant attention to re-pack a slipped load. Some horses seem gifted at keeping the load square, even horses that do not have adequate withers.

Not all riding saddles will fit a flat backed horse, so be careful to match the saddle to the horse. Modern saw buck pack saddles with hinged or adjustable bars appear to improve the fit on a low withered horse.

There have been many horses that head into a journey with no withers and two weeks later emerge with surprisingly good withers - these horses were just too fat. If you have a choice of riding or packing an animal like this, place a lighter rider on this horse for the first several days, or permanently. Live weight moves with the horse and there will be less chance of sores and rubs if you ride rather than pack loads on a flat backed, low withered horse.

Muscle

Although your horse should be well muscled, and have enough muscle to match the bone, avoid the large, round, bunchy, muscle as found on some athletic type horses - especially when twelve hundred pounds of muscle is accompanied by a small, double-ought size front horse shoe. This type of a build generally does not have adequate bone for the weight and lacks the “hard muscle” type of endurance for long difficult days.

There are many mules, morgans, arabians and other breeds out on the trails that appear to be shy on big muscles but can go all day and look for more when you get there. When given a choice however, you may want some cold blood mixed in. Well muscled horses often keep their weight better for longer periods, and they tend to have better muscle on the upper leg, which helps when slugging through water, mud and bog.

Chest

A trail horse benefits from a deep, well sprung chest. A good set of lungs helps the oxygen flow. It is debateable whether or not a wider chest is an asset, however we feel that a horse with a solid looking chest has more drive in tough going.



This Fjord pack horse may not be a prize to look at but she has the short coupling and prominent belly we prefer when we pack with the rear cinch back behind the low point of the barrel.

Size

The size or height of your trail riding or pack horse is mostly personal. People are of many shapes and sizes and choose horses to suit. Consider this.

1. Loaded on your riding horse will be you, a sturdy saddle, and possibles (slicker, warm coat, gloves, toque, spotting scope, binoculars, lunch, munchies, axe, firearm, bear spray, etc.). You need enough horse to pack the weight.

2. You will be crossing water, stepping over logs, debris, and up washouts and small banks. You may be crossing deeper water.

3. You will be lifting loads up to the top of your pack horses backs several times daily, and throwing and trying hitches over the top pack. Too tall may be an inconvenience.

Over the years we have increased the size of our saddle horses. Most are around fifteen hands. We always keep some smaller and some larger to match the riders.

We appreciate a packhorse that is sturdy, tough as nails, big boned, and not too tall - 14.1 hands to 15.1 hands. As a packer gains more experience, or uses a hitch that does not require tying off on top, or needs to haul a one ton moose out of the bush, a 16 - 17 hand work horse type gains favour.

Flex In The Pole

When you end up with a stout, short coupled horse, you often end up with a short, stout, neck. Flex in the pole is very important for a performance horse that needs to be “catty” and turn on a dime. Although you might appreciate this feature on your horse, there are very few instances on the trail where a long neck and a fine poll are needed.

Do not equate this with power steering versus standard steering. Some of the softest, easiest to control horses we have are short necked horses. They are trained properly to respond to soft pressures. What you lose with a short neck is the distance of flex and some quickness of flex. These are not overly important factors while on the trail.

A situation where you may appreciate flex in the pole is when you dead end your horse against a drop off or dead fall and need to turn your horse in very confined quarters, but these instances do not occur often enough to worry about flex in the neck.

Belly

Horse tummies vary from the straight taper of a race horse to the bulk of a pot belly pig. The size of the belly can be a concern to packers. If you pack with a traditional saw buck or decker saddle, and you use breeching and two cinches straight down below the rings, you may find a large bellied horse or mule pushes the rear cinch forward to meet or overlap the front cinch. This may place added pressure on the horses rib cage and may inhibit breathing. It may also make the cinches somewhat less effective holding the load.

If you pack with the “North Country” method described in this book you need a sizable belly to keep the back cinch behind the belly - which, in a sense, acts as breeching. Because we often use pack saddles with the rear cinch tight behind the gut, our pack horses need good sized bellies.

BUYING THE RIGHT HORSE / MULE

To Own Or Not To Own

Maybe we should ignore the reasons not to own a horse. If everyone knew what they were in for then no one would buy a horse, right? Ok. Maybe that is a little harsh. Horses are a paradox.... there is nothing better for the inside of a man (woman) than the outside of a horse.... however.... there is nothing more frustrating for both the inside and outside of a man or woman than a difficult, disobedient, or dangerous horse.

The value of our relationship with our equine partners rests on our involvement and the direction we provide. This direction is founded on our knowledge, ability, a suitable environment, and the conviction to see things through. As you prepare to become a horse owner assess your strengths and weaknesses and adapt and improve where and when needed.

1. Endear yourself to the reality of horse ownership rather than the romance. The reality includes hours of time over weeks, months, and years, from your already busy schedule. Consider money honestly; the horse purchase, tack, feed and board, medical, foot care, transportation, and more. How about an adequate environment for

your horse? Is there enough room, proper feed and water, access to your horse, good fencing? How will other horses and other people affect your relationship with your horse? Are there trouble free trails readily available to ride?

2. The friendship bond that we seek with our equine partners is often a driving force in our desire to own a horse. It is often a harsh and painful awakening when we discover that the horse is very willing to abuse us - and in a variety of ways. Hands on affection and the riding experience can move our soul and make our spirits soar, but a horse is not a dog. A horse does not show the overt affection or appreciation that a dog does. Unlike a dog, a horse is very big and self minded.

The horse-human relationship cannot survive on an ideal of friendship, it survives on very real respect, respect that manifests itself in the horses behavior toward the human. Respect requires a firmness and fortitude that is out of character for many sensitive horse owners.

It is easy to get "turned off" by horses that have little desire to return the friendship that was the reason we bought the horse for in the first place. There is sound logic in buying a horse that is proven to be quiet, calm, gentle, friendly, and responsive. That may be a tall order but your entire future with horses can hinge on it.

3. Successful, long term horse owners are nearly always pro-active personalities. They

really enjoy the hands on aspect of working with animals. They understand that the relationship is a constant series of applied physical pressures to the animal and desired responses from the animal. Their minds constantly wrap around a difficulty as a challenge with a required action and solution. They know that techniques can be good or bad, depending how they are used, and accept responsibility for their own actions. Through all of the ups and downs patience is not a virtue, it is a requirement, and anger needs to be retired, put in a cup and placed on the shelf - completely out of mind.

4. There are many opportunities available to ride horses without buying one. There are even stables with shared ownership horses. Sometimes these horses are leased out to help pay for costs. Many horses stand idle in fields and owners would welcome responsible horse riders. At the Blue Creek Farm we specialize in providing self-made back country pack trips - you use our horses. One of the above situations may be valuable prior to buying your own horse.



You do not need to own a horse or an outfit to enjoy an afternoon trail ride or a back country pack trip. This rider has spent one week on the trail enjoying Blue Creek horses.



Buying the right horse is the key to your successful future on the trail. Let the horse earn a spot in your heart rather than looking at the horse and saying 'I love it and I want it'.

It only takes a few minutes to follow the basic steps given prior to buying a horse. Asking the right questions over the phone can prevent many wasted miles of driving.



Buying The Horse

So, now you have some equine wisdom, a healthy mind set, and the means to buy, keep, and care for horses. Let's approach that horse.

1. Before looking at the horse ask the present owner some point blank questions. No matter what the answer, pursue it with more direct questions until you get an accurate sense of what they thought of the horse. For example, "Our daughter out grew the horse and we have too many" - your response - "When was the last time she rode the horse; how often did she ride, where did she ride? etc." Ask specifically about the performance of the horse. Is it afraid of vehicles, water crossings, hard to catch, did it ever buck anyone off?"

You will get a sense of whether the person is withholding information.

2. Tell the seller directly that you will be using the horse for long rides and ask them if the horse is completely sound - if there are any problems that may show up with hard use.

3. If you are talking over the phone, question the present owner about the weight, condition, coupling, withers, size of bone and feet. Be specific about foot size - you are hoping for at least a size one horse shoe on a 1200 pound horse.

4. At first sight the horse should look right (see the information on conformation). Pay particular attention to the feet - do not accept substandard feet!

5. With most horses, we do not get past this point. You need to be prepared to walk away before you get there.

6. Even if the horse is green - only halter broke, you should be able to approach it cautiously. If the horse is extremely tense, pulls, rears, or threatens you in any way, shop elsewhere.

7. Always approach the shoulder for first hand contact - it is the least threatened area.

8. In the next five minutes give the horse a mini training check. Any friendly horse with only a few days training will respond favorably in these areas:

a. Gently rub your hand over the horses back, neck, chest, and belly. See how sensitive he is in the ear, cinch and groin area. Do not force the issue if the horse is being very afraid or difficult. Be careful you do not get kicked when you check the groin area. Some discomfort and “complaining” in the sensitive areas is okay, serious refusal and aggression is not okay. A horse that has been brushed and groomed a modest amount should stand calmly for this procedure.

b. Beginning at the top of the front leg, gently rub downwards to see if the horse accepts your touch in this area. Being able to handle the legs is important. Do not worry about picking up the feet yet, unless the horse is very agreeable. See Chapter 6 - Training to Trim or Shoe. If the horse is very touchy with his legs do not continue with your hands, particularly on the back legs. To be on the safe side “tickle” the horses leg and foot with the soft end of the whip. The horse will pull his foot away, but as you continue he should begin to stand calmly. Reward the horse when it begins to accept the “tickling” by quitting. If the horse is aggressive, jumps, rears, or kicks with this procedure, you are better off to shop elsewhere.

c. If the horse is very friendly we usually rub under the tail where it joins the body, and slightly pull the tail in different directions. To be on the safe side do this after you know the horse is completely calm and better yet, do it with a rope from the neck, through the legs and gently into the groin - tail area (see Chapter 6 - Training to Trim or Shoe.). It is a real plus if the horse is calm when handled in this sensitive area. If this sounds like a scary procedure, think of how scary it will be if you buy the horse and get a rope under its tail while riding it. Again, some complaining here is okay, as long as you know the horse will accept this contact with practice.

d. Take the lead rope and go for a little walk. “Cluck” to go and “whoa” to stop. You will get a sense of how respectful and soft this horse is. If the horse is very “pushy” it may be a behavioral trait that is hard to change.

e. Apply simple pressure points with your thumb; back of the ribs “over”; chest “back”, and lateral tugs on the halter in both directions - giving their face and flexing their neck (see training section). Even though these procedures may be new to the horse, you will get a sense of whether or not the horse will be “soft” and agreeable.

f. If the horse does not appear to be respectful or soft enough, but we like the horse, we will ask the owner if we can put the horse on a lunge line or round pen for a short time, and then try again (when practical).

g. If the owner has the horse ready to ride, go through the above steps anyhow - the horse may look good but it may not have the calm training or be the agreeable horse you hope it is.

h. Ask the owner to ride first. If all goes well, take the horse for a ride. If the horse is nervous and afraid, fighting control, or tossing its head, irregardless of age or training, you should shop elsewhere. Be sure to ride the horse away from the corral and barn area. The horse may want to ride back to its home and equine buddies, but you need to see how herd bound and how aggressive the horse truly is.

i. If you plan to pack the horse only, and you have completed the above steps satisfactorily, with the exception of riding, take a rag or your coat and gently rub it over the length of its body, its neck, and gently over its ears and face.

j. Turn the horse loose in a large pen and see how easy it is to catch.

k. Watch how the horse interacts with other horses. If the horse “rules the roost” and is pre-occupied with aggression toward other horses then the horse may be difficult to work with.

The single greatest concern we can express to horse owners is buying the right horse. Countless riders have been injured or killed because they simply owned the wrong horse. You want an enjoyable ride? Buy an enjoyable horse. If a horse is spooky, unfriendly, hard to catch, kicks, is very stubborn, too high spirited, etc., etc. - walk away. You can tell yourself “ I can correct these problems - the horse needs some work - it had a bad experience, etc., etc.” Maybe you can, but maybe you can't. Even with

progress, is it going to be the pleasant horse you want? Why buy trouble? You can find the right horse - just keep looking.

If you have yourself convinced that the horse has to have certain qualities - none of which provide for better horse experience, you will often get what you ask for. Example - It has to be a paint; it has to have these blood lines; look at that pretty head; isn't he cute; look at how he prances; I only have \$800.00, I don't have \$1000.00; I like a horse with spirit; look at the great muscle; he sure turns nice; I'll catch him with grain, in a corner.

**YOU DON'T WANT TROUBLE!
DON'T BUY TROUBLE!** This is a trail ride - not a beauty contest.

The New Horse

Never ride the newly aquired horse as soon as you get home. *First*, establish trust, respect, and your expectations. To do this perform the leading, and/or lunging, and/or round pen exercises. Be sure that the horse is responsive to pressures, soft, and respectful before you ride him. This is very important as a new environment can encourage the experienced riding horse to be different - an attempt to earn dominant status in the 'new herd'.



This pack mare came to us extremely head shy. After one year of gentle attention and good training, she was less likely to struggle when her ears were handled - but she still put up a fuss. All problems are not necessarily curable under given circumstances. You are far better off not buying problems than you are if you expect to cure them.

A Problem Horse

There is a problem with correcting problems. Even if you follow the best problem solving techniques the improvement may be temporary. If we take a problem like hard to catch; hard to halter and bridle; fear of noisy plastic, bucking, etc. and we believe we have completely cured the problem with consistent attention and training (i.e.. round pen work, softening, etc.) - to the point where we feel the horse is cured, it is common for the horse to revert to past problems. Time off from use, an inexperienced or aggressive rider, or stressful circumstances are enough reason for a disagreeable horse to slip into past behavior.

If you are going to buy a horse with problems, with the intent to retrain that horse, at least do it with a calm, friendly horse. Life is too short for dangerous trouble.

Registered or Grade

Whether a horse is registered or grade has little bearing on its qualities as a trail horse. Many believe that crossing breeds provides for a more hardy and calmer horse - especially when crossed with a work horse type. Theoretically, registered horses have a higher resale value, however we regularly see calm grade horses sell for higher dollars than registered stock.

Age

We have had many sound horses over the age of twenty that regularly put in long days on the trail. At the other end of the spectrum we have purchased many calm, friendly three year olds and put them into regular use. A good three year old can be used with reduced loads. If a horse's body is sound and its teeth are good, you need to be more concerned about the behavior of the horse rather than if the horse is five or twelve years old. Young horses do have a higher resale value and if they are a very good horse you can look forward to more years of use. Like old people, old horses are prone to arthritis, tendon and foot problems, and excessively high withers.

The idea of a young person owning, raising and training a young horse is loaded with difficulty. The rule is - the younger the person, the older the horse.

Soundness

1. Check for good teeth. If you lack experience ask someone to do it for you. Give the horse grain and watch for slobbering and grain falling back out of his mouth. Grain falling out may mean the teeth need to be 'floated'.

2. Check the stall or corral area for signs of chewing or cribbing. You really do not want this problem. A good diet and exercise does not always cure this habit.

3. Watch for signs of a limp when the

horse walks. If you think you see a limp when the horse walks, send him into a trot and the limp should be more apparent. Run your hands over knees, ankles, cannons, pasterns, and the coronet band. You are looking for arthritis (calcified bumps), spavin, bone splints, fragments, and old wounds. Check the coronet band for damage and poor hoof wall growth. Obvious rings of growth around the hoof wall (a bumpy appearance) can indicate Founder or previous fevers and sickness. Check the hoof wall for serious cracks and the sole for corns, thrush, and separation. Apply pressure during all of the above to find sore spots. Lift the foot and stretch the legs forward and back (if the horse is willing) to check for sprains and tendonitis. A horse with a painful front foot or leg problem will often 'point' the foot forward. It is not normal to lift up and rest the front foot. If you think you detect a limp at a walk, make the horse trot, the limp should be more noticeable if the horse is trotting on a hard surface. A horse will react if you cause pain by taking its leg back, tossing its head, or wincing in some way (see Chapter 6). Run your hand firmly down the horse's spine to check for a sore back, kidney, etc.

4. Check for cloudy eyes. Cloudy eyes can be a sign of old age, cataracts, moon blindness, or other problems. Pass up these horses.

5. Pass up horses with rheumy, leaky eyes, nose, or saliva dripping from their mouth. Ditto for horses that cough. Some coughs are chronic (heaves). Sometimes a horse with chronic heaves develops a visible, elevated ridge along its stomach from constant coughing.

Male or Female

Most trail riders agree that a good gelding is a good choice for the trail so let us move along to mares and stallions. Never generalize and say 'Mares are good' or 'Mares are bad'. You may have had a good or bad experience with one but like geldings, they can be both good or difficult.

If we look at our top five horses, two are mares. They are completely solid, trustworthy and never show the foolish behavior associated with hormone changes of the 'heat' period. Mares are often the alpha horse that set standards for behavior and attract the company of males. A good, camp friendly mare is a wranglers friend. She keeps the herd close, encourages other horses to be caught and led into camp with no fuss, and sets a smooth tone as a lead horse in a pack string.

On the other hand, a poor mare can create and exaggerate problems. She can lead horses away when it is time to be caught. When a mare bickers and fights there is more unwanted movement and foolish behavior in the herd. Mares that display

their heat period encourage protective and distracting behavior in the geldings and can become very foolish while on the trail. They will sometimes walk off in the wrong direction deliberately or stop and back up to a tree. If a horse has its ears back in an aggressive or unfriendly manner or if a horse is pawing while standing in the horse trailer, adding new dents in the wall, it is more often a mare than a gelding.

Given two equal choices, we would choose a gelding. However, we would not part with our best mares.

Even though our stallions may be very friendly, well behaved, and well trained, we do not take them on extended trail rides. Other riders and other horses often feel uncomfortable around a stallion. Mares and geldings will react to a stallions presence. More than once we have come across a stallion that has lost its owner, and vice versa. A very experienced rider who knows his horses may choose to ride a stallion but most should avoid the experience.



If you don't like mules then likely you have never owned a good one. They are natural born followers, sure-footed, easy keepers and they have tough feet.

Mules or Horses

Over the years we have had two mules in our packstring and both were good animals. There are some differences between mules and horses that should be considered.

Mules are inherently tougher than horses. They live longer, can work longer, have strong backs, and can carry slightly larger loads. They can get by on less feed, as much as 30% less. Mules are built different than a horse because more of their body size is on the front end, over the front legs. Because of this, loads sway less and they tend to be more sure footed. Mules are often calm natured and not as prone to nervous spooky behavior as horses. A mule's mind is never wrapped around a girlfriend or boyfriend.

Mules are 'low maintenance' and get sick or

suffer foot and leg problems less often than horses. Their hoof is more concave which makes it stronger and often thicker walled. Mules are better at placing their feet on difficult trails.

Mules are intelligent but self minded. If a mule does not want to do something - cross a bridge for example - you may have a hard time convincing it otherwise. Mules can be more dangerous - more inclined to bite and kick. Mules require a patient, fair, and firm hand from trainers and packers. Mules often have a serious dislike for dogs and anyone handling their feet. Difficulty in trying to shoe a particular mule may be enough of a reason not to own it. You may find many mules feet too small for the soft bogs of the north country.

A calm, willing, big boned, big footed mule can be a prize for any trail wise packer. They can be surprisingly smooth riding as well. They are often good camp animals and can be found close by in the morning. They stick close to the bell mare. Mules are often more expensive than a horse so you need to consider your pocket book when you look to buy one.



TRAINING



The amount of information available on horse training is truly overwhelming. As we go through a lifetime of reading information, watching videos, attending clinics, and training horses, our muddy visions clear up, our understandings become simplified, and we find confidence in our training ability.

What we find satisfying and mildly surprising is that nearly all good trainers want the same thing, although they may have a different way of saying it and doing it.

Regardless of whether you use a round pen or a lunge line, whether you are training a Lippizaner stallion or a Welsh pony, whether you ultimately want a dressage horse, a rein-

ing horse, or kids pony, all horses need solid foundation training.

All trainers are training to create a horse that respects the trainer and yields to pressures (cues) willingly.

Trail riding and pack horses need genuine respect toward humans. It is paramount that they react decisively to our cues. Trail conditions demand much of our trail horses and we get into too many tight, fearful, confusing, and potentially dangerous situations with our horses to not have a solid foundation or basic training.

The training processes described in the following pages can be used for any horse or mule headed toward any discipline. The specific importance of a method for a trail riding or pack

horse will be clearly explained.

Whether or not you should train your horse(s) is a decision that will be based on many factors including time, personality, experience and available facilities. Even if you never train a horse, this chapter is very valuable to help you understand how your horse thinks and what training your horse should be exposed to. Many horses that people call “experienced” riding horse have poor foundation training.

Safety on the trail is always the

most important consideration for trail riders and packers. Injuries, wrecks, and dangerous events stem partly from trail conditions, poor luck, and poor choices. However, the greatest threat to our safety is using unsuitable horses and the absence of a respectful, controlled, calm working relationship. To write a book that encourages safe trail riding and packing, and to omit a section on training these horses will actually encourage dangerous events.

EARLY TRAINING

The age at which we begin our training may be several minutes after birth (imprinting) or several years after birth. The methods we describe may be used in either case. There are a number of reasons why you will benefit from beginning training with weanlings and yearlings as opposed to mature horses.

Most obvious is that a large horse is more physically imposing and the fact that they know it could put the trainer in danger. Not that you can't get kicked or stepped on by a yearling, it just hurts more from a five year old. Untrained older horses have lived longer without you as the dominant control and may resent your efforts to control them - at least in the beginning.

Horses that have been raised within the social order of a herd often understand respect and dominance, and more readily accept their role as a subordinate. Horses raised as pets without herd influence need early training as weanlings and yearlings in order to establish that humans are "the better horse".

Experienced riders and trainers practice safety as a habit, which includes calming the horse with voice and touch repetitively.

Objectives

Early training needs to establish trust, respect, patience, the trainers freedom to touch and handle the horse at will, and the first appropriate responses from applied pressures. You can put a green horse into the round pen with good results and adopt early training procedures during and after round pen work, but early training with your horse before round pen work, as a weanling or yearling, has these advantages:

1. The horse finds your presence and your handling familiar and less stressful so that its mind can focus on future lessons rather than a fearful environment.
2. You need to put on halters, de-worm, trim hooves, medically treat, and move your weanlings and yearlings from place to place. These procedures are much easier to perform with prior early training.



Safety

Follow this advice while working with horses.

1. Alert your horses with a soothing voice prior to your approach.

2. Approach the horse at the shoulder. Give your horse a gentle rub on the shoulder, withers, lower neck area prior to working with them. Lots of pro-active touch.

3. If horses are exceptionally nervous or spooky, never approach their personal space and demand firm contact. First touch or tickle the horse with the soft end of an extended whip - in this order - back, belly, upper legs. As well as being safer, it helps, to remove the whip as a threatening object. Reward the horse by stopping the tickling momentarily as it calms down.

4. Never wrap ropes, leads or lines around your hands.

5. Never ask too much too fast or force an already confused or afraid horse into pressured circumstances. Know when to back off and continue the training or approach differently.

6. Never strike your horse violently or irrationally. Trainers do give trained horses a 'reality check' when they are acting disrespectful, goofy or aggressive. They will slap the horse with the flat of their hand along the lower neck or shoulder, or 'bump' their knee up into the horse's chest (girth area). Avoid a tug of war with you and a horse at opposite ends of a rope - especially a short rope.

7. Never approach and touch the rear of a horse that has not seen you. Horses are often bickering with peers and startling a horse like this may result in a kick before he realizes that you are a human.

8. When rounding the back end of a reliable horse - as you will for dozens of reasons, the best way is to stay close, maintain hand contact all the way around. We have never seen a horse kick this way, and if they did, you would be shoved away rather than kicked with leverage. If you doubt the horse, circle its backside well beyond kicking distance.

9. Build a touching relationship. A horse that accepts your touching in all areas, prior to riding or training, is a safer horse to ride.



Never walk up to a horse from behind and touch its rear, however, as you walk around a horse, maintain hand contact all the way around and stay close. If the horse is nervous, begin watching the horses ears and body before you get this far. We have never seen one kick this way, and if it did, you would be pushed away rather than kicked at a distance.

Trust

As far as a horse is concerned trust comes from familiarity and accepting you as a non-threatening predator type. If you have imprinted your horse, this trust should already be established.

We do not handle our foals much until they are weaned. Before first contact or exposure to the rope we confine the horse in a yard corral where they can become familiar to people, yard activity and noises from vehicles and tractors. The horses soon look forward to the humans approach because they get a can of grain or some treat. At this time we make an effort to close the gap, ideally letting the horse smell you or be touched. After a few days there should be a good amount of comfort.

Continuing this game of trust to the point where you can rub the horse with a rope, slip a lead around its neck, or a halter on or off is great - but do not expect that the horse will not struggle once it learns that the rope ultimately has it confined.

The real value of trust is that when the horse is experiencing fear and stress or confusion from training, he is more likely to accept and understand what we are after if he is not afraid of us.

Imprinting

The idea of imprinting is to take advantage of a new borns instinct to identify with the closest large moving object as its mother. It instinctively feels this object - you as well as its mother - is good - not to be feared. If the new born accepts you with a trusting hand you can expose it to various stimuli.

Confining and touching the body in various ways and having the horse accept or become less sensitive to the activity is called desensitizing.

Some possible benefits are:

1. Having the foal accept you as the dominant being will reduce the "run away with fear" (flight response) when you catch your horse or use restraints later (ropes, halters, hobbles, etc.)
2. You will be able to handle the foals face, ears, mouth and neck more easily. This will help when de-worming, bridling, medicating, giving needles, grooming and clipping.
3. The horse can accept handling sensitive areas like groin, legs, hooves, and tail area. This can help shoeing horses later, taking rectal temperatures and violent reactions from ropes being stuck under the tail.
4. Desensitizing to scary objects like machines or even firearm noise.

Imprinting needs to be implemented properly or you can create fear and mistrust:

1. Wait until the mare has bonded with the foal, the umbilical cord is broken, the fetal sack removed, and the mare has licked the baby. If you discover the foal standing and feeding, let him finish feeding before you begin.

2. Halter the mare. If she is friendly, allow slack in the lead rope so that she can nuzzle the foal periodically. Otherwise tie her up and proceed close enough where she can observe her foal. Wait until your mare is relatively calm before you begin. If the mare is showing excessive anxiety wait until she settles down. The foal will pick up on the distress.

3. Be sure to finish what you start. The foal must absolutely relax after you apply the stimulus (rubbing). Do not quit until the foal completely accepts your activity.

4. Begin by holding the horse in a cradling fashion. If the horse is standing, hold the horse with one arm across his chest and the other around his butt. If he is laying down, kneel behind his back and hold his forelegs tucked into his chest and another arm cradling the head and neck. It is very important in this first lesson in restraint that you do not quit until the foal is completely relaxed.

5. Gently rub and desensitize these areas well. Do not quit on one area before going to the next. Fifteen minute sessions if the foal is standing and thirty minute sessions if it is laying down are long enough:

- a. Rub the face, head, ears, and nostrils, placing a foal halter on and off repeatedly.
- b. Stroke the inside of the lips and mouth, focusing on the space where a bit would go.
- c. Rub the entire body including neck, belly, groin, anal area, legs and feet. Tap the hooves gently with an object until he accepts it.
- d. Finish with noisy plastic, spray bottles, and the noise of clippers, lawn mowers, firearms, etc.
- e. Repeat the above procedures periodically.
6. Developing a human-horse bond can relieve the stress experienced by the foal when the mother is removed at weaning time.

We have tried it both ways. We have imprinted with some foals and with others we have omitted any handling until weaning time, without forming a definite opinion on which method provides a better foundation. We do not necessarily believe that removing all of the horse's fear early makes a better horse. A little fear or caution can promote a mind set that focuses on the trainer during learning - a respectful learner. Some of the horses that we have least enjoyed training and working with suffer from a lack of respect due to too much friendly handling and little discipline.

If we had the time and the choice, we would choose our horses imprinted then trained early with an understanding that "man is allowed to enter my space but I must be asked into his space."

EARLY TRAINING



Initially the foal will struggle. One arm around the chest and the other around the butt (or holding the tail) will control the foal until it calms down. Remember to do this in the mares presence. Never stop until the foal completely calms down.

Rubbing the body, groin, legs and girth area will help future saddling, cinching, and accepting objects such as ropes.



Desensitizing the ears will help with future bridling and trimming.

Desensitizing the nose and mouth helps with future bridling, worming and bit pressure.



You can be creative. Introducing the foal to clipper noise, spray cans, vacuum cleaners and lawn mowers can help the foal accept brushing, trimming, spray treatment, and vehicles.

WARNING - As you progress beyond the first 48 hours it is not really imprinting, but rather, habituation - getting the horse used to repeated stimuli. You run two risks with the imprint - habituated horse. One is that if he gets loose, he learns that struggling or fleeing is a release from the pressures you apply and your presence. In effect you are creating a hard to

catch and difficult horse. Second is that he becomes so 'friendly' that he loses the fear and flight response needed when you attempt to move the horse forward in training (the round pen or lunge line). These horses can lose respect for humans as a dominant figure and may be difficult to train.

Halter Breaking And Leading

Before halter breaking be sure that the foal has had at least a few days to become comfortable with you and the environment where you will be doing the halter breaking.

We have four objectives while halter breaking.

1. That the horse will submit to the control of the rope completely. The horse must stand quietly with a rope or a halter in place. It must be post broke - never pull back when tied to a post.

2. That the horse will be desensitized. The horse will stand calmly while tied to a post and accept your gentle rubbing over its entire body.

3. That the horse will allow you to walk up to it repeatedly and at intervals without shying away.

4. That the horse will come towards light tugs on the lead rope - Its first lessons in yielding to pressure.

To begin you need to have handy a twenty-five or thirty foot lariat or a rope with a loop that will not bite and choke the horse after it releases pressure. You need to have a secure rubber strap or inner tube attached to a secure post just above the height of the horse's eyes. You need a foal halter, a whip, and some grain or treats handy. You need a squeeze to confine your horse while you slip on the rope or halter. A gate turned back or another calm horse can be used to confine the young horse. Under no circumstances chase the horse around with a lariat trying to catch it. If you are an experienced cowboy and very sure that you can slip the rope over its head with no stress, fine, but you want to avoid building a fear of the rope.

Before you begin you must *read the colt*.

You must decide whether or not the colt will struggle upon placement of the halter or lariat. If the horse has been imprinted or handled well, and is very friendly, then you can proceed to *non-resistant halter breaking*. If you feel that the foal may resist the lariat or halter you must follow *resistant halter breaking*. Avoid placing a halter on a fearful, high energy horse and getting into a tug of war.

Resistant Halter Breaking

The first objective is to have the horse accept the rope or halter around its neck and stand calmly. If you know that the horse has not had handling expect that he will pull back on your twenty-five to thirty foot training rope. Once the horse is in the squeeze, thread the free end of the rope through an inner tube attached to a nearby post before you slip on the halter or lasso. Let the horse out of the squeeze. Once the horse reaches the end of the rope there will be a reaction. Depending on the horse and the amount of handling, the horse will "give" to the pull of the rope and stand calmly, or it will fight.

If there is one time in the entire life of the horse when we do not mind to see a horse struggle with a rope, this is it. A weanling or yearling with a lariat around its neck will generally take only a few minutes of choking struggle to give to the pressure of the rope. We prefer using a lariat as opposed to a halter for this first lesson. The horse will generally stop struggling sooner with a lariat and the horse is more likely to hurt himself struggling in a halter.

It needs to be a life long lesson that the control of the rope is absolute. Your trail or pack horse must *never* pull back on the rope. Pullers are created when a person is struggling at the other end of the rope and the horse gets loose, or, the halter, rope, or post breaks

and the horse gets loose.

If the inner tube is at eye level and you are on the end of the rope to allow some give, there is very little chance of injury. If the horse is older than a weanling you need to wrap the rope twice around the inner tube ring or run your end of the rope twice around a nearby post.

Now we have a horse that has struggled a few times, maybe laid down once or twice, and has learned to step forward to give to the rope as a release from pressure. We need to be able to handle the young horse but we do not want to create excessive fear or injure ourselves by being struck by a struggling horse. The horse has tested the dominance of the rope a few times and now stands relaxed and is breathing normal. This may have taken five minutes or it may have taken a half an hour.

Approach the shoulder of the horse slowly and in a non threatening manner. You may still be holding the free end of the rope but we prefer to give it to someone or tie it off. If the young horse has had no handling he will probably struggle a time or two before letting you touch him. You need to take your time because the horse needs time to think about and accept the confinement. Walk around the horse repeatedly. To be safe, tickle the horse with an extended whip before getting too close. Do not just quit because the horse struggles. Continue until the horse stops struggling. The distance from

the horse to the tie ring should be about ten feet. Not so long that he has room to run to the end of the rope and not so short that he will get hung up if he falls.

Once the horse calms down, leave the horse tied up for about one hour but do not lose sight of him. At various intervals during this hour walk up to the horse and gently rub and soothe him, expecting a little more calmness and rubbing more of the body each time. Reward the horse that calms down as you touch him by leaving him for short periods. Offer grain or treats at this time. Gently rub the horse around the neck and ears before placing another free halter on and off repeatedly. This is enough of a lesson for one session but do not turn the horse loose until it accepts you calmly and does not shy away when you return. Turn the horse loose in a small pen so you can catch the horse and repeat the procedure later in the day and in the few days following. Never turn the horse back out into the pasture after one handling session, or if the horse does not let you catch it easily in the corral. Small amounts of grain is a good way to earn the horses trust and a short two foot dummy lead rope that is left on the horses halter can help you catch him for the first couple of days.

From this point you need to continue with the non-resistance halter breaking- leading.



For first time lasso or halter placement on a horse that cannot be freely approached, haze the horse into a squeeze, gate turned back, or another calm horse (like the foals mother).

Resistant Halter Breaking

Although some prefer to place a halter on the first time, we prefer a lariat, believing the horse will give to the pressure of its choking effect and struggle for a shorter time than with a halter, and ultimately respect the rope as a device of complete control. We believe it is the safe way to go in the long run.



While the horse is still in the squeeze, slip the loose end of the rope through the rubber inner tube or strap (two loops if a larger horse). When the gate is opened the horse may run and struggle to some extent, eventually giving to the pressure in order to catch its breath. This big yearling has had its struggle and is now given time to accept the rope.

Tie the rope off and gently approach the horse from the side. Better to approach the horse with a soothing voice and shoulder-neck rub from the side as the horse may jump forward and injure the trainer if you approach from the front. You need to take time yet be persistent at this stage so that the horse accepts you calmly. Giving treats may help. Once the horse accepts you calmly continue with non-resistant halter breaking.



Non Resistant Halter Breaking



The trainer here is bumping the yearling forward but its legs are braced and it naturally pulls back. This is not an effective way to encourage the horse to lead.

The trainer is now bumping from the side. Because the head and neck are turning from the pressure of the rope, it is natural that the feet will follow.



The horse has now turned towards the trainer, its first successful lesson in giving to pressure. Repeat a few times from either side until the horse is confident in what you are asking and how it responds. Be sure to provide slack in the rope and a rest as a reward after each successful turn.

Eventually you will be able to bump directly towards you and have the horse follow. One step forward is enough in the beginning. The trainer needs to step back as the horse steps forward.



Non Resistant Halter Breaking

2. Non Resistant halter breaking and leading is more friendly, however non resistance work may not provide enough respect for the rope. At some point in a horses life he will pull back. It is safer if restraint halter breaking is complete when the horse is young and it is safer when the young horse learns that the rope is the absolute master. We believe that a horse that completely respects the rope is less likely to be a puller, more likely to stand still while its legs are tangled in a lash rope that has come off, more likely to stand still while tangled in fence wire, and less likely to get tangled while being pegged out to feed. You need to be very careful with non resistance halter breaking that the horse does not learn that the more they pull, the more “give” the rope has, ultimately leading to pulling as a means of escape.

Now you have a horse, preferably a weanling to yearling size, standing calmly at the end of your rope. The horse will learn two lessons now. He will learn that giving or moving towards the “bumping” pressure of the lead rope provides a pleasant release from that pressure, and that light bumping is our way of “asking” the horse to respond. Responding by yielding to pressures is the basis of all training and trail riding. It is continued through future ground work, reining, and while you use horses on the trail.

Stand several feet back from the horse’s nose and hold the rope at about nose level. Move off to one side a few steps, in a direction that allows the horse the freedom to follow in that direction. You need to be off to the side because the horse finds it more difficult to resist your “pull” and is more likely to step toward the pressure. With sideways pressure you are turning the head and neck toward the desired direction first and it is natural that the feet will follow.

Start slowly, with light pressures. Give the horse lots of time to think. You are setting up a situation where the horse decides on his own to move toward pressure - moving only slightly to relax the lead is acceptable at first. If you pull too hard, he will want to pull back. If the horse tenses, throws his head up, or pulls away, ease up and start again. If he backs up to the fence, that is fine, continue from there. With time the horse will step toward your pressure. Reward him by releasing pressure for a minute. Take a step back as you ask the horse to step toward your bumping pressure. He will eventually begin to follow. Expect more with practice. As he turns towards you he will begin to take steps directly towards you. These are his first steps at direct leading. Never get into a tug of war, release and start over. Enough for one day.

Non Resistant Halter Breaking Continued



This horse is following the trainer nicely after each 'bump' on the rope.

The trainer provides about 10 feet of slack in the rope, moves towards the flank of the horse and drives the horse forward with a verbal command. If the horse takes off in a run, let it go around in circles until it calms down. Bump it back in towards you, let it rest, and begin again. If it does not want to move out you need to get behind it, swirl the rope, and give it stronger verbal commands. Tap it if you need to - it must move forward.



The horse is now moving around the trainer in small circles. Stay towards the rear flank of the horse and keep it moving forward.

After a few circles bump it in to face you. Let it rest for a moment then repeat the exercise. Repeat on the opposite side.



Reinforce your actions with 'up' and 'whoa'.



As you continue to practice this exercise shorten your lead until you are moving along side the horse neck and head area. He needs to get comfortable with you in this space.

If the horse has responded well continue with 'The Round Pen' and 'Continued Gound Work.' If not, use the butt rope to enforce your command to move forward.



Once the horse willingly steps toward your bumping pressures he is ready to learn that the trainer has the right to drive the horse forward, move with the horse at its side, and to continue applying and releasing pressure. Let him walk off with no resistance in the lariat. If he takes off in a hurry let him settle down to a calm walk. As he is walking apply a light bumping pressure until he again turns toward you. Repeat this process of moving him forward and bumping him sideways towards you. When the foal responds favorably by turning towards you and standing, release pressure and soothe the foal with your voice and/or light petting.

When the foal balks and does not want to move forward, worry or tap his hind quarters with the end of the rope. He *won't* move forward. Be careful you are not where the horse can strike you with his back feet. When you increase bumping pressure to turn him, and he turns toward you, release the pressure immediately and he will likely stop. Use "Whoa" each time the horse stops and the horse will soon relate the verbal command with stopping.

As you continue the activity of moving the horse forward, shorten the lead rope and move up to the horse's shoulder as you are walking. The horse will at first resent you entering this space. Keep steady pressure on the line until the horse yields towards it and turns to you. Release the pressure and praise him. Repeat the lessons from both sides of the horse.

As you are walking forward with your horse creep along towards the front of the shoulder, neck, head. Now when you say "whoa" release the pressure of the rope and the horse will stop. If it does not stop let it continue to walk around and apply side pressure until it turns towards you and stops. Release pressure. The idea is now to stay as

close to the horse's head as possible and have the horse stop when you do, reinforcing the stopping with whoa. If you experience much difficulty with moving forward and stopping, try a butt rope.

Before placing the butt rope on your horse, gently rub your horse with a small soft cotton rope, paying attention to the hind quarters. By now your horse should be well desensitized. Take a lariat or a twenty to thirty foot, one half inch to three quarter inch rope and make about a three foot diameter loop. Take the straight end and run it forward through the halter. Gently lift and place the rope over the horse's back and hang the loop around the butt so that the back end dips down to just about thigh level. The loop works better if it is fixed - can't tighten.

Stand in front of the horse, facing it, and gently bump the lead rope towards you. If the horse does not respond tug the butt rope. Do it lightly at first and allow the horse the time to think. If the horse does not respond and begins to walk backward, tug on the butt rope again and back up with the horse. If the horse pulls back hard, allow him to back up while maintaining pressure. Soon he will stop backing



Be sure your horse is desensitized to the rope on his back and rear quarters before you begin.



Slip a loop large enough to enclose the rump but not so large that it hangs below the hock. The knot forming the loop should be tied so that the loop cannot become larger. The free end of the rope should go between the halter and the jaw.

With one hand on the lead and one hand on the butt rope, give the 'up' or 'walk' command then lightly bump forward, moving back as you do so. If the horse does not respond, repeat and bump more assertively. It will eventually respond. Standing slightly off to the side is a good idea incase the horse jumps forward. If it does, let it go in circles until it calms down then bump it in using the lead rope.

As you progress, give the verbal command, a light bump on the lead and bump the butt rope only if the horse does not respond. One verbal command and one bump on the lead is all you allow before you bump the butt rope.



Encourage softer bumps (tugs) as you progress. Once the horse responds favourably, increase the distance you walk and slide along side the horses head and neck area. Soon the horse will be responding to the verbal command and light tug on the lead and the butt rope can be removed.

up, probably backing into a fence, and you can continue asking him to step forward, tugging more firmly if needed. If the horse runs by you, tug from the side with the lead rope until he faces you again.

Always give a tug on the halter first and “ask” before you tug on the butt rope. Reward the horse by releasing pressure after the first few steps.

As the horse improves, shorten the distance between you and the halter and soon you can walk beside the horse, tugging only if needed.

“Cluck or kiss” first before lightly tugging the lead and if the horse does not respond tug the butt rope. Do not tug the lead three or four times before using the butt rope. “Cluck” once and tug the lead lightly, if he does not step forward, tug the butt rope. You can usually stop using the butt rope after a few sessions. Continue to “Cluck” to go forward and “Whoa” to stop. If the horse does not respond to “whoa” give light downward tugs on the lead rope next to the halter as you command “whoa.”

THE ROUND PEN

Horse enthusiasts are generally aware that the round pen is an effective training method for green and even wild horses as well as friendly horses. However there is no question that a horse with the early training previously described will be easier to handle to and from the round pen, safer to be around and work with, and provide a more pleasurable experience.

Trail riders spend many days living with their horses. They are companions through thick and thin - much more than a novelty to toy with and put away. The fact that a trail or pack horse must be friendly, soft, and yield to pressures willingly, is fundamental to the success and enjoyment of your rides and journeys. Many times a day, often by the minute, you will be asking your horse to do things.

The round pen is the surest way we have tried to build a respectful horse that yields softly to pressure. These first lessons in the round pen are very impressionable and last for life. We often spend several minutes in the pen each spring reminding each horse about its role in life.

An aggressive, erratic, or overly afraid horse in the round pen should be handled by an experienced trainer.

Round Pen Logic

We like to equate a young horse with a bullish grade seven student who is good part coward at heart. The student despises and rebels against the teachers wishes. The teacher takes the unsuspecting kid into the gymnasium and makes him run laps. For the first twenty laps the student looks for every way out of the gym while issuing a stream of curses. By the second twenty laps the student's feet are dragging on the floor as well as his tongue, and the student is focused on the teacher, promising he will listen and follow the teacher to the ends of the earth, if he can only stop running. A couple of more sessions in the gym convinces the kid for life

that trouble isn't worth it.

Considering that we are the predators and horses are the prey, it is not surprising that they should want to run away, but round pen logic runs deeper than "run until you are tired."

Young horses raised in a herd are kept in line by dominant or "Alpha" horses - often a mare. The dominant horse reprimands unwanted behavior by "pushing" the guilty horse out of the herd or to the periphery of the herd. This is a bad place to be because the horse is now exposed to predators and also, it can not carry on social interaction with its peers - and interaction is what all social animals desire. The outcast horse convinces the dominant horse by the sincerity of its actions that it will be well behaved, respectful and a good listener if it is allowed back into the herd.

The trainer follows this strategy, pushing the horse away, making the horse work as well as being pushed out to the perimeter of the pen. The trainer watches for the cues or "whispers" from the pushed horse, and eventually allows that horse back into his circle, hopeful for a "join-up" between trainer and horse that is full of respect and focus.

There are many challenges while in the round pen, the degree of which will vary depending on the disposition of the horse and the ability of the trainer. It is somewhat of an art form as you feel out the positioning of your body, the flow of movement, when and how to push, and when and how to let up. And of course, there is the art of reading the horses "whispers" the cues that tell you when to release and what the horse is feeling and thinking.



Round Pen logic is not overly complicated, but life in the pen is full of challenges. The biology and psychology of the horses body and mind is a science. The why, how and when we train the body and mind is art and music, with the trainer being the artist and conductor.

How It Works

1. Your round pen should be forty-five to sixty-five feet in diameter, ours is about fifty-five feet in diameter. They should be built very sturdy and high (at least six feet), as some horses may try to climb over the rails or boards even if the fence is six feet high. There should be at least three inches of sand that will not pack. The sand makes the horse work half again as hard to cover the same distance. You can have but do not necessarily need a training whip with you. The whip is not used for aggressive whipping, but rather, as an extension of your arm.

2. Bring the horse into the corral, leave the halter on and turn him loose. He may begin trotting around the edge of the pen on his own or he may walk around or stand.

3. Begin to move the horse forward by lifting your right hand (the horse is moving to the left, counter clockwise) and advancing toward the rear of the horse.

4. Do not begin your pushing too aggressively. Some horses will take off quickly and others will stand facing you wondering what all the fuss is about. All types of horses *must* move out at a trot or run. You do what you have to do to get that friendly, lazy horse moving. Use verbal commands to reinforce your pushing. You do not need to use the whip if the horse moves out well.

5. As the horse moves out, edge toward the center of the pen so that you are turning while focusing on the flank of the horse rather than running or chasing the horse. Your shoulders need to be square with the rear of the horse. The most common error of first time round pen trainers is that they confuse the horse because the trainers body position keeps shifting. Keep your eyes and

shoulders focused on the flank of the horse - *no further forward*. The horse needs to be absolutely convinced that you are pushing it forward. If you carelessly begin to look at the horse's chest, neck, or head, he will feel the pressure shift forward and want to slow down, turn, or hesitate. Releasing pressure will then not be as effective. You need to relay a definite push and a definite release. When in doubt, square your shoulders and eyes on the horse's tail - better too far back than too far ahead.

6. Now your right arm is raised up and behind the horse, with or without a whip. As the horse moves, you are turning with him, keeping focused on the horse's rear. Maybe you have to step towards the horse's flank and chase the horse sometimes to keep him at a trot or run. A walk is pointless because he can walk all day and not get tired. Likewise, if you let him slow to a walk, he gets his wind and you have to start over. Lets look at a number of possible scenarios and how to deal with them.

Let us begin with the perfect run. A beginner should take an experienced well behaved horse into the round pen in order to experience the joy of this near perfect run. The horse trots around the pen staying close to the wall, the trainers shoulders are square to the flank or behind. For the first few loops the horse was looking out the pen, his body stiff or arched opposite the curve of the pen. He tossed his head a couple of times in defiance of the trainer - maybe kicked up his hind legs. Once he slowed down at the gate looking for a way out but the trainer jumps forward toward his flank and "hoorah'd" the horse, keeping him on the run.

After several laps the horse begins to look more at the trainer and twitches his ears (a sign of increased focus.) Another lap and the horse begins to show signs of wanting to slow.

This time, instead of moving forward to drive him, the trainer notices the horse is more relaxed, lowering his head, and generally beginning to look submissive. Just to make sure that the horse is not “playing the game” the trainer raises his whip that has begun to droop and he sends the horse for another two laps. The horse licks his lips and lowers his head further (signs of submission.)

The trainer has remained calm and in control during the entire process, being careful not to elevate the horses’ fear. Now the trainer hides the whip behind his back and calmly but deftly steps directly back and continues to step back, trying to mentally release pressure from the hind quarters. Because the horse is moving to the left, the trainer steps back and to the right. The horse feels he is being “sucked backwards”, as opposed to the trainer blocking forward progress. Immediately the horse slows, turns to face the trainer, and

stops. He has felt the release of pressure, followed it, and has been rewarded by a rest. The trainer takes a few more steps back and the horse responds by stepping forward. The trainer gives the horse a brief rest then “rainbows” his way to the horses shoulder and the horse again turns to face the trainer (a sign of respect.) The trainer lightly takes hold of the halter, “clucks” and steps back. The horse follows willingly. The trainer lets go of the halter and the horse continues to follow the trainer like a lost puppy dog. A bond of respect, submission to the trainer, and responding to a release in pressure, has been created - success.

Let us be more realistic and look at some of the challenges and how to deal with them.

a. Problem: The horse does not appear interested in running or trotting, but persists on walking, stopping, or turning around.

Remedy: The key to successful round pen



This trainer has initiated round pen work by properly positioning her focus (eyes and shoulders) square to the flank.

THE ROUND PEN



The whip is an extension of your arm that helps drive your horse forward. Whether or not it touches the horse, and how firmly, depends on how willing the horse is to move forward. The horse must move out. Never tie your emotions to the whip in your hand - it should be like holding a fork at supper time.

This trainer has stepped toward the horse and cracked his whip because the horse slowed down to a walk. Preferably the trainer is casually turning a small six foot diameter circle in the center of the pen as he pushes the horse forward - rather than being overly animated and emotional - which will add fear and confusion in the horse.



After running several rounds this horse has shown that he is respectful of the trainer by having his eye and ears focused on the trainer and having his body soft and flexed with the curve of the fence. A few more laps and the horse was submitting to the will of the dominant trainer as shown by a sincere 'bobbing' and lowering of his head and by licking his lips. The photo on the right shows the trainer beginning to release pressure - backing up and somewhat parallel with the horse and fence. She is hopeful that the horse accepts her release and will turn to the right and face her. The whip needs to be tucked behind her to remove its threat.

TRAINING

When the trainer released pressure, hoping for a full turn and join up, the horse only gave a quarter turn. When the trainer 'rainbowed' his way towards the horse it took off. The trainer immediately 'pushed' it several more laps.



After two more attempts he offered a release and the horse faced him. The trainer 'rainbows' his way to the horse and rewards the horse with a short rest then backs up, leading the horse. Ideally join up means the horse will follow the trainer like a lost puppy dog - in total submission and willingness - but sometimes it helps to take an uncertain or fearful horse through the steps - looking for complete join up the next time around.



This trainer rainbowed her way to the horse then backed away. The horse accepted the release and moves nicely forward. When the trainer turns and walks away, the horse follows - great join up!



The trainer 'grabs the moment' when the horse is focused, soft, and willing, to practice leading and responding to pressures - see 'Further Training'.

work is *definite* push and *definite* release. Even if you *feel* confused *act* more direct.

Although your goal is to do as little chasing as possible you may have to drive the horse more aggressively, especially if the horse is overly friendly, lazy, or both. After you jump in to drive him, using voice at the same time and tapping him on the butt with the whip, settle back to less work and a calm demeanor when the horse picks up his speed. You may have to "step in" regularly possibly, every lap or two, to keep him moving.

b. Problem: The horse is reversing direction while running or trotting.

Remedy: If you are well focused on the rear or tail of the horse, and you have been vocal and holding the whip well back of the horse, driving from the rear, and the horse is still turning, he is probably challenging your authority, or turning into the gate or fence looking for a way out. You must not let the horse reverse direction at will because then he has mind control over you. Be ready and position yourself well back of the rear. When he turns, move towards the fence and head him off. Raise both arms and whip and scold him back in the proper direction. If he races past you, catch him in the next turn or the next until he gets back in the proper direction. Do not put your body in a collision course with the horse.

c. Problem: The horse is cutting corners,

leaving the wall and cutting across the pen.

Remedy: As the horse gets tired, he is looking to cut corners and he has chosen to push you out of your space - not acceptable. Raise both hands and "hoorah" him over where he belongs. Tickle his body with the whip if needed. The horse will often try to do this in the same spot. Be ready - you may have to step towards the front of the horse to force him over.

d. Problem: Finally you have got your lazy horse, or maybe your wild, untouched horse, to run. They appeared to show signs of wanting to slow down, or submitting, but when you "release" pressure they continue to run. It feels like they have been running or trotting forever and will do so forever.

Remedy: Getting the horse to respond to your release and turn toward you and stand calmly is often the greatest challenge and the most frustrating. First, control your own anger, keep yourself as close to the center of the pen as possible and try to run less - but still drive him forward. Do not worry too much that you have missed an important cue that the horse has given you and that you have missed your opportunity. Build for coming opportunities. Sometimes young horses, horses that are afraid, stubborn, or dominant, can take an hour or longer to be convinced that running away and looking for an exit over the fence or out of the

gate is not the only release. Keep the horse running and once in a while, offer a release. If the horse does not accept, immediately step towards the flank and send him on his way. Do not let the horse rest. The horse will realize that accepting the trainers release is the best alternative.

e. Problem: When I release pressure the horse stops but does not turn towards me. He stands parallel with the fence or looks out of the pen.

Remedy: *Immediately* run towards the horse's flank and "hoorah" him forward. Send him on a few more laps and release again.

f. Problem: When I release pressure the horse stops and turns toward me but only slightly.

Remedy: Give the horse a moment to rest and think. Take a step or two backwards and see if he completes the turn towards you. If the horse turns back parallel to the fence, immediately drive him on. If he stays quarter turned, slowly walk toward the fence, well ahead of the horse, tucking your whip behind you. When you reach the fence walk along it toward the horse, keeping yourself between the fence and the horse's body which is angled slightly outwards. If the horse stands and allows you to touch him, take the halter and take a step back toward the center of the pen. The horse will step forward and turn with you. Pet and reward the horse with a rest. Again take the halter and step back. He should follow you willingly.

If the horse takes off before you reach him, "hoorah" him and send him on his way for several more loops.

g. Problem: The horse turns toward you when you release but he won't bond or join-up with you. If you step back he faces you but just stands there.

Remedy: Tuck the whip away or drop it on the ground and nonchalantly seesaw a "rainbow" side to side, ending up at a shoulder - where your affectionately rub him. Take the halter and back up to the center of the pen. Rub him and let him rest. After a rest, politely send him on his way and you should get a better response next try.

Be sure to continue stepping backwards when you release pressure. He should walk towards you. If not, rainbow towards him, take his halter and gently lead him around. He should follow like a puppy.

If the horse stands facing you but as you edge towards him he runs, keep him running and try again. The horse may be turning toward you and stopping to rest as a ploy - he has no intention of letting you join-up. These horses will turn toward you before you ask them, effectively having mind control. Do not play the game.

When you see the horse beginning to turn towards you without being asked, immediately send it off in the same direction.

However, the very first time the horse turns towards you, accept it as if you made the choice. Edge towards it, reward it, and lead it towards you. If it does it again, send it on its way a few more rounds and then release pressure. You may find he keeps running and has no intention of submitting for a while.

h. Problem: The horse does not appear to take running seriously - I am tired before he is.

Remedy: Try changing the whip from hand to hand in mid stride and step to the front of the horse, changing his direction. Do this several times back and forth with a lap or two or three in between. It makes the horse work harder and instills your control over their mind and body.

i. Problem: The horse kicks out at me.

Remedy: This is dangerous behavior and a serious lack of respect. Be careful during your first time in the pen with a new horse. Do not let him crowd your space. If the horse kicks out at you respond with verbal terror and a snap on his rump with the whip. We have heard of aggressive horses chasing the trainer in the pen. Get rid of a horse like this.

j. Problem: The horse won't respond. You are running around like a chicken with your head cut off. The horse crashed the gate and you spent half a day fixing it. The horse has spent another hour trotting circles in the pen and he's still laughing at you. You're soaked and its not even raining. You hate your horse. You hate yourself. You want to lay down in the dirt and cry.

Remedy: Go into the house for an hour and watch "Dr. Phil." Come back to the horse armed with a bucket of grain and a twenty to thirty foot lunge line or rope. Allow the horse to eat some grain. Slip the line onto the halter and gently send the horse on the way. You can hold on the rope or let it drag for the first while. Remember your proper positioning. After several circles in the pen release pressure by backing up and tug the line toward you, the

horse will turn to you. Continue to back slowly and "reel" in the line until the horse meets you. Reward it with a rest and affection. After you do this a time or two you need to be able to duplicate the results without the line, only then do you know the horse has given its mind and attention to you. Some trainers prefer to tie a 20' to 30' soft, large diameter rope around the horses neck. The horse drags the rope and at times the trainer picks up the rope and bumps the horse while backing up. This helps the horse accept coming towards the trainer as a release, and it also helps the horse loose its fear of a rope being dragged around its feet.

Joining up in the round pen is truly a valuable experience - it can be an amazing transformation from a difficult or frightened horse to a calmer agreeable horse. *But don't stop there.* After join-up the horse's mind is at its best. Use the special moment to instill a solid understanding of pressure, response, and further training. See the heading on Continued Ground Work. If the horse has had a difficult time just learning to turn towards you, continue progress the next day. You may be amazed at how easily he responds the next day.



A lunge line or large soft rope can be used to help a young, fearful or nervous horse to work through the first steps of round pen work.

The horse is 'pushed' in a similar fashion but when the trainer releases pressure he also bumps the horse in, reeling line in and backing up to encourage the horse to willingly approach the trainer.



The trainer can then proceed to 'Further Training' but repeating the process without the lunge line is a logical next step as it ensures the horses mind is with the trainer - a sincere join up.

CONTINUED GROUND WORK

Once your horse is responding in the round pen and following your lead nicely, you need to continue the ground work. We like to perform these exercises immediately after round pen work - when the horse is very willing to learn. Your sessions can last longer than half an hour but if it does, give the horse breaks - allow it to walk around, rest, brush it, give it treats, etc.

By the time your horse has finished 'continued ground work' it will freely yield to the pressures applied that we regularly use on the trail. The horse will move forward willingly and on cue. The horse will understand yielding to pressures while in motion, while changing directions and changing pace. Further desensitizing is also a goal of continued ground work.

Yielding To Pressures

The dots or buttons on the photo are all areas that we expect our trail horses to yield to pressures. Our pressures are always applied in bumps or pulses. We reduced the intensity of each bump as we practice in order to build softness. As trainers, we must be soft before the horse can be soft. Always enforce your requests with voice commands first. Eventually, the command alone is often enough to get a desired response. Perform these exercises just after round pen or lunge line work.

1. Button #1 encourages the horse to move forward. The horse understands this from round pen work and the butt rope. Pressure here, as well as the flank, provides impulsion and moves the horse forward.

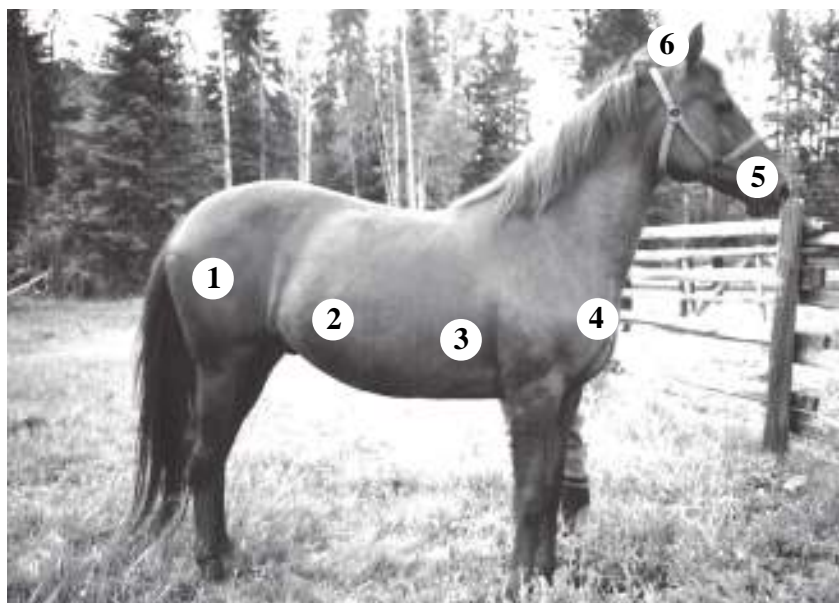
2. Button #2 encourages the horses back end to move over. While on the trail we ask horses to move “over” daily. Applying pressure further forward on the ribs may encourage the entire body to side step, so we begin by apply-

ing thumb or knuckle pressure just behind the last rib. This is easier for the horse to learn and it is usually the back end we need moved when saddling and packing trail horses.

“Pulse” or bump your thumb into this area. Make sure he has room to move. Be patient but persistent. Say “over” as you push your thumb into him. We always train for this pressure after we practice #4 and #5. Some horses can be very stubborn - the natural reaction will be to lean into your thumb. Be patient, give the horse lots of time to think, but increase pressure. The horse may want to kick his hind foot up - be careful. To be on the safe side we sometimes use a stick or a broom handle to train “over.”

3. Button #3, just behind the cinch, encourages the front end of the horse to move over. We generally do not apply pressure here until using direct leg aids during early riding training.

4. Button #4, the chest, is where we bump the horse with our thumb when we ask him to “back.” This is done simultaneously while



bumping the lead and halter “back” (always use voice commands before your bumping request). Most horses respond fairly quickly. Bump harder if you need to but once the horse gets the idea, aim to soften your bumps. Even one step back is enough to start. Reward the horse with a release of pressure. Always give the horse time to think.

5. Button #5 is where we usually begin after round pen work. If we control the most sensitive and vulnerable part of the horses body - its face, then the horse will be a soft and willing student. If we own the face, we own the horse. Soft and willing lateral flexion of the head is very important for later reining work.

Slip your fingers under the close side of the halter and bump it lightly toward you. After each bump provide slack, not constant pressure. It will probably give its face willingly but in the beginning do not keep its head turned longer than about a three count. If the horse pulls its face away, bump it back towards you immediately. You only need its face to bend towards you slightly to begin with. Once the horse gives his face to you, relax the pressure as a reward, do not bump anymore. Try for a three count with his face turned toward you with no pressure being applied. Once he holds it on his own for a few seconds, reward the horse by moving his head back to the straight position. Repeat on the other side. On subsequent days ask for more flex for longer periods of time and with *softer* bumps.

You do not want the horse’s body to turn towards you as you bump his bridle, only his head. If he does turn his whole body allow him to turn and keep your positioning as you turn with him. He will likely pull his face away, and you need to be persistent and bump it back

- but don’t ask for too much flex for too long. You and the horse will likely turn in several circles until the horse realizes it is easier to stand and give of his face only. Reward him immediately by giving his face back. *Never* be aggressive when you ask for flex. This activity leads directly into soft reining. You may choose to place your hand over the horses nose and apply side to side pressure, but we prefer to bump the halter as it simulates a hackamore or bridle.

6. Button #6 encourages your horse to drop his head. Having a horse drop his head is important for putting on halters, bridles, worming, and trimming hair.

Form your thumb and a couple of fingers into a point and apply a steady, downward pressure on the poll - between the ears (you will feel a lump there). Rather than force it down aggressively, provide a light or medium pressure and give the horse time to think. When he drops his head, even slightly, stop and reward him. Leave it until the next day and you will gain with each effort. Soon the horse will be dropping his head to back level or lower. If the horse is friendly, you may want to stand on a small, stable stool. You can continue this exercise by lightly tugging down on the lead rope as you apply poll pressure. Soon he will drop his head as you bump the lead rope down only.

We repeat requests for yielding to pressure, especially #5, #4, #2 and #6, in that order, nearly every time we work with the horse. The horses response tells us how soft he is, where his mind is at, and whether he needs a run in the pen or on a lunge as a reminder of respect and softness.

CONTINUED GROUND WORK



Button #5



Button #4



Button #2



Button #6

Under Saddle

If your horse is a yearling or older, you may choose to put on a saddle while doing ground work. It should be desensitized by now. Do it gently, first rubbing the pad over its back, rubbing the cinch area, and allowing the horse to smell the pad and saddle. Give the horse more treats during the process. When approaching the horse do not abruptly throw on the gear. If you approach carrying a saddle,

allow your elbow to gently touch the horses shoulder before the saddle does. Tighten the cinches enough that the saddle or pad will not slip but not overly tight. Always tighten the front cinch first. Walk the horse around the pen a few times. If you send the horse around the pen for a run tie up the stirrups so they do not bang on the horse. Use a lunge line so that if the horse spooks badly you have some control and after a few laps he can be eased in and calmed down. (See Chapter 3 - First Saddle.)

Improved Leading

At this point your horse leads well. Now we need to eliminate any hesitation when we ask the horse to move forward. We need to be able to ask for and receive an increase in speed as we walk beside the horse. While on the trail we often “cluck” and ask our riding and pack horses to pick up the pace and even change gait. It can be very frustrating when you are leading or riding a horse and you need to make good time (its getting dark) and your horse will

not respond, or worse, pulls back.

We need to teach our horses clearly that whoa means stop. We need to change direction or back up with soft cues. *Most importantly* we need the horse to expect the unexpected, to wait patiently for the next command. We encourage lots of patience by long periods of standing tied to a post - a few hours at a time. We wait until the horse stops pawing before we let him go.



Refine the horse leading skills. One voice command and cue is enough. If the horse is slow to respond to ‘walk’, tap him with the whip.

Tug the lead (never the bridle) sharply down and back if he does not respond to ‘whoa’.

Once the horse stops at the 'whoa' command, do not allow it to take even one step. Snap the lead down if it does. Practice lots of calm standing time.



While leading, stop intermittently and practice all of the applied pressures that trail riders commonly use, including giving its face (with or without the bit). Strive for a quicker, softer response with less applied pressure.

Remember soft pulses only.



“Over”



“Back”



“Down”

1. Gently rub your horse with your hands and the handle of your training whip until he has no fear of the whip.

2. Hold the lead close to the halter with your right hand while the long carriage whip trails in your left hand. "Cluck" or say "Up" lightly tug forward on the lead, and step out. He may step out fine as he has had butt rope training already, however we need perfection here. If the horse hesitates lightly reach back with your left hand and tickle him on the rear with the whip (never the feet). He should move out. If not, repeat the command, tug the lead more firmly, and tap him harder. If he bolts out aggressively just let him run in circles as if he was on a lunge line until he calms down and try again.

To stop say "Whoa" and tug the lead down and back. Always give the voice command first, and always release pressure when you get a favorable response. Walk around the corral in both directions until he is comfortable with you and the whip.

3. Practice walking in circles and straight lines, going and stopping randomly. Walk along straight fences and obstacles. When you stop, increase the time he stands before you give the command to go. *Never* allow the horse to decide when to move. At intervals, when you

stop, practice all of the pressures and yields. Have the horse give its face, step back, move its body over, and drop its head.

4. Once the horse is soft and leading well, ask for changes of direction from a stationary, head flexed, position. "Whoa," using the halter (or bridle if you are using one), tug to one side and flex the pole. When the horse is standing calmly with it's head Flexed to one side, "Cluck" and walk out. The horse will turn and walk out in a circle. Practice this from both sides. Do not always walk out when the neck is flexed. Sometimes release and let the horse stand then have the horse walk out straight. Sometimes ask for his face as you walk, and turn consistent circles. After a few sessions you will have a horse that will be very soft in the mouth and ready for reining.

5. As you walk along with the horse on your right shoulder, cluck and tap the horse with the whip tugging lightly forward on the lead rope. Move out in a trot, and encourage the horse to do the same. To slow down say "easy, easy," and lightly tug back on the lead. Do not use "whoa" unless you know you will be stopping. Do the same on the trail. "Cluck" to increase speed or change gate, "easy, easy," to slow down, and "whoa" to stop.

6. Use natural objects like fences and buckets to improve leading and turning skills. For example, lead the horse straight into a fence, say whoa when you 'hit the wall', tug the bridle or lead rope to softly turn the face left or right, 'cluck' and walk out in the chosen direction.



With the horse standing still, flex the head to the left, 'cluck', and walk out in a circle to the left. Repeat to the right. Walk straight toward a fence, say 'whoa' when you get to the wall, and repeat the flex right or left, and walk out.

Further Desensitized

1. We need to be sure the horse is comfortable with rope around the legs. Once in a while a loose rope entangles itself around a trail or pack horse's feet. Sometimes a rope gets dragged along. Use a twenty foot long, three quarter inch or wider soft rope. Tie the rope in a bowline around his neck. Run the rope back. Ask the horse to move "over" until it steps over the rope. Pick up the rope well back of where you could be kicked. Gently lift up the rope and slide it up along each inner leg, right up to the groin. The idea here is to go gently. You want to desensitize, not throw the horse into a fit. We often hobble break the horse first and put hobbles on him to help settle him down. (See Chapter 6 - Training To Trim or Shoe.)

Go slow. Ask a little and reward the horse that stops resisting by letting the rope down for several seconds. Go as high into the groin as you can.

Once the horse settles down and accepts the rope, bring it forward, lightly catching the hock with the rope as you walk forward to the front shoulder area. Give the horse a friendly rub. Gently pull the rope forward so that it sucks the back foot forward, holding it only for a second. The horse may resist. Give it time to feel the rope behind its hock before you pull it as it accepts the rope and your pressure, back off as a reward. Go slow. Soon you should be able to

lift the horse's hind leg to the count of ten. Repeat on the other leg. This is an important exercise prior to handling and trimming feet.

We often rub down the horse, including legs, before this exercise.

2. Noisy objects can frighten animals. Rain gear, plastic cans on the ground and a variety of other items can spook horses. Some horses could care less about noisy objects and others get spooked at the slightest opportunity.

For horses that spook easily, start slow and approach the shoulder first. Be sure you can rub a horse blanket over the horse's back before a plastic bag. We will sometimes hobble the front feet if the horse is very difficult.

Once we begin to work with a horse we never quit until the horse stands calmly. When the horse accepts noisy plastic over his head and face - he is calm. We often walk a horse over a poly tarp until he loses fear of it. Having a calm, experienced horse go through the above procedures while the green horse watches, can give the green horse confidence.

Tying a noisy object to the horse's saddle or having a horse drag a noisy tarp with a rope until it calms down is a valuable lesson but it needs to be done with a calm horse that has already been 'desensitized', or it can frighten a horse even worse.. Be sure that you have a strong, tall fence. Be careful that you are not in the path of a frightened horse. When you begin a lesson like this, repeat it a few times to be sure that the fear is gone. (See Chapter 7 - Spooking)

Desensitising the flank and groin area is important. It is an area that you will need to rub bug repellent on and it is where the back cinch may end up if it slips back - which may result in a bucking contest.



Ears, nose and mouth need to be desensitised for bridling, de-worming and bit placement. The moment the horse calms down, even slightly, reward the horse by stopping contact. Note: This horse should be tied at eye level or higher.

The tail area is sensitive. The horse needs to be calm when the tail is handled for tail-tying or when a lead rope gets jammed underneath the tail. Take a lead rope and gently wedge it up under the tail a few times until the horse is calm. Repeat the procedure a few times a year. It can save a wreck.





The horse should accept ropes, blankets, pads and noisy material rubbed on its body. Start slow with soft, friendly material.

The horse needs to stand calmly when legs or feet are handled, and to give their feet willingly when asked. See 'Shoeing' for how to train your horse to lift feet properly. On the trail you will be cleaning feet, checking for injuries, lifting them to remove an errant lash rope or lead rope, and trimming feet.



The horse needs to completely accept a rope in all areas including around feet, between the legs and under the tail. Remember that when the horse calms down, even slightly, that is his way of asking for a release from the presence or pressure of the rope. You must 'back off' as a reward. Stand far enough back so that you cannot be kicked.

Before a horse is comfortable with his leg being tied up it needs to be desensitized to the feel of the rope and the trainer needs to 'ask' for the foot with small amounts of rope pressure. It is an important game of give and take until the horse is comfortable with his foot being held up for several seconds. (See Chapter 6 - Training To Trim or Shoe.)



Pack tarps, jackets, rain coats, and various gear may wind up dragging alongside an unsuspecting trail horse. Familiarizing your horse with a dragging object should be done in stages beginning with a gentle rub from a soft, friendly pad or coat. High energy, nervous horses may never respond calmly to a noisy or moving object and these horses may not be well suited to life on the trail. (See Chapter 7 - Spooking.)

Horses do step on noisy objects on the trail unexpectedly. Prepare them for it.



LUNGING

Lunging is basically a horse with a light line attached to the halter at one end and the trainer with a whip on the other. As with round pen training, the horse is driven in circles. Proper lunging can benefit the horse in ways that a round pen can, and some of our softest, most respectful horses were trained on a lunge. Horses that respond well to early training and round pen work do not need to be lunged or driven to become a well trained trail horse.

One significant benefit of the round pen is because there is no line attached, the horse that bonds with the trainer joins up on its own will.

The join-up may be more sincere, and therefore the horse is a more willing student. However, the lunge line is very effective for teaching a horse to change gait with the commands “walk”, “trot”, and “lope.” It is also a good way to teach a horse to stand or “whoa” while the rider is in the distance. Getting off of your horse to relieve yourself while on the trail is very necessary. Lunging can train your horse to stop even if you are not on your horse, and to stay stopped. Lunging is also an effective way to work a herd bound or energetic horse while you are on the trail. See chapter seven ‘Problem Solving’.

Lunging also helps with early reining. The horse learns to accept a rein (the lunge line) controlling its face, its direction, and the size of the circle it is moving in.

We begin our lunging exercise much the same as round pen work, with the trainer ‘pushing’ the horse. Forward movement needs to be prompt upon command. If the horse turns to face you, quickly get behind him and drive him forward. Use the whip if you need to.



When the trainer releases pressure by backing off and ‘bumping’ the lunge line in, the horse comes in to the release nicely.

Now we want the horse to stop upon the 'whoa' command. We snap the line and step towards the front of the horse while saying 'whoa'. It knows 'whoa' from our leading exercises and with a few more attempts the horse will stop at a distance from voice command alone. Being able to stop your horses on the trail from a distance is a great asset.



At this point we like our horses to stop and stand straight - in the direction they are moving. This is because we will soon be saying 'whoa' from the seat and we want the horse to stop straight between the reins. If the horse turns toward the trainer we use a shorter line, walk up to the turned horse, hold the lead at the halter, push his front end over until he is straight, lightly snap the lead and say 'whoa'. He needs to stand straight as you walk back into the center of the arena, until you give the command to 'walk'.

As the horse is moving in circles and his body is rigid, curved away from the trainer, and looking out of the pen, his face can be 'bumped' back into position by the line. When the horse is soft and focused on the trainer it will be responsive to a change of pace. Say 'Trot', snap the whip, and step toward the flank to ask the horse to change pace. He must change pace when you ask.



Allow the horse lots of standing still time. When the lunge line is dropped, or the reins (ground tying), he needs to know that he does not move until he is asked to do so. From this point repeat the softening exercises from leading (the buttons).

Steps to follow while lunging:

1. Use a light twenty to thirty foot line.
2. Attach the line to the bottom of the halter rather than the side. This allows you to change direction without unsnapping the line.
3. Before you lunge be sure your horse leads well and stops when you say "whoa" and tug your lead down. Be sure your horse goes when you say "Walk" or "Up" or "Cluck", and tug your lead forward.
4. Sending the horse off may be a little confusing at first. Because you have the line attached to the halter the horse will probably want to turn to face you. Try to stand back toward the hip, allow more slack in the line, "Cluck", and tap the horse with the whip firmly. If the horse begins to turn toward you raise your hands and "hoorah" him away. Do not have pressure on the line. Feed more line out and stay behind the quarters. You will have to do some walking to drive the horse forward until it learns to keep its distance and forward motion.
5. After the horse has run a few laps try to minimize your movement. Like round pen work, you will probably be walking a small six foot circle at the center. Be sure your whip is positioned high and behind, as an extension of your arm.
6. After several laps step toward the front of the horse, and say "whoa", and give the line a snap that will snake its way to the halter. The horse is usually glad to stop. If the horse does not stop you may have to step forward more assertively, be more vocal with "whoa" and put more pressure on the line. If the horse has too much energy, stand quietly and let him go until he gets tired. Sooner or later, he will want to stop. Proper lunging means that the horse respects you as the 'pusher', the dominant being in the relationship. This is being

achieved when the horse appears to 'soften', and the horse is bent with the curve of the circle (the barrel of the horse is bent away from you).

7. If the horse begins to stop when he wants to, but not when you want to, don't let him, send him for a few more laps until he responds to your offer.
8. The first few times the horse stops do not worry if he only stands for a while or if he walks towards you. You can reward him with rest and a rub for a moment then send him off. As he gets comfortable with stopping, have him stay parallel to the fence. When he begins to turn toward you, quickly walk to him, turn his face back, push his body over until he is straight and tug the line and say "whoa." You are teaching the horse to stand straight with "whoa" because you need him to stop straight when you ride him later.
9. When the horse is standing straight watch him for a while. As days go by, expect him to stand for longer periods of time with you further and further away.
10. Lunge the horse in both directions. Most horses have a direction they find more difficult so it is good to practice the difficult side. He may turn to face you after or cut corners and "cheat" as he makes laps. In each case push him over with threatening motions and keep him moving parallel with the fence in the right direction.
11. Having the horse change pace from a walk to a trot is not that difficult. Simply "Cluck" or say "Trot" as he is walking, and pop the whip. He will soon learn that "Trot" means to change gait. "Lope" requires more effort for some horses. You may need to be more assertive to get him to lope. Do not worry if they want to slow down right away. As you practice more in future lessons, increase your trot or lope time.

DRIVING

Simple driving can further the horses understanding that you do not have to be on him or with him to give the “whoa” command and expect him to stop. It can teach patience and “ground tying” (the horse standing still while the reins are down) because the colt is not permitted to move until the “cluck” or “walk” command is given.

Driving improves lateral yield from bit pressure and like riding, the horse yields to either direction while in motion. Sometimes a horse is reluctant to “step out” on the first ride. Driving establishes immediate impulsion upon command.

Once in a while a trail horse can find something dragging beside or behind him. Maybe it is a lash rope, maybe a coat hanging by a saddle bag string, maybe they only think something is behind them. Driving desensitizes the colt to activity behind them.

Although you may begin driving training with a halter, most prefer to use a snaffle bit. See Chapter 3 - Riding.

1. Use light driving lines, your lunge lines will do. Be sure they are long enough to keep you behind kicking range.

2. Be sure the horse is calm with the lines. Rub them over his body, including behind his hocks.

3. Bring the lines back from each bit ring and through the stirrups. Tying the stirrups together with the string will keep them from bouncing around the lines. Running through a

ring on the tie string below seat level is better than running them through the stirrups.

4. Holding one line loosely in each hand, “cluck” and ask the horse to move out. Stand just on the inside of the circle you expect the horse to walk in. If the horse is reluctant to move, walk to his side snap the line that is around his hip. Cluck and tug the line around his hip. Tickle the horse with the whip if necessary. As the horse moves out keep yourself slightly to the inside. If the horse takes off in a run; let it go. Drop the lines if you have to. After a few laps step toward the front of the horse and say “whoa.” Start again.

5. Try to keep the line above the hocks.

6. When moving ahead, keep slack in both reins. When turning left, provide slack in the right rein while tugging on the left, and vice versa for turning right.

7. Expect the horse to move out as soon as you “cluck” if not, tickle him with the whip immediately. Ask for lighter, softer yields when turning and “Whoa” as the horse gains experience. There is a danger here if the handler is being too aggressive with “Whoa” and turning. We must improve soft control and be careful not to dull the horse’s response with hard pulls. A few hard tugs in the beginning is fine.

8. Ask the horse to stop, increasing the time he stands. At intervals, drop the reins, walk up to and brush the horse, insisting that he stands perfectly still. After standing for a moment, ask the horse to “back” with light tugs. A step or two back is enough to start. Ask for more as the days go by.



The author explains the advantages of 'driving' training for the trail horse, including reinforcing 'whoa' as an absolute stop with the trainer at a distance, ground tying, 'backing up', giving the face right and left while in motion, and immediate forward impulsion upon command.

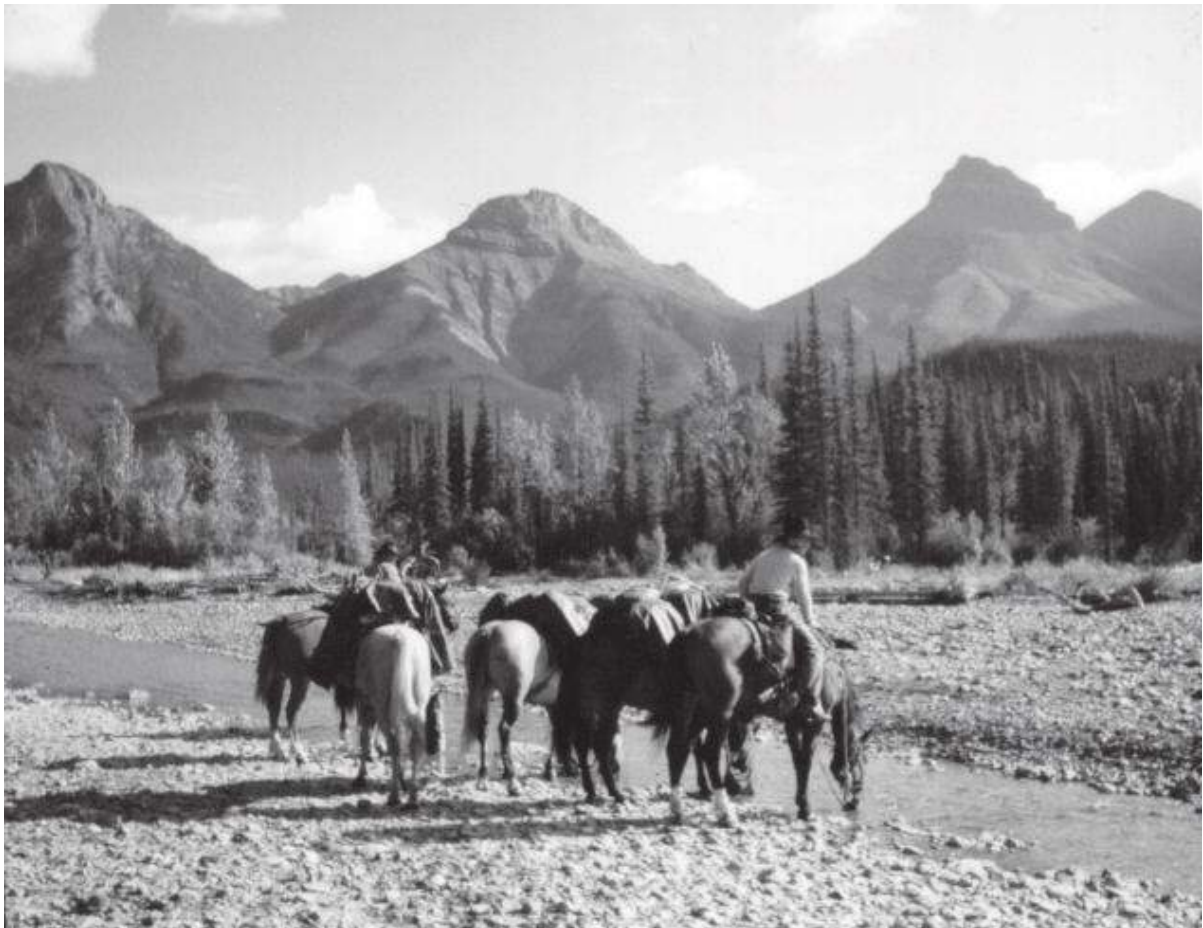
This horse jumped toward the fence and stopped. It was spooked because the drive lines were too low and they bumped the lower leg area. The lines need to be through the stirrups or a ring on the saddle. They also need to be long enough to put the trainer out of kicking range.



This horse attempted to walk out before being asked to do so and was asked to 'back' up to check the forward movement and to establish the authority of the trainer.

Driving is a good way to ask the horse for lateral flexion of the head while in motion. Be careful that you do not aggressively force the face around or you will lose the softness needed. Remember, bumps only - and softer as the horse understands what you are after.





Chapter Three

RIDING



There are many sensible books on the market that have sensible information, that sensible people can use to train a sensible horse successfully and even quickly. We use the word sensible here repeatedly to indelibly brand the notion in our minds that we need sensible horses on the trail.

Here is a story that brings the point home.

One morning a guest said to me as we brought in a Fjord-cross pack horse. “Can you ride that mare?”

“I don’t know,” I answered, “here hold her.”

The friendly little mare had been purchased as part of a group of young horses and she had never been ridden,

but we had given her ground work experience and she was fairly soft. I tied some bale twine to each side of her halter, jumped on bareback, tapped her hip with a twig and walked off for a small loop then dismounted.

“Yep,” I said, “she’s a riding horse.”

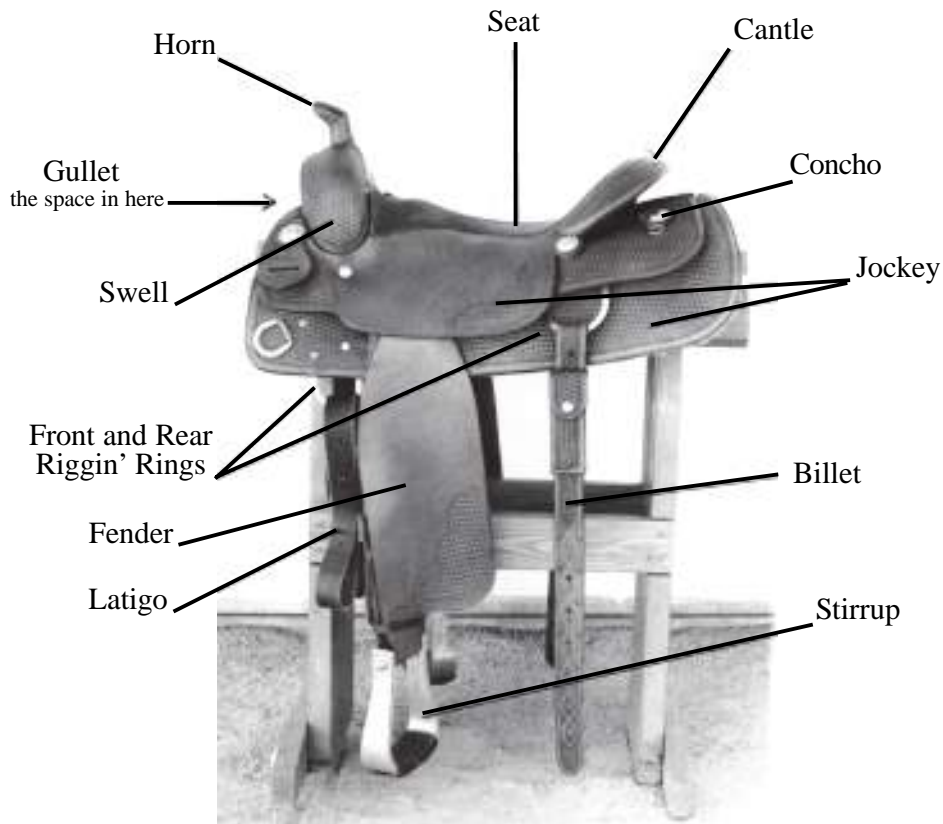
Never underestimate the importance of the nature of your saddle horse when you want a calm, friendly, trail companion. Not all horses are suited to be race horses and not all horses can be dependable trail horses.

Some riders defend a high energy, nervous saddle horse by claiming they want a horse that ‘steps out’ - sets a fast pace on the trail. We do not feel

that there is a direct relationship between how nervous, or how calm, a horse is and its pace. In fact, on longer trail rides and pack trips we have found that high energy horses can burn themselves out and become tired, agitated, and stubborn.

Much emphasis has been placed on the horses we choose. However, more than one half of the recipe for a good horse experience is the disposition and abilities of the rider. While working with inexperienced horses,

riders need to set smaller, attainable goals. Know what actions and pressures you need to apply in order to achieve your goal before you begin. Try to be a better listener - your horse is *always* telling you something by his actions. Pretend confidence and present a calm nature - even if you are unsure. Know when to back off before getting upset and displaying aggressive behaviour.



SADDLES

There are many who spend enough time on a horse who truly feel that the western saddle they ride is more important than the vehicle they drive. They will spend hundreds of days and hundreds of hours in the saddle each season but use the vehicle to go to town to buy groceries once in a while. The point is that we spend many hours and days so it the saddle needs to be comfortable and functional. Saddles need to be sturdy, stable, and need to fit the horse. Your ride can be a pleasure or an ordeal, depending on your saddle.

Comfort

Comfort is mostly personal. Seat size is also personal. Some like a tight seat and some like more room. Some say that a roomy seat leads to sloppy riding and too much weight shifting. This could be true with some riders. We personally find a larger trail-roping type saddle, narrow in the crotch and wide in the seat, more comfy then the flat, wide seated old timers. We find most riders like a padded seat and some like it really soft - a fleece sheepskin. Again, comfort is personal.

Sturdy

Many good saddles have been made with rawhide, rawhide (a type of plastic) or fiberglass trees. Inspect your tree for cheap materials and breaks. Avoid trees that are wood only or wood covered with soft leather or cloth only. Most reputable saddle makers use good materials. Most saddle makers can tell you in a minute what went into making your saddle. Give the saddle a bear hug or place it on its side and press down in order to see if the tree is broken. There should be no “give” in the tree or the saddle horn. If it feels like it is somewhat “hinged” lengthways, then it is broken and generally not worth fixing.

Check out the quality of leather. Good leather feels smooth, alive, and has an even thickness. Poor leather often feels coarse, especially on the bottom side. It can also feel hard, dry, and like paper. It is often not uniform in thickness.

Check the construction to be sure that many screws are used as opposed to staples and nails - which are fine provided screws are used.

Trail saddles carry all kinds of objects including saddle bags, saddle rolls, axes, guns, cante packs, back packs, and cumbersome riders. The saddle needs to stabilize the load so we like our saddles to have some weight, usually thirty pounds or more for most adults.

We use two cinches. The back cinch is there to be used and it does help stabilize the load. If you are going to let it hang loose then take it off rather than have the gut speared by a stick that gets jammed between a loose cinch and the horse. Some ropers say that a loose back cinch tightens when they haul back on a calf. It is unlikely that you will rope a calf on your next trail ride.

The saddle horn should have enough length and enough of a head to allow a few wraps of the rope. Avoid small diameter “post” type saddle horns as they are dangerous. An acquaintance’s father died after the post was jammed into his stomach. He was not the first. You will be bouncing over dead falls, ditches and down slopes. A large flat top to your saddle horn is safer.

Saddle Fit

Now that you are spending long days in the saddle, possibly on rough trails, and with heavy loads, the riding saddle needs to fit the horse.

Place the saddle on the horse with no pad. Check the gullet (space under the horn and the swells) and be sure that it is high enough to easily clear the withers. This is *very* important as a saddle that presses down on the wither can sore a horse in a few hours. Next, check the fit between the saddle bars and the back of the horse. A saddle that is too narrow will appear to lift off of the back. One that is too flat sits low will bother the withers and appear loose or sloppy. A saddle that is too narrow or too wide does not distribute pressure evenly over the length of the saddle bars but rather at certain points. Because the pressure is focused on a smaller area, it can hurt the horse's back or create sores.

Rigging

Rigging is the gear that holds the saddle to the horse. In the front it consists of a leather strap that attaches a large ring to the saddle, or a metal brace mounted in the skirt. You need to compare saddles to see the difference in quality of leather, metal parts, and how secure the rigging is attached to the saddle. Rings need to be attached securely with sturdy leather around the tree or with screws through a heavy piece of leather and into the tree. Beware of rigging attached to the tree with staples and nails only. You may find that tying off your latigo on a skirt mounted metal brace is more difficult than the large ring mount. With time, skirt mounts tend to weaken the leather and pull out. We generally avoid skirt mounts and we have attached rings below some skirt mounts.



This is a well rigged trail saddle. It has a snug back cinch, properly adjusted chest strap, tapaderos, proper sized saddle bags (no larger), and a ring to hold the tied off lead rope.

How far forward the front ring is attached to the saddle also varies. The furthest forward attachment is about even with the swells and called “full” rigging. Just behind the swells is called “7/8”. “3/4” is behind “7/8” and “centerfire” rigging has the front cinch about even with the center of the seat.

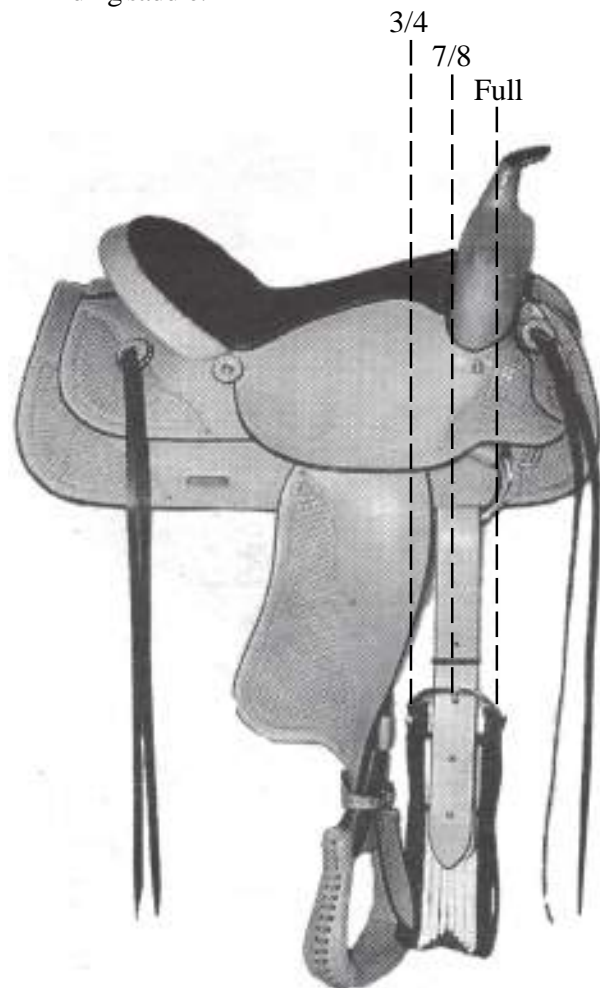
Full rigging is most common on roping saddles and needs to be used with a back cinch to keep the back of the saddle stable. Full rigging can help keep the pressure off of a high withered horse as it sits further back. “7/8” is the most common rigging on trail saddles, and it is perfectly acceptable. Some like “3/4” rigging as it places more weight over the load bearing shoulders. Some do not like the idea of forward placement affecting shoulder movement. Centerfire rigging is not very commonly used

and generally avoided..

We prefer the rear rigging to be attached to the tree and hold a ring with a billet on each side. The billet is a sturdy strap with holes for the rear cinch buckles. Billet holes tend to wear and tear so use heavy ones and check them periodically. A skirt mounted billet is okay if the hole in the skirt is well reinforced. Constant use, large riders, and using your riding saddle to pack loads once in a while, warrant a securely mounted front and back rigging.

When you see a trail saddle with holes or slots cut through the tree it has been made with the intention of being able to secure a basket rope when tying a basket or barrel hitch to the riding saddle.

This saddle is 7/8 riggin’ because the center line of the front riggin’ ring runs just behind the center of the swell.



Saddle Pads

There are many excellent saddle pads on the market. You generally get what you pay for.

Saddle pads need to absorb shock, distribute the pressure of the saddle evenly, reduce pressure points from saddles that do not fit perfectly, be non-abrasive against the horses back, absorb moisture, and cool down the horse.

If you pay more than a hundred dollars for a pad it will likely be a good one, but you do not need to. For years we have used thick, wool, Navaho blankets that are doubled over. They clean easily by washing and usually get

more fluffy with each washing. Many outfitters used wool army blankets folded over for both saddle blankets and bed rolls. If you use a blanket be careful that there are no wrinkles between the saddle and the horse as they may create sores. Cotton felt (hospital felt) absorbs moisture, cools the horse, and reduces friction better than wool felt. Adding a 1/4 inch washable hospital felt pad between the horse and your pad will do great service to your horse and you. Some synthetic fleeces and felts are also very good.

Avoid saddle blankets and pads that are too thin, abrasive or hard to clean. At the end of the day dry your blankets and pads.



Good saddle pads need to absorb shock, reduce pressure points, distribute the pressure of the saddle evenly, be non abrasive, absorb moisture, and reduce heat. Although expensive, a quality saddle pad is a wise investment. This thick wool Navaho is adequate.

Cinches

The front cinch wraps around the horse's barrel in the chest area and secures the saddle to the horse. Many materials have been used to make cinches over the years including rope, leather, canvas, mohair, cotton strands, fleece, felt, and neoprene.

The desirable qualities in a cinch include:

1. The cinch needs to be non-abrasive so that it does not chaff or sore the horse from constant motion.
2. It needs to be supple rather than stiff in order to flex when the body flexes.
3. It needs to be easily cleaned and less likely to hold dirt and scunge build up.
4. It needs to "stick" to the horse without excessive tightening.

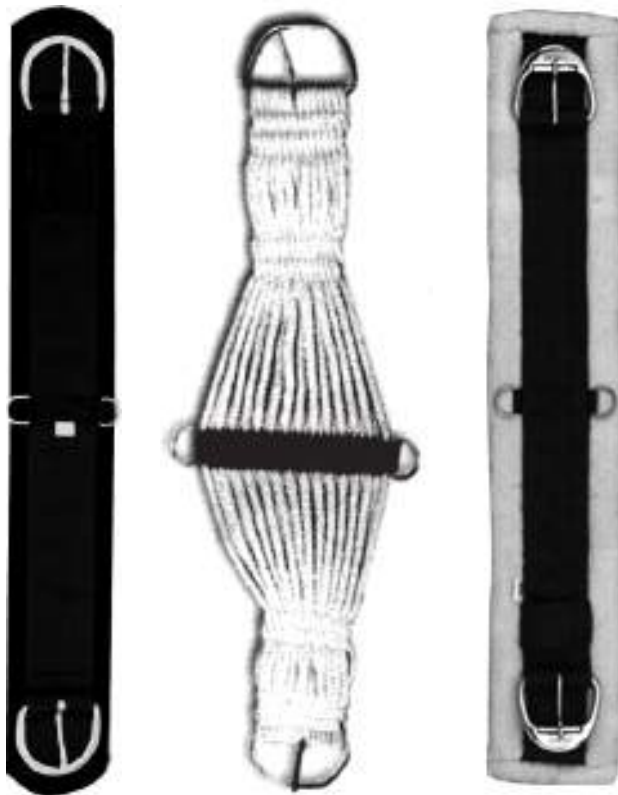
From our experience neoprene is an excellent choice. Our Blue Creek horses are

bound with cinches just about daily from June to October. Modern neoprene cinches have virtually eliminated cinch sores on our horses. When neoprene first became available some traditional riders felt that neoprene would over heat and create sores. The opposite seems to be true.

Neoprene is not as durable as some materials and constant riding in the bush can eat away exposed neoprene. When in doubt, buy your cinches a little on the long side rather than the short side.

Strand mohair, Fleece and Felt cinches can also be an excellent choice. Be sure to keep them clean and free of hard scunge build up.

Back cinch material is not as crucial as the front and bears much less load and basically helps stabilize. Because the stomach is soft, it gives more and is much less likely to sore. All of the above materials mentioned can be used successfully as a back cinch.



Quality cinches have been made from neoprene, cotton, mohair, felt, and fleece. Keep your cinch clean and supple.

Latigo

The latigo is the seven foot strap that is attached to the front ring on the left or “on” side of the horse. It loops through and secures the cinch ring to the rigging ring. You can use a billet and buckle on both sides but the latigo allows for fine tuning your cinch pressure. Billet holes also tend to wear and tear.

Latigo is much easier to handle and tighten if it is not overly wide. One and three quarter inch is as wide as we go and one and one quarter inch is fine. We use both leather and nylon but if we use nylon we avoid the thin, wide, seatbelt type of material. Nylon bites better if it is thick and coarse. If nylon is thin and smooth it may tend to slip and the cinch may loosen.



TACK AND ACCESSORIES

Halters

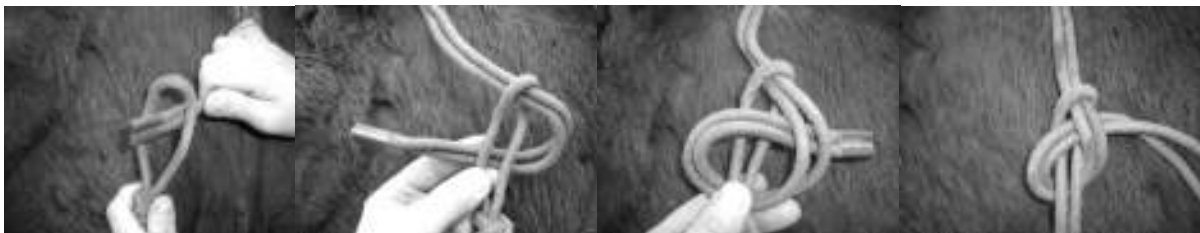
Halters need to be strong, well fitting, and free from abrasive parts. Taking these three factors into consideration, a quality rope halter is superior. For twenty years we used the common nylon web halter with metal joints and rings. Once you switch to an attractive rope halter for trail use (not the cheap poly ones) you will never go back. There are no metal parts to rub, they clean easier, they are lighter, and

because they are smaller diameter, they act as a mild nerve line and your horse will often be more responsive. Nerve line effect means that the small diameter of the rope halter has some 'bite' behind the ears if the horse resists, encouraging it to move forward.

You can even use a rope halter as an emergency hackamore. See the photo in order to tie them on so they can be easily undone. Like many outfitters, we often leave the halter on when we ride - under the bridle. Rope halters are unobtrusive under a bridle.



A quality rope halter is a blessing for the trail rider.



Tie the rope halter on like this...and you can untie it later

Headstalls and Reins

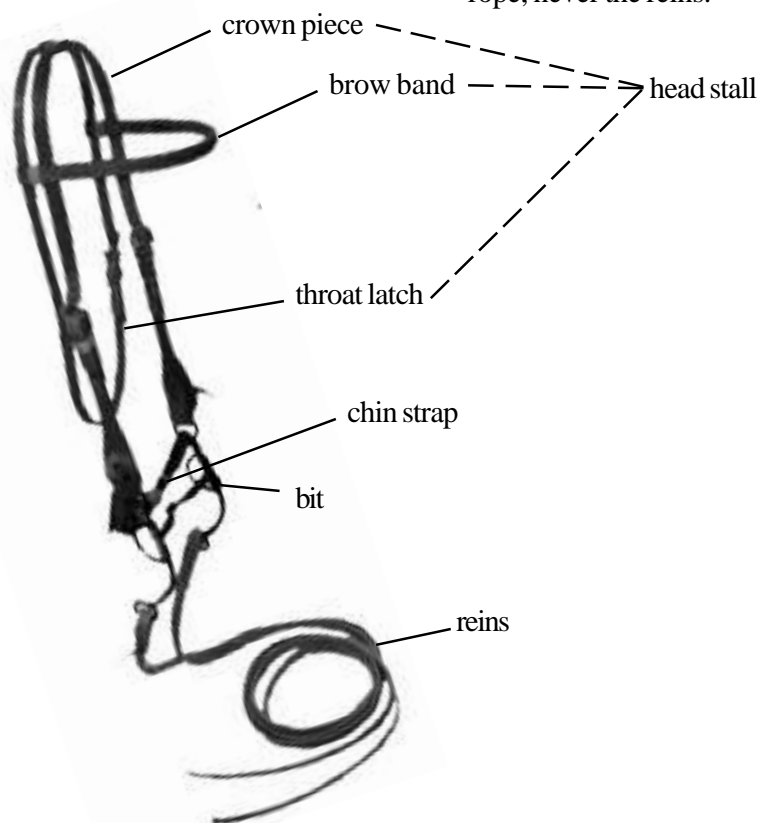
The bridle consists of the headstall and the bit. The headstall is leather or nylon and has a chin strap, neck strap, brow band or ear slot.

If you are putting the pieces of the bridle together be sure to include the chin strap because it applies pressure below the jaw when you pull the reins. It allows the action of the bit to be effective. For years we used traditional headstalls with a brow band and neck strap but lately we have been using single ear slot headstalls. They keep the bridle in place just as well and maybe better, and with fewer parts. For many of our horses that are trimmed behind the poll, we have removed the throat latch. This is because we are bridling many horses at once and it saves time. However, some horses learn how to rub the bridle off and you need a throat

latch for these horses.

Reins are much nicer to handle if they are not too wide. We prefer three quarter of an inch wide or less, but rein design is personal. However, heavy, stiff reins are not as responsive. Some prefer round woven leather reins. We like our reins narrow, “weighty”, well oiled, and supple. There is a synthetic leather like material on the market now that makes excellent reins. They look like leather and are more supple and consistent in cold or wet weather. While on the trail, riders tend to drop their reins or not secure them properly at times, allowing the horse to step on them. If you are using synthetic reins they will not break, so when the horse steps on the reins and pulls his head up he can be seriously hurt when the bit jams against his mouth. You need to install a “break string” between the reins and the bit.

Always tie up your trail horse with the lead rope, never the reins.



Bits

Walking into a saddle shop and looking at a twenty foot wall covered with bits is enough to send a neophyte bit buyer into a cold sweat.

It is embarrassing to tell the sales girl, who always looks like she won the national reining finals that very morning, that all we know about bits is that they are supposed to turn a horse left, right, and “whoa.”

Take another look, it is not so bad. We can simplify bits and put them in two categories, snaffle bits and curb bits.

Snaffle bit - The snaffle has no shank or lever on the side of it. It often has a round ring or a D-shaped ring on the ends of the mouth bar. Reins are attached to the rings and when the rider pulls on a rein there is direct pressure from the ring opposite the rein being pulled that pulls the head around. Snaffle bits often have a jointed mouthpiece. The mouthpiece should be thick enough that it will not cut into the horse's mouth - we prefer 3/8 of an inch or larger.

Curb Bit - If the bit has a shank or a lever on each side, regardless of whether or not the mouth bar is solid or swiveled, it is called a curb bit. Unlike the snaffle bit, the curb bit needs a properly adjusted chinstrap. The reins are attached to the ends of the lever and when the rider pulls the reins, the lever swings back, the chin strap tightens against the lower jaw, and the curve or “port” in the mouthpiece is driven up to the roof of the mouth - to “cue” the *trained* horse for the desired request.

It is very important to note that when using a bit for early training you need to use a snaffle bit. Do not proceed to a curb bit until the horse is proficient with the snaffle bit. This means that the horse is calm and responds softly to cued stops, lateral flexion, flexion while riding in circles, riding straight between the

reins, and backing up. Using a curb bit will not help train a horse to become responsive and soft to the above requests. Proper training will.

We progress to a curb bit when the horse is responding to indirect pressure – neck reining.

If your horse is trained properly, all you should need to ride is the halter and a piece of string for reins. We have ridden many trail miles with only a halter and makeshift reins because the bridle (and an extra one) was ruined or lost. However, for trailriding, a bit or hackamore offers safety, control under difficult circumstances and durability.

If you feel you need aggressive bits or aggressive hackamores, retrain your horse. If you always need a marten gale because the horse is throwing its head or rearing dangerously, retrain or sell your horse. As many dude strings we prefer medium shanked, gentle curved, medium port bits. Do not expect that changing the bit will correct a stiff mouth, stiff neck, or rude behavior. The idea of long shanked deep port bit is to exaggerate movement so that an experienced rider can offer subtle cues and get a response. Do not use an aggressive bit to control a difficult or stiff horse. Send the horse back to basic training.

We have used a traditional hackamore (bosal) for early training as well as a snaffle bit. There are excellent hackamore designs for trail but the mechanical hackamores with long metal shanks should be used with caution. If you need an aggressive hackamore like that to control your horse you need to do some retraining.

A bosal needs to be adjusted properly and although they all look similar, they vary in texture, stiffness, and diameter. A horse does not react to a bosal as it does a bit, and may toss its head to pressure. Read about bosal use and training before you use one.

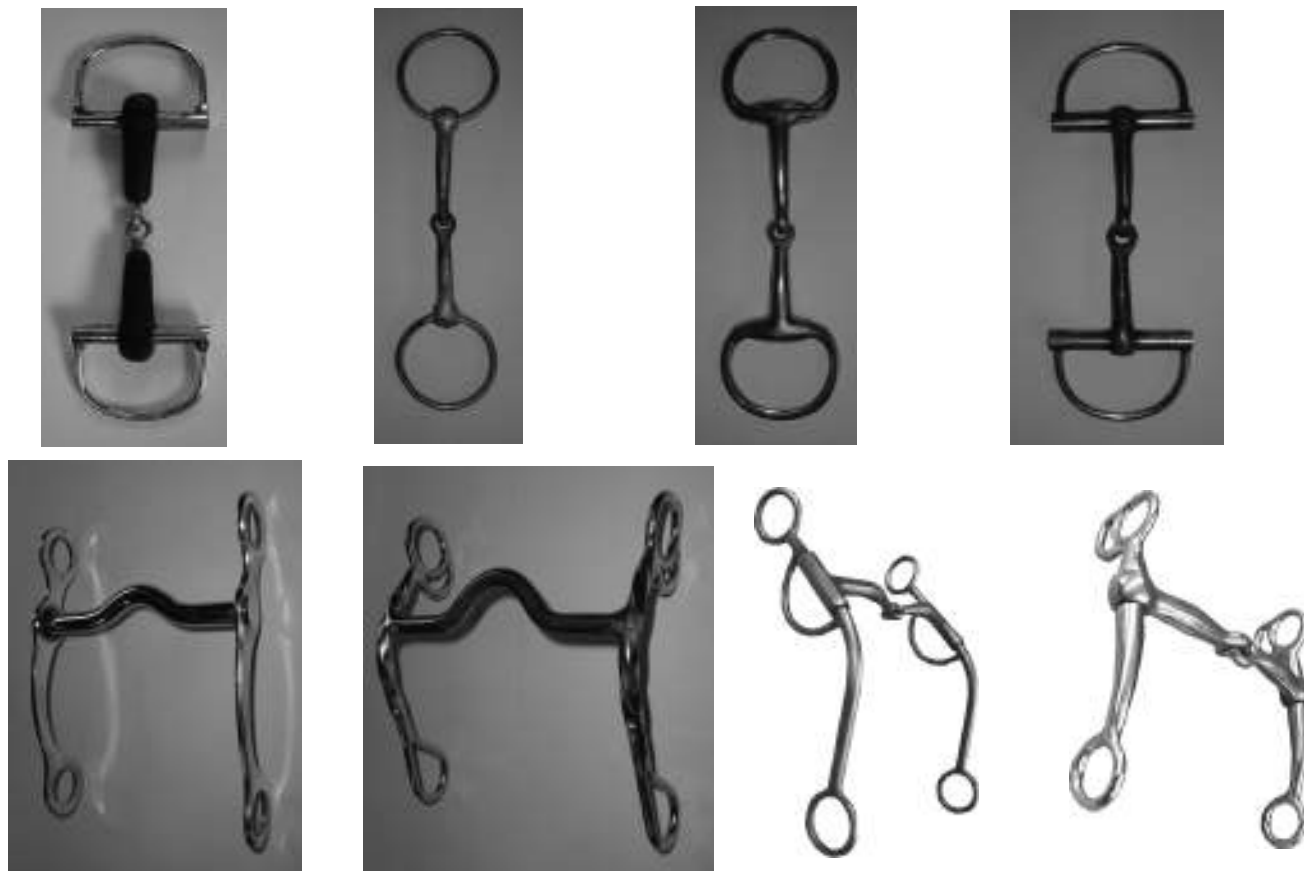
Early training and problem solving is best done with a snaffle bit because they do not have shanks that apply pressure. You need the horse to *want* to respond softly to simple, light pressure, not pain from an aggressive bit.

Be sure that the width of the bar matches the width of the mouth. Too wide a bit will be sloppy and too narrow will pinch the mouth.

The chin strap needs to be snug (two fingers between strap and jaw) enough so that it

firmly contacts the chin when the reins apply pressure to the shanked bit. A chain strap has more bite than a leather strap. Be careful that a chain chin strap is not too tight.

Use a quality bit with a sweet iron, and/or a copper bar. These materials encourage salivation and are 'sweeter' to taste than cheaper stainless steel or plated metals - and you want salivation.



The top row are all examples of snaffle bits used in training. The bits on the bottom row are curb bits. The curb bit on the left has a shallow port (bump on the mouth bar) and the one to its right has a medium port. The curb bits on the right have a swivel mouth bar that, like a port, does come up into the roof of the mouth when in action. The mouth bar of all bits should be wide enough to not pinch the sides of the mouth and thick enough (3/8 inch) so that it will not cut the horses mouth. Mouth bars should be made of iron, sweet iron, or copper, to taste good and encourage salivation. Do not be concerned about some rust on an iron mouth bar - horses like it.

While on the trail your bit offers control, safety, and durability. Although there are dozens of bit designs on the market, a trained trail horse will be well served with a medium shanked, medium port bit with a copper or sweet iron bar.

Hobbles

Hobbles are a control device that can be used in a variety of situations:

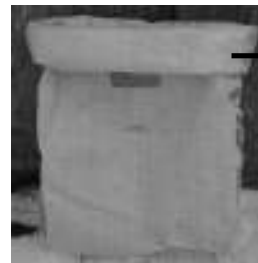
1. Turning your horse out to feed.
2. Control while desensitizing, worming, grooming, applying medicine, or breeding mares.
3. Turning your horse loose at night in a strange pasture - helps prevent the horse from running into a fence.
4. Standing calm practice - post broke - helps to stop pawing.
5. Temporarily placed on an aggressive horse while in the company of subordinate horses.

6. Temporarily placed on a horse to prevent him from jumping a low or damaged fence.

7. Allows the horse to feed while on the trail and you want to walk over to the next basin.

Some riders feel that hobbles are cruel but they are just one of many ways we control horses. Our horses are in and out of hobbles from June until November. If given a choice they would prefer to be running free, however they are controlled horses and they are not free when they are ridden, packed, or feeding.

Using hobbles will be covered under "Wrangling."



— Cut off collar.



Our two favorite hobble types are the quick release model on the lower left, and a typical outfitters chain hobble on the top left. These 'Blue Creek' chain hobbles have a protective rubber sleeve to help prevent 'hobble burn'. The hobbles on the right are made from a feed sack folded back a few times, cut off, twisted, and slipped over the horses feet. Use a large feed bag or gunny sack.

Bells

Every horse that is turned out to feed has a bell around its neck. If a horse is standing behind trees you could spend a week and walk a hundred miles for a horse that was initially one hundred yards from camp.

Bells that disappear faintly in the distance tell you they may be headed for greener pastures and that it is time to bring them in. Bells can often be heard a mile away - an impressive homing device.

Very often the horses are resting or standing still as you walk by - some actually learn to stay still to avoid detection. Sometimes you can have ten horse bells and barely catch the sound of one little “tink.” If you leave a bell off of a horse in the herd, the “tink” that you don’t hear belonged to the horse you did not put a bell on - Murphy’s Law is alive and well on trail rides. Be sure your bell strap is just tight enough so that the bell cannot slip over the horses head.

Lead Ropes

Over the years we have used nearly every type of lead rope and metal snap imaginable. Most have served their purpose. We have settled on the button - loop lead rope described below. A horse can pull on it all day and it won’t break. It has no metal parts to break,

seize up, or bang on our bells as we ride. They are economical, and much lighter to carry when you head out on a walk looking for a few horses.

The knob end is tricky to make and difficult to explain with drawings or photos. If you like, call us and we will send you a rope, or as many as you would like. These ropes work great with rope halters as you can quickly slip the button into the halter loop for short term use.

We prefer to have our saddle horse leads at around eight-nine feet long and our pack horse leads at around eleven feet. Because you may want to tie horses neck to neck when you bring them in (which requires more length) and because it is a nuisance measuring ropes to see how long they are, keep all of your leads at around ten to eleven feet long and they will be practical for all uses.

As trail riders gain more experience, they tend to prefer leads at 1/2 or 5/8 inch diameter as opposed to 3/4 inch. 1/2 inch is handier to work with and tie. It is lighter to carry and creates less bulk when dallied around your saddle horn. Although cotton feels friendly, we use a synthetic as they are more durable. A horse can make short work of a cotton lead that gets dragged around and stepped on. A quality double braid (stable braid) or sash braid nylon or polyester works very well.



Because trail riders may lead other horses, bring horses into camp tied neck to neck, or tie horses to large trees, they often prefer a longer lead rope, often ten to eleven feet long. This Blue Creek 'Button Lead' is our favorite. The leather 'tip' on the end aids the rope when used as a crop or as a short lunge line.

Accessories

The type of stirrup riders prefer is also personal. We prefer stirrups that are roomy and heavy - it helps to catch them quickly in difficult circumstances. Riding shoes are not always practical during wilderness rides so we need a wide stirrup. Be careful if your boots have a low heel and grips because they can get caught up. Tapaderos (front covers) are a great idea. They keep your foot from entering too far and they also protect your foot from debris or sticks getting caught up.

Use good long, strong, tie strings on both the front and back of your saddle. A two inch ring mounted on the front left side is a good place to tie your lead rope to, especially if you already have your pack horses lead wrapped around your horn. Your stirrups should be "turned out", ninety degrees to your horse. This makes riding much more comfortable - less stressful on your knees and most important, when you find yourself jockeying for the stirrup it is much easier to find. Turn them and put a

stick through them when you are not riding and they will "set" with time.

We prefer our saddle bags ten inches square or less. One time a guest showed up with a huge nylon saddle bag arrangement that had to be fifteen inches around and six inches deep. He tied the arrangement on the back of his horse and stuffed it with who-knows-what. He went to mount and could not get his leg over the abomination. We took them off, unloaded what he did not need, and used a regular set. He was much happier.

Saddle bags need to be tough, securely mounted, and rain proof. Avoid bags made from light split leather or cheap synthetics.

A small set of pommel bags can be nice to hold your camera or munchies, but again, unnecessary bulk does create awkward and difficult situations on the trail. Velcro straps can spook your horse so desensitize your horse to the noise.

THE FIRST RIDE

With the ground work completed, the first ride is often anticlimactic. What you ask for in the saddle is the same as what you asked for while on the ground. The greatest fear that the horse has on the first ride is the surprise of weight plus the idea of having this imposing, living creature, looming above his head. Have you ever unexpectedly climbed over the opposite side of a fence from a tied horse? The horse probably looked up, thought you were death itself, and flipped out.

Some feel that this common reaction stems from the instinctual fear of predators like mountain lions attacking from above.

There have been many horses from years gone by that have had their first ride with no ground work at all. You have seen the drill in cowboy movies. The horse is roped, thrown, saddled, and bucked out. Modern day trainers might consider this a horror but these buckaroo methods have more in common with modern meth-

ods than we care to admit. In the round pen, we push the colt until he submits and the colt learns to come to us as a release from pressure. The buckaroo rides the horse until he submits, and the horse finds a release from pressure as he yields to the struggle and the riders presence. The buckaroo then does his “ground work” from the saddle; softening the mouth, applying pressures and familiarizing the horse with ropes and the cowboy way of life.

These harsh methods created many resentful horses with a host of bad habits, but sensible stock and talented, tough riders overcame many difficulties. Countless good horses that spent long, reliable years under saddle were trained in this manner.

We have successfully completed ground work with many of our two year olds in less than a week. Sensible horses seem to “eat up” training in a minute and appear to know what to do before you even ask. These horses often welcome more time with the

trainer. Although the above may be true, experience tells us that we create a happier, receptive horse when you make lessons shorter, say an hour a day, and repeat these lessons over time. Many trail riders prefer to pack their horses for a season before riding them. There are many benefits to this process as the horse becomes desensitized to many noises, objects, trail conditions, and looming weights. These horses are generally safer as they are exposed to difficult trails, water crossings, pecking order and human contact.

Saddling

Putting on the pad and saddle is just a continuation of the brushing and rubbing that you have been doing.

1. Begin with a good brushing. Rub the cinch area.
2. Let the horse smell the pad and saddle before you put them on. We often put

the saddle on the ground and hold a bucket of grain by the saddle while the horse takes a few mouth fulls. Saddling an experienced horse beside the first time horse will show him it is nothing to fear.

3. Approach the shoulder first. Rub the pad gently on his shoulder, lower neck, and back. Place the pad on a few inches forward of where it naturally belongs.

4. If you have a choice, use a light saddle for the first few times. When you approach the horse's shoulder, gently make contact with your left elbow as a friendly signal that the saddle is coming. Be sure that the rigging and offside stirrup is up and out of the way. Be sure the offside stirrup cannot flap down and bang the horse on the ribs. If in doubt, tie up the rigging with a string.

5. Rather than just putting the pad and saddle "on", play with it, slide it around a little, take it on and off a few times - until the horse is totally calm about the experience.

6. If the horse gets excited, be sure you stay calm and keep your voice gentle. If he moves around, try to hold the saddle on until he calms down. By this time, our horses are hobble broke so we often put them on before first saddling.



Prior to placing on the pad or saddle the horse must be completely desensitized, including brushing the saddle and cinch area and rubbing the saddle pad over its back, sides, neck, and rear quarters. Notice that the trainer is making first contact with her elbow, gently, before placing on the pad (or saddle). This is a friendly signal as to what's coming. It has a great calming effect.



The trainer is placing the saddle on from the 'off' or right side as opposed to the more common 'on' side. Trail conditions demand that trail horses become comfortable with both sides. Note the forward placement of the pad.

Once the saddle is in place the saddle and pad can be gently slid back into proper position (the front cinch should not be rubbing up against the front leg, but an inch or two back from it). As you ride the horse saddle pads tend to slide back with the direction of the hair so be sure that the extra pad is out front.



The first time that a girth cinch is tightened can be a fearful experience. Be gentle, snug it up only 80% until the horse accepts the procedure. Snugged up 100% means that you can comfortably slip in a couple of fingers behind the cinch, or, as you tighten the latigo it will slide tight with effort then become suddenly very resistant. This is the time to stop. (The cinch is too high in this photo. It should be just above the point of the elbow and 2 inches back from the front leg.

Tie up the stirrups for the horses first run in the round pen or on a lunge line. The saddle feel and noise is enough to get used to the first time without stirrups banging him in the ribs. Do not be overly concerned if the horse acts up or bucks during his first run. Once the horse is calm we let the stirrups down and run him again in order to desensitize him to the jostling.



7. Once the horse is settled down, go to the other side and gently let the rigging down. Back on the left side reach under and grab the cinch. If you do not feel comfortable reaching under for the cinch, make a hook with a piece of bailing wire or clothes hanger. Your saddle and pad should have been placed a few inches forward but by now will have slid back to the proper place with the cinch just behind the shoulder. If the saddle is too far back, pick it up and lift it forward rather than sliding it forward.

8. Tighten the cinches snug but not overly tight. You do not want the saddle slipping under his belly on his first time with a saddle. Always tighten the front cinch before the back cinch. If you tighten the back cinch first, the saddle can slip back, slide sideways and cause the horse to react. The girth cinch ring should be positioned just above the point of the elbow and two inches behind the front leg.

9. Take the saddle and jiggle it around, pulling and pushing here and there and from both sides. Give the saddle a slap once in a while, and give the horse a mouthful of grain once in a while.

10. The horse should be standing calm and used to the saddle. Attach a lunge line and send him for a few laps (see Chapter 2 - Lunging). You can send him for a free run in the round pen but having a lunge line attached gives

you control of his head. When the stirrups begin to flop around (you may want to tie them together at first) the lunge line will help you turn him if he tries to look for a way out of the pen. The line also allows you to “reel” him in and calm him down after several laps. Do not be too concerned if the horse does some bucking and acting up to begin with - just put him through the lunging paces and he will soon settle down.

First Bit

The bit is used to control the horse. Because we use control constantly we need to train the horse to respond to the bit properly. This is probably the most important lesson for the first ride. There are countless horses, you can see them at every horse gathering, that have problems with their mouth. They won't turn properly, they throw up their heads, they brace themselves, and other problems.

Having the horse yielding to pressures in the halter is the best place to start, however, being soft in the halter does not necessarily mean he will be soft in the bit. The horse needs gentle hands to place the bit, time to get used to the bit, and soft, deliberate hands that ask for the first responses. You need to be sure that the horse is comfortable and responding properly with the snaffle before progressing to the shanked bit.



Once the mouth and ears are desensitized, and prior to bridling, slip a halter on and off repeatedly.



Pressure on the poll lowers his head and allows the rider to place the bit. These photos show an experienced horse and a curb bit. Note: Always use a snaffle bit for early training as opposed to a curb bit.

For a horse that does not respond to pressures and you do not have the time to train him, you may find this method more practical. Your back against his chest encourages him to push forward into the bit. Pull the headstall up with your right hand as you insert the bit with your left hand.



Find the gap between the front and rear teeth. Push down against the lower gum until the lower jaw opens. Gently slide the mouthpiece (bar) in. The bit placement must be a gentle process or you can ruin the horse (head shy, hard mouth, puller, etc.).

1. A D or O ring snaffle, with a swiveled or solid bar, metal or rubber, can all be used successfully as a first bit. The width of the bar, from ring to ring is important. If it is too wide it will be sloppy. A large D ring is preferable to a smaller O ring because it is less likely to pull through the horse's mouth. The reason that a simple snaffle bit is better as the first bit than a bit with long shanks and a pronounced port is that with the snaffle, the horse is responding to gentle, direct pressure. When the horse re-

sponds properly you know it is responding because its mind is soft - it is not reacting to a forceful bit.

2. The horse needs time to accept the feel of the bit the first time. We find it handier and safer to use a headstall and snaffle with no reins attached until he will actually be ridden. By now the horse has been saddled a few times and the saddle is on the horse.

3. Be sure that the horse is giving his face

freely and yielding to pressures (see Chapter 2). He must be willing to drop his head. We gently massage his mouth and the side of his face with our hands and headstall prior to asking him to drop his head and putting the bit in his mouth. If you have repeatedly applied poll pressure with your fingertips and have the horse dropping his head, putting on the headstall should be no problem. If you are having difficulty getting the horse to lower his head hold the lead rope close to the halter in your right hand, put grain or a carrot in a lowered left hand, and tug down lightly as he lowers his head to eat the treats. You can even squeeze his lower neck - wither area prior to giving the treats in a lowered hand. Soon he will lower his head with a tug on the rope or a squeeze on the withers.

4. Bring the headstall up with your left hand and reach down for it with your right hand which is over his poll. Use your thumb to gently pry his mouth open in the space where the bar will sit (there are no teeth here). If the bar is resting between your thumb and forefinger, and the mouth is pried open, you should be able to slide the bit in place.

Be gentle when you slip the headstall over his ears. The bar should just touch the corner of the mouth. Do not put it on too tight -

not an obvious 'smile' - we want the horse to learn to pick up and carry the bit as opposed to having it jammed in.

Remember that training to this point has been a series of applied pressures and yielding or giving to the pressure for a welcomed release. In the case of the bit, your thumb that pries open the mouth is applying the pressure, and the horse lowering its lower jaw is a release and reward for responding to the pressure. As with all requests for yielding to pressure, give the horse some time to think and respond.

5. After the bridle is in place let him get used to the feel. Giving the horse grain while the bridle is in place is a great way to have the horse accept the bit. The aggressive chomping on the bit usually calms down within the hour. We like to keep the horse tied if we leave him alone for an hour or so as the young horse that is turned loose may try and get rid of the bridle and get caught up in it. Allowing the horse to eat grain with the bit in his mouth helps him get used to it.

6. After the horse has carried the bit for a while, run the horse in the round pen or on a lunge, and lead him around for a while. Repeat all of the pressure yields explained in "Continued Groundwork". Put the reins on and tie them

This two year old is experiencing his first snaffle bit. He will pack the bit around the corral for an hour or two, munch on some grain now and then, and get used to the bit to the point where he stops constantly chewing. Do not begin any training while the horse is still aggressively chomping on the bit.



up. Keep each rein loose and equal length. Because the bit is in place use it rather than the halter when asking the horse to give its face side to side and “back.” You are trying to soften the horse as you go - your tugs should get lighter as the horse gains experience.

7. While asking the horse to give his face to the side, use crisp, light tugs and expect him to hold his face in position briefly with no pressure on the reins. Increase the holding time from a couple of seconds to several seconds as time goes by. You do not need to ask the horse to give its face more than 90 degrees to the body. Move the horse’s face back to the straight and normal rest position after each yield rather than allow the horse to take it back. If the horse flings its head all the way around so that he is looking toward his backside let him hold it there but when it goes to take it back, bump him to the flexed position.

8. Do not repeat the side to side exercise more than once or twice or the horse will become frustrated. Mix in all of the yields as you lunge him, run him or walk him (“over”, “back”, drop the head).

9. Once the colt is giving his face laterally, bring a rein around and attach it to a

cinch ring. Begin with the horse’s face just off center. Do not ask for too much flex as you want to allow the horse the room to flex more, to give to the pressure of the bit. Put the colts through some round pen or lunge line laps. Repeat on the other side. This exercise allows the horse to accept flex while in motion, and yielding to the bit while in motion. This is an important step in softening the entire horse in preparation for riding.

Similarly, tie both reins back so that the head and neck are flexed slightly downward. Again, do not tie the reins too short as the colt needs to comfortably yield more to relieve bit pressure. Moving the horse forward while his face yields to downward pressure will introduce the horse to the concept of ‘collection’.

Collection is the idea of ‘pulling a horse together’ - ‘getting his hocks under him’ while under forward impulsion. It is a balance between impulsion and restraint that is highly sought after in dressage, western pleasure, and reining disciplines - and not always easy to achieve. Trail riders generally spend little time debating the worth of collection - it is usually placed on the same shelf as ‘Flying Lead Changes’.



When asking the horse to yield to lateral bit pressure, use light tugs directly back towards the saddle. Soon we will be asking from the saddle seat. Tugs need to get progressively lighter. Be satisfied with his head turned slightly in the beginning. Take a few lessons to work up to a 90 degree position. As you practice, ask more softly, expect more.

The horse must hold position as you allow slack. Expect only a three count in the beginning but a ten count after a few lessons. Position the horse face back to center with your hand before he takes it back himself. Repeat.



Now that the horse is flexing his head softly toward direct rein pressure, tie a string or rein from the bit (use a snaffle) to the saddle ring. Flex the head slightly at first. Send the horse on a run in the round pen or lunge line.

Do not prolong running with the head flexed. A few laps should be enough to have the horse 'soften' to the pressure of the bit. You can tell when the horse stops fighting the bit and his body softens in an arc similar to the curve of the fence.



First Riding Lessons

1. Remember to tie your horse at eye level or higher. Lower tying can injure the horse's neck if he pulls.

2. Begin with your horse bitted with a snaffle bit and saddled. Without getting in the saddle, apply pressure in your stirrups with your foot, on both sides, increasing pressure and elevating your body as you repeat the exercise. When working with young horses never stick your foot in the stirrup too far.

3. If you are able, saddle an experienced horse next to the green horse and sit in the saddle. Lean over and gently rub the green

horse. This will help him get used to your looming presence. Pony the green horse - lead him around as you ride the experienced horse.

4. Brush the horse down before you get in the seat, especially the hips where your leg may brush up against.

5. Continue putting your foot in the stirrups until the horse is calm. Finish the job and lift your leg over and *gently* sit in the seat. Use soothing verbal dialogue. *Never* mount if the horse is moving about.

6. Spend fifteen minutes sitting in the saddle and relaxing. Rub the horse gently in the shoulder, neck, and hips. Repeat getting on and off from both sides. Trail horses need to be comfortable being mounted from both sides.



Before riding be sure the horse is desensitized to saddle noises, saddle 'jiggling', and stirrup pressures - from both sides. If the horse moves, even one step, lightly snap the lead downward and say 'whoa' - be sure he stops moving - front feet need to be even (square).

As the horse continues to stand calmly, increase stirrup pressure and elevation, until you are 'looming' above the horse. Bounce up and down several times on each side without actually getting in the seat.





7. Lead the horse out to the middle of the pen or corral. From the ground, ask the horse for the yields practised in the “Training” chapter (lateral face yields, “over”, “back” and head down). “Cluck” and lead the horse around a lap or two.

8. Get in the saddle again, sit for a moment then from your seat ask for lateral flex with your rein. Be sure to relax the off rein. Allow the horse time to think. If the face yields go well, ask the horse to “back.”

9. When asking the horse to “back”, lean back slightly in the saddle and lightly tug back on even reins. Increase the bumping. Because we lean forward and squeeze our legs to ride forward, we must open our legs (move them off of the barrel of the horse) and lean slightly back to back up the horse. If the horse does not respond and is bracing itself try “sawing” the reins. By sawing we mean holding a rein in each hand and repeatedly pulling one then the other. If the horse refuses, “back” or is very stiff, get off and perform the procedures from the ground, or, have someone back the horse from the ground while you are in the saddle. Be sure you apply pressure with the bit while on the ground, not the halter. After a couple of reminders from the ground, the horse will respond in the saddle, if even for one step back. Do not expect too much first time out. These first pressures from the saddle should be the comfortable and enjoyable lessons that they

Once the horse is comfortable with your presence, gently slide into the seat. If you are concerned about the horse acting up, have someone hold the lead rope. Practice lots of standing time while sitting in the saddle, desensitizing, and getting on and off, before you ride.

already know. The only new thing now is the location of the trainer.

10. Many people begin the first ride by having the horse walk or run forward. We prefer to spend time standing, asking lateral Flexing, and “back” to start. We are establishing that the trail horse needs manners before movement and that the horse does not know what will be asked of him next. It keeps the horse honest and focused on the rider.

11. After fifteen minutes of “playing” in the saddle we encourage the horse to move forward. We do this by keeping the reins relaxed, “clucking”, lightly squeezing our knees together and leaning forward. If the horse is reluctant to move forward we get off and do a leading drill, using the whip to be sure that the horse responds immediately to “cluck.” If you have help, have someone help leading as you give cues from the saddle. Being led around by someone on the ground can be a safe beginning for the first ride. Be sure that the person on the ground is tugging on the halter and not the bridle. If we know the horse is calm, we often use a crop to tickle the hips in order to get the horse to move out.

12. *When the horse does move ahead, give him as much free rein as you can. You want to make his first forward motion enjoyable.* Let him walk and even trot around freely. The colt needs to think that moving out is good, “Hey, I can do this!” If the horse begins

to take off in a run you need to tug him in and stop or slow to a walk, but let him move ahead as much as he wants. If he takes off on a big run pull on one rein and turn him as he runs. Pulling on two reins may encourage bucking or rearing. (See 'Emergency Stop')

13. It is very important that you do not ask too much on the first riding day. If your horse walks out when you cluck, feels good about moving forward, has a sense of "whoa" to stop and pressure on a rein to turn, that is enough for one lesson. Do not get into a struggle to stop repeatedly or haul the horse's head around to turn or expect the horse to walk around in nice circles. Ask a little more each day and if he is stiff, ask for yields on the ground first.

14. In the coming days you should practice these drills while in the pen or corral.

a. Before each ride, practice all yields on the ground. This takes only a few minutes.

b. Practice patience in the saddle. Ask for lateral yields of the bit and "back before walking out. Remember that all of our requests are bumping pulses in the reins, never long pulls. When asking lateral flexing the horse may want to walk circles (as they often do the first time with ground work). Let him. You do not want to be pulling back on the rein and confusing the horse. If you just ask for flex with the rein, but do not "cluck" or lean forward, *the*

colt will walk circles until he realizes it is easier to stand with his head flexed rather than follow his nose. Give his face back when he stands still as a reward.

c. Walk the horse in circles. Do not ask for too much flex at first. The idea of forward movement is more important than the idea of tight circles. As days go by, ask for flex and circles in both directions.

d. Place buckets in the round pen and turn the horse around the buckets in various directions. It helps the horse to accept turning as there becomes a logical reason to turn - you are going around a bucket.

e. Practice riding straight lines -bucket to bucket. Walking straight and keeping the horse "between the lines" is very important for the trail horse. Trail riders are constantly riding across fields, meadows and along roads, where you need your horse to walk in a straight line. Your horse may not want to walk in a straight line because the direction may not make sense to him or there may be distractions. If he will not ride straight "between your reins" at home, you cannot expect him to ride between the reins away from home. Riding along fences is good line practice but it is better in the open, from object to object. Ride straight into fences. When you 'hit the wall', 'whoa', flex left or right, then cue to turn and move forward. Introduce the concept of direct leg pressure - see photos.



In order to ride with the proper seat, your stirrups need to be adjusted to the proper length. When you stand in the stirrups there should be 3-4 inches of clearance between the saddle and your butt, or, when your legs hang down, your ankles should be even with the bottom of the stirrup.



When the horse is comfortable with your presence in the saddle lead him out to the middle of the pen and once again, from the ground, ask for all of the yields. Repeat lateral flexion with the bit and 'back'. Walk out and 'whoa' repeatedly. Gently get in the saddle seat and practice standing calmly. At this point some trainers want the horse to immediately walk out to confirm the idea of good forward impulsion. We know our horses will walk out on cue, or with some encouragement, so we want to indelibly brand in their minds that they do not move without our consent. We want them 'waiting' for the next cue - and that cue will likely not be to walk away. At this point we lightly bump the face for soft lateral flexion, on both sides, and back to center. Practice standing calmly. If the horse walks out in a circle as you ask for flexion only let him turn until he decides to stop. Eventually he will stop. Give him his face back to center. Repeat on both sides.

Sit back and down in the seat. Remove leg pressure, say 'back', and lightly bump back with the reins. If no response, increase bumping pressure. If no response, 'saw' reins back and forth while saying 'back'. Do not get overly aggressive. If the horse is still braced you should dismount and 'back' from the ground using the reins, then try again from the seat. As a last resort have someone on the ground backing the horse as you give cues from the seat. Do not expect too much the first time, a step or two back is fine.



The first time you ask the horse to move forward it may take some encouragement. Lean forward, squeeze your legs and 'chick' ('walk' 'up' etc.). Once he moves ahead allow the horse some freedom of pace and direction the first time. Do not turn the horse, "whoa" or pull on the reins unless absolutely necessary. Let him feel that forward movement is good, even fun!



For the first few riding sessions practice lots of forward movement with turning circles. Lightly flex the head, large circles, not tight circles. Always work to soften your bumping rein pressure. Once the horse is comfortable with large circles, try smaller circles.

It is very important for a trail horse to ride straight 'between the reins' when asked to do so. Ride towards objects, along fences, or along a straight rope on the ground to practice this.



The trainer will be turning left. To initiate her turn she moves the pressure off her left leg ('opens the gate'), bumps her right leg against the girth area, 'pushing' the front end directly over to the left (direct leg pressure).

Out Of The Pen Riding and Reining

If a horse acts rude, stubborn, or is not focused on the trainer, you need to be very willing to send the horse on a good work lesson in the round pen or on the lunge line. Many good trainers will not even allow the horse to look in another direction while they are in training - if they do, they go for a run - they pay a price. The horse needs to know there is a consequence for bad behavior as well as a reward or a release of pressure for good choices.

Continue lessons away from the corral. Use your lawn, driveway, nearby fields and forests. Practice riding around objects and straight lines. Always strive for softness - ask less (lighter) and expect more. We carry a lunge line in the field. If a horse acts up, sees ghosts, wants to head home or gets silly for any reason, we lunge him as is where is, until he settles down. The horse learns that unnessecary behavior results in more work.

The more time you spend away from home the better. Tie the horse up for periods of time while on the trail. Taking your first rides away from home on an experienced horse and leading the green horse, or going with another rider, is the best way to introduce your horse to the trails. Take your rides away from home when the dogs are tied up and the wind is not blowing.

Up until this point in our training we have focused on direct pressures and direct reining. Now it is time to ask the horse to turn with an indirect rein (neck reining) and have him respond to cues as we ride. The point here is not simply to build a finely tuned horse but to have a trail riding horse that is practical and useful.

There are many moments when we ask our horses to take directions that make no sense to them at all. For example they see a perfectly good horse trail around the left hand side of a tree but you can see that thirty feet ahead it runs into a snag or a drop off and so you ask the horse to turn right instead. Well practised cues leave no doubt as to your intentions and so the horse goes right and the ride goes smoothly.

1. In order to give proper cues from the saddle we need to have a comfortable and natural seat. First the stirrups need to be adjusted so that when we stand in the saddle we clear the seat by two to three inches. When your legs hang down out of the stirrups your ankles should be even with the bottom of the stirrup. You should feel natural in the saddle. When the horse is walking, your thighs and rear take much of the weight, and in a trot or lope your lower leg takes most of the weight. You do not want to sit in a trot. It is important to ride on the ball of your foot so that you have balance and your ankles and knees can cushion your movement.

2. When mounting your horse stand near the left shoulder, facing back. With your left hand hold the reins evenly together with a good size clump of wither hair as close to the saddle as possible. Pulling yourself up with a clump of wither hair will not hurt the horse. Pulling yourself onto the saddle by the horn will pull your saddle off center. Place your left foot in the stirrup no further than the ball of your foot. With the power of your right leg spring *lightly* up into the seat. As you do this you will pull yourself up with the left hand while the right hand holds the back of the seat (cantle). It is important to mount this way while out on the trail because if your horse spooks while mounting and you are unseated you are still holding the reins in your left hand. It can prevent a run

away.

3. As you ride along, turning circles this way and that, you have been reining with direct pressure - plow reining (tugging on the right rein to turn right). Now, when you turn right and pull on your right rein, lay your left rein over the horse's neck to the right as well. Move your left hand slightly forward and be sure your left rein is relaxed. In time, the feel of the off side rein over the horse's neck will be enough to turn the horse. You are beginning to neck rein.

4. We combine the concept of neck reining with direct leg pressure. When you are about to turn right, squeeze or bump your left leg over to the right to "push" the horse to the right. Bumping your left leg or foot in this front cinch area sends the message to "move over" to the right. At the same time that you do this "open up" or move your right leg away from the horse. This gives the horse the feeling that it is okay to move in that direction. Your open right leg is like an open gate. Vice Versa for turning left. In a short time you can be riding down a trail, see a fork in the trail, lightly squeeze one leg and have the horse choose the right path. This is nice as your hands are free to do other things. *Once a horse responds to the feel of neck reining (indirect pressure) we can begin to use a curb bit.*

5. Forward impulsion was encouraged by squeezing our legs together and leaning forward. Now when we want to stop shift slightly back and sit down firmly as you tug the reins back. With some practice you will be amazed at how soon your horse will be stopping when you slightly "sit" back in the seat. Remember to use voice commands.

6. Try not to exaggerate hand positions with reining. Keep a shorter rein and keep your reining hand at about wither level. Do not drop, raise, or extend your hands out from the sides when turning or stopping. When you are asking for lateral face movement during early training you may have been tugging the halter or bridle outwards but now the reins need to lay along the horse's neck as you bump them back.

7. As we are riding the trails with one hand and turning with one hand we need to allow the right or left rein to alternately slide between our fingers. We do this by placing our ring finger between the reins and pinching one side or the other and letting the other slide, as we turn. Some people prefer the index finger. Take the slack back up with your free hand placed behind the reining hand. This process is like riding a bicycle. It feels clumsy and difficult then suddenly its easy and we never think about it again.

8. Finally and most important, *keep the horse guessing!* As you train and as you ride the trails you *always* control the horse's mind by never letting him know what is coming next. One minute you ask him to flex his head to the left while standing. The next minute you ask him to "back". Then you may say "whoa" and stand still for a while. A few minutes later you ask him to flex the right then walk out. Maybe you press down on his poll and ask him to drop his head. *Never* just go for a ride. As long as the horse thinks "What is he going to ask me to do next?" You can control the mind and the body. If the horse thinks, "I'm going to do this now because we did this last time", the horse controls his own mind and body. Its fun and easy to do.



While on the trail, mount facing backwards along the left shoulder of the horse with reins and a clump of wither hair in your left hand. Hold the reins short so that if a problem develops - if horses spook as you are mounting, you have control with the reins in your hand.

This rider has advanced from the pen to the trail. She is using bushes to encourage turns and circles. Neck reining is being introduced as the left hand bumps directly to the left and the right hand lays the rein over the neck. The left leg is opened to remove pressure and the right leg bumps the horse directly to the left. Hands are held low and not exaggerating their cues. Once the horse responds to the indirect pressure of a rein over its neck (neck reining), we can begin using a curb bit.



A well trained trail horse never knows what cues the rider will provide next - and waits patiently until they are given. It is the riders job to vary the requests and always keep the horse guessing!

Emergency Stop

There are times on the trail when we need to stop the out-of-control horse, including a horse that wants to buck. Pulling back on the reins collects the horse, bunches up his muscles, and encourages the rear quarters to drive forward. If you continue to pull back hard with both reins on an out of control horse then bucking or rearing may be the only outlet for the forward driving motion of his collected muscles. On the other hand, if we turn the horse with one rein we disengage the rear quarters by moving them sideways. This removes much of their power for forward motion.

It really helps to practice this exercise a few times because the horse gains confidence in you, your ability to control him, and he understands what is expected of him during an emergency. If your riding horse also packs, these lessons will help stop an excited pack-horse as you hold on to the lead rope and turn him. If you do not practice this method a few times then the out-of-control horse will be much more likely to fight for control of his head during stressful times.

1. Ride out in a walk. After several steps ask for flex to the right by bumping the right rein. The left rein is slack. As usual, do not apply constant pressure on the right rein, bump him then allow slack when his head is flexed. Keep the head flexed to the right enough that you are walking a tight circle, say ten to fifteen feet in diameter.

2. Let the horse continue the circle. Do not ask it to stop but do not ask it to go for-

ward either. As you are turning, move your right leg back to the back cinch area and apply pressure. Because your horse is trained to move "over" with pressure on his back rib area, your leg pressure will encourage his hind end to disengage and move over. As you are applying pressure with your right leg at the back cinch area in order to move the back end left, you can also apply pressure or bump the front cinch with your left leg. This will help move his front end over to the right. As you are turning circles ride straight in the saddle, do not lean over to the inside.

3. Allow the horse to turn until he stops on his own. When he does stop be sure his neck is still flexed and that you have slack in the rein for a few seconds. Then bump his face back straight with the left rein as a reward.

4. Repeat the procedure at a trot and practice turning in both directions. A few times is enough. Do not over practice.

You can also use this procedure on an antsy horse that constantly fidgets and will not stand still. Be patient and be sure you are not pulling the rein but providing slack after each bump.

The energetic horse will likely turn several circles but will eventually learn that stopping and standing calmly is the only way to remove the rein pressure that keeps him turning. Bring the horse's head straight as soon as he stops turning as a reward. Do not use this method to stop a fidgeting horse while with a group on the trail unless the other horses are stopped. The fear of being left behind will create too much stress for the horse to effectively learn to stop.



Simple Test

Do not call your horse a well trained trail horse unless he willingly and perfectly completes this simple test. Attach a lunge line or long lead rope to the halter. Say 'whoa' to the horse. Walk around the back of the horse to the far side as he stands perfectly still. Continue to walk until the rope is around both hind legs - above knee level. 'Cluck' to move the horse forward as you lightly tug on the lead. The horse steps out and turns in a smooth arc as you reel in the line until the horse faces you. Say 'whoa' and he stops a couple of feet from your hands.

Think about it - He flexes his face softly, stands still with 'whoa' as you walk away (ground tied), accepts the feel of a rope around his hind end and stands still, move out upon command in the direction of applied pressure, and stops with 'whoa'! Nice Horse!

CHAPTER FOUR

PACKING



Our forefathers & mothers packed horses as a necessity, a life line from supply posts to homesteads, ranches, mines, logging camps, outfitting camps, railway camps, exploration camps, and military camps. Times have changed dramatically now that we live the “good life”.

Horse use has changed dramatically as well. Horse enthusiasts enjoy a number of activities including backyard riding, rodeo, horse shows, horse racing, and a host of performance disciplines. Many of these horse people as well as other outdoor minded individuals maintain something of an adventurous spirit. Every year thousands hit the trails or pick up the lead rope of a trusty packhorse and head into what remains of our wilderness.

There is variety in the packhorse world too. Some enjoy a day ride as

mother natures companion while others head into the wilds beyond towards very real adventure. Either way the trip needs good planning, good equipment and good packhorses.

Experienced outfitters often feel that pack trips need to be taken with experienced guides. In some situations this would be true, however many first time pack trip adventurers with good gear, friendly experienced horses, and a limited number of horses, experience smoother, more enjoyable trips than guided groups with questionable gear, questionable horses, under questionable circumstances.

The reality of adventure is that you cannot predict what is going to happen. Although you may come out of your adventure wiser and worse-for-wear, you are much better off heading in with good gear, good horses, and the ability to tie secure hitches and knots.

EQUIPMENT

Carrying one hundred and fifty pounds of pack gear is more likely to cause sores and rubs than a one hundred and fifty pounds of live weight. Unlike dead weight, live weight “gives” and “flows” with the motion of the horse. It is very important that your pack saddles, pack pads, panniers (pack boxes), top packs and manties are well fitting and secure.

Pack Saddles

We have used all of the saddles described below and the one fact that stands out as important is that the type of saddle you choose is not as critical as how you use it.

Traditional sawbucks, deckers, and modern molded plastic saddles with adjustable trees and bars have all been used very successfully. Packing systems are often localized. You may find traditional sawbucks favored in the RioGrande, deckers in Idaho, and modified sawbucks in Alaska. You may find all types on the same mountain in Montana.

Adjustable, molded plastic saddles have gained great favor in the past twenty years because they often fit the horse’s back better than other store bought saddles. Follow these guide lines with your pack saddles.

1. Place your pack saddle on the horse’s back that will be using the saddle. *Carefully* check for spaces where the saddle does not contact the back and places where the saddle

creates pressure points. Be sure that the saddle is in the proper position on the horse’s back when you assess fit (not too far forward). *Most saddles*, even molded ones, need to be shaved, rasped, or sanded at high points before they fit perfectly. Your goal is to have complete, smooth, contact.

2. Check your saddle for breaks, cracks, and screws and bolts that are loose. Check all the rigging for weak and worn sections that need replacing. Over the years we have slowly adopted heavy nylon straps, belts and latigo for our packsaddles. Leather is great but be sure it is of good, heavy, quality.

3. Packsaddle latigo is usually narrower than riding saddles. You will find a one inch quality nylon or leather latigo nicer to work with than the wide, riding saddle type. Do not use thin seat belt type nylon as it slips and your load will loosen.

4. If we are using the Northern method, we prefer the same neoprene front cinch on our pack horse as on our saddle horse. If the rear cinch is placed back onto the barrel then the cinch material used is not as important as being sure that the cinch is at least the standard width or wider. Be sure that each horse has a separator band between the two cinches, adjusted to the proper distance so that the back cinch does not slip up into the flank. If you are packing with a decker, or a sawbuck with two cinches straight down, you may prefer a ‘double cinch’ - two cinches together as one unit. This eliminates cinches slipping on top of each other and provides more comfort from a wider band.

5. Whether or not you use a breast collar or a breeching (bum strap), or both, depends on the system you use, trails you ride, build of the horse and personal preference.

- a. If you pack with the traditional sawbuck or decker you will need both a chest

collar and britch'n to keep your saddle in place. Because both cinches (or one large one) come straight down to the flat chest area, there is really not much to keep the saddle from sliding back and forth, particularly on steep grades or once the cinches loosen up. In the "Northern" method, the rear cinch is tightened well back on the gut, preventing any forward motion of the saddle. Because this system is used with a horse that has a noticeable gut (as compared with a race horse type bottom line), the front cinch cannot slide back. The rings on the Northern made sawbucks are further apart, and the cinches generally applied tighter. The rings being further apart helps cinch down the front and back ends of the saddle tighter and there is less rocking motion in this system.

We generally use a breast collar on our Northern sawbucks for insurance. Sometimes, at the end of a long season a horse will lose its belly and if we are packing down steep grades with heavy loads a britch'n or crooper will prevent the load from slipping forward.

b. The decker is often the favorite choice for packers carrying heavy loads and it was also the type preferred by the army. It typically has a lot of built in padding to help prevent

sores. Deckers are often heavier and more expensive than a sawbuck, but many consider them the best value. Because of the metal bars, deckers are inherently stronger. A wooden forked sawbuck can easily break when rolled on but a decker rarely does. Because a half breed (padded canvas overlay with wooded slats for protection) often accompanies a decker, they protect the horse better with mantied loads or odd objects.

c. Some saddle makers do not like the idea that modern adjustable plastic packsaddles have bars that swivel. They feel that the load may rock more or more pressure may be placed on one bar or the other. We cannot tell that it makes a difference. Adjustable saddles definitely fit a wider variety of horses better than store bought wooden sawbucks. We also believe that a metal crossframe is less likely to break than wood. When packing with the Northern method, the back ring on the sawbuck should be placed further back than they come from the store. You can do this by increasing the length of the strap that joins the two cinch rings or removing in, and tilting the back ring back.

TWO CINCHES STRAIGHT DOWN

We have used many methods of attaching packsaddles to horses over the years. Our preferred method the last several years is two cinches straight down and a crupper, rather than full britching.

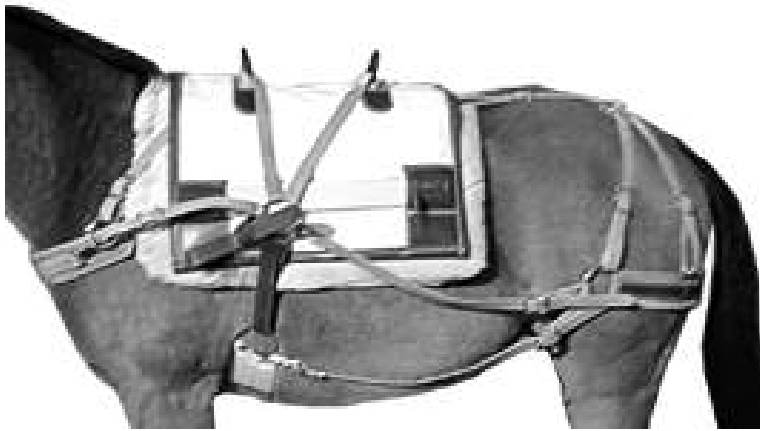
A crupper is all that is necessary to keep loads from sliding forward. Less gear to carry around, easier to place on the horse or mule, easier to maintain, and less expensive to buy. They do not have to be leather, but supple. And clean.

Strand cinches, and strand joined packers cinches are traditional for packsaddles. Through the 1980's and 90's that was our method as well. We turned to modern neoprene cinches for riding and packing and find them superior. They are friendly on the horse (no trouble with overheating as some would suggest), they stay clean longer on the trail – less scunge and crusting, and as a result, there is less maintenance and scalding.

With synthetic cinches we prefer rounded edges or forgiving edges, firm edges are more likely to rub. Use neoprene cinches, not PVC. To use as a double cinch simply attach a hobble leather or string between rings and 4-5 inches space between cinches.



A traditional wooden sawbuck used with a double cinch, britch'n and chest collar.



A Decker packsaddle being used with a single cinch, britch'n and chest collar - covered with a padded halfbreed.

A modern adjustable packsaddle used in the 'northern' pack method - two cinches with one well back on the barrel.



Packsaddle Pads

The pack pad needs to protect the horse's back without compromising the fit of the saddle. In order to protect the horse's sides from panniers or various objects packed, the pack saddle pad is typically thicker and larger than a

riding pad - about thirty by forty inches. For many years the typical pack pad consisted of a grey wool blanket (army type) folded and laid over the horse's back and a riding pad or felt pad over the wool blanket. This was, and is, an

effective system. The blanket could be used as a blanket in camp and can be easily washed. While using this system there is the concern that the blanket may have a fold or crease that can bother the horse's back. Folding the blanket to the proper dimension and using two pads rather than one is more work.

Most use one pack pad these days. The pad needs thickness or loft to protect the horse from saddle weight and pressure points. We generally avoid the fluffy looking pads that look one and a half inches thick but squeeze down to less than a half inch. Fluff is fine but we need substance as well.

The pads we use now are a quality one inch felt with a fleece cover (synthetic or natural fibre). We remove a strip of felt down the back to allow the pad to be lifted up to the forks of the saddle. Stores often carry felt pack pads that are one half to three quarters inch thick with canvas on one side. The felt is often cheaper quality synthetics rather than wool and tend to compress easily and possibly over heat more than wool or cotton. They should be used only with another blanket or thin felt layer underneath.

Avoid putting canvas, cheap felt, or coarse, hard, fabric against the horse's back.



A pack pad needs to provide exceptional protection from pressure points, excessive weights, and long days on rugged trails. A quality fleece with a 3/4" to 1" quality felt insert is a good choice.

Those materials can be abrasive and create saddle sores. These materials often collect sweat and scunge that hardens and becomes difficult to remove. Every few days take a horse brush and brush off scunge and "fluff" up the pack pads.

Soft bag and many loads can have objects in them that create pressure points against the horse's sides. Traditional packers sometimes use a piece of padded canvas draped over the saddle forks and down along the horse's sides. A wooden slat runs lengthwise along the bottom of the canvas and protects the horse's sides. These are called "quarter breeds" or "half breeds". They are not as commonly used as they once were, probably because mantied loads appear to be giving way to pack boxes.

For a few years we used a piece of quality carpet on the topside of our pack pads with excellent results. Just remember the idea of thick protection and soft and clean against the horse's back. Be careful that the pad is not so thick that the saddle loses its ability to fit the withers. Too thick will encourage the load to roll side to side and sore the horse (see Packing Up). One inch of felt is more than enough.

Packboxes (Panniers, Panyards)

Packboxes, soft bags, and manties are three types of containers that are used to hold gear that is secured along the sides of the horse. Packboxes are the most common method in use and many modern day packers use boxes exclusively. Food, cookware, and various smaller items are placed in boxes. Bed rolls, duffel and tents are placed on top of the boxes.

Panniers are very versatile. One back quarter of elk or moose, boned, will fit into a good sized pack box nicely. We do not see big game slung onto a horse with a barrel or a basket hitch as often as we used to.

Boxes protect gear better than bags or manties when going through thick bush. We have used panyards made from rawhide, canvas and leather, metal barrels, wood and plastic. Modern plastic boxes are nearly indestructible. We have had horses roll on our plastic boxes several times with little damage. Plastic actually “gives” when rolled on and may be easier on the horse’s ribs than wood. Wooden pack boxes have been the standard

and we have some beauties - attractive natural grain fir boxes reinforced with fiberglass. However, wooden boxes will not stand up like plastic and they are not as easy to clean. Nasty smells like old blood imbed themselves into wooden or natural packboxes. We love the feel and smell of canvas, leather, and wood, but it appears plastic is here to stay.

Innovative plastic panniers have shower attachments and lids that convert into table tops. We often send one over-size set of boxes out with each group as a kitchen set. The kitchen set can hold large, light, objects like pots and paper towels.

Pack bags (Soft packs)

Pack bags can be very handy items. Pack trip adventurers often pack too much gear and soft packs are excellent for packing bed rolls, duffel, tents, day packs, and other gear.



This is our favorite pack box. It is a very sturdy plastic in a natural brown color. It can take a beating without breaking and it cleans easily. The tops are sturdy to sit on and they form a table top. It also has a threaded female inlet for a shower hose attachment.

Hunting groups that may come back with loads of meat will often throw a set of empty bags on a packed horse then later sling them on a riding saddle and walk out with the saddle horse loaded with meat.

Recreational hikers and riders can hang the soft bags full of their personal gear and food on a riding horse, hike in, set up camp, and explore from camp with their saddle horse.

If you hang soft bags on a riding saddle, the saddle needs to be sturdy, have two good cinches and a breastcollar. Avoid the soft packs that are one unit and designed to “drape” over the saddle with a slot for the horn and cantle. These bags shift easily and it is difficult to weigh each side when placed on the horse.

Soft packs have some disadvantages. They puncture and tear when subject to extended use in brush. They do not protect gear as well and when you get to camp they cannot be used as tables or chairs. Also because the lash rope is placed between the soft pack and the horse’s pad, it is difficult to get the diamond hitch as tight as you might on a pannier, and they may become loose sooner.



When throwing a diamond hitch around soft bags there is no groove on the boxes to run the lash rope through, so, run the rope tightly between the bags and the pack pad. Never run it between the pad and the horse.



A hiker can remove the soft packs and have a riding horse.



Although most recreational packers use pack boxes and soft packs, manties are very practical when packaging and packing an assortment of gear - which is often the case when packing in a dude string.

Manties

A manty is simply a tarp wrapped rectangular load created when an assortment of gear is packaged. They often end up looking something like a wrapped square bale of hay. Manties are handy when outfitters are faced with a pile of assorted gear as you might expect from an assortment of guests heading out on a

pack trip. If you break a pack box or unexpectedly have to repack, a mantly can be the answer.

Manties have been standard practice across the U.S.A. for as long as there have been pack trains, and they are commonly used today. However, most recreational packers find it easier to hang a couple of pack boxes on a horse and throw the duffel, bedroll, or tent on top. Manties never did seem to catch on in the Canadian north or Alaska, possibly because the horses up north are constantly banging into trees and brush, an unfortunate reality that can make short work of manties or soft packs. Manties should be accompanied with a halfbreed to protect the horse's ribs. Manties are well suited to decker saddles.

Lash Rope

The lash rope is a key item because it secures the side and top load together and to the horse. Basically, it consists of two parts; the rope and the lash cinch.

Once tight, it is the job of the lash rope to "bite", as opposed to slipping or stretching. Do not use the common yellow poly rope found in hardware stores - it has the slippery, stretchy qualities that we want to avoid. Natural fiber manila rope is often used but it soaks up water

and can become soft when wet and stiff when frozen. Look for a quality "stiffer" poly or nylon rope. The best we have seen and use exclusively is a one half inch nylon line used by commercial fishing fleets.

One half inch is the standard diameter for a lash rope and those that have tried wider or narrower generally do not like it. The length of the lash rope is generally forty to fifty feet long, and the length may vary with the size of the horse and load. Ours are made at forty-five feet. An eye should be spliced into one end of the lash rope or make one with a bowline or honda knot. The eye is looped through the lash cinch ring to secure it without making a knot. The eye also allows you to easily remove the lash cinch for repairs or to use the rope for a basket hitch, high lead, etc.

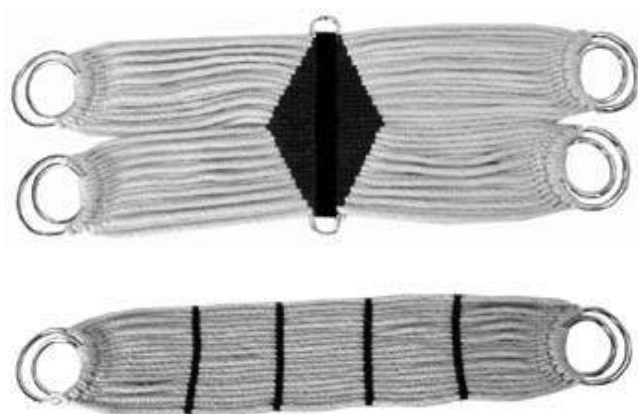
The lash rope is a handy item in camp. It can be used as an emergency tether for picketing a horse, a highline, a temporary fence, a clothesline, a tent rope, etc.

Lash cinches are commonly made of canvas, cotton, nylon web (a trucker's tie down belt), or old fire hose. We do not care for canvas as they get stiff and hard when dirty or frozen. We prefer old truckers belting or fire hose split in half. The lash cinch needs to be as wide or wider than a riding cinch.

Many saddle shops have cinch rings and

The lash rope needs to 'bite' when a knot is formed and when it is lashed around the load. There are better choices than the traditional manila but slippery, cheaper, yellow poly is not a good choice.





These packsaddle cinches have the extra ring for use with the crowsfoot hitch. The double cinch is an excellent choice for the sawbuck saddle. They also come in neoprene. (See Chapter 3 - 'Cinches'.)

lash hooks and they can be riveted or sewn on. Lash cinches should have an overall length of about forty inches. Because you stick your fingers through the rings when you coil the rope, the ring should be large - about two and a half inches across.

Top Tarps

Like the mantle cover, the top tarp needs to be made from extremely tough material. The top tarp helps secure the top load and protects it from the battering abuse of bush and the weather. A very heavy (fourteen ounce or better) treated canvas is good. We prefer the expensive synthetic tarp material that truckers use to cover loads. It has a flexible, rubbery feel to it in any weather and it is quiet. Noisy poly tarps can frighten the pack horse. Our tarps are six by seven feet.

Top Packs, Gear Bags And No Knot Systems

Top packs and gear bags are basically 'packages' that contain gear slung on as a top

load. They are great for packaging personal items, clothing and sleeping gear, and they help protect items against the weather and the general abuse that trail life provides. We use cylinder shaped carry bags rather than one large top unit because they can be individually weighed to perfectly balance each other, they are the right size for one individual's clothing and personal items, and they can be quickly and easily transported from house to vehicle to horse to tent, etc. If you unpack in the dark and leave them out in the rain or snow the gear is well protected. They can also be slung on the sides of the horse with a basket or barrel hitch - no boxes or bags needed!

Top packs are sometimes used with modern no knot packing systems. These systems really do work and they get you into packing without having to learn hitches like the diamond hitch or basket hitch. However, we have found that a well thrown diamond hitch secures a variety of loads easily and more securely, and it is really not that difficult to learn. We have used no-knot systems for several years and although they work well we find it unlikely that they will ever replace traditional lash ropes and hitches.



No knot systems are not traditional but they do work well. Experienced packers know that the simplicity and versatility of the diamond hitch is hard to beat.



We find these simple gear bags the ultimate personal carrying containers. They are 14" in diameter, 34" long, and made with the same heavy poly tarp material as our top tarps.

Muzzles

Muzzles are an important part of our pack gear. As your packstring is moving along, even if your horses are tail tied, it can be a constant nuisance if your horses are trying to feed. Muzzles eliminate that problem. While trailering, muzzles prevent horses from biting others. Buy muzzles that are durable as horses tend to be hard on them. Be sure they can breath and drink water freely.

PACKING UP

The packing procedures described in this book are universal. It does not matter if you are packing a donkey in Mexico, a mule in Arizona, or a percheron in Alaska, your goal is always to pack a load safe and secure; safe for you and the horse, and secure even after several hours on the trail. Slipped loads means you are creating pressure points under the saddle, possibly creating rubs, blisters and sores, and having to stop the trail string - which in itself can create many problems.

Location

Choose a good location to pack up. The ground needs to be level and you need enough suitable trees or a good spot for your picket line or high line. If you use trees be sure that there are no sharp branches to poke an eye. Tie above a branch or knot so that the rope does not slip down.

If you are working with several horses, keep your saddle horses in one group and your pack horses in another. This keeps your pack gear in one area when it is time to pack up. Be sure you identify the correct trail you need to head out on, and find a clear path to your trail before you pack up. The first several minutes after you mount up are often the most troublesome. If your packstring is playing ring around the rosie as you search for the "real" trail head, you are dealing yourself a load of grief.

Preparation

The amount of preparation that goes into your ride is directly related to the success of your trip.

Most people have expectations for their first day. They want to be gone by a certain time and travel so many miles. Once the horses are tied up and the gear scattered about, it becomes quickly apparent that sorting, packing boxes with food, pots, cutlery and adjusting tack and saddles, and packing up, is not a one hour job. Save yourself and the horses stress and time by having everything ready to go. Consider this....

1. Pack and weigh your panniers in advance, preferably at home.
2. Number your boxes so that you know

which box belongs with which as a partner. Also match duffel. Partnered bags and boxes need to be matched in weight.

3. Separate food types and cookware.

For example, box 2a has breakfast food and 2b has lunch. Inside the pannier lid tape a list of food or items that are in that box. It saves having to dig through 6 boxes to find the salt and pepper!

4. If you are slinging your boxes and bags on the packsaddle, be sure the ropes are right length and matched in length. Packboxes should not sit too high or too low on the horse's side. If they are too high, the weight is centered too high and then roll side to side. If the boxes are too low there is too much side pressure on the horse's barrel, making it more difficult to breath and awkward to carry. We find that if the top inside edge of the packbox is even with the top of the saddle bar (not the fork), then it is at about the right height.

We do not want to enter into a debate on whether you should hang pack boxes on with a sling rope or secure them with a basket rope - both methods work well. If you feel that the boxes may tilt with only a sling rope, try twisting the sling rope around one of the forks.

5. Have your saddles and bridles matched and adjusted for the horse prior to leaving home.

6. Plan the load of each horse before you leave home, otherwise there is sure to be someone's duffel or bedroll with no place to go.

7. Tell the riders in your group to keep gear down to an absolute minimum - allow a weight limit to each person. We allow twenty pounds of duffel, a bed roll, a day pack with camera, binoculars, munchies, etc. and thirty pounds of food per person per week.

Here is some information we send our holiday clients:



When preparing for a pack trip, leave all of the unnecessaries at home. This traveller is prepared and complete. He has twenty pounds of clothing, a warm bedroll with a thermarest inserted, and a day pack with camera, binoculars, munchies, etc. Warm coat and rain gear are tied on behind the saddle seat. Most day pack items go into the saddle bags.

BLUE CREEK

FOOD CHECK LIST

CANNED:

Meats
Fish
Vegetables
Pork & Beans
Stew - Chili
Pasta Sauce
Milk
Jam
Fruit

DRY:

Rice
Potatoes
Soup Mix
Pasta
Noodles
Kraft Dinner
Bisquit - Banock Mix
Granola
Porridge
Fruit - Raisins
Milk

FRESH:

Bread
Pita Bread
Cheese
Eggs
Vegetables
Bacon
Meat - Salami
Apples
Oranges
Margarine

OTHER:

Sugar
Syrup
Honey
Peanut Butter
Spices
Sauces
Salt & Pepper
Mustard
Ketchup
Mayo
Cooking Oil
Treats

WEIGHT:

Each Person is permitted a maximum of 30 lbs. of Food per week. For example, 2 people for 2 weeks can take up to 120 lbs of food. Be sure to pre-weigh your Food at home. It will save time and confusion at the trailhead.

WEIGHT SAVING IDEAS:

- 1) Pre-made backpacker type meals are lighter, easier to pack and quick to prepare.
- 2) Buy small sizes of items i.e. ketchup, mustard, mayo, jam, sugar, oil, margarine, sauces, syrup, etc.

PACKING - UP

It is very important for safe and efficient horse travel to pack exactly like the photo. Warm coat, raingear, and some backpack items can go on saddle.

Bed Roll (provided) - Your sleeping bag, thermarest, canvas cover. 10-15 lb.

Personal bag (provided) - Extra pants, shirts, sweaters, socks, towels, underwear, toiletries, gloves, toque, extra boots 15 - 20 lbs.

Day Pack - Camera, binoculars, treats, spotting scope, gloves, toque, water bottle, etc..

IMPORTANT:

If you add items like video camera, tripod, sleeping cot, etc., they must go in your personal bag or food box, and remain under the allowed weights.

BLUE CREEK

PROVIDED BY BLUE CREEK

Pack Gear

1. Horses (2-3 per person)
2. Saddles, pack saddles, pads
- fuel
3. Tack (bridles, halters, hobbles, bells)
4. Panniers, meat bags, ropes
5. Duffel bags (pack horse top packs)

Shelter

1. Tents, pegs
2. Tarps
3. Extra rope

Bedding

1. Canvas bedroll
2. Foamy
3. Extra blankets
- bards
4. Hot water bottle

Kitchen

1. Water containers
2. Grill
3. Pots, pans, griddle
4. Kettle
5. Tablecloth
6. Plates, bowls, cups, cutlery
7. Peelers, flipper, knives, can opener
8. Paper towels, tin foil, garbage bags
9. Basin
10. Scouring pads & soap

Equipment

1. Camp stoves (choice)
2. Lanterns, mantles &
3. Flashlight
4. Matches
5. Backpacks
6. Table tops
7. Axe, saw, scabbards
8. Bear spray
9. First Aid Kit
10. Duct tape
11. Playing cards
12. Mirror
13. Bug repellent
14. Topographic maps
15. Rifle or bow, scab-

RECOMMENDED PERSONAL LIST

1. Sleeping bag
3. 2 extra shirts, sweaters
5. Light underwear & long johns
7. 1 or 2 extra pants
9. Spare socks - 3 light, 2 heavy
11. Extra gloves
13. Towel & face cloth & soap
- paste, soap
15. Camera & film, binoculars, spotting scope
17. Water bottle
19. Diary - pen
21. Day pack
- tanks
23. Cheese Cloth - game bags
2. Warm coat & light coat
4. 2 T-shirts
6. Extra boots or runners
8. Toque & hat
10. Sweat suit - pyjamas
12. Rain coat & pants
14. Shaver, toothbrush &
16. Hunting knife
18. Sunglasses
20. Spare truck keys
22. 6-10 small propane

Packsaddle Adjustments

Proper pack saddle, riggin' and cinch adjustments insure that a load is less likely to slip or sore the horse.

Once again it is important to note that the type of saddle or system you use is less important than how you use it. For example, the 'Northern' method described here may be unfamiliar to many packers exposed to packing with Decker saddles with britch'n and sawbucks with britch'n. However, it has been the method of choice for many packers in Canada, the Territories and Alaska for a hundred years. Here are some guidelines to help you adjust your pack saddles.

1. *Saddle Adjustments* - As explained under the equipment section, saddles need to be fitted to the horses back. Because horses backs vary considerably in their shape, saddles are often personalized. They carry the horse's name that it belongs to; i.e. Bess, Shaker, Rex, etc. From our experience the modern plastic saddles that adjusting for width and have bars that swivel to the best angle fit better on most horses than the rigid, wooden, store bought sawbuck types.

To fit the saddle place it on the horses bare back. Be sure it is not too far forward or back. It should be placed so that the girth (front) cinch is about two inches back from the front leg. If the saddle has adjustable forks then adjust the width to the point where it has the most contact with the horses back. You can heat and bend the forks of a Decker saddle to give their bars their best fit. Carefully study the contact between the bars and the horses back.

Rasp down any high points. Be sure that the edges of the saddle are rounded so that they do not dig into the horse.

2. *Cinches* - Cinches should be adjusted so that the ring is just above the point of the elbow of the horse on both sides. Be sure they are not so high that they are pressed between the load and the barrel of the horse. If they have a sleeve over the ring, be sure it is not accidentally turned under - creating a pressure point. The girth cinch should not be so far forward that it touches the front leg. Two inches behind the leg is about right.

One advantage of the Northern method is that if the back cinch is tightened lightly before the girth cinch it keeps the girth cinch off of the front leg. The back cinch on the Northern method is done up just as tight as the front cinch and some do it up tighter as the gut becomes smaller as the day goes by. The back cinch in this method should be as wide or wider than the girth cinch.

How tight the cinches are is important. When a rider feels that his cinch is loose he gets off and gives it a pull - no problem. If your pack horses cinches are too loose, you have to hold up the string, repack and re-throw hitches on all of the loose loads. As a result, most trail riders tighten packhorse cinches - whether double, single, front or back - somewhat tighter than a saddle horse. However, too tight a girth cinch results in a cinch bound horse that labours to breathe or causes it to break into a profuse, feverish sweat. Overly tight cinches can also create swollen blisters on the lower chest area. You need to develop a feel as you snug up the latigo. As you slide it tighter it will suddenly become firm - almost a hard stop - that is

where we stop. The two fingers slid comfortably behind the cinch test is okay, but slightly tighter on a pack horse.

You need to have the back cinch riggin' on the Northern method tilted slightly back. Many store bought sawbucks have forks and riggin' rings too close together to use this system effectively. *Be sure* that you have a separate strap between the front and back cinch to prevent the back cinch from slipping up into the flank. Interestingly we have never seen a cinch sore or any related problems to using the back cinch behind the gut - contrary to what people who favour another system might say.

Always use friendly, wide cinch materials. (See Chapter 3 - 'Cinches')

3. *Chest Straps or Collars* - The chest strap is insurance for long days and steep terrain when the cinches loosen and the load begins to slip back. Really, the front girth cinch prevents the load from moving back, unless the barrel of your horse is streamlined like a greyhound or a race horse. The chest strap should

have about three inches of slack between the strap and the chest when pulled forward. The horse needs to be able to drink and put his nose on the ground without much restriction from the strap.

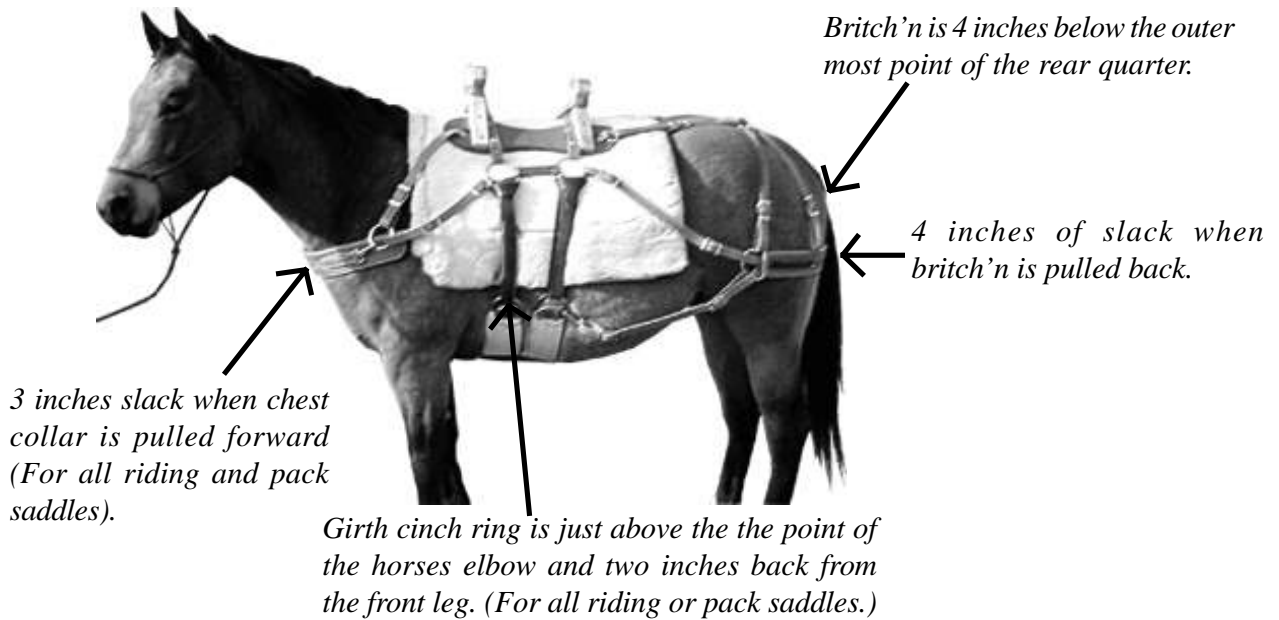
A smaller size cotton girth cinch makes a good chest collar.

4. *Britch'n* - Most packers feel that leather is the material of choice for britch'n as opposed to synthetic. Lately, there have been some leather imitations used that are quite impressive. Britch'n is an important component for traditional Decker and sawbuck saddles. When adjusted properly the load has to move only two inches forward before the britch'n comes into play. Adjust britch'n so that there is four inches of slack between the britch'n and the rump - the width of your hand. The britch'n should be adjusted so it is four inches below the point of the rear quarters. Note that changing the saddle and rigging from one horse to another, or, as the horse loses weight, will require readjustment.

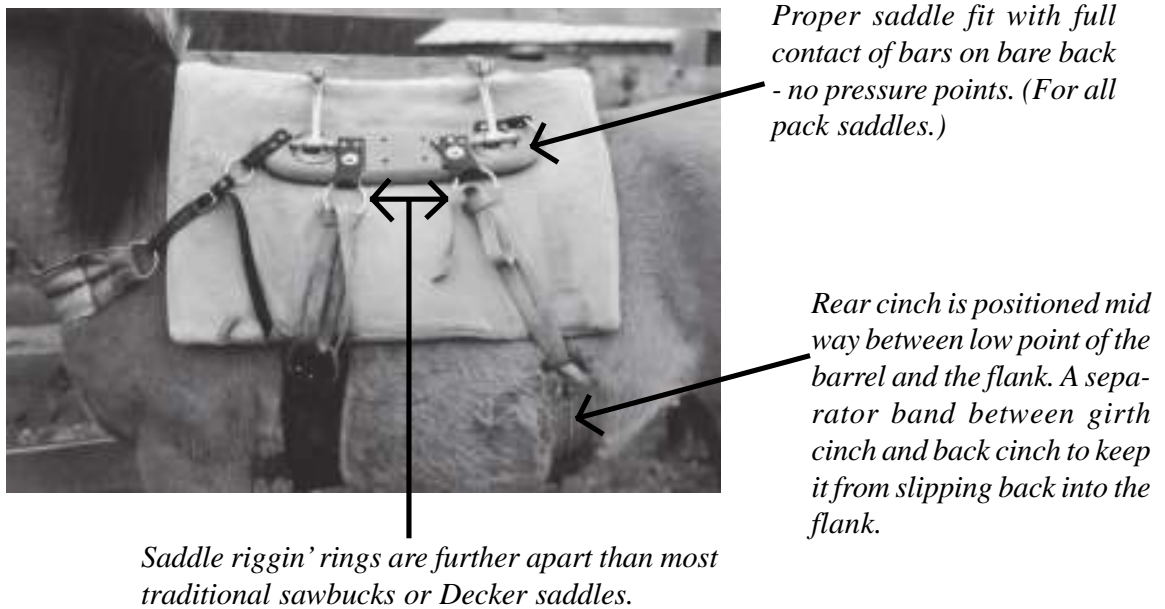


This crouper (soft leather ring under the tail) also prevents loads from slipping forward. Like a britch'n, it needs some slack when positioned. Croupers can also be used to prevent riding saddles from sliding forward.

Sawbuck or Decker Adjustment



Northern Adjustment



Packing Up

1. Have the packhorses tied up in the same area so that the pack gear can be unloaded from the vehicles and placed near the horses efficiently.

2. Leave enough room between horses so that you can work around one horse without being crowded by another.

3. Before packing horses, place each horse's saddle, pad, load, lash rope, top tarp and muzzle behind each horse. Be sure the horse cannot step on the gear.

4. Place all of the saddles on the riding horses and the pack horses before packing up. Cinch them up to about 80% tight. We put on bridles and adjust bridles and stirrups before packing up. Accessories including axes, saddle bags, extra coats, rain gear, gun scabbard and day packs should also be in placed on the riding saddle before packing up.

5. Matching boxes, bags, manties, duffel, and bedrolls that are placed on opposite sides of the horse must be weighed. Opposite weights need to be *within one pound*. If one side is a few pounds heavier it creates an uneven load that will tend to lean as the day goes by, and create uneven pressure on the horses back and sides. Many experienced packers do not use scales but many other experienced packers have learned it is the best way. *Be sure you use a quality scale* - a ten dollar scale that weighs a fish you caught is not adequate. If you are determined not to use a scale then practice at home to see how good a judge you are with full panniers, using the bathroom scale. On the trail, always get a second opinion on which box or bag seems heavier or lighter.



Have the saddle, pad, lash rope, top tarp, panniers, top pack, and muzzle neatly laid out behind each horse before you begin packing.



Use a quality packers scale and the same scale for all of your loads.



All boxes, bags, manties, duffel, and bedrolls must be precisely weighed with a quality scale and matched with its partner.

The pack pad, cinches, horses girth area and back, need to be cleaned. Any hard 'scunge' build up needs to be removed. The excess pad is extended more beyond the front than the back and lifted up to contact both the front and rear saddle forks.



6. Check all saddles to be sure the cinches are properly placed and tight before packing up. Check to make sure that the saddles line up down the center of the horse's back. The Breast collar and breeching need to be adjusted properly. They should not be tight but only tighten up if the saddle moves slightly forward or back. There should be about one hand width of slack between the hip and the breeching. This will allow free movement of the rear legs. We allow about three inches of slack if you pull the Breast collar forward.

7. The pad needs to have more excess out of the front end than the back end. As the day goes by, pads seem to slip out the back side - with the flow of the horses hair rather than against it.

8. The pad needs to be lifted up under the forks so that the pad is off of the horse's spine. If the pad is tight down on the spine it creates a lot of pressure once the load is on. This encourages the spine to act as the fulcrum of a teeter-totter, with the load swaying to and fro - side to side. This type of movement is very hard on the horse's back and sides. Lifting the pad up also helps air circulate, cooling the back.



9. Communicate with your packing partners. Be vocal. Tell them when lash cinches are coming their way and what needs to be tightened and when. Talk about what jobs need to be done so no one is standing around. If something does not look right, question your partner.

10. When you pick up a packbox or packbag, try to determine if one end of the box is noticeably heavier than the other. If one end is heavier, place that end to the front of the horse. Be sure there are no loose noisy objects in the box as they may frighten the horse as it trots or runs.

11. With the boxes slung and in place, check to see that one is not lower than the other. If the horse is standing square, and the saddle square down the center line, but the boxes are uneven, then the pannier ropes are not even and they need to be adjusted. Some packers like to sling the boxes on with a basket hitch only or a basket hitch after the box is hung on. This will secure the boxes better while on the trail but many packers feel it is not worth the time or effort. We hang them on then "Flip" the rope over one front fork so the box cannot shift.

As you walk around the horse, check to see that the bottoms of the boxes (bags, manties) are perfectly even and that the center of the pack-saddle lines up with the center of the back. If not, the problem must be corrected.

12. A sturdy, one thousand to twelve hundred pound horse should be able to travel all day comfortably with fifty pounds on each side and a thirty pound top load. Forty percent weight on each side and twenty percent on top is a good balance. Never increase the top load beyond this ratio. Increasing the top load increases sway and will lean one way or the other, again, possibly hurting the horse's back. We have had as much as three hundred pounds on a big boned, skookum, horse, but the load

was well placed with little on top, and the pack trip was only a few hours.

13. When placing a rectangular object as a top load, a tent or bedroll for example, place the length of the load across the horse. When placing two bedrolls or duffels as a top load, place them lengthways, like torpedoes, as close to the center line as you can. The "torpedoes" should be slightly forward.



Cylinder shaped duffel can be packed lengthwise in pairs (one on each box) with slightly more out the front than the back. Single duffel bags and rectangular shaped loads should be packed with the longest distance across the boxes. Whether the boxes are hung on with a sling rope or fixed with a basket hitch, they need to be level before the diamond hitch is thrown.

14. There should be no small bags or objects that you are trying to hang on the packhorse. You can slip in flat objects like a grill, table top, extra lash rope, empty pack bags, etc., on top of your panniers and under your top load, but be sure you balance weights by adding an item to the other side.

15. Share the loads fairly. Do not pack one horse with sixty pound packboxes and another with thirty pound boxes. Three year olds should have only fifty to seventy percent of the weight they will be expected to carry as an

adult. A two year old can carry ten to thirty pounds of duffel in training.

16. Top tarps protect gear from rain and snow, dirt and grit, and sharp branches. Once the load is hitched down, the tarp prevents the top load from shifting. In camp the tarps can be used to cover gear and firewood, and as ground sheets or temporary shelters.

17. Think of packing as a system and do everything you can to simplify that system. "Two boxes, two bedrolls, up and on and gone."



For twenty years we tucked the tarp in as shown here - which works fine, then packing instructor Bob Silverthorne showed us the 'hospital tuck' below, which works better. It holds the top load together better and stays tucked all day long.



FIRST TIME

Packing your horse for the first time should be a painless experience, provided you have completed early training and some round pen or lunge line work. There is no sense in throwing a saddle and packboxes on a horse if he does not lead well, is not desensitized, or does not give to pressures. A couple of days of preliminary training can bring a calm horse to the point where it is ready to pack.

1. Tie your horse to a sturdy post at eye level or higher.
2. Hobble your horse. If he has not been properly desensitized then follow procedures in Chapter 2, Early Training and Further Desensitized.
3. Because your horse already accepts the saddle, put on the pad and saddle. Place the pad and saddle a few inches *forward* of where it needs to be. By the time you cinch it up it will “set” into the right position. There should be more extra pad out of the front than the back. Lift the pad up under the two forks of the pack saddle. Some people believe that if the back cinch of a packsaddle is cinched behind the gut, the horse will want to buck. On the contrary, any horse that accepts being rubbed in the groin area gets comfortable with the back cinch in a matter of minutes. The first time a horse is cinched we deliberately bring the cinch back, tighten it eighty percent and have the horse run a few laps before packing him. Most horses could care less after being desensitized in the gut area (not the flank).

4. Familiarize the horse with the packboxes or bags you will be placing on its back. We usually let the horse eat some grain out of the box.

5. Pick up the lightly weighted box or pack bag and gently rub it on the horse’s shoulder. Carefully hang it on the forks.

6. The box is obtrusive and it does hinder the horse’s rear view so the horse may “dance” somewhat.

7. Wait until the horse settles down and pat the horse - give him a treat. If the horse really flips out he probably was not ready for the boxes, however, we continue to put the boxes on even if they come off. A particularly difficult horse can have a back leg tied up. See Trainig To Shoe or Trim in Chapter 6.

8. If the horse shows a lot of fear you should use soft bags filled with duffel. Boxes are hard and can hurt the horse if he falls on them, as well as break your boxes.

9. Tie a soft rope around the boxes or bags and around the chest of the horse so that they do not flop around. You do not need to throw a diamond hitch yet.

10. Deliberately shove the pack around, bumping and slapping it noisily. Get the horse used to the feel, sight and noises of the pack.

11. Once the horse is comfortable, we lengthen the lead rope to its furthest point, ten feet or so, and tie it. We allow the horse to walk a few feet in either direction. Be sure to stay clear of the horse. We do not take the horse for a walk right off because he can run you over.

12. From this point we snap on a lunge or send the horse for a run in the round pen. We prefer a lunge for control rather than turning him loose.

13. Once the horse has completely settled down we add some noisy objects and weight in

the boxes (we use grain) and send him for another run.

14. Finally, we take the horse for a walk in a confined area. As we move through gates and near trees, we deliberately move the horse over so the load will bump into the tree. Be careful you are not in the way in case the horse jumps forward.

15. Complete all of this training in a fenced area as you do not want a startled horse running loose in the countryside.



The first time pack horse is completely desensitized, saddled, and a box slipped over the forks. Note the elbow of the packer touching the horse before the pack does.



The box is moved around, slapped, and jostled.



The box is bumped against the horse.



Once the horse accepts the boxes calmly, noisy weight is added (grain or stones) and the horse is sent on a run with a lunge line. The boxes need to be secured with a soft rope around the boxes and barrel. Complete these activities in a sturdy round pen.



HITCHES AND KNOTS

Although the goal of a hitch is simple - to secure the load to the horse - the variety of hitches is overwhelming. All of these hitches are favored by one person or another, and for one purpose or another; diamond hitch, one man diamond, one man double diamond, two man double diamond, square hitch, box hitch, basket hitch, barrel hitch, ring hitch, and others.

The hitch preferred is often localized. In many areas you never see a double diamond and in other places double diamonds abound. Hitches are also *personalized*. If you learned your trade from Uncle Joe, your friend and idol, you may defend Joe's double diamond all the way to the grave, just as he and his grandfather did. You should know that there are more than a dozen versions of the diamond hitch.

So where does this leave us? Obviously we have to make choices. When and where diamond hitch contests arise - the FNAWS convention for example, the hitch of choice is the basic diamond hitch. This hitch can be thrown by two people in less than one minute. It is effective for a variety of loads and because the rope is "walked" along tight, it is the knot

least likely to loosen with use. It is the hitch preferred by most outfitters north of the Forty-ninth Parallel. It is important to note that different people use variations of the diamond hitch. We find the diamond hitch described below to be fast, tight, effective and our guests find it easy to master, especially if you work with a partner - and most people do.

The one man diamond hitch is a version of the diamond hitch that is easier for one person to throw than the standard diamond. It may be the most popular hitch in North America.

The one man double diamond has the advantage of being tied off down below, on the lash ring, and the diamond being formed on the sides rather than the top. This means you do not have to fumble up high to form your diamond or to tie it off. A solo packer with a tall horse may find this the hitch of choice.

The basket hitch adds an important dimension to packing. It hangs panniers and packbags if you do not use sling ropes. It hitches bales of hay, feed, duffel bags, manties, lumber and firewood. It does just about everything we need. What it does not do well is secure the top load to the panniers and the horse. That is the job of the diamond hitch.

The barrel hitch is also an excel-

lent way to pack duffel, firewood, lumber, and other long loads. The basket hitch can also secure long loads along the sides of the horse but the barrel hitch will likely keep long loads more secure.

We are reminded, repeatedly, that trying to tie a diamond from a drawing is confusing. Even though we have thrown a thousand diamonds, learning how to do it by looking at a drawing continues to confuse us. Maybe pictures are more helpful - we hope so.

Do not worry too much about these hitches until you have the right gear and a horse in front of you. With your book open, you will find the guide easier to follow, step by step, then you may imagine by looking at it. The video is also a big help.

If you would like some good hands on practice - then join us at Blue Creek's Trail Riding, Training, And Packing Clinic! (See the back of the book.)

Please note in the following photographs that the 'on' side refers to the left side and the 'off' side refers to the right side.

DIAMOND HITCH

This is our favorite version of the diamond hitch. It is great for a variety of top loads, including antlers. There appears to be many pictures but it is very fast to throw and very tight when completed. This hitch is fun to throw with a partner. When two people know the drill it is a fast and beautiful experience - better than watching ballet!

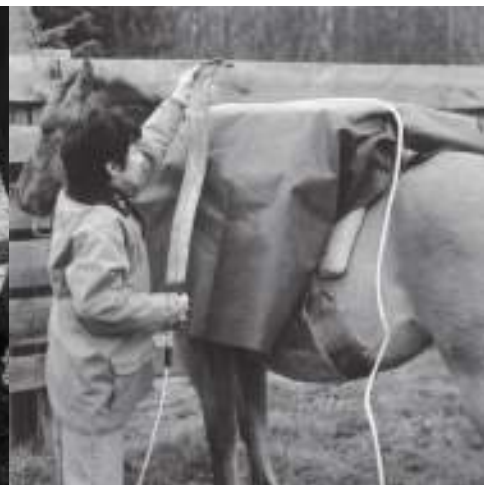
This hitch is much easier to make with a quiet horse in front of you rather than trying to imagine it before hand.



1. Coil the lash rope onto your fingers of your left hand, while holding the ring in the palm of your left hand. This should have been done when it was put away the night before (See page 280).



2. Drop the coiled rope, cinch down near the front, left corner of the horse. We will call the left or drivers side the “on” side and the right the “off” side. Pick up the tail of the rope off of the ground and flip it over the load to the center line of the horse’s back. The tail of the rope is dangling on the right about a foot off of the ground.



3. Pick up the cinch from underneath the coil and toss it over the middle of the load, or slightly towards the front.



4. The off side person catches the cinch being tossed over the horse. They bring the hook down under the chest and hold it just behind the front cinch and just beyond the center line of the chest. The on side person slips the rope through the hook.



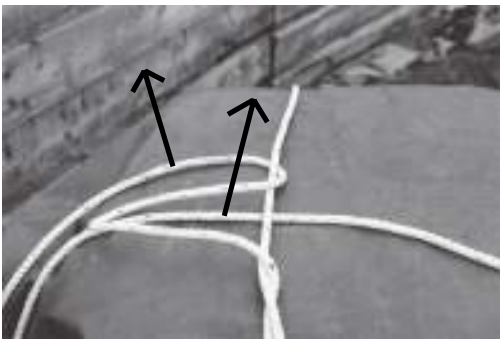
5. All you have done so far is thrown the lash cinch around the load and hooked it. Now the on side person brings up the rope in the right hand is coming up just forward of the existing one. Note how the left hand is holding the excess rope high to the left and out of the way. Keep both hands on the rope as you slide your right hand up to the rope that was flipped on lengthwise.



6. You do not have to see the ropes in the next three photos - just feel them. Your right hand slides up until it feels the lengthwise rope from Photo 2. At that point the rope in your hand is shoved under the rope you have been following up.



7. Continue pulling it through until it forms a small loop - about a foot long. Then flip the rope forward.



8. Once the loop you have just made is forward, pull up the lengthwise rope with your right hand to form a small loop, about a foot long. Your left hand is still holding the excess rope out of the way and now pass it over to the person on the off side. Your right hand is still holding the loop formed that you will use later. Photo #9 is just a repetition of #8.



9. The person on the off side has taken the rope out of the left hand of the on side person. The on side person holds the loop with their right hand while the off side person pulls their rope.

DIAMOND HITCH



10. The rope that was taken by the off side person is now pulled. Don't worry about the excess rope laying over the horse's neck. Be sure to push against the load as you pull the rope.



11. The on side person pulls the front rope up, getting as much slack as they can. When they can't get any more slack they say 'yours'.



12. The off side person pulls again, taking the slack from the on side person. Repeat 11 and 12 again.



13. Once the off side person cannot get anymore slack they walk the rope to the back corner. If you have two duffel bags or bedrolls on top, you always run the rope high and on the inside corner of the bedroll etc. Keep the rope tight here but do not pull too tight as you will roll the top knot. The off side person is catching the grooves at the back then walking the rope to the front, catching the front grooves.



14. The off side person is now standing on the front corner of the horse holding up the rope they have walked around and kept tight. They say "Yours". The on side person has been standing at the back corner waiting, with one hand on the top loop they made earlier. When they hear "Yours" they begin to pull one side of the loop only - the side that takes up the rope the offside person is holding.



15. The on side person pulls all of the rope through that the off side person was holding, keeps it tight and walks to the front corner, keeping it high and on the inside corner of any duffel.



16. At this point, the on side person pulls forward as hard as they can. The front half of the diamond will begin to form.



17. Without giving up any slack the on side person walks the rope down the box, through the grooves, back along the bottom, and up through the back grooves, while keeping the rope tight. At the back corner the onside person says "Yours".



18. The off side person has been waiting with the tail of rope in their hand (made in photo 2). When they hear "Yours", they pull as hard as they can. This pull tightens all corners and forms the diamond.



19. Without giving any slack back, pinch off the rope on top.



20. Tie it off with a simple release knot (See Knots).



21. Secure it with a half hitch.

ONE MAN SINGLE DIAMOND

The one man single diamond hitch is probably the most widely used hitch in North America. As implied, it is easy for one man to throw and it secures the top load very well. Unlike the double diamond you do have to

form the diamond on top of your load - which may be a challenge for a short person packing a tall horse. However, keep in mind that you do not need to see the diamond that you are forming, you just feel it. After a few practice runs it is really not that difficult to reach up and form your diamond. *This hitch is much easier to make with a quiet horse in front of you rather than trying to imagine it before hand.*



1. Begin the same as a standard single diamond, with the tail of the rope flipped on top of the load, along the center line of the horse.



2. Pick up the cinch and simply poke a loop through it.



3. Pull the loop through until it is about eight feet long, long enough to toss over. It needs to be tossed over the middle of the load or slightly forward.



4. Hook the loop you tossed over, on or just behind the front saddle cinch.



5. Grab the two ropes on the side of the load and pull down until the cinch ring slides down to a point midway between the box and the horses body. The lash cinch can lay over the front saddle cinch or just behind it.



6. Pull the rope that comes out of the ring until it is tight. The two ropes on the side should snap back when you pull on them.



7. In order to get the rope tight enough you may need to pull down on one rope, pull up on the other, and take up any slack.



8. Go to the top, take the two ropes that were thrown across the top and twist them three times.



9. Grab the rope that was initially placed lengthwise over the load and pull it through the hole. Pull it through, taking the slack off of the ground from where the lash rope was laid. Do not pull the tail through from the back of the horse.



10. Pull it through, taking all of the slack off of the ground.



11. Once the slack has been pulled through the top, the rope will catch on the bottom front corner grooves of the box.



12. The packer then walks around the horse to the front off side and tightens the rope that they just pulled through. (Very tight!)



13. Keeping the rope tight, it is pulled down around the front off side corner and walked along to the back.



14. Once through the bottom groves on the back, the packers left hand can pull on the rope to the left, which is the tail from photo 1.



15. The packer walks around and continues to pull the tail. This pull tightens all corners so it needs to be pulled tight!



16. Keeping the rope tight, it is walked down through the grooves on the on side.



17. Poke the tail through the ring and pull back to tighten.



18. Tie it off with a simple release knot and a half hitch. See 'Knots'. Take the excess tail and tie it up to get rid of it.

ONE MAN DOUBLE DIAMOND

The one man double diamond is a great hitch to throw on your own. It tightens well as you work along. Be careful that any top duffel is not protruding after you are done. Using a seven foot by seven foot top tarp is better than a six feet by seven feet for

this hitch as it holds the top load down better. On a long, bush filled day, the ropes around the bottom corners may be more likely to slip off than the single diamond. There are other versions of the double diamond but this one is easy to follow from photos. *This hitch is much easier to make with a quiet horse in front of you rather than trying to imagine it before hand.*



1. Drop the lash rope, cinch up, at the front on side corner of the horse.



2. Similar to the one man diamond make a loop long enough to toss over the center of the load (about 8' long).



3. Toss over.



4. Reach under the chest and grab the loop.



5. Hook the loop, on or just behind the front cinch.



6. Grab the two ropes above the ring and pull down, sliding the ropes downward until the cinch ring is midway between the bottom of the box and the horses chest.



7. Pull the tail until tight.



8. The ropes should be tight enough to 'snap' back.



9. Twist the two ropes three times midway on the box and pull open to form your first diamond.



10. Poke the end of the tail (which you have picked up from the coil on the ground) and slip it under the front corner of the diamond.



11. Pull the rope forward until the entire rope is pulled through the diamond.



12. As you pull it through, catch the bottom front corner groove of the box.



13. Pick up the excess rope off of the ground and toss it over the front. Note that you will lose some shape of your diamond. Do not worry - it will come back later.



14. Walk around to the off side front corner of the horse. Form the second diamond with three twists on the middle of the box, then pick up the tail off of the ground and poke it under and through the front corner of the diamond.



15. Pull all of the rope through the diamond and pull tight.



16. Keeping the rope tight, bring it down through the grooves of the box.



17. Walk the rope along the bottom towards the back corner of the horse, catch the bottom grooves and bring the rope up to the diamond.



18. Poke the tail through the diamond.



19. Pull all of the rope through towards the back and pull very tight.



20. Keeping the rope tight, walk it around the back of the horse to the on side. Note that the rope across the back, as the front, is placed in a position that will best secure the top load.

ONE MAN DOUBLE DIAMOND



21. Pull the remainder of the tail through the first diamond on the on side.



22. Pull back very tightly.



23. Catch the bottom groove once again.



24. Poke the tail through the ring.



25. Pull the remainder of the tail very tight. The lash rope going up and around the load should be in the middle of the boxes.



26. Without losing tightness, tie off with a simple release knot and a half hitch. (See Knots).

BASKET HITCH

The basket hitch is an excellent and versatile hitch. If you pack with boxes that are hung on by a rope and a typical top load, you may never have to use a basket hitch. However, when the time comes that you want to mantly up or carry boxes, hay, duffel,

etc. you will be glad you learned it - and its easy. If you want to go on a pack trip and you have no panniers, you can basket hitch duffel bags, hockey bags, or manties on the sides. Throw a tent or bedroll across the top and a diamond hitch and you are gone!

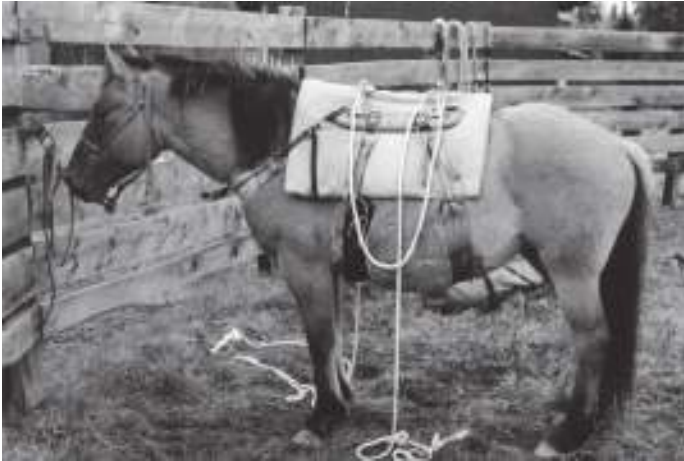


Begin by finding the halfway point of a 40-50 foot rope. Make a clove hitch (see 'knots') at the 1/2 way point and slip it over the front forks. You can use a couple of half hitches if you choose, rather than the clove hitch.

Slip the rope over the back forks as shown. Note that the section of rope hanging down to the ground is behind the lower loop.



BASKET HITCH



At this point you can take your pack box, mantle, bags, bale of hay, or what-have-you and place it against the side of your horse.

The bottom of the hanging loop is brought up and attached one of two ways.

1) If it is a pack box, mantle, or rectangular shaped load, placed vertically, you bring the loop up and around the box, so that the box is hung by the loop. On pack boxes with handles, the loop is positioned under the handles.



The tail section of the rope that is resting on the ground is pulled to tighten the hitch and to position the load at the right height. A knot is tied on the loop to secure the hitch. See next page.

Use this knot to secure Basket and Crows Foot hitched loads.



BASKET HITCH



2) If a duffel bag, firewood, bale of hay, or other long loads are being placed horizontally, bring the bottom loop directly upwards and slip it over the forks of the sawbuck as shown.

The hanging rope tail is then brought up to tie off with a simple release knot on the rope that has been looped over the forks of the sawbuck, as compared to being tied off on the loop around the box if a pack box is being hung.



As an alternative to the photo above, all basket and barrel hitches can be tied off by bringing the two tails up and tying them together, rather than tying them off between the forks. This can help secure a top load. If one of the tails has a loop in it, it is easier to tighten and tie off.

Basket Hitch on a Riding Saddle



Use a sturdy saddle with two snug cinches and a chest collar when packing a riding saddle. Find the half way point of a 35 - 40 foot basket rope. Slip it through the gullet.

Bring the rope forward, twist it once and slip it over the horn. An alternative is to make a clove hitch or two half hitches over the horn without slipping it through the gullet.



If you plan to do a lot of this type of packing there are saddles with slots in the cantle for the basket rope - rather than going around the cantle.

A riding saddle can also be used with soft bags quite easily. You can put on a top pack and finish off with a diamond hitch.



CROWSFOOT HITCH

The Crowsfoot Hitch is a bottom extension on a Basket Hitch that helps secure the load. It helps reduce the



sway and jostle of the load. The 'crowsfoot' is a small loop, attached ring, or extra ring on a cinch, that the basket rope is secured to.

The crowsfoot hitch begins as a regular basket hitch. In this case, a bale of straw is slung on by the loop. The packer is pulling the tail up to tighten and adjust the load.

The tail is tied off on the loop with the knot described under 'basket hitch' (page 142), except that a half hitch is not added. Instead, the bottom of the loop is pulled.



Continue pulling the loop out, which is actually taking up the tail of the rope laying on the ground.

Make the loop large enough to slip around the bottom corners of the load.





As you slip the loop around the bottom corners of the load, keep your hands on the loop, following it behind the load, and poke a small loop through the crowfoot or cinch ring.

This is the loop being fed through the crowfoot.



Pick the tail up off of the ground and slip it through the small loop you have just made.

Note: On this photo the crowfoot ring was removed from the cinch to show you that you can simply form your loop through the cinch ring.



Pull the remainder of the rope through the small loop and pull tight. Many packers believe that you should not pull overly tight as the rope pulls the girth cinch away from the barrel of the horse - reducing the girth cinch's effectiveness.



Bring the tail up and tie off with a simple release knot and a half hitch.



You can use a ring to stabilize your load or a cinch ring on any basket or barrel hitch simply by feeding the tail through the ring before you tie off on top.



Barrel Hitch

The barrel hitch is similar to a basket hitch but it tends to hold long loads laterally, along the sides of the

horse, more securely than a basket hitch. A Barrel Hitch is great for firewood, lumber, duffel, tools, feed sacks and bales slung lengthwise.



Begin the barrel hitch the same way as a basket hitch, with a clove hitch over the front fork at the midway point of the rope.

Push a loop through the space beneath the front fork. Push from the inside, out the front.





Push another loop from the inside, out the back of the fork.

Adjust the loops slightly larger than the size needed to surround your load.



Tighten the loops. First adjust the front loop, pull the slack to the back loop, then pull the tail (hanging down to the ground) to tighten.

Bring the tail up and tie off with a quick release knot. Note that with any basket or barrel hitch you can run the tail through the crowsfoot before bringing up the tail and tying it off.



MANTIES

A manty is simply a packaged bundle of gear that is often slung on the horse by a basket hitch or a crowsfoot hitch. Use a heavy gauge 7x7 or 8x8 foot tarp. Use about a thirty foot, 1/2 inch or lighter tie rope. There are many ways to tie off the manty, the one

shown is fairly simple and effective. Be sure that the side against the horse is smooth - no bumpy objects to hurt the horse. A 'half breed' (a padded canvas cover with wooden slats that slip over the forks) will help protect the sides of the horse or mule. Heavy objects in the manty should be placed in the center of the load or towards the bottom.



Arrange a rectangular shaped assortment of gear (about 24x30 inches) in the middle of a 7x7 to 8x8 foot tarp.

Bring up the bottom corner...



PACKING



then one side...

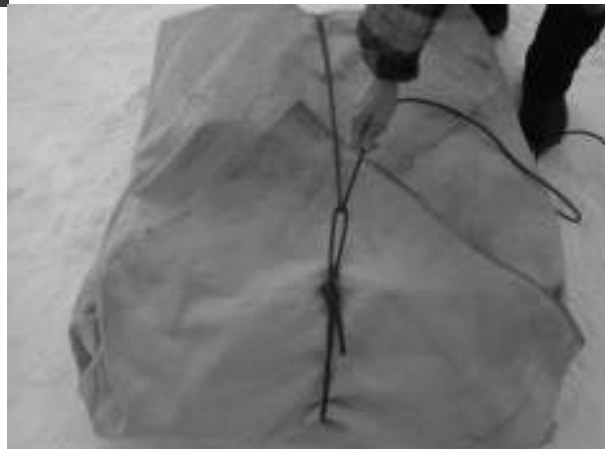


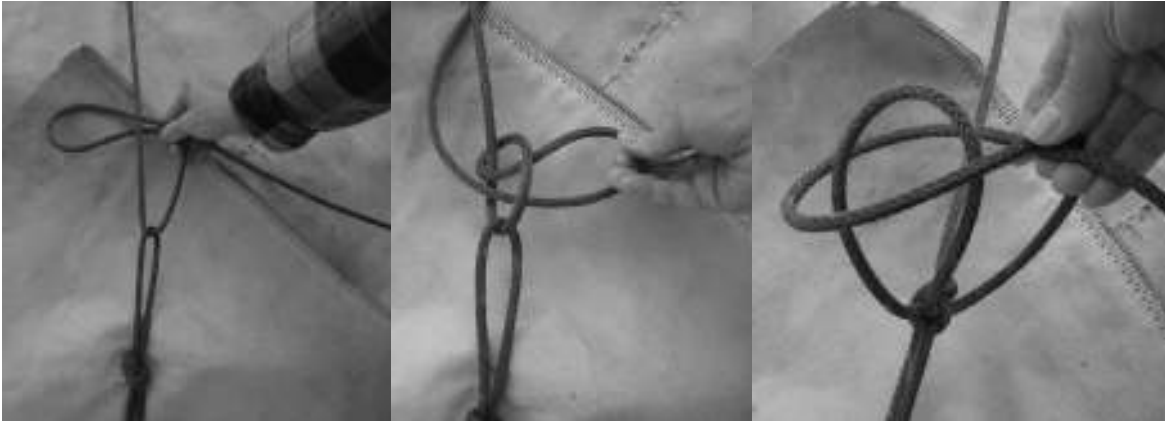
then the other...



and last, the top. The top goes up on the horse as it will keep out rain in this position.

Wrap a 30-35 foot rope around the manty lengthways, pulling it through a loop about 1/4 of the way down from the top.



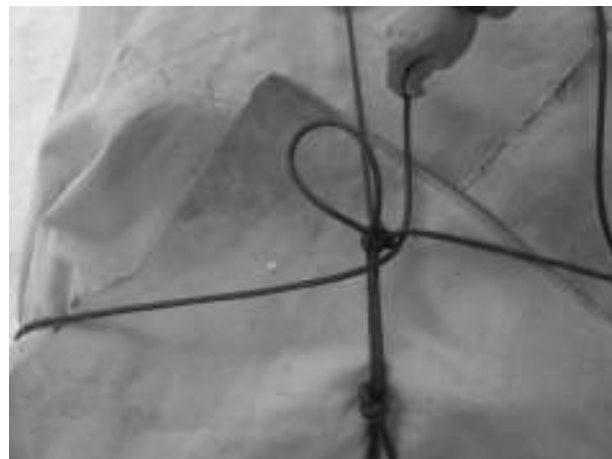


Pull tight and tie a simple release knot. Secure with a half hitch.



Make a loop around the load one quarter of the way down.

Bring the extra rope through and pull tight, then down.



PACKING



Form a similar loop in the middle and one 1/4 of the way from the bottom.

Bring the excess rope around the back of the manty - keep it tight.



Poke the tail of the rope through the loop made initially. Tie off with a simple release knot.

KNOTS

There are knots that are nice to know and knots that you need to know. The quick release, bowline and half hitch are used daily and are in the need to know category. There are several versions of these knots and most are fine.

Quick Release

The quick release knot is just what it says, it ties quickly and releases quickly. It has many uses including tying up your horse for shorter periods of time and tying up the lead rope of your horse to your saddle horn or a ring. It is also used to tie up the lead rope on a pack horse and on hitches.





Tighten the knot on itself before sliding it tight against the tree.



Use a half hitch to secure the knot as some horses will pull it loose in a minute, or, drop the tail through the loop.



Bowline

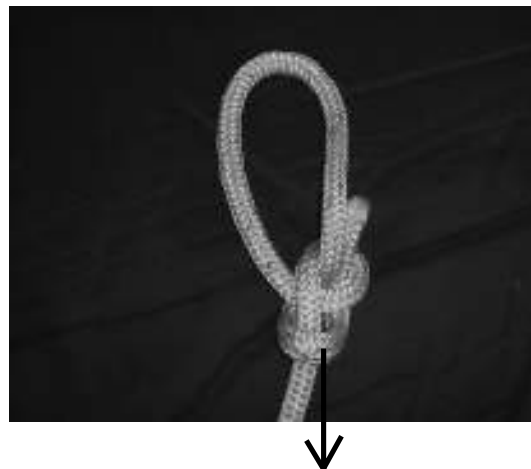
The beauty of the bowline is that it can always be undone after a horse pulls on it. It is more difficult to undo for a horse that likes to untie knots. A loop formed with a bowline does not tighten on itself. It is the knot of

choice for tying up a horse for long periods of time, tying a packhorse to a pigtail (the horse in front), tying the picket line to the picket, tying ropes on a problem horse, and pulling your truck out of the ditch!





We have turned the knot over to show the part that can always be forced down to loosen the knot.



No Slip Hitch

This is an easy tie hitch to use when you want to quickly tie a horse to a smooth tree or pole as it does not slide down. A smart horse can rub it loose so do not leave the horse unattended with this knot for long.





Half Hitch

A half hitch is just a simple loop to place around and secure a loop or over an object like a saddle horn. It is the knot of choice to secure the loop on the final knot of the diamond hitch

or quick release knot. Two half hitches can be used to secure the half way point of your basket rope on the pack saddle forks when you tie a basket or barrel hitch. Two half hitches in reverse order are more secure than one.



Clove Hitch

The clove hitch is basically two reversed half hitches. It is not a necessary knot but nice to know if you use the basket hitch as you use it secure the basket rope at the halfway point.







This clove hitch has secured a rope on a post



This clove hitch is securing a basket rope on the forks of a modern adjustable sawbuck.

Reef Knot or Square Knot

The square knot is commonly used when you are tying two similar size peices of rope together.



Honda Knot

Use this Honda knot to make a nice standing loop.



Sheet Bend

This knot is commonly used when tying two different diameter ropes together.



A sheet bend can also be used with a loop.



Add one more wrap to secure a sheet bend if you think it might slip.

Simple Release Knot

When we say tie off with a simple release knot on the diamond hitch, Basket or barrel hitch, or manty, this is what we mean.



Highline Knot

There are many knots you can use to form a loop in your highline or any line. This in-line bowline is great because it can always be easily undone. Courtesy of Bob Silverthorne.

Secure one end of your highline to the tree, pole, etc.



Coil about a 5 inch diameter loop around your hand.

Make three loops as shown.





Pick up the middle coil.



Lift it up to the left and outside.



Pick up the new middle coil.



Move it up to the right and outside.



Pick up the new middle coil and move it to the left and outside.



Lift up the new middle coil and pull outward.



Pull it to the desired size.



Pull the highline rope to tighten.

Tail Tying

Tail tying on the trail is not as common as it used to be. Using tie strings on the backs of saddles or long lead ropes and tying to the neck when wrangling multiple numbers of

horses in the morning avoids knots getting jammed in tail hair or tail hair being pulled out. However, tying two horses head to tail is a great way to keep horses standing when you are in treeless country. It really works!



Begin just below where the fleshy part of the tail ends. Drop all of the lead rope over the tail except for about 2-3 feet from the nose to the tail.

Lift up the tail.



Loop the rope as shown and hold it against the lifted tail.



Bring the tail of the rope up and around the entire tail, crossing over.

Continue to wrap the tail of the rope tightly around, staying above each wrap.



After 3 wraps around the horses tail bring the rope up through the remaining loop.

Pull the rope tight that leads to the other horse. Now you have a quick release tail tie.



Quick Halter

At times when you want to lead a horse some distance and you do not have a halter, it is nice to know how to make a makeshift one with your lead rope. This is another good reason to keep your lead ropes on the long side. *Never* leave a horse tied to a tree or post with this setup.



Latigo Tie For Riding or Packsaddle

Be sure that the cinch is centered and long enough to be above the point

where the leg joins. Note that the final knot is formed to the side of the main wrap in order to reduce bulk.



a and b are alternatives to 4 and 5 and form a quick release latigo knot.



ON THE TRAIL



Riding the trails is much more than a pastime. It gives us a timeless link to mother nature. It keeps us physically active, mentally alert, and feeling young. It gives perspective, a purpose in life and a break from the hectic pace and confusion of our civilized lives.

For many of us, riding the trails is not simply something to do but part of our identity, a genuine link to our spirit and soul. Maybe that explains why we put up with so much just to do it.

Sometimes we need a break from our horses and the demands they place on us. At Blue Creek Outfitting we feel very relieved to put them “out to pasture” in the late fall. As aware as we are that we may be needing a break from our horses, we have learned, sometimes the hard way, that we need to pay close attention to what is hap-

pening to our horses, both in the field and out on the trail.

Common sense and a good attitude go a long way out on the trail. With the right attitude and a good effort you can improve your horsemanship ability. Horses are always in better hands with people who carry a good attitude and less ability than people with more experience but questionable attitudes.

A good attitude means getting involved and taking action when needed. Horses do not train themselves, saddle themselves, trim themselves, or bring themselves in first thing in the morning. If you want to know horses and be competent on the trail you must have a pro-active attitude. There are times to take it slow, and times to act fast - but always keep your eye open and get involved.

TRAIL TIPS

One of the big differences between a recreational trail rider/packer and a professional outfitter is that the outfitter has a long memory full of important details. The pro knows how little things can quickly become big problems and he knows how to deal with these situations before they become problems. Pros have an endless mental library, a way of doing things, that helps the trip go smoothly. Here are some of those ideas that will help your ride.

1. When with a group assign someone the “trail boss”. Usually it is the person riding up front. They have these responsibilities.

a. The coordination of the packing and saddling procedure. The idea is that everyone is completely ready to go before horses are untied and people mount up or head out.

b. The lead rider on the trail must be able to see and communicate with the last rider. He may need to slow down to keep the outfit tight. This is very important as people need to stop

for bathroom breaks, something they dropped, or horse related problems.

2. When possible, avoid having loose items tied on you or your horse while on the trail.

3. Use the word “Whoa” only when you know you are going to stop. To slow down say “easy, easy, easy.”

4. Communicating is good; be vocal. You can talk loud to get someone’s attention but *never* yell or scream or get overly excited, *no matter what*. It can only serve to excite horses and make matters worse. The exception to this may be if you are hazing livestock and you want to get them moving. On the trail you want things calm.

5. Always tie your horse short, one to two feet of rope between the horse’s nose and the tree. If you tie longer you may feel you are being kind but you are being mean. You are making the horse think he is loose when he is not, and he will fidget for no reason. He can also get a leg over the rope and get other horses excited. Do not let the horse feed while being tied - unless he is on a proper picket line. Be sure there are no sharp branches that can poke your horse’s eye. *Never* tie up horses with the reins - always use the lead rope.



When riders pack up and head out as a group, someone needs to coordinate the activity, both during saddling, packing, and while riding.



Tying horses short is friendly. Tying them long is unfriendly, encouraging restless behaviour, stress, and the possibility of becoming tangled.

Tying your lead rope with a quick release knot to a ring keeps it out of the way but readily accessible.



Quickly tying your reins to prevent them from falling to the ground and having the horse step on them - possibly injuring his mouth - is better than looping them over the horn.



6. Tie your lead rope up to a ring rather than the horn. When you stop for a break keep your reins over the horn rather than on the neck. Twist them when you put them over the horn. Better yet, tie them with your front saddle strings when you are not in the saddle.

7. You are generally better off leading packhorses than letting them trail loose, especially young or foolish horses. Some areas require that all horses are ridden or led. Tie the horses as shown in the photo. Use a break away string with a strength similar to baler twine. Keep several strings handy. Tail tying is

okay but knots can become jammed, tail hair lost, and in serious pile ups you would rather have a string break than horses tied together in a wreck.

8. We generally allow a few packhorses to trail free. However, if we begin a journey on a road or truck trail, or if we know a certain horse constantly runs up and down the line, we try to lead most or all of the packhorses. When leading a string of horses that are tied together, keep the dominant or bossy horses in front of submissive ones.



Tying loose horses together with a break away string prevents the serious pile ups that can result when horses are tied together securely.

9. If a loose horse takes off in the wrong direction, you are generally better off to continue leading the pack string in the proper direction. It usually takes only a minute or so for the delinquent horses to realize they have lost their buddies, reconsider, and come back to the string. If the lost horse(s) do not show up after a few minutes, stop, tie up all of the animals and one capable person go back and get them. When you catch up to them and they are merrily walking along in the wrong direction, you may need to tactfully get around and ahead of them rather than push them from the rear. This is where a friendly relationship and “whoa” training helps.

10. When you lose a horse trail it is nearly always worth it to stop the string, get off, and find it on foot, rather than blundering through tight situations with horses in tow. You

need to assess the situation. Maybe you *know* the trail is over to your right and you can ride to it easily. Fine, but don't ride for a mile and then decide to look for it. Trails can take abrupt and unexpected turns and you should find it as soon as you lost it.

11. Lost - being temporarily lost is an expected ordeal. The trouble with wandering around lost is that you may be leading several horses in circles with you - which leads to unnecessary effort and a horde of problems. Usually, you are lost in tough going. Get off, tie up, tell everyone to get off and tie up *all the horses*. Take your axe and bear spray and figure your way out of there. I have done this a hundred times - its never fun but always interesting. The safety of your group depends on your path. If you have a GPS, then take a reading before you head out so you can find your way back!

When the horses get into a bad spot, or the trail disappears, or the river has washed out the trail; get off, tie up the horses, and search for the trail on foot. Pushing in bad conditions causes serious problems.



12. Horses that stop dead with the command “Whoa” also respond collectively when saying “Whoa” on the trail. Whether it is peepee stop or a serious emergency your horses should stop on command at a distance. Teach your horse to stop with drive lines or ground tying. This gets them used to obeying the command from a distance. On a lunge line is good too (see Training Unit).

13. When stopping for a break, all of the riders need to immediately tie up loose horses. Do not let one person do all of the work. Do not expect that a loose horse will stand around for an hour and watch you eat your lunch. The rule is, the more horses loose, the more trouble. The lead rider needs to be patient when leaving again. Be sure everyone is ready to mount before giving the cue to mount. Synchronizing a dozen horses to leave is very important. While on the trail, the first and last horse need to be in voice contact - no more than one hundred feet spread. This gives responsibility for the last rider to speed up and press the packhorses and the lead rider to slow down. A tight outfit reduces running horses and allows important communication between riders.

When leaving and while on the trail the last rider needs to ‘push’ forward and the lead rider needs to slow down to keep the group tight. They must be able to communicate by voice.

14. Do not allow your horse to crowd the horse in front, you may get kicked. Do not get into a pulling match with your horse while trying to hold him back. Use crisp bumps on the rein, then relax the reins. If this does not work have a rider on a calm horse ride in front of you and snap your horse on the nose if it gets too close (see Chapter 7 - Herd Bound). Always keep slack in your reins while you ride. Similarly, do not allow the horse you are leading to crowd you. You can snap his nose with the end of your lead (be careful you don’t snap your own horse) or throw a small stone at him. Sometimes an aggressive gesture is enough to send him back where he belongs.

15. Be sure your axe is sheathed. Color your sheath red or orange so you don’t lose it.

16. When you are walking down a trail leading your horse, stay at the end of your lead rope, well out in front. If the horse crowds you, snap his nose with the end of your lead. He will soon honor your space.

17. When arriving in camp, stop the outfit where the horses can be tied up. Everyone



immediately ties up all of the horses. Tie up the pack horses in one general area and the saddle horses in another if practical. Strip the pack-horses before the saddle horses. Many riders believe that leaving the saddles on for a half hour or longer allow the horse to cool slowly and creates fewer blisters. Place your gear neatly, riding saddles in one spot and pack saddles in another for example, and cover it up. Coil up the lash ropes and hang bridles and lead ropes.

18. Try to place your tents and camping spot between the trail you rode in on and the area you expect the horses to feed in. This way, if hobbled horses attempt to head back out, you can hear the bells go past your tent.

19. If you are doing some exploring on foot you need to tie your horse short with a secure knot, place hobbles on your horse, turn the bell on, and remove the bridle. Whether or not you remove the saddle depends on how long you will be gone.

Usually the cinch is somewhat loose after you have ridden for a while. If you are going to loosen it too much, you may as well take the saddle off. Do not tie horses so close to each other that they can chew each others saddle.

Some people think it is cruel to leave a

horse standing with a saddle on for a few hours - even several hours, but take that same saddled horse, throw a two hundred pound rider on it and ride him for eight hours over rugged trails and that's okay - go figure!

20. If you are tying up with a quick release knot or a couple of half hitches, give the rope a couple of turns around the post, tree, or branch. It will keep the knot from over tightening if the horse pulls and also keep it from sliding down. If you use a quick release knot, add a half hitch over the loop so that the horse cannot untie it.

21. Always "hurry" the horses through soft or sandy places. They are likely to roll if you do not.

22. When crossing shallow water and allowing the horses to drink, the lead rider should move forward and hold steady until all of the horses have had a few gulps. Never dally too long. Horses learn that stopping for a drink also gives them a rest break. Soon, horses are stopping and drinking or pretending to drink at every water hole, puddle, and stream. Do not let them get in the habit of stopping to drink when they want, only when you want.



Do not dally while riding through water. Horses need to be hurried in the right direction or they may bump each other or wander down stream, heading into dangerous water and difficult banks.

23. When leading tandem horses, put the dominant and calmer horses up front.

24. When riding downhill lean slightly back. When riding uphill grades lean forward and grab a hand full of mane and pull to take some weight off of the saddle.

25. Brush your horse daily. Running your hands down the horses back sides, under

his cinch and belly area and down his legs reveals wounds, bumps, scalds and blisters.

26. When there are no trees, try tying head to tail - it works great!

27. Warm up the bit on a cold day before placing it in your horses mouth. Do this with your hands or place it in your coat for a while.

28. Rather than constantly fighting a horse that wants to eat as you ride, tie the reins together short enough so that when looped around the horn he cannot eat grass.



This young cowboy is warming up the bit on a cold late fall day.

While packing up and while on the trail, get in the habit of glancing at the backs of riding and pack saddles and loads to be sure that the center of the saddle lines up with the center line of the horses back. If a load or saddle has slipped and you only have a few minutes to camp, you may be able to pull it over, back into place. However, if it is a heavy load, an hour left to ride, or obviously leaning, it must be re-packed.



These horses are tied head to tail. It is a great way to keep horses standing in treeless country. (see knots - tail tying)



SAFETY

Safety is somewhat relative. What one person may consider a dangerous trail or river crossing another may travel as a daily routine. Common sense tells us that we need to decide for ourselves what we consider acceptable conditions. Experience and sound procedure gives us the confidence to travel safely, even in tight situations.

Serious accidents are really not that common. After thirty years on the trail we know of four deaths that have occurred. Two have been drownings, one was a tumble off of a bank at night and one was a tumble off a horse and a head being struck on a rock while riding along a road. Accidents do happen but not very often. The most serious one to occur with our

horses was a broken leg from a tumble off of a bank.

We find the process of hauling horses long distances far more stressful than actually being on the trail. You are more likely to be killed or injured in your vehicle than riding your horse.

First and foremost be sure that your trail horse is of a calm nature and completely desensitized. On the trail you will be pulling out noisy lunch wrappers to snack on while sitting on your horse, having your rain gear flap in the wind, reading paper maps, looking through binoculars, having your hat blow off your head, having grouse fly up under your horse - all while you're on the back of your trusty steed - he needs to be Trusty! Sacked out! Rope Broke! Etc.!

The following are important safety considerations.

1. Never tie your lead rope to your



When leading a horse never tie the lead rope or secure a loop over the horn. Dally the lead around the horn once or twice.

saddle horn. This includes a fixed loop. If you would like to have free hands, simply lay one complete wrap around the saddle horn.

2. When you are walking a short distance on the ground, walk alongside the horse's head. Hold the lead rope close to the halter with your arm straight. It feels odd to have your arm straight at first but in a short time it becomes an easy habit. If you do not do this you will get your feet stepped on.

3. Never allow a horse to crowd your space. This includes the horse choosing to put his face into your body in any way. You may feel the horse is being friendly but if he takes the most vulnerable part of his body, his face, and puts it into your space this means he owns you. He can now crowd your space, push you, step on you, bite you, and choose not to obey your commands or respond to your pressures. You can go into the horse's space at will, which means you can pat him and give him all of the affection you want, but he can never come into your space at will. Your safety on the trail depends on this. When your horse pushes his face into you, immediately shove his face back where it belongs or aggressively rub his nose.

4. While you are riding keep an eye on



To prevent your feet from being stepped on, and your body from being pushed into objects, keep your arm straight as you walk your horse short distances.

the lead rope that you are holding, especially in tight turns, if it gets jammed under your horse's tail you could go for a buck.

5. It is a good idea to have riders in between packhorses. This allows riders to watch pack horses for slipped loads and settle horses down if they spook for some reason. It also allows riders to communicate easier.

6. On very difficult trails it is safer to turn more horses loose and lead one or two horses only. Tandem horses invariably get into trouble while weaving through thick bush, soft spots, leaping logs, and scrambling up and down banks.

7. Never stick your foot all the way into the stirrup, only to the ball of your foot.

8. Practise losing and finding your stirrup with your foot. Getting your foot back into the stirrup quickly may be important in difficult moments.

9. Never allow the saddle horse to move when you are trying to mount it. It can create dangerous circumstances when your horse is moving off or turning circles as you are in a group and trying to lead a pack horse. (See Chapter 2 - First Ride.)

10. When you are walking down a trail ahead of your horse, stay well out in front, at



While walking down trails stay well out in front of your lead. Move to the side when crossing mud or obstacles as the horse will tend to jump forward and on top of you! If the horse crowds you, snap his nose with the end of your lead to get him to move back. Always walk with 10 to 20 feet of space between you and the horse ahead.

the end of your lead rope. Be very careful when crossing water or obstacles that the horse does not jump on top of you. Stand to the side.

11. Never shoot a gun while riding your horse (unless you are Roy Rogers and your horse's name is Trigger). If you feel that you must lead or ride a horse while using a headlamp or flashlight, a red or green light (glow stick) reduces the blinding effect.

12. Stopping on the trail with a dozen horses that are eager to go can be more than a nuisance, it can be serious trouble, creating unnecessary delays, wrecks, damaged gear, and injuries. Be sure everyone has gone to the

toilet before your mount. If you drop a glove, chocolate bar, etc. when part of a fourteen horse string, you may be wise to leave it, especially at the beginning of the day.

13. Water Wise - There are two things that a horse generally loses while riding in a pack string - a fear of water and "ghosts" (odd white stones, stumps, etc.). For the horse's first water experience go easy at first with shallow hard bottom water and an experienced lead

horse as a partner up front. If your horse regularly spooks try the suggestions in Chapter 7 - Problem Solving.

14. Crossing Rivers - More people are killed crossing rivers than any other way while on the trail. Some rules to follow:

Find the best possible crossing - most shallow - calm - not big boulders. Be sure you can see a good place to emerge at the far side. Do not cross where, if things go wrong and a horse or rider go down stream, there is deep pools, big boulders, log jams, etc. The cinch should not be overly tight - loosen slightly. The horse will tend to go down stream too much so start high and keep the horse's head angled up river, however do not fight the horse when swimming, give him his head as much as possible. Remember - short tugs on the reins. Take off your boots and tie them to the saddle if it looks like a dangerous crossing. Also remove coats, packs, etc. Hurry the horses across.

Avoid dangerous crossings - just don't do it!

When crossing with children they are

better off riding behind an adult on a good sized saddle horse rather than a smaller horse or pony. Smaller horses generally roll or go down in water sooner than big horses. Children, and even adults, should pack and wear a life jacket if deep or swift water crossings are expected.

Do not swim horses while they are tied together.

Sometimes horses will drop their rear quarters down in swimming water and you will find yourself swimming. If the horse is calm, hang onto the horn on the down river side and swim along side. Holding on the end of the tail also works well. If the horse is in panic or rolling - push away and stay away until he finds his swimming legs.

15. Mud, Bog, Dead Fall - It takes some experience to navigate mud and bogs. Always try to pick high ground. Get off and check routes first. Take your time. The time you take will save you *big time* if you have to pull out and repack a mired horse or if your outfit is stuck in a dead fall forest. Be very careful when leading or walking ahead of horses over mud,

Crossing water probably takes more human lives than any other trail riding activity. Do it carefully or do not do it at all.



water, holes, banks, - even small ones. The horse behind you *will* jump towards and on you! Get off to the side.

16. Erratic pack horses or loose young horses on the trail can cause injury, sometimes by kicking out at the horse you are riding. Lead troublesome horses in order to teach them manners. If idiot horses try to pass us we attempt to whack their noses with the tail of our lead rope, or throw small stones at them before they pass us. Do this only if your saddle horse is dead calm.

17. There are no real rules for safe passage when you pass another party on the trail. Common sense says that the party with the fewest horses and the best place to get off of the trail should ride off of the trail and wait until the others pass. You help prevent horses mixing if you get well off of the trail.

18. When we hear or see an ATV or vehicle approaching (on a truck trail) we stop and hold up our hand to stop them and ask them to turn off their machines. Ride by and thank them.

19. Riding along roadsides is a very

dangerous pastime. Be sure your horse is completely desensitized to vehicles *before* you take them out on the roads. You can do this in your yard. When a vehicle is coming along and we know it will not stop we get off of the road, turn our horses towards the vehicle, and stop well in advance of the vehicle passing us. This gives the horse time to see the vehicle which reduces its fear as it passes.

20. Children should always wear riding helmets. Ditto for inexperienced riders. We have even had our children ride wearing life jackets to protect their chest and body.

21. Regularly check all gear and rigging for wear, tear and breaks. Tighten screws in bridals and saddles.

22. Horses that do not want to be led create all sorts of problems. Tie a simple knot in a rope halter at the point where it touches the poll (between the ears). This pressure point will encourage the horse to move forward.

23. Tapaderos help prevent your foot



Serious problems can develop if a stick gets jammed between a loose back cinch and the horses gut or into your stirrup. Tapaderos are an excellent safety feature. They also help keep feet dry and warm.

from getting hung up in the stirrup and also prevents sticks from jamming between your foot and the stirrup.

24. Keep your back cinch snug to prevent sticks from being lodged between the cinch and belly of the horse.



25. Tie a red ribbon on your horses tail during group activities if you feel it may kick. A red ribbon is the universal sign of a kicker.

26. Hard hats are a very good idea. A bank broke away and our daughter hit a rock with her head - we believe the helmet saved her life.

27. You may be very capable of riding bare back but that does not mean that you should. Even experienced riders can slip off and hurt themselves under trail conditions.

A red ribbon tied to the tail is a warning that the horse is a potential kicker.

A muzzle is actually a safety feature. It helps prevent the turmoil, wrecks, and injuries from horses stopping to feed and biting other horses. Note how the lead rope is over the horses neck. This prevents the rope from slipping down and getting stepped on or over.



This five year old adventurer is riding more than 200 miles in the remote North-west corner of British Columbia. Two years later a bank gave way and her horse toppled over onto a boulder strewn stream bed. The hard hat suffered a big dent and probably saved her life.



While on the trail you are getting in and out of your saddle constantly, sometimes in a hurry. The cumbersome saddlebags, cantle packs and horn packs on the left may look convenient but they inhibit your mounting and movement and they can be dangerous. The saddle bags on the right are all you need - and maybe a small day pack hanging from your horn or on your back.



As you walk around saddles that you or others have put on, always watch for cinch sleeves, saddle pads, and saddle skirts that are turned under. These pressure points can create sores.



If you need your horse to lift his front leg in a hurry - maybe he is stepping on a rope, tarp, some gear, or maybe you need to move his front end over quickly - try sliding your foot firmly down the side of his leg.



This horse was mired in a mud hole much like quicksand and nearly had to be left to die. You do what it takes to get the horse out - digging, prying, smacking its butt - you need to get the horse to struggle after rest periods. If you pull with another horse, try to get the rope around its chest before pulling by the halter. Better yet, be very careful not to get in these situations. Get off and walk, take one horse at a time through tight spots.

When a horse is facing away from you, or carrying a pack that blinds its rear vision, or being attended by others, never touch its backside. You can startle it or it can think you are another horse and you can be kicked.



When packing antlers be very careful that the tines are not able to slip and jab the horse. For elk, moose, and caribou antlers, tightly tie on a stick one foot back from the skull cap as shown. Throw a diamond hitch to secure the load.

WRANGLING

Wrangling means working with horses on the trail or in camp, including when they are not being ridden or packed. This means bringing them in during the morning, turning them out at night, and managing their movement and use. Wrangling begins with choosing a good campsite. Good grass and locating your campsite between the horses and the most likely escape route will help keep the horses home. Good techniques help keep the horses close. The closer the horses the less trouble you will have while wrangling. Always keep trail horses confined; either hobbled, tethered, tied, ridden, or packed.

Hobbles

Working horses need quality feeding time and turning out your hobbled horses for the night is the most common way to ensure they get what they need. Depending on the size of your herd, one to three of the dominant horses can be put out on a picket line to keep the hobbled group close. Some people keep a horse or two tied up all night but a couple of hours of feeding time before night and before you leave in the morning is not enough. You may get away with this for a one week trip but these horses will lose condition.

Horses that have hobbles placed on

them the first time react in different ways. Some think about it for a minute then hobble happily along their way. Some go for a run, or a fight and a tumble. Many horses “pull” against the restraint with each step until they become familiar. Horses can become rubbed and sore quickly so learning horses should be trained at home and be placed in soft hobbles for a short time on a few occasion before being turned out over night. The very first time we put hobbles on we often put them above the fetlock as the horses seem to struggle less with them in this position. If pasterns get sore you can rotate the hobbles above and then below the fetlock.

There are many makes and models of hobbles and most are very good. The two examples given in Chapter 3 are our favorites. Chain hobbles without protection should not be used on a beginner as they can be abrasive. On an experienced horse, chain works well and are easy to remove when wet or frozen.

Placing on a second hobble, front to back, can be an effective way to keep the horse close. This “sideline” needs to be long enough to prevent the back foot from becoming sore - about two and one half to three feet end to end.

Placing hobbles on the back feet is a technique not used by many but it is just the ticket for some horses that like to wander. It is more difficult for the horse to get used to hobbles on the back but once they do, they rarely run with them on. If you are hit by a snowstorm, hobbling on back works well because it allows the horse to paw for feed with the front feet.

Some horses go for a headlong charge the very first time you put on back hobbles, so have them become comfortable with front hobbles first then put on the back while the front are on. Later, just use the back.

A halter tie down is another effective

way to keep hobbled horses close. With a tie down, the neck should be just slightly lower than back level. Our tie down rope has a snap at both ends and the bottom needs to be snapped on a foot collar of the hobble and not the center piece. If you snap it on the center

piece it is more likely to wrap around a foot. Some feel that tie downs are a harsh and unnecessary control but once the horse learns to give to the pressure of the tie down the horse's head becomes softer to work with - easier to bridle, etc.



Hobbles serve several purposes including reducing pawing, helping to settle aggressive horses, assisting breeding, holding horses in poorly fenced areas and reducing travel distance during grazing. These front hobbles have a 'side-line' attached that further reduces travel and also reduces kicking.

Tie downs should be fitted so that the neck is slightly lower than the back - no lower. They prevent the horse from traveling long distances while grazing. Although they may appear somewhat harsh, once you use them for a few days you will find the horse yields to face and poll pressure softly.



You do not see hobbles placed on the rear feet very often but it is an excellent choice for many horses. Unlike front hobbles, very few horses will run with rear hobbles. However, the first few times you put them on the horses are confused and often make a headlong charge. We often put on both front and back hobbles to start. Be careful when placing back hobbles as the horse may kick at first. The horse must be desensitized with the back legs prior to using back hobbles.



Picket Rope

The picket rope should be attached with a hobble sleeve (one half of a hobble) to the front or back foot. Either foot is safer than attaching to the halter. A heavy chain or a hose over the rope for the eight or ten feet closest to the horse helps prevent the horse from becoming tangled.

The one half inch lash rope is often used for a picket rope but a three quarter inch or wider soft rope is safer. Your picket rope needs to be soundly secured or pegged down and it needs to have a swivel near the hobble collar. Remember, you can always undo a bowline knot. Always walk the horse to the end of the picket rope before letting him go.

When we first train a horse to picket we let him drag around the rope loose for a few hours so he gets used to the feel around his feet. Never leave the learning horse on a picket without keeping an eye on him. Personally, we choose not to picket horses over night as they can become tangled and one of our best geldings nearly choked to death on a picket.

You may read comments in books about



the danger of turning out horses in the woods with hobbles on - a questionable comment since thousands of outfitter's horses spend all summer and fall hobbled in the woods and we have yet to see a horse injured by being hung up in the woods with hobbles. We have seen hobbles get stuck in between a loose shoe and the hoof, and once we had a halter get jammed in a loose shoe. In these cases the horse is freed and the shoes tightened.

Halters - On or Off?

As a general rule, it is always safer to remove halters when horses are not in use. This is especially true in farm yards with protruding nails, corral rails, or refuse that is laying around and may catch the halter. Mares and foals should also have them removed. However, comparatively speaking, a hobbled, free grazing horse with a well fitting rope halter is much safer than a tethered horse or one on a high line. Similarly, riders who leave their back cinches loose, and stirrups with no covers create far more danger than a free grazing horse with a well fitting light rope halter. In forty years of trail use we have repeatedly seen and know of many horses that have been tangled in lines while feeding and had sticks jammed in loose cinches and stirrups. Only once have we had a small problem with a halter - a loose horse shoe catching a piece of the halter.

We find it safest to picket by a rear foot. Be sure to walk the horse out to the end of the rope before letting it go. Have them drag around a heavy rope to familiarize themselves with the idea when learning to picket.

Electric Fencer

There are some very effective electric fencers available that use D-cell batteries and are about the size of your hand. Several plastic stakes, a roll of electric string and the fencer fits nicely in the bottom of a pack box. Horses kept in the fence should also be on hobbles as horses can be pushed through by other horses or frightened through the fence at night. Train the horses to respect a hot wire at home, or walk them into the hot wire deliberately before turning them loose.



High Lines

High lines are an effective way to control horses. They can destroy the sod or brush so use hard ground areas that are clear of debris and keep the horses tied away from trees and roots. Use the 'In-line Bowline' in Chapter 4 for making a high line loop you can always untie.

Your fencer kit does not have to be elaborate. A battery powered, hand sized fencer and several stakes is all you need. Train horses to respect electric fencers at home - before you use them in the woods, and place hobbles on horses inside the fenced area as insurance - a cheap policy that can save miles of searching for missing horses.

We prefer to keep our high line above the horses head, with the rope long enough to allow the horse to lay down but not long enough to get a leg over. We keep our in-line bowline loops about eight feet apart.



Morning Jingle

Unless you are a well honed wrangler with well honed horses, the fewer horses free the better. If you are bringing in a large number in the morning - say eight or more, you may be better off tying all to trees and making two trips to camp. Sometimes, when not too far from camp, we take a few of the leaders back and let the followers hop in with hobbles on. Keep all of your horses confined - either with hobbles on or leads - tied to trees or being led in. The more horses loose, the more trouble. When leading several horses at a time keep your dominant horses up front, i.e.. lead your "bell mare" first. Never lay your hobbles on the ground. If you do they will get lost, sure as shootin'. Slip them around the horse's neck or halter as soon as you take them off. We always keep hobbles draped around the horse's neck as we ride for the day.

Have bells on all of your horses, no exception. If you have not found all of your

horses and you are leading in the ones you found, leave their bells on. The sound may help to turn the missing horses.

We tail tie or neck tie the horses together when we bring them in. Tying the lead with a bowline around the next horse's neck requires a longer lead, but it is quicker for short walks than tail tying. Tail tying two horses to each others tail is a great way to leave horses controlled if there are no trees around. They walk in circles for a few minutes then stand still.

Use

When putting in long days on the trail, over the course of the summer and fall, we like to have the horse used no more than three out of four days. If your trail horses ride and pack, alternate their use from base camp. *Do not* ride one horse every day while the others sit unused because he is your favorite horse. We call this abuse. You can do this for a week or two, but not for a season.



We often leave the bells on our horses while we ride and silence them by sticking the 'dong' through a slot cut in the end of the strap. You can also stuff the bell with sod or moss.

CARING FOR HORSES



People are always amazed at where a mountain horse can go and what they can go through. To accomplish these feats they need good food, water, and rest.

Horses are biological beings. They are used under many conditions,

sometimes under demanding and stressful circumstances, and as a result suffer health problems. Often, age and unforeseeable circumstances create injuries or health concerns.

Trail riders need to be able to recognize some of the more obvious health concerns and to a point, be prepared to deal with these problems.

FEEDING

The biggest mistake travelers make is inadequate feeding. A horse's stomach is designed to require repetitive feeding several times a day (unlike a cow). Their stomach is not especially large.

You cannot turn out confined horses for a couple hours morning and evening and expect them to keep up their weight or health. If you use them all day they need to be turned out all evening, night and early morning. If you keep a horse tied up all night and then turn it out for two hours to feed before hitting the trail, it is not enough. If you keep camp horses tied over night, then rotate camp horses. If you tether (which we find dangerous for many horses) then be sure they are on good feed. Giving the horse a daily ration of high vitamin - mineral supplement is a good idea on the trail. Green, palatable grass has all of the nutrients that a horse needs to stay healthy. In fact, some high mountain grasses are richer in protein and energy than valley grasses.

Hauling in feed may be necessary as some regulations require it. Hauling in feed is a good idea in late fall as grasses lose their value. It is difficult to recommend feed on the trail as individuals and circumstances call for different

approaches. For example, some prefer to feed alfalfa cubes and others prefer to feed bulk hay and a supplement. In any case, the horse needs salt, minerals, and vitamins, especially A, D, and E. If your horse is well fed at home, you probably do not have to worry about supplement for a one or two week trip.

Mules, some horses, and some breeds of horses, manage to keep their weight better under poor feed conditions. Keeping weight often goes hand in hand with calmness in a horse - the more calm, the better they keep their weight. Recreational riding does not place the demands on a horse or require the weight keeping ability that outfitter horses require.

At one time outfitter's horses were commonly kicked out to survive harsh winters, wolves, and willow brush for feed. The horses that survived bred tough, bush wise cayuses. Even though harsh winters and wolves claimed many horses on a yearly basis, remote locations and low horse prices made turning horses out more economical than feeding them. Stronger horse prices an empathy for good horses, and laws, have kept most horses well fed in recent years.

Horses and mules have an enzyme that cattle lack. This enzyme breaks down and allows the horse to digest coarse cellulose. In unfortunate circumstances, horses are often able to survive harsh conditions on poor feed such as twigs, bark, and dead grass.

Horses tend to stay friendly and closer to camp if they regularly get a handful of grain or treats. A small salt block also helps to keep horses close. Many wise horse people train their horses to come to a whistle for treats.

Feeding while hauling horses can be a blessing or a curse. A small amount of feed in a hay net or on the floor can calm horses down and help settle them in during a long journey. It can also be a way of feeding the horse during long hauls. On the negative side, if you feed the horse large amounts of dry feed without water you are asking for a plugged intestine (colic). This is especially true if a horse is sweating and losing body water in a warm trailer. If we do not have access to water, we prefer to let the horses go hungry for several hours rather than take a chance on colic. Rolling oats or barley vastly increases its value. Barley has all of the energy, vitamins and minerals that oats does only more of it, so feed less and be careful that horses do not set into your barley supply or over eating, over heating and founder can result.

MEDICAL

There are volumes written about the medical problems of horses. The purpose of this section is to address the more common ailments that trail riders and wilderness travelers may confront. Knowledgeable vets can and should have the final word on all of these topics.

The health of the horse on the trail should always be on the mind of the trail rider. We have been guilty of being so preoccupied with the many events of a journey that we have missed clues and symptoms of an ailing horse.

The areas of greatest concerns are lameness, sickness (usually related to the gastro - intestinal tract), wounds, and saddle sores.



Always be aware of what, when, and how much feed and water your horses consume. Horses need repetitive feeding times daily, or long periods of feeding time. During longer trips and for horses that are working all season, one or two hours of feeding time after the horse has been tied up or corralled all night is not enough.

Lameness

Let us categorize lameness as temporary or chronic (serious - re-occurring). A mature horse's bone structure, tendons, ligaments, and cartilage are very tough - they need to be. There is not a lot of give in the bone and tendon structure of an adult horse. Because of this, if a bone, tendon, ligament or cartilage injury occurs, it is often very serious. Since the front end bears the load and because the front end does most of the digging and scrambling, the front feet, legs, and shoulders are often the ones to go lame.

1. *Symptoms* - When you are riding along and a horse begins to limp - a horse you knew was perfectly sound a few minutes ago, it is nearly always a bruise or a sprain. Ninety percent of the time the bruise or sprain is temporary and wears itself off, usually within several minutes. This is much the same as stubbing your toe or mildly twisting your ankle. If the limp is pronounced you should check the



Lifting and stretching the leg forward, and backward, will often cause the horse to wince from the pain of a shoulder injury. (This horse may react and should not be tied to a post).

foot for a stone lodged under the shoe or the leg and foot for a wound or a puncture. In more than twenty years of wilderness travel we have been forced to make an emergency camp only once to deal with a limp.

2. *Temporary* - Once a limp is detected, keep a constant watch on that horse. If it does not improve within several minutes, or gets worse, you need to make camp early and get the weight and movement off of the foot. You can usually detect a sprain by swelling, heat (compare the warmth of the healthy ankle to the injured one), sensitivity to pressure or how the horse is standing. To find the area of sensitivity, squeeze around the ankle, the coronet band, and on the sole of the foot. Shoulder injuries can be detected by lifting up the front foot and swinging it all the way forward, pulling and pointing the toe high to the front. The horse will pull its leg, lift its head, or wince in some way if you cause pain.

This rider is checking the ankle and coronet band for heat from a possible injury. They are also applying pressure to the ankle, pastern, coronet band, and sole to see if the horse reacts to pain.



If the horse stands with a front leg lifted or toe pointed, you have a problem. It is not natural to lift a front leg while resting. If a horse repeatedly rests the same back leg you may also have a problem. If you think you see a limp as the horse walks, try trotting the horse on a hard surface - the limp should be more obvious.

If by the next morning the horse's limp persists you need to make your plans around the injury. If your base camp is not far and the horse can have a few days off, continue to take the horse in empty. We do not like to end a trip early due to lameness because resting in the wilderness can be just as good as resting at home. When it's time to go out to the road, and the horse is still lame, you don't have much choice but to let him trail out empty. Do not lead him - let him pick his own way. At the earliest detection of a limp you should let the pack horse loose. If the riding horse limps then the rider should walk. A tensor bandage is recommended on a sprain when travelling.

Standing the horse in cold water as soon as possible and at intervals will reduce the inflammation of a sprain or a bruise. Applying a heat liniment between ice cold water sessions will help. After the first day or so there is really not much you can do for a sprain besides keeping the foot inactive. A tensor bandage on a sprained ankle and separating the horse from unnecessary activity will help inactivate the foot.

3. *Chronic* - A serious sprain, tendonitis, fractures, founder, navicular, ringbone, etc. should be diagnosed by a vet and may take months to recover, or may never recover. It is a sad moment when a horse with a leg or shoul-

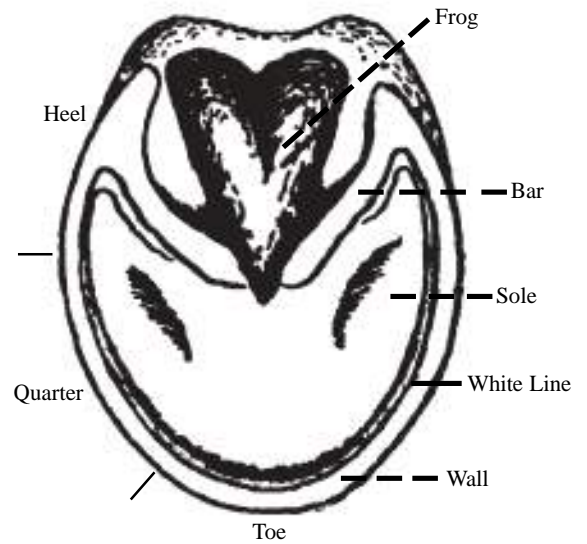
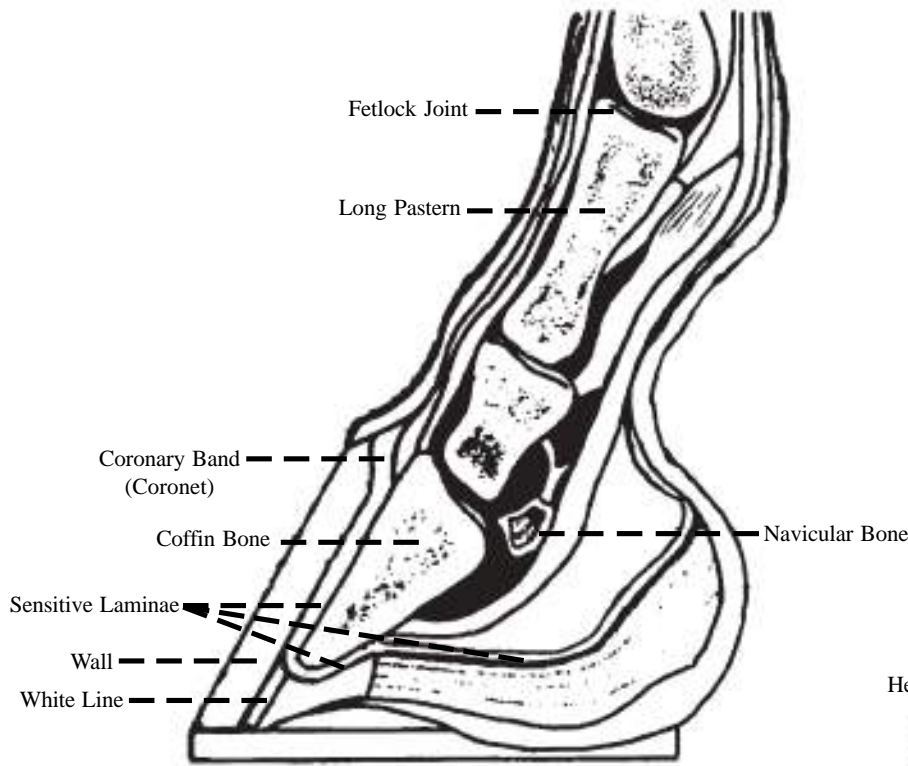
der strain has a year off then limps again under use. Shoulder, tendon and ligament injuries are often chronic and they re-occur with use. Again, the tendons and joints of a mature horse are very tough so if they are pulled, torn, or damaged in some way, it is often very serious.

Founder (laminitis, separated wall) can be a painful and chronic condition. Founder is caused by an inflammation of the interior of the foot. This inflammation can be caused by anything that can get the foot "hot" including too much high energy feed (green grass or grain), an overworked, overheated horse (especially if it drinks cold water), feet pounding on hard ground, trimming too short, and sickness.

If a horse displays the signs of lameness, especially pointing a foot or both legs straight, and slightly forward, and you suspect founder, it can help to cool the feet with water or ice. A vet can inject antihistamines and inflammation reducing drugs.

A horse that experienced mild founder may make a full recovery. If you suspect the symptoms of founder reappear only when using the horse on the trail, you may be dealing with chronic laminitis.

Chronic laminitis occurs when the interior of the foot is heated and swollen for too long or too often. The constant swelling of the interior forces the hoof wall to expand and "set". Some believe when the inflammation on the inside of the foot cools down and subsides, the interior contracts - but the hoof wall does not. The result is a separation, a space, between the interior sensitive laminae and the wall, and rotating and sinking of the coffin bone.



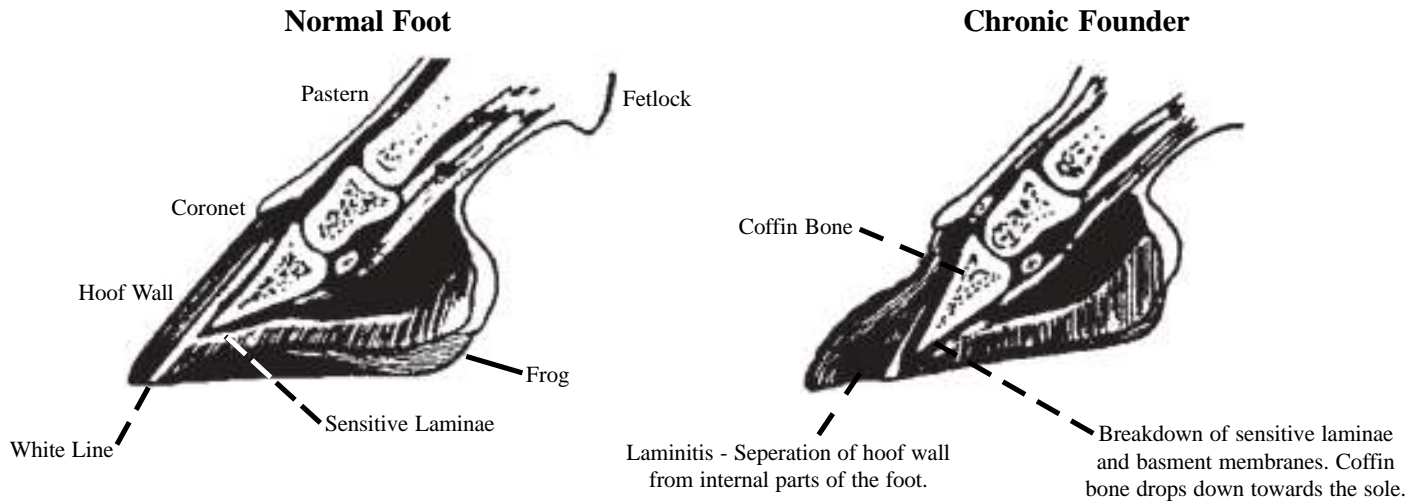
This is a painful, recurring condition that can eventually result in a dropped sole and the internal bone structures of the foot dropping down lower than they should be. Often when you trim these feet you can plainly see the separation between the sole and the wall. Grit and dirt and infection can create an abscess in this space, sometimes called 'seedy toe'. You can often see "rings" of growth, varying thickness of hoof wall up and down the hoof. However, rings of growth may be caused by reasons other than founder.

Larminitis is still being studied and debated. There are actually three phases of larminitis, Early (developmental), Acute (an attack) and Chronic (longer lasting - past 48

hours, recurring).

During acute and chronic stages there is a break down of membranes, especially the basement membranes, that may be caused by excessive heat and activated, uncontrolled enzymes. This breakdown of membranes encourages the coffin bone to drop and turn.

Horses that show signs of founder need to be assessed individually as some horses put in years of hard trail use after bouts of founder. With corrective shoeing some separation can be cured. Separation in the back feet does not seem to effect the horse as severely as in the front feet.



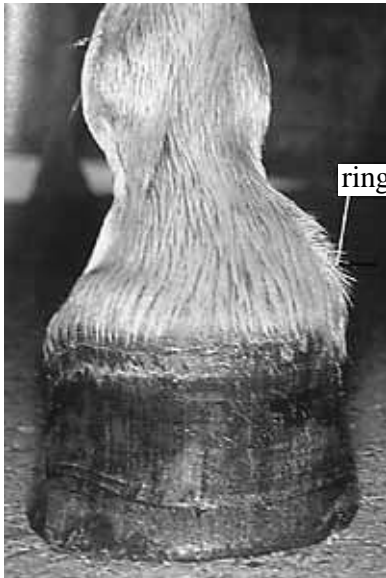
Because a trail horses feet are often subject to long hours of hard use, it is not uncommon for trail horses to show the symptoms of founder or laminitis. Trail riders should understand its causes.

Navicular disease is an incurable condition where the small navicular bone in the foot is fractured or damaged. Pain is caused when walking because important tendons slide against this damaged, inflamed, bone. The horse limps and tends to stumble because it wants to point its toe when walking. Surgery to cure this problem is not always successful and these horses are often retired.

Shoulder strains are very frustrating because we want to believe that time off should allow the inflammation and the strained tendons to heal. You can give a horse a year off that you feel had a mild shoulder strain

and believe that the horse is fine. Unfortunately, the tendonitis often surfaces with the first good ride. It really hurts when a good horse must be retired for what appears to be a nuisance problem.

A horse that is cut severely enough to expose leg tendons does not necessarily need to be destroyed. If a main tendon is cut then the horse will not be able to walk and the fate of the horse is decided. If smaller tendons are damaged the horse may heal and be very usable. Always give the horse the benefit of the doubt and give it a chance to heal.



A trail horses foot and lower leg is subject to bumps and bruises. It is not uncommon for a traumatic disturbance to cause calcification and new bone growth. Ring bone (foot), spavin (hock & knee), and arthritis can all develop from trauma to bones and joints. Horses with these conditions may or may not be subject to pain. A vet can establish if lameness is due to one of these conditions and provide a prognosis.

Sickness

In thirty years of active and challenging trail riding we have seen three horses die while in the wilderness. One belonged to another party and died from deadly swamp fever (equine, infectious anaemia). Two others died from sickness related to the gastro-intestinal track.

A horse that appears healthy at home can become ill with several ailments while on the

trail. Stress from hauling, changes of feed, and working conditions can cause a horse to become ill and will bring out latent sickness, or lower the horse's immune system.

Horses that become ill on the trail generally show one or more of these symptoms; excessive sweating; moving about irrationally; continued depression (head down and tired); unwillingness to move; mucus like discharges

A trail horse that acts depressed - head low, losing weight, lethargic, clumsy, - needs to have an immediate diagnosis from a vet. Some serious ailments such as encephalomyelitis and swamp fever (equine infectious anemia) have no cure and may be contagious.



from nose, mouth, or eyes.

Signs of serious illness include

- a) Refusal to eat or drink/inability to eat or drink
- b) Watery diarrhea/constipation
- c) Inability to walk or stand
- d) Fever over 101 degrees (Celsius)
- e) Laboured or noisy breathing/rapid breathing
- f) Pulse greater than 80
- g) Dramatic change in behaviour (either depression or agitation)
- h) Straining to urinate or excessively red/brown urine
- i) Severe swelling of the legs and/or along lower abdomen
- j) Seizures
- k) Shock (weakness, trembling, depression, cold ears, cold extremities, rapid, weak pulse, pale mucus membranes, decreased capillary refill time, decreased urinary output)

Common ailments include colic, diarrhea, influenza and colds. Less common but worth mentioning are swamp fever, encephalomyelitis, and tetanus.

1. Colic (impaction) - Plugging of the intestine, usually the large intestine, is probably the most common type of intestinal ailment experienced by trail horses. Common causes for colic include too much dry feed and not enough water, bolting down large quantities of green grass, and coarse, poor quality feed. Poor chewing due to bad teeth and poor internal muscle tone can contribute to colic. Older mares, especially if they have had foals, often become sloppy in the gut and loose the

muscle tone needed for the good peristalsis action needed for passing feces.

As the gut becomes plugged the horse has bouts of discomfort and pain. The horse will repeatedly look at its gut and lie down at intervals. The horse will lose its appetite. Feces that are passed will be small, hard, and covered with mucus.

As trail riders, we need to be sure our campsites have water readily available. Be sure that horses have access to that water. Steep banks often prevent a horse from drinking. During rainy weather, or mornings with heavy frost or dew, horses do not need to drink water.

When hauling horses do not give them dry feed for extended periods when they do not have access to water. If a horse is sweating in a warm trailer it is losing body water. If you combine this dehydration with dry feed you have a recipe for trouble.

When the horse shows symptoms of colic you need to get it off of feed immediately. Keep the horse up and moving. Pour mineral or cooking oil down the horse's throat. Allow the horse to drink water if it will. In serious cases, and depending on the location of the blockage, more direct action is needed. Vets often apply mineral oil into the rectum. They will not recommend that a layman sticks his arm up a horse's rectum but when a horse does not respond to treatment, it is a matter of life and death. On more than one occasion we have covered our arm with cooking oil, gone into the horse's rectum and broke up blockages. It needs to be a gentle procedure and you should study the

procedure in a vet book.

2. Diarrhea - Diarrhea in a horse is more serious than a human - it signals serious stomach or intestinal problems. The problem is often a bacteria imbalance or wall scarring from protozoa parasites. The symptoms are triggered by stress or hard use. Because diarrhea drains the horse of fluids the horse is suffering water loss, energy loss, and will often go into shock and possibly die. This is more common in older horses. Stop the work if possible. Rest the horse, get it home, and if it tightens up, give it an easier life somewhere else, because the intestinal problems can never really be cured.

A horse that is suffering from chronic diarrhea will act depressed and sluggish, eventually laying down and refusing to move.

3. Every few years a cold or flu bug runs its course through some horses in our herd. Cold and flu bugs commonly occur in the fall and winter. The symptoms are similar to those shown by humans - a fever, nasal and eye discharge, coughing, and generally a poor feeling. Sick horses need rest and when a horse gets a flu or a cold on the trail we rest that horse as much as possible.

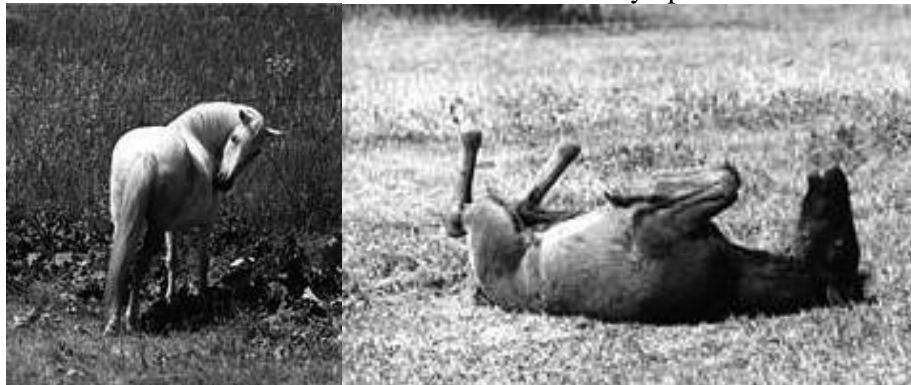
4. When a horse acts depressed (head

down), tired, loses appetite, loses weight, and appears to be less coordinated, it may have viral diseases, encephalomyelitis or EIA - equine infectious anemia (swamp fever). In either case they are carriers for life and more often than not the end result is death. You need to contact a vet immediately if your horse shows these symptoms. The vet will likely do a blood test for EIA (coggins test).

5. If your horse has received a deep puncture or wound you need to clean and disinfect the wound and have a vet inject tetanus antitoxin. The tetanus bacteria *Clostridium tetani* is common in soil and feces of horses. If the horse becomes infected it will show signs one week to a few months after the injury. The area around the wound often becomes stiff and muscles begin to spasm, including muscles on the head and mouth (lock jaw). Tetanus is often fatal.

Many horse owners carry penicillin into the woods and immediately give wounded horses a good dose.

6. Sick horses should be removed from stressful circumstances. This means they should be given rest and good water and feed until their symptoms are normal.



Colic and diarrhea are both very serious ailments for trail horses. These horses display the signs of colic - checking or biting the pain in its side and rolling in an attempt to alleviate the discomfort.

Wounds

Most horse owners have found it is only a matter of time before they have to treat a wound. Horses, like people, need first aid kits on the trail.

The first step in treating a wound is stopping the blood flow. Direct bandage pressure helps control bleeding and help keeps the wound clean. Blood stop powder also helps control bleeding from capillaries but large arteries or vessels need direct pressure. You may need to apply the pressure bandage for an hour or longer.

Tourniquets are not recommended but we had a yearling colt with an arterial cut in the pastern that required one to stop the blood flow. If you apply a tourniquet you need to release pressure every several minutes.

Next the wound needs to be cleaned. Flush the wound with cold water. Serious wounds should be flushed clean with cold water repeatedly during the healing process. Deep wounds can be initially flushed with hydrogen peroxide. Peroxide helps to bring dirt to the surface.

After cleaning, the wound needs to be medicated with a topical anti bacterial lotion to ward off infection. Use salves, lotion and sprays that are not too irritating to the flesh. Aggressive medication weakens the tissue around the wound, causes granulation and encourages

excessive and erratic tissue growth (proud flesh). Nolvasan, Silvidine, Betadine and furazone based medication (often a yellow color) are good. Avoid iodine. Blue lotion, scarlet oil and Cut Heal are best used on fleshy upper leg and body wounds as they encourage granulation and proud flesh when used on the lower leg.

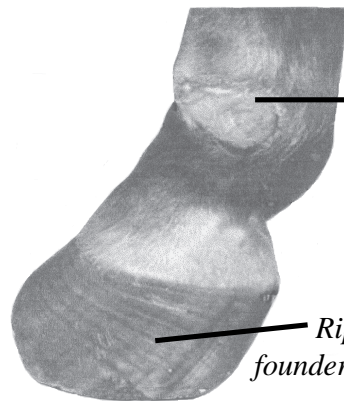
Fleshy upper leg and body wounds will usually heal as an open wound, without stitches. Air circulation will actually help the healing process. Open, fleshy wounds look bad, but if they are kept clean and free of flies they generally heal well.

Lower leg injuries are more critical. The lack of fleshy tissue and the movement of the limb make healing more difficult. You need to assess the seriousness of a lower leg injury. If the horse is not putting any weight on the leg, you need to see a vet.

Lower leg wounds often heal better when sutured, even if they are small wounds. A salve is recommended for wounds on or near joints as they keep the area soft and supple, as opposed to a spray that tends to dry the wound (which is good for fleshy wounds). Leg wounds should be wrapped until healing is well under way.

We usually take penicillin along an extended trip but use it only if the wound is deep - a deep cut or a puncture.

For hobble or rope abrasions we apply a furazone based ointment.



A lower leg wound may not look as nasty as an upper body flesh wound but may require more attention.

Rippled 'rings' on the hoof wall may indicate founder (laminitis) or bouts of fever (illness).

Puncture wounds to the body or bottom of the foot need to be taken seriously as they can lead to tetanus. A tetanus antitoxin should be given to horses with deeper puncture wounds.

Punctures need to be cleaned with a disinfectant like hydrogen peroxide, betadine or iodine. The wound needs to be packed with an antiseptic ointment and wrapped to prevent foreign matter getting in the wound. We always administer penicillin to horses with a deep puncture wound. With the exception of a fleshy body wound, injured areas should be always bandaged until the healing process is well under way, to a point where tissue growth can ward off infection.

Saddle Sores

If you look at a group of horses that have been used on the trail extensively you can usually see some white hair spots in the wither area or on the sides of the horse. These hairs are white because the hair roots have been damaged and they no longer show color. The damaged hair roots are usually the result of a saddle blister or constant rubbing from packing loads.

Because riders move with the flow of the horses movement, saddle horses are less likely to receive saddle sores than pack horses.

Saddle sores do not usually begin as an open wound but rather as a blister or bump in the wither area or on the sides of the horse. These blisters are often not noticeable until the morning after, so you need to check horses regularly for this swelling. If the horse is used with an existing blister you risk the chance of infection or an open wound. If the horse is

rested at the first sign of swelling then the swelling generally goes down in a couple of days and tissue damage is minimal.

Do not assume that white hair spots on a horse are always the result of a sore or wound. In fact, open wounds and sores below the skin level and usually do not result in white hair spots. Packing loads repetitively, even with a well fitting pack saddle, can eventually turn hairs white. In this case, the white hairs bother us more than they bother the horse.

Here are some ways to reduce the occurrence of saddle sores:

1. Be sure that the saddle fits well. Packsaddles should fit "like a glove". High spots create pressure points and most packsaddles need to be shaved or rasped (even plastic ones) in order to have the entire saddle bar touch the back.

2. Use good, quality pack pads.

3. Avoid packing horses under four years old with heavy loads as younger horses have softer skin and they are more likely to sore.

4. Lift your pad up to the forks of the packsaddle - off of the horse's withers and back.

5. Do not pack soft packs or manties with objects that protrude into the horse's side.

6. Stop as soon as you see a crooked or slipped load. A slipped load means that the saddle bars are creating excessive and uneven pressure.

7. Pack horses with loads on the light side. The lighter your load, the less chance you will create sores - especially if your packing methods are not perfect and most of us are not perfect. We feel good about a horse that is carrying forty pounds in each pack box and



Our trail medical kit includes antiseptic spray, salve, gauze pads, tensor bandages, penicillin, syringe and needles, tape, and blood stop powder. We like our penicillin to contain an anti-inflammatory and an antihistamine. Disposable diapers make good wound dressing pads.

twenty to thirty pounds on top.

8. Pour cold water over the horse's back after a long ride or when you feel there is a chance of a sore developing. Cold water reduces the heat that promotes tissue damage.

Treat an open saddle rub or abrasion as a wound and apply antibacterial medication. If there is excessive swelling in the wither area the horse probably has an infection called fistula of the withers (it will be a noticeable hump). The swelling eventually erupts and puss is extruded.

We have experienced this twice in thirty years of packing and both times we did what

the vets often do. We lanced the fistula, drained the puss, washed the wound with cold salt water, applied antibacterial lotion (betadine), gave the horse penicillin both orally and injected into the wound, and dressed the wound with furazone and gauze. Lance the fistula low down so it can drain as it heals.

On a long trip you need to deal with fistula on the trail as the infection can spread deep into the neck and shoulder area, rotting muscles, bone, and eventually killing the horse. Some bacteria found in fistula are very aggressive and can affect humans. Gloves should be worn.

This 2 1/2 year old is being ridden and packed lightly. Young horses have not completed bone growth and their skin is softer. Heavy loads and extended use is more likely to create saddle sores than similar use with an older horse. Old timers repeatedly rubbed vinegar into the horses back to thicken skin.



These white hairs on the wither area of this pack horse are the result of damaged hair roots. The damage has not developed from an open sore, but rather, the constant contact from years of use. Proper fitting saddles, quality saddle pads and proper adjustment helps reduce white hair spots (called Hudson Bay Brands by some).



The cinch can be moved back to avoid a cinch sore temporarily by running the latigo through both rings.

Flies And Bugs

Flies and bugs can drive a horse to extreme restlessness and create a dangerous, nervous, high energy animal. There are times when the horses are hobbled and turned out to feed and they appear determined to head out. Watch them closely. If their tails are swishing and noses snorting it could be that flies have got them on the move. Black flies, sand flies, deerflies and “no seeums” can turn the horse’s chest and groin into a bloody mess. Mosquitoes and horseflies also transmit diseases, including West Nile Virus and Swamp Fever.

Here is an old outfitter recipe that works

great. It lasts longer, works better, and is much cheaper than anything on the market. It is good for all types of flies.

Rub in the chest, around ears, cinch area, belly and groin. A swipe down the back is nice too. You won’t find this as bug dope in a store as creolin is considered an insecticide. We often use this salve around a rub or small wounds. It keeps off bugs and helps healing. Do not use it close to eyes. We will often use a rubber glove or a plastic bag over our hand when we apply it.

Recipe: 50% Lard, 20% Creolin, 30% Pine Tar.

Melt together and pour in a good tight container (it stinks!) We will often mix in a couple small bottles of bug dope (deet).

Using bug dope is more valuable than offering a welcome relief from a pest. It helps prevent contagious diseases, calms down agitated horses and helps keep them from wandering when turned out to feed. We feel our old outfitters recipe lasts longer and works better than anything on the market.



Dehydration

Horses that work hard on the trail heat up quickly. Sweating cools the horse as the water evaporates. During hot, humid days horses can lose 15 litres of sweat an hour! As the horse sweats, trace minerals (electrolytes) like sodium, chloride, and potassium are excreted through the sweat glands. Horses that lose too much salt and potassium experience stress, impaired gastro-intestinal function, increase the chance of colic, lose mental focus and judgement, and can experience shock and death. Horses should be given as much salt and water as they want during rest periods as the day goes by. Giving the working trail horse a mineral mix boost is a good idea. If the horse has been working very hard let it drink and walk it intermittently.

You can do the pinch test to see if the horse is excessively dehydrated. Pinch a fold of skin from the neck between your thumb and fore finger then let go. The skin should be elastic - snap back in less than two seconds. If it takes longer it is dehydrated. The snap response varies with horse to horse so test your horse before use to determine what is normal.

Thrush and Ringworm

Wet, muddy, trail conditions can encourage fungal infections. If your horse has cracked wrinkles on its nose, heels, infected frog or soul (foul smelling), or is losing patches of hair to reveal slightly scabbed skin, it likely has a fungus. One or two treatments with green coppers usually clears up the problem. If any infections persist you should see a vet.

De-Worming

A horse that is working on the trail needs to be relatively free of worms. A worm ridden horse loses energy, weight, and condition while under the demands of working trail conditions. All of our horses are de-wormed regularly with appropriate worm medicine. Very often riders are concerned about feed, vitamins, and minerals when the prime reason that their horse is losing nutrition is worms. Experienced trail riders check fresh feces regularly for an indication of worms. At the home pasture dung piles should be spread out (harrowed) and horses fed out of feeders - not off of the ground.



Always desensitize the mouth before de-worming. We make sure that the horse is calm. We massage the horses lips with our hand or the tube before we attempt to insert it. The wormer needs to be deposited above the tongue and as deep as possible.

Teeth

Poor teeth can be a major contributor when an otherwise healthy horse loses its condition. You should regularly check teeth for protruding sharp edges and opposing (top and bottom) teeth that are differing lengths - not on the same plane as other matching teeth.

Take your own tongue and feel the bottom inside edge of your back molars. You will notice that they are seated inside of the top molars. It is the same on a horse. This bottom

inside edge, and the top outside edge, can develop into a sharp protruding ridge. This ridge prevents the proper lateral chewing motion needed to break down coarse food - thus the horse loses nutrition. These sharp edges can also cause lacerations that can become infected. A horse that slobbers saliva and has feed falling back out of its mouth often has this problem. By the time many horses are eight years old they need their teeth 'floated' - the high, sharp ridges rasped down with a floating rasp (a special file).



This horse is having his molars 'floated'. In order to check and float the horses teeth, you need to firmly hold the tongue to one side of the mouth. This way the horse will not bite down on the fingers or your rasp.



Grooming

Grooming on the trail is far more important than a calming process or making the horse attractive. Your brush and hands need to clean and feel the cinch, wither, back, belly, groin and chest areas. You are removing dirt and chaff

buildup that will irritate the horse and create sores, especially from the cinch area. You are also feeling for blisters, rubs, cuts, and bug infestations.

It is also a good idea to inspect the lower leg and soles of the feet. You may notice broken hoof walls and loose shoes, etc.

SHOEING

If Blue Creek took note of its most frustrating experiences as trail riders it would probably go something like this. First - hauling horses to and from the trail head. Second - shoes falling off of horses prematurely. Third - dealing with difficult trails. Fourth - dealing with difficult horses.

We have been in situations when farriers have placed shoes on twenty horses, and within three weeks twenty shoes were lost or about to be lost!

The purpose of your trip was not to spend every night shoeing horses that you have already paid good money to have shod a few weeks prior. Furthermore, if you do not notice a lost shoe and continue to travel with heavy loads and on rocky trails, your horses foot may be injured or worn down to the point where it needs time off to grow back before being shod again. You can, and should, have some extra shoes, a shoe boot, your nippers, file, hammer and nails with you, but not everyone feels competent about shaping, fitting, and nailing shoes on.

You need to check for loose shoes regularly and listen for a different sounding shoe as it strikes rock. A

loose shoe has a higher pitch “clink” to it. Use the edge of your file above the clinch and hammer loose nails tight.

When to Shoe

We shoe horses for three reasons. First, to protect the foot during use. Second, to reduce the stress on a damaged foot and allow it time to heal. The damage is often cracks that need to be secured, laminitis, or seedy toe. Third, is corrective shoeing for faulty gaits like toe in, toe out, pigeon toed, splay footed and feet striking each other.

If your horse has sound feet with no serious cracks and about one quarter to a half inch of sound hoof wall, and you are riding the horse casually, you may choose not to shoe at all. Deciding not to shoe is a judgement call. We have seen horses with tough thick walled hooves pack for two months without being shod, and still maintain a half inch of hoof wall beyond the soul.

On the other hand, some feet are delicate. Soft (generally lighter color), thin walled, smaller feet may need the protection of a shoe for any riding. You need to pay particular attention to shod soft feet on the trail because they tend to loose shoes easier than hard thick walled feet, and if they loose their shoe, they can be worn down and injured within a few hours - especially on rocky ground.

Many outfitters from years past would shoe horses in August or even July, use the horses into the fall, then turn the horses out in range country for the winter without pulling off

their shoes. Sometimes they would remove the front shoes so the front feet would not “ball up” with snow when pawing for feed. The horses were gathered up next spring or summer, trimmed, shod, and put back on the trail.

The reason these old time outfitters were able to ignore feet for several months of the year was due to the durability of the “bush horses” foot. When the hoof walls got too long they would chip off laterally, not lengthwise cracks from coronet band to the soul.

Since we are not old time outfitters and our horses are closer to home, it makes good sense to trim feet every eight to ten weeks during the off season. If we do not, we run the risk of cracks and losing chunks of hoof wall to the point where it is difficult to secure the shoe. We have found that it is well worth the time to re-set and keep a shoe on a horse with problem feet all year long, rather than try to repair the damaged foot when it was time to shoe. Shoes need to be reset every six to eight weeks. Allowing the hoof to grow too long puts unnecessary stress on tendons, ligaments, and joints.

Shoeing procedures are the one area where we expect farriers to disagree with how we like to see our trail horses shod, especially horses under hard use on rocky, soft, or brush filled trails.

Modern day farriers learn theory to support their shoeing methods. The past several years there has been emphasis on the concept of the rear quarters of the hoof wall flexing outward when the horse puts pressure on his foot - both without and with shoes on.

Possibly because of this we have seen the four nail holes shifted forward on many shoes these days, the idea being that the rear nail is seated further forward to allow the rear branch of the horse shoe and the hoof wall the freedom to flex. Some farriers take the concept

further and do not place the rear nails in at all. Combine a missing back nail with shoes that stick out behind the rear of the hoof (the shoe heels will catch on rocks, roots and the toe of the back foot) and nails that were seated too shallow, and you have a shoe that may not last a week, let alone a season.

Trail horses are used long and hard. The likelihood of a horse hurting a bare foot on rocky ground because a shoe is lost is far greater than the possible harm done by placing the rear nail further back in the hoof wall. If a farrier will not follow these wishes we find another farrier or shoe the horses ourselves.

1. Nail all of the holes.
2. Do not allow the rear branch of the shoe to extend behind the hoof - not even a sixteenth of an inch! Often when a farriers says it will extend beyond the hoof the width of a dime, in reality it becomes the width of three quarters.

3. Do not excessively curl the heel of the shoe inward. When the horse steps on objects with weight on the curled in section, the shoe will twist and eventually loosen.

4. When the shoe is in place you should not feel or see the top edge of the shoe, it needs to be flush or seated slightly inside of the outer edge of the hoof wall.

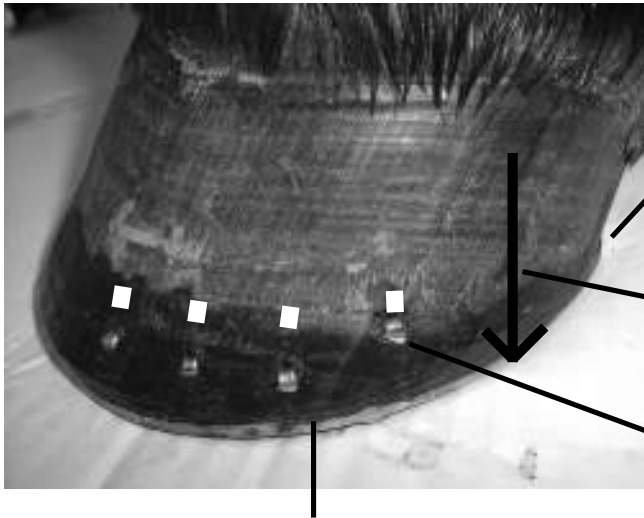
5. The prepared surface of the horse’s foot must be flat, perfectly flush with the attached shoe. Any gaps between the shoe and wall will allow the shoe to flex with each step, eventually loosening the nails and the shoe.

6. Seat the nails so that they come out of the hoof wall about 1/3 up the hoof from the

metal shoe. If the front three nails are seated too low, be sure the rear nail is seated higher. The rear nail is the most important nail for trail riders.

Farriers are individuals and they do not shoe exactly the same. If you are travelling in

rugged country you need to discuss these concerns with the farrier over the phone. Try to get a reasonable guarantee about the shoes coming off. If we shoe someone's horse and a shoe comes off within two weeks, we feel obliged to put another one back on.



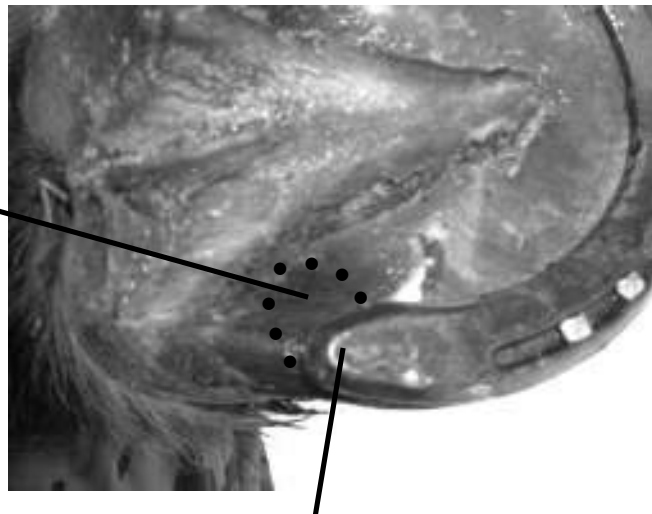
The prepared sole and hoof wall is filed perfectly flat - no space between the shoe and the hoof.

The shoe does not extend behind the hoof.

When looking or feeling down along the hoof wall to the shoe, the shoe should not protrude at all.

This rear nail is seated slightly higher than the front nails, which is good in this case because all of the nails are too low! They should be seated about 1/3 up from the bottom of the hoof - where the white squares are.

The shoe is not curled in beyond the rear of the hoof.



The rear branch of the shoe does not extend back beyond the end of the hoof wall.

The style of shoes used by trail riders varies considerably. Recently there has been a shift from the old standby toe and heel shoes to rim and flat shoes. We use “eventers” which are similar to a rim shoe but wider.

For those of you who are riding on frozen ground or into the winter, you need to screw or weld calks (small buttons often made from borium) onto the bottom of your shoes. Riding on frozen ground is dangerous without them.

Slip-on “Easy Boots” are great in an emergency, they really work. The reason we do not carry them with us is that we would need several to cover all of our shoe sizes. They can prove themselves valuable for recreational riders with a few horses. Front shoes have a tendency to come off more often than rear shoes and you should buy the easy boots accordingly.

We buy horses that walk reasonably straight so we do not have experience with corrective shoeing for toe in, toe out, cow hocked, splay footed, pigeon toed, or laminitis.



Cracked Hooves

Regardless of where they are located, cracks in a hoof wall are called sand cracks. This is true for cracks starting from the bottom up or from the coronary band down. If a crack occurs from the bottom up it is usually the result of excessive hoof length. The hoof needs to be trimmed with the area where the crack touches the ground being trimmed slightly shorter - to relieve pressure where the crack is. If the crack runs from the coronary band down, look to see if it is the result of damage to the coronary band, in which case it may be permanent. It is not uncommon for trail horses to have cracked hooves. Feet with persistent or serious cracks should be shod to allow the crack to grow out. The crack can be cleaned and filled with acrylic (or fibreglass resin). ‘Cleaned’ is the key word here. Many farriers and vets believe that the bacteria and dirt deep in the crack is what keeps the crack open. They will slightly par open the crack and clean out the crack very well. (Some use a shoe nail and hydrogen peroxide, iodine, or betadine.) Cracks sometimes result from dry hooves in which case it will help to fill cracks and coat hooves with pine tar or ‘hooflex’. A good diet with added vitamins and minerals (biotin) will help prevent cracks. Avoid buying horses with serious cracks, but if you have one, deal with it because if it reaches the sensitive laminae the horse will go lame.

A slip on boot can protect a horses foot when you lose a shoe.

Shoeing Procedure

Although you can not learn to be a farrier by reading this book, a good understanding of the procedure is valuable. Let us walk through shoeing step by step.

1. To lift the foot of a trained horse run your right hand down his leg to the fetlock as your left hand pushes against his shoulder, encouraging the horse to shift his weight off of that leg. The leg is lifted by the hair at the back of the fetlock and then cradled between the shoers knees.

2. The sole of the foot is cleaned thoroughly with a hoof pick or the dull edge of a hoof knife.

3. Any dead tissue is removed from the sole and the frog. Farriers do not always agree on how much dead sole or frog needs to be removed. Some farriers trim the frog entirely and rasp the sole down to the “pink” color. At this point you can actually push against the sole with your thumb and have it “give” like a hard sponge. Because trail riders are subjecting the sole of the foot to rugged use, we like to see a good amount of protective sole remain, as well as most of the frog. However, many horses have excessive build up of sole and it needs to be removed. You can usually tell how much build up you have by how deeply the frog is set into the sole. The sole can usually be parred down close to the base of the frog.

4. The hoof wall is trimmed level, flush with the sole on the front but some wall still visible at the rear quarters. The front is generally rasped until a clean “white line” appears between the sole and the hoof wall. Farriers are careful not to rasp too much off of the toe or the heel because they want to maintain a natural, straight, angle along the pastern and down

along the hoof.

5. The shoe is shaped and fitted to the evenly prepared surface, then nailed on. Particular attention is given to the beveled nails to be sure that they slant outwards. The nails are started on the outside edge of the white line and nailed up and out. If the nail penetrates inside the white line accidentally, it will enter the blood filled sensitive laminae. If the nail penetrates this area it is painful and the horse will let you know, often pulling its leg back. *Never* leave a nail in that is causing blood, pain, or the horse to limp. Have it pulled, treated with medication, and a new nail driven at an outward angle.

There are a number of good books and courses available on horse shoeing. If you plan to shoe your horses spend some quality time with a farrier or take a course. Learning to shoe your horses is a realistic goal and a lifetime benefit, and it is really not that difficult. Learning to trim your own horses is a very good idea because of the cost and timing involved when you need to hire a farrier. Often times you need to trim a foot and you do not want to wait for a farrier.

Trimming

1. Clean and remove all dirt and loose soul and frog matter. If the frog is long, it may be fragmented. You can trim the frog back somewhat. Many farriers feel that the frog is an important cushioning, feeling, and support for the inner bone structure and it should not be entirely removed.

2. Trim excess sole with the knife but not

to the point where the soul turns pink or becomes soft.

3. Trim the wall level - hold the nippers so that your cut is flat. Leave at least one fourth of an inch of wall beyond the sole of the foot and slightly more on the heel.

4. Rasp and round the outer edge. Sharp edges will break off more easily, cut other horses if they are kicked, and cut other legs on the same horse if they over step.

Training To Shoe Or Trim

A horse that has had early training generally lifts its feet well. However, we often need to check and work with the feet of young horses that have not had adequate training. Also, many older horses have grown to resent anyone handling their feet.

Before a horse gives feet willingly he needs to be desensitized in the leg and foot area and he needs to feel comfortable with the procedure rather than threatened or afraid. Asking for the horse's foot is asking for him to give up his only means of escape and also his weapons of defense, and you are asking him to do this while he may feel threatened.

This is a recommended procedure when working with young horses, difficult horses or horses that do not give their feet willingly.

1. Do not begin unless you can approach the horse's shoulder and rub him in the neck, back, and cinch area. If the horse is too frightened for any handling, go back to "Early Training" in the Training Chapter.

2. Rub the horse's shoulder, back and lower neck area with the thick end of your training whip. Do this as if you were brushing him so that he gets comfortable with the whip.

3. When the horse is comfortable with the presence of the whip, stand to the side and tickle the horse's upper front leg with the fine end of the whip. Gently run it downward with the flow of the hair. If the horse stands calmly, stop the tickling after a few seconds and continue with the other legs.

4. If the horse stands calmly, repeat the procedure around the canons, hocks, and feet.

5. More than likely the horse will pull up, paw, or stomp his leg when you first tickle him with the whip. If the horse will not tolerate the light touch of the whip then he is definitely not ready to have his feet lifted, trimmed, shod, etc. Some horses attempt to kick when you touch their feet, which is why you are off to the side of your horse and at the end of a whip. Any horse that violently kicks out at the trainer with this procedure is assessed and likely sold. Never sell a kicker to an unsuspecting rider.

6. When the horse pulls away his leg, continue to tickle it, even as he moves it. Do not do this aggressively. You are simply desensitizing him and having him understand that having his legs touched is nothing to fear. Soon he will drop his leg and stand on his foot, if only for a moment. When he does, take away the whip and give him a friendly pat. Wait a few seconds and once again lightly touch his upper leg. If he stands calmly then stop, if not, then continue to tickle him lightly until he stops moving his leg, then take your whip away.

7. Move onto the next leg when the horse stands steady. Do not continue to touch one leg with the whip once he stands calmly as you will

confuse him. When he stops his leg movement he expects release from the pressure of the whip, so when he stops, you must stop.

8. If you suspect the horse may pull or fight during this procedure then tie the horse using the ropes and bowline knots as shown in the pictures.

9. Once the horse stands calmly with the tickling then gently rub the horse with your hand from the top of the leg down to the foot. Again, if he picks up or moves his foot, continue to rub

him until he stops, then you stop. If you feel he is lifting his foot to give it to you, do not take it and do not stop the gentle rubbing. Stop only when his foot is down on the ground. This is important because he gives the foot and you take it, then it was his decision so he controls his feet. If he can give it then he can also take it back. We are working towards total control over the horse's mind and feet.

10. If you are afraid to lift the back feet even though he stands calmly when you tickle



With a calm, desensitized horse, gently rub the leg downward toward the hock. Continue even if the horse moves his leg but stop when he puts his foot down again. The horse will soon understand that stopping his motion is rewarded by the touching also stopping. Continue with all four legs until the horse stands calmly.

Once the horse stands calmly, rub his leg downward to the fetlock, grab the long hairs and pick up the foot. We say 'give' or 'up' and tap the outer hoof wall with a hoof pick or our knuckles if the horse does not respond. Never take the foot if the horse gives it to you before you take it.





Once the foot is up, lightly 'bob' it. After a few seconds, when it is relaxed, let it down gently. If the horse puts the foot down forcefully, immediately pick it up. If the horse leans on you, do not carry the weight. Keep the leg bent and let the horse lean over, all the way to the ground if he wants. When he picks himself up - start over. This step prevents the horse from becoming a 'leaner'.

Continue the procedure with the back foot, bobbing it forward and back. Having the horse yield his feet softly is enough of a lesson for one day.



Now that the horse is giving its foot freely. The front foot is held between the knees for trimming and shoeing. Simulate trimming and shoeing by holding the foot for longer periods of time and tapping the foot.

The back foot can be trimmed and shod in this position. If you hold the end of the hoof and lift it even higher, you can more effectively hold a foot that the horse is trying to pull away.



him with the whip, then before handling the feet use the rope as described in the photos. Be sure the horse is comfortable having his front feet lifted before lifting the back feet.

11. Stand next to the shoulder of the horse facing back. Gently rub the leg downward with his hand until you reach the long hair at the back of the fetlock. Lightly pull up and back on the hair while gently tapping the top front of the hoof with a small object (your knuckles, hoof pick, hoof knife handle, etc.). Say “give” or “up” to reinforce your lifting effort. The horse should lift his foot. If not, tap harder rather than pull harder. You are trying to establish that lifting his leg is his release from the tapping pressure, rather than getting into a pulling contest with the few hairs on his fetlock. If you find you have to tap him hard to get him to lift his leg, then do it because the next time he will respond to lighter taps. Soon, you can just say “give” and lightly lift and his leg will come up.

12. Again, if at *any* time he gives you his foot when you did not ask for it *do not* take it. If he does decide to lift his foot when we do not ask then rub his leg until he puts his foot back down, as we did initially to get him to stop moving. Then, ask for his foot as described.

13. When the horse gives his foot properly hold it for a brief moment then put it down. Pat the horse as a reward. Because giving it to you willingly may be a new and somewhat frightening experience, do not take it for too long. A few seconds is plenty. Ask for the foot again, when he gives it to you pick it up and “bob” it slightly up and down a few times. The foot needs to have a loose feel. If it is stiff or he is putting weight on it, keep bobbing it up and down until he loosens up. When he loosens up, if only for a moment,

hold the foot steady for a few seconds then let it down. Continue with the other foot.

14. Never let the horse put weight or lean on you when you are holding its feet up. If they do while you are holding up a front foot, keep it bent and let the horse lower himself downward on the bent leg. The horse will go down on its front to a certain point then pull its foot back. Immediately tap the hoof and take the foot again. If he leans on you again, let his front corner go down again, do not hold his weight but keep his leg bent. At some point, even if after his knee hits the ground, he will pull his leg back. Again, immediately tap his hoof and take up his leg. When he gives you his leg softly, even for a moment, let it down and pat him. Give him a brief rest and continue with the other front foot. Once the horse is giving his front feet softly, and for several seconds, tap the soles gently and “bob” the leg up and down for practice. Be sure the horse is giving both front feet softly before lifting a back foot.

15. Now that the horse stands for light tickling of the back feet, we run a rope back to be sure that the horse is desensitized around his groin, legs and feet. We use the same rope to teach the horse to give his back feet to the pressure of the rope. Have the horse step over the rope rather than running it through by hand. Lift the rope up and down against the inside of the horse’s leg, right up into the groin area. Go gentle as you are not trying to frighten the horse but, rather, to desensitize him. However, if the

horse gets excited do not stop. Stop only when the horse begins to calm down. The horse is learning that the pressure of the rope goes away when he stops moving. We often put on front hobbles before beginning this procedure.

16. Once the horse is desensitized in the groin and leg area, bring the rope around, catching the back of the pastern as you do. Horses generally find it more difficult to give up the control of their back feet than front feet so you may experience some struggling and kicking with the back feet. Do not pull the rope forward abruptly. "Ask" by lightly bumping forward. Give the horse time to think. Let him calm down before asking again. Lightly bump forward again until you get some forward movement and the foot is off of the ground. Hold it for a couple of seconds then give it back. Give the horse a pat and a brief rest then ask again. Ask for more until the horse holds his leg up for several seconds.

17. As with the front feet, you should be able to "bob" the back leg softly forward and back. When the leg is soft, if only for a moment, give it back. If the horse kicks out or takes his leg back, pull it up again immediately, but be ready to give it back if he stands with his leg held up softly.

18. We have had few horses over the years that have refused to give their back feet. They resent any confinement of their back feet and insist on putting their back leg down, to the point of falling down on their side or pulling back violently. Leave enough slack in the lead rope so that the struggling

horse will not strain its neck if it falls. If a horse goes down then release the rope, let it stand up, and immediately pull up its back leg again. Remember, the horse is much less likely to struggle if it knows that its leg is only being held temporarily so do not ask for too much too long the first few times.

19. If you run a few twists with the free end around the rope running from the bowline, and then run the free end through the loop around the horse's neck, you can secure the back foot better. You can also tie off the rope with a quick release and leave the back foot up (Scotch hobble). On a difficult horse we tie the foot up once the horse is giving his foot willingly then lightly "bob" the back foot back and forth by hand while it is slung by the rope. Then we slip the foot out of the noose with our hand and gently let it down.

20. You will find that the horse is more willing to give an outside foot when the body of the horse is flush against a fence or a wall.

21. Once the horse is giving its feet fairly well, practice asking for each foot regularly. Increase the length of time you hold it and never let the horse lean on you or pull his foot back without quickly taking it up again. "Bob" the foot softly, clean it with a hoof pick and tap it to condition the horse for future shoeing.

22. Practice lifting the feet when the horse is not tied up. After picking up each foot walk the horse in a small half circle, say "whoa", and pick up another foot.



For a young or difficult horse that you may not feel comfortable rubbing his legs or picking up the fetlock, begin with the handle of a whip and gently 'brush' the horse over his neck, back, cinch, belly, and upper leg area. The horse should be desensitized - calm and have no fear of the whip.

Lightly tickle the horse's leg, starting at the top and working down to the foot. If he pulls his foot away, continue to tickle. Stop immediately when he puts his foot back down or stands still. The idea is to reward the horse by removing the whip when he stands still. Repeat with the back legs and feet. Be sure to stay at a distance to avoid being kicked.



Lay a soft large diameter rope on the ground alongside the horse. 'Push' the horse over, either by gesture, or, if the horse responds to pressures, with your thumb behind the last rib - until one back leg steps over the rope.

From far enough back that you can not be kicked, gently slide the rope up and down so that both rear legs are desensitized to the feel of the rope. Expect the horse to be uncomfortable and possibly jump or kick out. Reward the horse by dropping the rope as he calms down.





We train all of our horses to give their front and back feet to the pressure of a rope before we attempt to trim or shoe them. It teaches the horse to accept the feel of a rope around their feet - a circumstance not uncommon to trail horses living with lash ropes, tether ropes, lead ropes, etc. It is also the safe way to pick up feet for the first time. If the horse is tied to a post, be sure the lead rope is long enough so that the horses head does not get hung up if he falls.

This young trainer is pulling lightly, applying light pressure and getting a relaxed yield.



And that is enough to start. The trainer gives the horse his foot back as a reward for yielding his foot willingly.

The trainer asks for more....





...The horse resists the applied pressures and kicks out. The trainer repeats the above process a few times, asking softly and expecting to hold the foot slightly higher and longer each time.

In order to maintain control of a more difficult horse the trainer puts a few twists in the rope between the foot and the bowline and brings the tail of the rope through the neck loop. Now when the horse kicks, the trainer can keep the foot up until the horse calms down - then he gives the foot back to the horse. If the rope is tied off once the foot is lifted up, then we refer to the horse as being 'scotch hobbled'. This was a common method used to control difficult horses for a variety of reasons including shoeing, saddling for the first time, de-worming, etc. The horse usually struggled, fell down a few times, and finally stood, accepting his fate. We prefer to train the horse to accept a scotch hobble in the above manner described. Then, if we use it in the future - for whatever reason, the horse immediately stands steady.



A couple of wraps are made around the pastern and the front foot is lifted, and let down once the horse yields the foot.

Note: If the horse reacts violently to any of the above steps you must continue to ask for the foot until you get the appropriate yield - before you stop. Complete all four feet.



Problem Solving



This problem solving chapter needs to be handled with care. There are so many types of problems, intensities of problems, and dispositions of handlers, that to imply that ones problems will be solved by following the instructions in this book would be an unrealistic expectation.

Regardless of why the horse behaves the way he does, whether or not the horses fears are well founded and whether bad experiences have tainted the horse's perception, we need to understand that as far as the horse is concerned, his perception *is* reality.

No matter how foolish the horse's behavior may appear to us, the only way we can change the behavior of the horse is to change his perception. To change his perception

we need to be able to change his mind. To change his mind, we need to become the alpha or dominant figure and the horse needs to become a willing student. Not changing the horse's mind simply does not work. For example, you can have a hard to catch horse convinced to come to your grain bucket but once you put the bucket down or go to slip a lead around his neck the horse's mind does not *want* to come towards you and the horse takes off.

Going back to the unit in Training and making sure that the horse comes towards you as a release from pressure and making sure that the horse responds softly to all of the applied pressures is an absolute prerequisite to this Problem Solving Chapter.

CONSIDER THIS

Before attempting to change the behavior of horses we need to be realistic with ourselves and the horses we work with.

Consider this:

1. Trail Riding is meant to be an enjoyable pastime. Assess the nature of the horse (how high strung the horse is), the seriousness of the problem, the effort and time required to fix the problem, and the confidence you have in yourself and in the horse. The horse may not be well suited to you or your level of experience. Not all horses are meant to be calm, dependable, trail companions. Sending your horse to an experienced trainer or getting a better horse are options.

2. Having the horse 'yield' to pressures - being soft - is a prerequisite to this chapter. Complete early training, round pen or lunge line work before you problem solve. Most problems are vastly reduced when the mind is willing and the horse yields to pressures.

3. Continue the "lightness" of your

approach from early training. Whether you are asking a horse to drop his head to bridle him or to lift a foot we always ask lightly at first, getting more firm only if needed, and getting lighter again once the horse provides the proper response.

4. Be sure that you are clear about what you are doing and what response you are after. The horse appreciates your clarity and firmness. Reward the horse that responds favorably. Do not ask too much at once. Set yourself up for small successes rather than big failures. Keep your emotions out of the mix.

5. Build trust and comfort before you work with horses and continue the trusting relationship while you work with them.

6. There are times when horses do not respond to our methods. For example, some horses seem to dedicate their life to pulling back or running away from humans. If a horse gets into a struggle, be sure that it is an appropriate struggle with a rope and not a tug of war with you. When the horse loses the battle with a rope it settles down and learns to give to the pressure of the rope - a valuable lesson. If you fight the horse, you both lose.



The point of trail riding is to enjoy yourself.

HARD TO CATCH HORSE

Many horses that are hard to catch are no fun to be with as they often appear to truly dislike people. Other horses have no problem with people once they are caught but remain habitually difficult to catch. A difficult to catch horse on the trail can ruin an enjoyable trail ride. These horses tend to head straight away from human company when turned

loose or when we accidentally drop our lead ropes or reins. They often lead us on a frustrating game of cat and mouse before we can mount up again. Once we arrive in camp the hard to catch packhorse that is not being led often hoofs it beyond camp and we end up chasing him around. Packed horses have been known to disappear in this fashion, never to be found again - at least not by the proper owner.



A hard to catch horse can lead to serious problems on the trail. The problem cannot be corrected unless the horse becomes a willing partner in its own mind.

Identifying The Hard To Catch Horse

The “hard to catch” problem is like a disease. If a horse or two in your herd has it, it soon spreads to others, often young horses or foals. We really need to nip this problem in the bud, and to do this we need to recognize the problem in earlier stages.

When you walk out to your horse or a group of horses, watch for horses that shy away, hide in corners, put other horses between

themselves and you, or turn their rear quarters towards you. When a horse shows this behavior, we bring the horse into a pen in the yard and the horse is not turned loose until the problem is cured. If the horse shows the behavior again a few days later, it is brought in again.

We do have horses that revert to this shy behavior every winter, when the horses are turned out for a few months, but some handling in the pre season soon familiarizes the horse with the handler.



Being friendly and encouraging contact can go a long way towards building a trusting relationship for young horses, horses that have had little contact, and horses with fear that are low in the herd social order.

Join-Up Therapy

No matter how difficult a horse is to catch, the best way to cure the horse of the problems and to truly have the horse to *want* to come towards you. *To do this we need to follow the round pen procedures in the Training Chapter.* It does not necessarily have to be a round pen. A square pen can be used, however, a square pen is more challenging as the horse tends to “hide” in the corners. When they do this you need to tickle their hind quarters with the carriage whip and get the horse moving and turning towards you as a release of pressure. Even the most difficult or shy horse will come towards you in time, as you release pressure.

Remember that even though you need to remain as calm as possible, since you are trying to convince the horse that when he comes towards you he is entering a comfort and safe zone, you also need to remember that the horse needs to keep moving forward at a trot or run if you are pushing it. Your pushing needs to be clear - on the flank of the horse, and your release needs to be clear, stepping back to remove pressure and also removing any aggressive gestures.

Once you start the round pen lesson you *cannot* quit until the horse comes towards you as a release from pressure. This “join up” may take an hour or two so do not begin the lesson



unless you have time to finish it. Never quit on a horse that is still running away from you in circles. If you do, the horse’s evasive behavior will be a successful reward.

You will notice that once the horse turns toward you as a release from pressure and begins to walk toward you in “join up”, he will begin to appear more calm, relaxed, and his body will soften. When the horse turns, his body will bend smoothly and softly, as opposed to being stiff and abrupt.

Once you have join up with the hard to catch horse you need to follow these steps.

1. Reward the horse with some quiet petting and, if you wish, a treat (some grain).
2. Leave the horse standing calmly and disappear for several minutes. Re-enter the pen. If the horse shys away, immediately repeat the round pen work. Continue leaving the pen and returning, increasing the time gone until you are confident that the horse is comfortable in your presence and comes toward you upon your arrival.
3. If you enter the pen and the horse stands, but is standing away from you or quartering away, tickle the horse’s rear with the whip. If he moves off push him until join up or until he turns towards you. If he turns toward you be sure to back up so that you have complete join up and the horse follows you.

Working in the round pen or on a lunge line is the best way to get ‘join up’. When a hard to catch horse follows you around like this, more than half of the problem is solved.

4. Once the horse comes to you in the round pen, move him to a larger area. This may be a large corral or small field. Leave the horse temporarily then return. If the horse moves off push him around the large corral a few times and he should come towards you. Repeat this procedure until he comes willingly towards you in the large area. Sometimes it can help to lightly tug the halter as you back up and have him step towards you, eventually letting go and having him follow.

5. If the horse moves off in the large pen and does not respond, he needs to go back into the round pen.

6. Once you feel that the horse does not see you as a threat but as a comfort, place hobbles on the horse and turn him loose in a large area, preferably with no other horses. Watch the horse's reaction as you walk up to him. If he moves off, you need to go back to the round pen. If the horse turns toward you, you can remove the hobbles and he should now be an easy to catch horse.

7. We always keep the horse in a corral for several days to be sure that the horse

responds favorably for several days running before turning him out with the herd.

8. Once the horse is coming to you as a release from pressure in the round pen, carry a rope and halter that you use to gently rub him with and slip on and off. Do this in the round pen before attempting it out in the field. If we approach the horse's shoulder in the field and pet him, we slip the end of the lead rope around the horse's neck before putting on the halter. You should not have to spend the rest of your life trying to hide the halter.

Treat Therapy

Throughout the training process and throughout the horses life you should carry a treat or pocket full of grain *now and then*. Also carry a halter and lead rope *now and then* as you go out to 'check the horses'. The horses will never know if they are going to perhaps get a treat, have a halter slipped on and off, or be used or not. Keeping them guessing and friendly means keeping them easy to catch and handle.



Although a hard to catch horse may respond favourably in a small pen, it can quickly revert to evasive behavior in a large area. Do not turn the horse loose until it responds favourably in larger corrals, which may take a few days of repeated round pen or lunge line work.

PULLERS

Blue Creek Outfitting does not have the luxury of tolerating horses that pull back. Horses that pull back are dangerous to humans and to themselves. A horse that pulls back does not just pull back, it often jumps forward once it hits the end of the lead rope, and it could care less if it strikes you with its feet, chest, or packboxes.

We are constantly tying horses to trailers, trees, branches, and questionable fences while on the trail. We need to tie them up for saddling, packing, brushing, giving medication, trimming and shoeing, and when we leave them in the woods while we take bathroom breaks, lunch breaks, or go for walks. We *must not* have a puller on the trail.

If a farrier wants to leave a horse free as he or she works on him as a lesson in good shoeing behavior then that is fine. If you need to hold onto a horse rather than to tie him up for fear that he will pull, then that is something else - it is called a serious problem.

Very few, if any, of the horses that we have raised have become pullers. This is because they learn to give to pressure, they learn that the rope has ultimate control, and they learn to give their feet to rope pressure.

How Pullers Are Created

These are some common reasons why horses become pullers. Try to avoid these situations.

1. A horse with a high level of fear or stress is abruptly restrained or roped and the only defense is to fight back or pull. This horse will normally learn to give to the rope but if the battle becomes a tug of war and the horse is rewarded by escaping, then pulling becomes a favorable, learned behavior.

2. Tying a horse with a faulty lead rope, halter, knot, or fragile post or tree, any of which may break when the horse leans back. The horse learns that pulling will break it free from confinement.

3. A horse that breaks free after being scared by a frightening object, like a noisy tarp.

4. A horse will deliberately pull to frighten the human away. "Pushing" the human out of the horse's space is a release from human presence. This is rude but logical behavior by a dominant or frightened horse.

Curing The Problem

Horses can become chronic or latent pullers. They may appear perfectly well behaved after following the prescribed treatment then at a later date, or with a different handler, suddenly erupt into a pulling frenzy. We always try to *make* the horse pull after successful lessons. We want the horse to say to itself, "I know you are trying to make me pull but I am not going to pull no matter what, you can't

make me!”

1. A horse that is about to pull feels confined, tense and stiff on his feet. We need to soften pullers and make sure they respond to pressures. If a horse has not had round pen work or early training to soften it up then you need to complete these lessons in order to have it respond softly to pressures. You will find that completing these lessons will go a long way to having the horse “give” to the confinement of the rope - rather than pull.

2. A horse that responds or gives to the forward pressure of a rope around its foot will not likely stiffen and pull back with its feet.

3. Although some horses are plenty soft and move freely to the forward pressure of a rope around their hocks, they may still be serious, habitual pullers. These horses need safe and secure rope work, lessons that permanently convince the horse that pulling does not win them a release from pressure or a release from the presence of a human being. We always “test” the horse with confinement, handling, and noisy objects before declaring the horse a non-puller.

We have seen comments written by trainers that say if you tie a horse up while bridling, giving wormer, trimming, etc. you deserve to have a puller. We find the idea that we need to untie horses before we work with them very impractical and somewhat ridiculous. You are not going to create a puller by trimming a horse that is tied up. If he pulls then he already had the problem and you need to fix it, or, the horse is a fearful, high-strung or aggressive animal that needs work, and it may not be

suitable as a trail companion.

Here are some ways that pullers are secured to convince them that pulling is not a sensible behavior or a release from confinement. For all of these methods you need to:

1. Use a top quality halter that will not break, or better, avoid the halter and tie the rope around the neck with a bowline.
2. Avoid leads with snaps that can break.
3. Use very strong one half inch or larger rope.
4. Leave the horse where you can watch him but also leave him tied up for a few hours. Many horses begin to pull once they lose patience.
5. After the horse has learned not to pull by using the procedures in the photos, work with him. Rub saddle blankets over him, rub his cinch and groin area, tug lightly downward on his halter, etc. If the horse pulls when you do this, do it right away again, so he knows you are *trying* to have him pull. Soon the horse will refuse to pull.
6. Repeat the procedure for a few days.
7. Stay out of the horse’s path should he pull back or jump forward.



Trail riders are constantly tying horses in less than perfect conditions - tying horses to branches, small trees, brush, dead falls, questionable fences, and logs that are lower than they should be. A puller is a dangerous animal in these circumstances.

Horses that give their feet to forward pressure will rarely pull. Train your horse to lead as you 'bump' a lead rope attached to a front pastern. Bump the pastern rope before the lead rope, and then the lead rope if he does not respond. Your goal is to have him step forward by bumping the pastern rope only.



This may be the safest way to discourage pulling. Tie off just below the knee with a quick release knot. Do not lower the head more than about back level.



A horse pulling in this position will find his front leg coming up in the air - which will surprise him. He may pull a few more times but soon realizes that the last thing he wants to do is pull and have his leg come up. Leave the horse walk around the corral like this for an hour or so.

Progress to this strategy after the first one. The advantage here is that the horse now feels he is secured to the post or tree and he may pull for that reason. His desire to pull evaporates when he discovers that his leg comes up when he



pulls. Now, when you tie him up to a post, he remembers the action of his leg the last time he thought he was tied to a post and he does not pull.

This is an outfitters method to correct pullers that pull when tied to a post or a tree. Like in the previous page, the foot will come up when the horse pulls. Although we have not tried this method it is supposed to work well, however, the rope should be around the post at eye level.

If a horse is a very determined puller he may figure out when his leg is not tied. If he knows his leg is not tied to the halter he may revert to pulling. In this case, use one bowline around his chest and one around his neck and through the halter. Be sure the rope

around his chest engages just before the bowline around his neck. We often use front hobbles at this time, but be careful when you put them on. The ropes should offer a few feet of slack between the nose and the inner tube so that if the horse falls his head is not hung up.

When a horse is a dedicated puller we tie him in this manner and let him pull until he has had enough. We actually encourage the horse to pull. For example, if placing a saddle pad on his back makes him pull, we rub him with the pad. If tugging the halter downward makes him pull, we do that. Placing hobbles on the front feet can make the activity less dangerous. Be sure that the bowline around his chest tightens up when he pulls before the bowline around his neck. Use a heavy, soft rope only. Always stay to the side when working with a horse that may struggle and when placing on hobbles. Be sure that the rope from his neck to the fence is long enough to prevent the horse from hanging up if he falls. Tie the rope securely to an inner tube or strong rubber strap to allow some 'give' when he pulls.



CROSSING WATER AND BRIDGES

The only way to fix a water, bridge or obstacle crossing problem is to set up successful crossings. The horse is afraid to cross because he is concerned about self preservation. The severity of the problem will vary with the amount of fear, the amount of nervous energy and the trust and respect, or lack of it, in the rider.

Go Small

Often it is not just the water that is the problem, but the fear of what is beneath the water. If the footing is soft and the depth unpredictable, it simply compounds the fear. Create a more comfortable challenge that you can win. Walk or ride the horse through small, hard bottomed puddles or streams first. A very shallow six inch puddle on a hard bottomed road is good. Put on your rubber boots and lead him into a puddle then stand there for a few minutes. Criss cross the puddle several times.



Do not expect that your horse will walk through deeper water with unsure footing. Set up successful crossings like this small, shallow, hard bottomed, puddle to start.

Pony Up

We never worry when we end up with a horse that has a fear of water or obstacles. We know that once the horse finally does go through the stream, river or over a bridge or railway tracks, the fear is lifted and although the horse may remain cautious, he will cross willingly. Probably the surest way to change the horse's perception of the fear from water or a bridge is to have other horses cross first. We often cross with experienced horses and leave the inexperienced horse loose. This gives him

time to think about crossing on his own. When the horse sees his buddies cross and head on down on the trail, it usually takes only a minute before the horse overcomes his fear and follows.

Leading the fearful horse is also a good idea because it keeps him feeling safe in line and it keeps his feet moving. It is often the hesitation when confronting water that builds the block in the horse's mind. If you lead him and keep him moving it can help convince the horse to continue through the water.



Time and again we have had horses who refused to enter water or cross bridges accept the challenge when they are ponied (led across) or left to their own devices as their peers cross.

Impulsion

A horse that moves forward willingly on command is more likely to do the same thing when confronted with an obstacle. If your horse is sluggish and balks as a habit then you can imagine his reaction when you ask him to cross water or a bridge. Developing a trusting relationship with a rider that has control gives the horse the confidence needed to accept chal-

lenges. Be sure your horse is a willing partner under trail conditions before you challenge him. Ride him around for an hour or so over acceptable obstacles before asking him to cross water or a bridge. Practice lots of riding straight, between the reins, so that when you come to obstacles the horse understands that you expect him to continue the straight path, straight across the puddle of water.



A horse that has great impulsion - moves forward willingly and immediately upon request - and moves forward 'between the reins' (in a straight line) is much more likely to cross a sheet of plywood on the ground, a bridge, train tracks, a puddle of water, etc.

Teaching to 'ride between the reins' goes hand in hand with training to respond to neck reining. See Chapter 3 - Out Of The Pen Riding.

High Energy

If your horse is a nervous high energy animal you may be wise to calm him down with some round pen, lunge line, or hard riding work before asking him to cross something he is afraid of. Excessive energy will exaggerate the fear so burn it up. Once the horse crosses he should gain confidence and accept the next attempt more willingly.

Never Say Never

Once we create a situation that is safe and realistic, we need to be sure the horse completes the task. If we do not, if we allow the horse to struggle with a situation that we are not successful in and then leave, we have taught him that refusing is a reward - a release from the pressure of the situation. Sometimes we need to keep moving forward to encourage success. For example, if we are leading a horse through a small, shallow, hard bottomed puddle or a stream, and he balks, then we dally up and lead him through. Another alternative would be a butt rope or someone behind with a whip to tap his rear. The horse soon learns that the small stream is nothing to fear. Small and shallow are the key words here. The challenge has to be achievable, a small step in the horse's mind. Avoid deep water situations to begin with as you are setting yourself up for failure. Also, avoid situations where you are on foot and pulling at the end of the lead because the horse may decide to jump over the obstacle and on top of you. Once the horse goes through, repeat the crossing a few times.

SPOOKING

We are reminded often that horses are prey animals that rely on flight for survival. Horses are big, strong animals but they are more chicken hearted than braveheart. A fearful object can send these big strong animals on a big jump, big buck, or a big run - a dangerous situation in any case.

Of the problems covered, permanently solving spooking has the lowest success rate. It is common to work with a horse, have him accept a noisy tarp, or ride up to a white rock, only to be spooked again by the same object a few days later. We need to remind ourselves that nervous, spooky horses may never be the best choice for a trail horse. On the up side, the more desensitized the horse becomes to a frightening object, the less dramatic his response will be to this object in the future.

Remind yourself as you head out on a horse that has been known to spook that he can sense your nervousness as well, and when he does it will escalate his own fear. You need to present a calm, brave face under *all* circumstances.



A nervous horse needs to be calm and comfortable with the rider before being asked to perform a task he finds fearful. Build a trusting relationship on the ground with lots of brushing, handling, and giving treats.

Spook Feast

Probably the best way to change what the horse perceives as a fearful object is to make the fearful objects part of his normal environment. Horses that are raised on rough terrain generally spook less at odd shaped objects. Keep a fearful horse in a corral for a few days with these desensitizing conditions. Note that we are not forcing the horse into these objects but rather placing them there casually so he can think about and accept them.

1. Tie a few plastic bags to a few sticks and place them up in a few places in the corral where the wind can knock them around.
2. Throw a big poly tarp on the ground,

open it up, and scatter a few pockets of grain over the tarp. When the horse attempts to eat the grain he will paw at and get used to the noise and motion of the tarp.

3. Position a few sheets of tin or plywood on the ground around the horse feed bin, so he has to step on them before he eats (nothing loose or sharp that the horse can hurt himself on).

4. Add any other frightening objects you can think of. *Be sure they are safe.*

5. When you hand feed the horse with a daily ration of grain, feed it from a noisy bag.

Give the horse a reason to overcome his fear. For example, place some grain on a tarp and have him choose to get it. Give him time. Set up a corral with tarps to walk over, plastic blowing in the wind, and let the horse familiarize himself with these fearful objects.



Working With Fear

Horses that lack the confidence to ride up to or past frightening objects like rocks, buildings, vehicles, mail boxes, noisy plastic, etc. often have no hesitation doing so if they are second or third in a line of trail horses.

We might think that placing the dominant horse in the herd up front would make the most sense however we have found that independent minded horses appear to take spooky objects more seriously than subordinate horses. They act insulted and difficult if they are forced to go where they do not feel safe.

We like to work a horse in the round pen or a lunge line that shows a lack of confidence or stubborn behavior towards accepting spooky objects. *Be sure that the horse is completely desensitized by rubbing a jacket or plastic garbage bag over his entire body before being asked to drag it.*

1. Saddle the horse. Leave the stirrups hanging loose and flopping around.

2. Place a few white buckets around the round pen about ten feet from the wall.

3. Take a small piece of rag or plastic and rub the horse down.

4. Tie a small piece of tarp or plastic to the end of a fifteen foot rope. Once the horse stands quiet with the rubbing, tie the other end of the rope to the saddle horn and send the horse around the pen. While dragging the tarp. He may take off in a big hurry but since he is very familiar with the round pen he will probably turn to face you fairly soon. When he does, pet him, let him rest for a few moments, and send him on his way again.

Keep the horse between the buckets and the wall as you move him and continue your work until he is completely calmed down.



We commonly see photos of horses chased around with frightening objects tied to them or following them in an effort to get the 'spook' out of them. This should only be done in a controlled environment - in a sturdy round pen and preferably on a lunge line. And the horse needs to be desensitized to brushing, ropes, and have no fear of the handler before it is sent on a run. Sending a nervous, high energy, fearful horse on this run can be dangerous and make the horse more afraid.

Spooking On The Trail

When your horse spooks or shys at an object on the trail you are better off continuing to ride past, or slightly around the object, rather than trying to force the horse's nose into the object. When the horse rides past the object he feels a sense of relief from his successful passing, and his confidence rises because the object did not attack him - it was not as bad as he thought. Now, ride a loop or turn and go back past the object, slightly closer. Return again, and pass even closer. Continue until you ride close by with little or no reaction from the horse.

In time the horse realizes that if he shys he is made to return and do extra work as a consequence, and he also learns that the object is never as bad as he thought.

He learns to spook less and in a more controlled fashion.

If you force the horse straight to the frightening object it escalates the fear and sets up a battle between the rider and horse. When you finally leave, the message may be that his resistance paid off because he was allowed to leave the object. If you feel you need to bring the horse to the object then dismount and lead him there, and spend some time there until he is comfortable.



When riding towards an object that is spooking the horse, do not force the horse up to the object as you will increase the fear factor. Rather, ride past the object so that the horse realizes it did not terrorize him after all, then ride back past the object, this time closer. Repeat, riding closer each time until the horse shows improvement in keeping his wits about him.

Runaway

If the horse blows up, bucks, or takes off on a run you need to get control of the horse for your own safety. As soon as he spooks and you realize that he means business, take a hold of one rein - your right rein if your right arm is your strongest, and pull the horse's head around. The horse will be less likely to buck, rear, or run with his head to the side. Keep him going in circles until he is under control. See "Emergency Stop" in the Riding Chapter.

In times of trouble you should always remain calm and try to stay on your horse. Horses can learn that bucking gets rid of a rider because riders get off too soon. On the other hand, if you are not strong enough to control a runaway and you fear for your safety, the logical solution is to try and get off as safely as possible - sometimes we don't have much say in the matter.

As a final note, if you or yours are riding a horse that you feel may spook, you should wear a helmet. We have even had children wear life jackets to protect their body.

Unpredictable

There are some horses that may not respond to the methods described. These horses often seem fine then blow up for some reason. Maybe a cinch slips, or a branch tickles their flank, or jacket slips off of the saddle, or a grouse flies up or a dog jumps on the trail. They

are unpredictable and often react violently. It is no fun when you are riding on the edge of the seat wondering when the horse will dump you again. When you see a horse for sale that "needs experienced rider" you need to beware. We always sell these horses too.

HERD BOUND

Horses have strong social or herd instincts. Horses can have a particularly strong bond with a member of the opposite sex, a close relative or a buddy. Being close to the herd also provides comfort and safety. If you ride out on a horse with strong herd bound instincts it will do anything to get back to the herd, including fighting the rider to the bitter end. The bitter end can be a runaway or a rearing or bucking session.

We often find that our horses with the strongest herd bound instincts are often raised from foals with the bunch. When we bring in an adult horse from elsewhere, especially a well trained horse, it is often easier to ride out on solo trips.

Trail Symptoms

Most obviously, if you are camped out in the woods and you want to take a herd bound horse out for a day ride, he will struggle to get back. If we are fortunate it is a mild fuss with the horse soon getting used to the idea, settling down, and then putting in an honest days ride.

While riding down the trail the herd bound horse wants to be as close to the next horse as possible, often sticking his nose into the rear of the next horse, and fighting your efforts to hold him back at a safer distance. The horse that is being crowded often kicks back with resentment, sometimes kicking the rider accidentally.

When we try to hold the horse back it experiences serious anxiety.

If we drop an item on the trail and we

stop to get it while the other horses continue, the herd bound horse can make retrieval pure misery, possibly escaping and leaving us to walk or run back to the group. It is important when riding with a group to have empathy for someone in a difficult situation. Always “hold up” when someone is having difficulty.

There is a contradiction with herd bound instincts. We depend on these instincts to keep loose packhorses in a close knit line while riding down the trail or when wrangling horses. In fact, we depend on it. We get upset when a horse wanders off because he does not have herd bound instincts. Then later, we get upset when the same horse who stayed in line all day does not willingly leave the herd to go on a ride.

We expect the best of both worlds. However, the purpose of training is to have the best of both situations.



We want a trail horse to have strong social bonds when we expect him to follow nose to tail behind his buddies. Then later, we want him to be independent and leave his buddies to ride out solo with us. It is a tall order and we must become the dominant ‘alpha’ partner or we can expect trouble.

Independence Day

These strategies will help a herd bound horse find confidence as an independent riding horse. These techniques will also help a barn sour horse (a horse that does not want to leave the barn). Herd bound problems are not easy to solve and in some cases we have sold these difficult horses.

1. When riding in a group stay alert and be in control of gait transitions. If the horse(s) in front of you break into a trot or slow down to a walk, your horse will want to do the same. If you allow the horse to make the transition on its own then it controls its destiny, a frame of mind you cannot allow a herd bound horse. If you try to control the horse after it breaks into a trot it will resist your efforts because the other horses are trotting ahead. When you finally give in and

let it trot up to the bunch, the horse has learned that the struggle paid off because it resulted in being allowed to catch up. Stopping the horse while the others take off is not an alternative as you are setting up a losing situation because you must catch up sooner or later. With the struggle you are encouraging resentment and a stiff mouth.

You need to be an alert, a proactive rider. You need to see that the horses are about to change gait to a trot or slow down to a walk and cue your horse into these gaits *before* he attempts the change himself. Then you are in control. Similarly, when the horse turns or stops you need to provide the cues to maintain that you are in control. This gives the horse confidence in your control and respect for your commands.



As you ride along you may not be aware that your riding habits encourage the herd bound horse to believe that he is in control. He feels that he is deciding when to go, stop, turn left or right, or trot to catch up. No matter what position you are in as a rider, you must be pro-active. You need to give the cues to stop, go, turn, etc. before your horse engages in the activity. Then, you have control over his mind for future requests.

Change - A - Spot

The herd bound horse wants to decide which horses it spends time with and when it wants to be with those horses. If the rider decides where the horse rides in a line and decides when to change positions it will help remove the control that the herd bound horse has. You can do these exercises with two or more horses.

1. Let the other riders in your group know that you will be changing positions.
2. As you ride along ask your horse to trot ahead of the rider in front who is holding back to allow you room to pass and to move into line. Keep your reins loose as you ride.
3. Allow the rider to pass you in a similar fashion.
4. Repeat the leap frogging.
5. As you are riding along, flex your horse's head to the right or left with direct rein pressure. Ride out of line, back against the group, and into the last position. Ride back up front and repeat.
6. As you ride past a tree or an object that you can easily ride around, take your horse out of line, ride around the object, then ride

back into line.

7. For brief times ride fifty feet out in front or behind the other horse(s). Do not keep the horse separate for too long to begin with. Increase the time spent apart as his anxiety is reduced.

8. Continue deciding where and when your horse will change position in the group until your horse gets comfortable with your control.

9. When you come into line decide at what distance you ride from the horse in front with as light a rein pressure as possible. If your horse insists on crowding the riding horse in front ask the rider in front to snap him on the nose with his lead. The rider in front needs to be sure that his horse is calm before attempting this. Keep your horse in line but do not pull back on the reins, keep them slack. Allow the horse to put his nose into the rear of the next horse and to get his nose snapped. Using one rein to flex his head left or right, and riding forward with his neck flexed, can be an effective way of slowing down. Practicing the leap frogging and maneuvers in 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 will help your ability to control your distance from the horse in front.



The rider on the right is frustrated with a herd bound horse riding too close to the horse in front. She is taking the horse out of line, having him ride a circle around a bush, and bringing him back into line behind her partner.

Work Where The Problem Is

Most people do not like to be told what to do. It is unlikely we can be forced to change our minds if we do not want to, and a horse is much the same. If a horse wants to go back to its buddies, the barn, or the camp, it is unlikely we can force it to change its mind. What we can change is where the horse finds it comfortable to be. We can have the horse *want* to leave its buddies or the barn because that is where the work is. We can also have the horse understand that acting up on the trail means more work.

1. When you begin to leave the barn, yard, camp, or buddies, and the horse begins to act up, put him to work. Trot him in circles, stop, continue, back up, turn directions, ride around obstacles, and if the horse is very difficult, lunge him.

Do not be angry with the horse. Consider this a work exercise where the work he is doing is much more demanding than the alternative - calmly riding out in your chosen direction. Work him until he needs a rest then walk a short distance (a hundred feet or so) away from the barn or buddies.

If the horse rides out calmly do a loop

back to the barn to help him understand that you are not keeping him away permanently, then ride out again. If the horse is difficult, take him back to the barn and put him through the paces again. When he is good and tired, ride out, preferably in a different direction or a slightly different direction. As before, once he is well behaved return to the barn then continue to head out.

2. On several occasions we have had herd bound horses balk on the trail or put up a fuss, taking the fun out of riding. Where ever you happen to be, put him through the trotting, flexing, backing, turning exercise, or get off and lunge him until he is good and tired. If you use an eleven foot lead as we do, it will serve as an adequate lunge line.

3. Do not get into a struggle that results in excessive pulling on the reins or dangerous behavior. You are much better to get off, work the horse on the ground, and if that does not work, lead the horse to where you need to be. Always wear a helmet if you are training or riding horses that may display dangerous behavior. Patience, a positive attitude, and repetition of these exercises is key to successfully solving the herd bound problem.



One of the advantages of having an eleven foot or longer lead rope is that you can dismount when and where the horse is misbehaving and lunge him on the short line until he is truly tired of the work.

Headstrong Dude Horse

Most dude horses have been ridden by many riders and can judge their ability better than the riders themselves. Good dude horses are adept at taking control of the situation and putting in an honest days work. Problems arise when the rider has different intentions than the horse, like turning, wanting to ride off in a different direction, wanting to ride in front of the group, heading away from camp instead of towards it, stopping for a moment while other horses continue, or wanting a different spot in line. These horses are, understandably, often hard mouthed and bull their way or run away in their chosen direction, fighting the rider tooth and nail all of the way. There is not a permanent solution, considering that your time with the horse is temporary.

First, and most important, be sure that

you are controlling the dude horse from the onset by being pro-active (see This Chapter - 'Independence Day').

Second, even if you feel intimidated be very firm in your demands and your cues. Often these horses are testing you and once they feel your control they accept it.

Third, if you are capable of lunging and you have a long enough line, get off and make the stubborn horse work for a few minutes. The horse soon realizes that it is easier not to be difficult (see this chapter - 'Work Where The Problem Is').

Finally, if your horse is unmanageable, or threatening to buck or run, either give in to its wishes or get off and walk. Discuss the problem with the horses owner.



The rider barely visible in the lower left of the photo needed to find the proper trail in a burned out area. The dude horse he was riding did not want to be in front or ride out on its own. Rather than fight the stubborn dude horse, an activity that was creating stress for both the rider and the horse, he chose to walk - the safe and sensible alternative.



Camping



Through the years we have made some interesting observations about the camping experience. We have met many people who enjoy and even thrive on life in the outback, and met others who would rather stick needles in their eyes than camp one night in a tent.

Modern society discourages a healthy mind set towards back country camping. The RV world has everyone convinced that we feel and look our

best in the latest model 5th wheel or motor home. These days we dress light and in cold weather run from the house to the warm remote started car. We find it difficult to believe one can be warm and comfortable out in poor weather. Outdoor stores have us convinced that staying warm and dry requires spending the big dollars on clothing and footwear made from the latest synthetics and styles.

Bear scare stories makes for headlines and good entertainment. They also worry many people into sleepless nights while camping or scares them out of the woods altogether.

Possible injury while on a back country horse trip worries many although the reality is that riding horses around the yard, farm, down the road, or driving in vehicles, is many times more dangerous than back country riding.

Peer pressure also works against us and convinces friends and family to back out of trips. If we only had a dollar for every time we hear, "How can you go out there like that? Aren't you cold? Won't the bears get you? Aren't you scared you'll get lost? Don't you feel dirty if you can't shower? The bugs are going to eat you," etc. etc. When we hear this from those close to us, it does effect us negatively.

When we finally pack that last horse and say "giddy up" it is like a big weight lifted off of our shoulders. The stress melts away with the first few steps. We wonder why we spend

even a minute worrying about anything. After all, we have common sense, a warm, dry shelter, warm clothes, and good gear. So we point our noses into the wind and towards the adventures ahead.

Fear is a disease that is bad for freedom. God bless everyone who goes camping - it keeps us humble and healthy, gives us character and courage. Don't think about it, just do it!

Please note that the perfect camping trip is like the perfect horse - it is an ideal we may strive for but it is never reality. Many times we have witnessed people head out with a tarp for shelter, a change of warm clothes, some simple gear, and stay warmer and happier than others headed in with better tents and gear but shy on patients and common sense.

There are many unknowns on camping trips, that is why we call it adventure. Do not formulate ideas, plans, and absolutes about how things need to progress. If you do, the coming delays, changes, and conditions all become frustrating problems rather than expected circumstance.

THE SITE

Horse camping sites need to have some basic ingredients including forage, water for humans and horses, firewood, a level tent spot, and preferably rails or trees to tie horses to. Sites may vary considerably depending on the duration of ones stay or the circumstances of the visit. For example, a base camp you plan to use for a two-week stay needs abundant feed as well as some good wood, water and fixtures. On the other hand making an emergency stop due to poor weather, taking the wrong turn in the trail, or travelling late, may require only enough food for one night and a flat spot big enough to lay your bed roll.

Forage

Horses find most wild grasses palatable, preferring some species to others. Although we know that some plants are toxic, even lethal when eaten, horses are good at avoiding these plants when given a choice. We never worry about a horse eating toxic plants when wild grasses are prevalent. Avoid confining your horse in corrals or areas with excessive weeds or clover. Horses can and often do die from liver dysfunction after eating excessive clover, usually over long periods of time.

Until the 1970's and 80's it was common practice for outfitters in Northern B.C., Yukon,

NWT, and Alaska to buy large numbers of horses, truck them up the Alaska highway, "break" them prior to coming hunting trips, use them, and turn them out to fend for themselves during the winter. Out of a semi load of 24 horses, several would survive the harsh climate, wolves, and sparse feed. The horses that survived did not always have sweet dispositions but they were always tough, and they bred a very tough, durable type of northern "bush" horse. To this day these horses work the north country. Outfitters have learned that hard winters and wolves were not selective and they often lost even their best horses, horses they now choose to feed and protect.

The winter diet of these horses was often primarily willow bush. Horses have an enzyme that cows lack. It allows them to break down coarse cellulose fibre into a usable form. They can survive on brush. We like to see horses willing to eat willow and other brush – although it should hardly be necessary.

If your campsite does not have enough grass to hold your horses then you are basically forcing them to run away – although hobbled horses may hop off just because they feel like it. We never feel sorry for a fat horse on a short two day to two week trip that is tied up over night, provided that the horse has at least three hours of feeding on good feed both morning and night. However, if your horse is losing condition because you tie it up for long periods then that is abuse. Do not confuse lack of feeding by an insensitive owner with a lean bred, hard muscled running or working horse that is on a controlled diet. Remember, horses on the trail are working long, hard hours often in poor weather, and they need several hours of feeding time daily to maintain health. We always try to give hard working horses at least one day in four off.

Most wild grasses actually have higher protein, energy, vitamin and mineral content than tame grasses. Interestingly, high mountain grasses that come to life for a short season often have more value than valley or swamp grasses.

Try to make your campsite between the grazing area and the trail you arrived on. When the horses try to escape during the night you

can hear their bells go by.

Horses that are tethered need to be moved often and should also have some free grazing time daily.

“Whistle” train your horses at home to come to treats, grain, or salt. It can be a joy to behold when your whistle in the woods and the horses come thundering home. It really works!



Good grass, accessible water, wood, and a flat camp site keep horses home and people happy.

Water

Horses that feed on wet grass from rain or heavy dew do not need water. If horses are working during the day they should be given opportunity to drink during the day. In dry weather horses need access to water. It does not have to be the pristine stream that humans prefer; a pond or puddle can suffice. Do not assume that because your hobbled horse is near a creek that he can drink from it. Check for easy access and lead a horse or two to drink. For humans, the Giardia bacteria, or “beaver

fever” is a genuine concern and a common problem in water that has some feces contamination. This would include virtually all streams, ponds, and lakes; even the cleanest looking ones. Giardia can send your belly into summersaults and your body into fevers. It comes in bouts until treated, and it needs to be treated as it can permanently damage intestine walls. Boiling water for 10 minutes is effective but not always 100% sure. Use an appropriate water filter for safe drinking water. There are many excellent ones on the market but be sure they remove Giardia. Campers often remember to purify drinking water but forget to boil water for dish washing and cooking.



The water filter in your pump or squirt bottle must remove giardia bacteria. Some even remove viruses.



Wood

Next to good horse feed and access to clean water we look for wood. By wood we mean trees that shelter our camp from wind and rain, provide firewood for fuel, and trees or poles to tie horses to, hang bridles and lead ropes from, lay saddles and pads upon, and tie high lines to. We often avoid well-used campsites because over many years campers have used all accessible dead wood, preferring a nearby site with plentiful fuel. In parks and high use areas campers may be confined to sites where no wood use or outdoor fires may be permitted.

Tent Site

We have had many memorable campsites over the years. Most have served us well and many have had beautiful vistas. To this day we can recall the scenery; the mountains, valleys, and woods unique to each spot. Ingrained with our vivid memories of places are the people, events, and feelings of those times. The high alpine camps are our favourite. We usually aim high and stay there for the entire trip, enjoying the peaks, basins, plants and wildlife that likes to call alpine “home”.

It is always worth the time to find or “grub out” a flat spot for your sleeping area. It is senseless and lazy to lose sleep because of a root, stone stick or bump under your bed. Try to avoid camping in lumpy, soft, damp bog

areas. We prefer to avoid stream, river, or lake sandbars, as sand seems to get into everything.

Take the time to set up a table, garbage bag, and lay out cutlery, cookware, and food items. An outside wash stand and simple pit latrine is a good idea if you are staying a few days. It is astonishing to see two groups of horse campers head into the woods with the same gear and observe how different the campsites appear. One groups tent is tall and tight with beds, packboxes, kitchen and garbage neat and organized while another tent looks like a rag on the ground covering a bomb site.

Be sure your campfire is well contained. Never build a fire on an organic, bog type soil. Once the fire creeps down into the wooded soil it may creep underground for days, weeks, months, and even years, later emerging to start forest fires. Sparks from your fire will burn holes in your tent so be sure the fire is not too close or up wind from your tent. The smoke from smouldering fires tends to creep along all night and becomes a bother to breathing and your eyes – another reason to not have your fire up wind.

We often set up a 12x18 or larger poly tarp as a roof high over the campsite or even from the ground up, including a roof. This shelter keeps the outdoor fire and cook area free from rain and wind. It makes cooking eating, and lounging outside enjoyable in poor weather. It allows us to keep firewood dry and hang wet clothing to dry out.



A simple tarp as a roof and wind break keeps camp life calm and dry.

TENTS

There are many wonderful tents out and about that are simple and effective. Try to match your tent with the job you want it to do. For example, if you are on the move each day, or nearly each day, then a large wall tent requiring several poles may not be appropriate. Conversely, if you need a comfortable base camp in late fall weather for a few people, a large wall tent with a wood stove would be in order.

A large wall tent is a roomy, comfortable dwelling that was the standard living and cooking quarters for most outfitter camps. They were typically made from 8oz to 12oz canvas, treated or untreated, and often weighed in excess of 40lbs. They required several poles and some labour to erect. In recent years there has been an influx of wall tents and pyramid

tents (one pole in the middle) that are manufactured from a light synthetic “realite” material. A 14x16-wall tent or 14x14-pyramid tent that used to weigh 50 lbs. now weighs under 20 lbs. – complete with collapsed poles! Your horse can appreciate this!

Although we now use synthetic wall tents, canvas tents are warmer and breath better in damp and cold weather. They actually feel friendlier. Although we prefer our canvas tents white we prefer our synthetic tents off white, as the white is so bright it bothers our eyes. The seams of all synthetic tents need to be regularly treated with seam sealer to prevent leaking. Although we use propane and gas lanterns and stoves in synthetic tents, they encourage internal condensation. Wood stoves in synthetic tents keeps things nice and dry.

For fair weather travel and breaking camp repeatedly, a wall tent is not ideal. There are many light, easy to erect, tents on the market. You do not have to spend big dollars for a 10x10-dome tent that you can stand in. Avoid small backpacker tents that you have to worm your way around in. A 10x10 or larger dome tent allows you room to move, dress, undress, and use a lantern in during poor

weather. Be sure they have vents and a fly.

We most commonly use a modified Whelan lean-to for travel and fly camps. It is a wonderful shelter with a top, sides, bug screen, and tall enough to stand in. It requires no poles, only a lash rope tied between two trees, and the front is open, allowing the tent to be always air dry and catch heat from the campfire.

For years a simple tarp has given shelter to countless lonely riders in countless lonely mountain meadows. Really, a tarp can do just about what a state of the art synthetic can do – except keep the bugs out and maybe weather a very bad storm.

We prefer to have no floors in our large wall or pyramid tents. Floors collect dirt, especially when you walk in and out all day with muddy boots. Floors also add considerable weight to the load the horse is hauling – and for no real purpose. We lay a tarp down in the sleeping area to keep bedrolls clean. A tarp should also be laid down before a tent is dismantled and dropped to the ground. Dirt stains can be very difficult to remove from tent fabric.

When you fold up your wall tent for packing, try folding it as a flat square or rectangle rather than a rolled cylinder. It will sit on your pack boxes or bags better and you may choose to place your light wood stove on top.



Our 10'x20' wall tent is made of 'realite' synthetic and weighs about 20 lbs. with the poles (no floor). A similar canvas wall tent would weigh 70 lbs.

This 'realite' Pyramid tent is handy because it uses only one center pole. We have one with 2 1/2 foot side walls that needs no side poles at all.





This super light tent is roomy enough for a wood stove and its weight, under 10 lbs., makes a pack horse smile.

These modern 10'x10' and larger dome tents are big enough to stand in and use a lantern in. Be sure these tents have good ventilation, a good fly, and a water proof floor that extends up the side wall several inches.



This is our favorite light travelling tent. It takes only a lash rope between two trees to quickly set up. Blue Creek makes these 'modified Whelan' tents. It is dry in all weather (no condensation) and has a roll up bug screen. A fire in front keeps you warm in all weather. It is also very quick to take down.

CAMPING ESSENTIALS

Horse camping gear needs to be practical, simple and efficient. Items that are not useful and necessary should not be packed in. Simple items are reliable, not gadgetry that may or may not work or may or may not be breakable. Gear needs to be efficient to pack. Avoid having to create an extra horse load or top pack because of unnecessary gear (with the exception of bedrolls or clothes bags). The most efficient horse packers are often prior backpackers. They pack light food, small stoves, and limit their clothing. Although horses provide us with comforts that backpackers will never know, like folding tables, wood stoves, stand up tents, and jars of jam and peanut butter, it is very easy to go overboard with gear and weight.

Stoves

Stoves are either wood stoves intended for large tents or outdoor cooking, or petroleum fuel burning stoves – most commonly white gas, propane, or butane. We have used all of these types successfully and recognize that your

choice of stove type is mostly personal. We do have some thoughts on the stove types we use.

We have used many excellent wood stoves of varying sizes, weights, attachments and take down capabilities and prices. We always seem to return to the simple rectangle box tin stove. Ours have the wood door at the end and two removable lids. They are commonly found in hardware stores. We find the solid design more sturdy and reliable than most take downs we have used as take downs often warp with use and heat can be a nuisance to put together. We like the lightweight of a tin stove as compared with some of the heavy, stronger, much more expensive stoves. We like our stovepipes to fit inside of the stove when packed. If the stove has a 5-inch pipe hole we use a 5-inch to 4-inch reducer and pack the pipe inside. We like the stove large enough to take an 18-inch piece of firewood, with good diameter, so the fire keeps going well into the night. We want burner lids that can be removed when you want to cook on the stove – the cooking happens much faster. Our common tin stoves are light, probably 8-10 lbs., with pipes inside and it can be packed on top of nearly any pack or in a side bag. If you prefer a heavier, custom made stove with cooking attachments, or the smaller compact models, or the take downs, go for it!

Sparks can ruin a synthetic tent very quickly so use a good spark arrestor. Take your top most section of pipe and drill many small holes in it. The cool air will put out sparks before they come out. Place one inch of soil or

sand in the bottom of your stove to prevent the bottom from burning out.

We always take gas stoves along. We usually pack a thin profile (takes less room in a pack box) two burner and a single burner back packer type stove. In the past we have used white gas stoves and lanterns but now use propane models. We find propane burns cleaner, there are fewer problems with fuel lines, and less trouble refueling. Packing out the small empty propane tanks is a draw back. There are some excellent white gas backpacker type stoves on the market. Butane stoves burn

hotter and with less fuel however they are often inoperable in freezing weather.

In most horse camp situations the gas stoves are supplementary to the campfire but very valuable for quick cooking and they often help to heat the tent. We find that on a two week pack trip we use about eight small propane canisters for one stove and one lantern.

During warm weather wood stoves do not have to be inside the tent. Many fine camp cooks prefer to cook summer meals outside where there are lots of room and less chance of overheating the tent.



We prefer our wood stoves light, simple, roomy, and with removable cooking lids (not shown in this model). Use a good spark arrestor and drill holes in your top most pipe. The holes allow cool air to circulate which puts out sparks before they leave the pipe.



We also pack a light, thin, two burner propane stove in a pack box, as well as a small one burner for quick cooking.

Lanterns and Lights

One year we forgot our lanterns on an early October trip and it was a serious inconvenience. At that time of the year days get short with night falling by 7 PM, and there is still lots to do – cooking - cleaning, and getting ready for the next day. The campfire did provide enough light, barely, but life would have been much more pleasant with a lantern. Lantern light in a tent provides for an evening of camaraderie, story telling, card playing, etc. In base camp we often use a two-burner propane lantern for the extra light needed in a large wall tent. However, single burner lanterns get the most

use with us. They are bright enough, smaller to pack and use less fuel. There are some compact models on the market that are smaller than your fist. They provide good light and the thick, small glass bulb is less prone to break than standard models.

When properly packed, the glass should not break, however when one of our glass shields breaks we generally use it as is. You will find that propane gas is less likely to cover the glass with soot than white gas models. The bayonet model mantle (the mantle slides down over the post) is definitely less likely to break while packing.

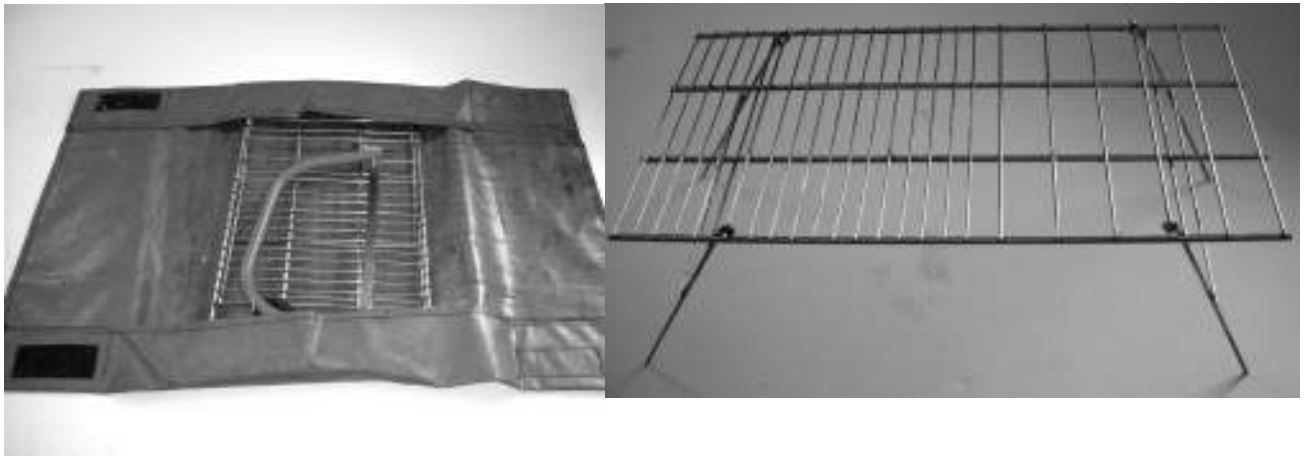


You get more light from a large double mantle lantern, however these very compact 'bulb' models are surprisingly bright, sturdy, and use less fuel.

Camp Grills

We have used a variety of camp grills including large heavy models and the spoke type that need to be assembled and disassembled with each new camp. For pack trips we have settled on the simple, light, inexpensive

models that have fold-up legs. Once again, light weight and simple construction is better. We keep our grill in a sheath with the saw. It is very flat and fits nicely between the box and a top pack, in a pack bag, or on a tent or top pack.



We are weight conscious about everything, including our grill. We pack our grill in a cover, often with a saw. It slips nicely in a soft pack or between a bag and the top of a pack box.

Tables

Folding tables are standard fare for many horse packers. They make cooking and kitchen life much easier. A small table outside as a wash stand, for outdoor cooking, or to lay objects on can be a nice touch in camp.

Historically, outfitters used narrow ½ inch to 1 inch wide slats a couple of feet across, and nailed them side by side on a piece of canvas. It was then rolled up like a bedroll, later to be unrolled and replaced on two poles nailed onto a couple of trees or two poles laid on top of

pack boxes. We prefer to make tabletops from pieces of ¼ plywood or aluminum in a size to just fit inside the bottom of a pack box. The plywood or aluminum pieces are inserted in a tough fabric sleeve and sewn between each piece, to give it an accordion folding like ability.

There are some fine folding tables, complete with legs, that you can purchase, but we prefer ours because they are larger, cheaper, and pack away better.

Our table packs inside a pack box, or if needed, opposite the grill and saw, between the pack box and top pack.



We make our folding tables from thin plywood and a tough synthetic fabric. They are light and fit nicely in the bottom of a pack box. They set up easily with two sticks over pack boxes or between trees. They are lighter and do not create a 'where do I pack this' problem that commercial roll away tables do.

Cutlery Pouch

It may be surprising that we consider a cutlery pouch an essential but once we started using them several years ago we find it difficult to be without one.

We lose fewer spoons, forks, and knives because they always have a place to return to. Our cutlery pouch also carries bowls, cups and

plates, which can rattle while travelling. The pouch keeps them quiet. Campers spend a lot of time looking for another spoon, or fork – the pouch always has one – pack a few extra. Cutlery is kept cleaner. The pouch can be quickly hung between two trees or on the end of a table – so items are quickly accessible for your meal.



A cutlery and plate pouch keeps things clean, quiet, and accessible. This kit contains a set of four plates, bowls, cups, cutlery, dish cloths, scrubbers and soap. It folds up nicely and fits into a pack box. It has cord to tie it between two trees or to your table.

Water Bags

We often carry three water bags, one medium, one large and one extra large. The medium bag has low sides and is used for washing hands and faces. The large bag has high sides and is for packing water to camp. The extra large bag is lower sided and used for

washing dishes and hauling water. Be sure that your bag is stable. It needs to stand on its own while full of water. The beauty of a water bag is that it holds large volumes of water then folds to nothing when packed. They also are great for stuffing into packboxes in an effort to secure and silence noisy items.

This is our extra large water bag - great for hauling water to camp or washing dishes.



Shower Bags

A nice hot shower after a long day on the trail can truly re-juvenate your spirits – and make you smell better too! Considering the weight of an empty bag, we generally pack one along. We also use a shower head that screws directly into a pack box as well as a hand size, battery powered pump with a small attached hose that allows you to heat up a pot of water, hang the nozzle only, and shower away.



A hot shower puts life on the bright side. Keep it simple. This shower bag can be used to haul water as well. The small shower pump unit uses two 'D' cell batteries and pumps hot water from your cook pot to the nozzle over your head.



Head Lamp – Flashlight

We consider a quality, weatherproof headlamp or flashlight an absolute must, and we prefer headlamps. Headlamps allow your hands to be free while performing many chores – and the light is always focused on the subject. For those who like to read at night there are reading

light headlamps that throw a small glow so that you can read with free hands and everyone else can sleep. Do not ride with a flashlight guiding the way as it blinds the horse's eyes and they can take a miss-step or blunder in the wrong direction. People have been killed this way.

Once you use a head lamp you may never go back to a regular flashlight.





First Aid Kit

Our first aid kit includes sterile gauze, gauze pads, adhesive tape, triangular sling, tensor bandage, band-aids, polysporin, pain killer, antacid, sun screen, eye drops, alcohol clean wipes.

Fire Kit

We have one kit that goes out with each trip that contains fire starter cubes or sticks, lantern, mantles, extra lighter or matches and bug dope. At times we will combine this with the equine first aid kit.



Our 'fire kit' includes a lantern head, mantles, extra lighter and matches, fire starter squares, and sometimes, bug dope.

Axes

It's easy to have a love affair with an axe. It stays close to hand year after year, bails you out of tight spots, feels good when you grab it, and doesn't look too bad either.

A trail axe is used for cutting debris out of the way on trails, cutting and breaking smaller diameter wood for firewood, clearing brush for tents and campsites, limbing branches off of trees, cutting and pounding in tent pegs and stakes, cutting rails, and field dressing game.

A trail axe does not need the weight of a wood splitting axe or the thickness of blade (which wedges the wood apart when splitting large sections). It does not need the length for leverage while splitting. As a result, a trail axe has a 3/4 length handle (about 25 inches long). The blade is lighter and thinner than a general utility axe (pole axe). Although not always, trail axes are wider of blade, which is similar to a loggers limbing axe.

Pay attention to the wooden handle of the axe you are about to purchase. Look for a close, even grained, quality wood. There are

some fine metal or synthetic handled models available as well.

Axe heads are made from softer metal than knives. On the Rockwell scale of hardness (a diamond point is dropped onto the metal and the depth of the indentation tells us how hard the metal is) axe head metal is generally a 40 to 45 rating. Knives are 54 to 62 - the higher the number the harder the metal. Axes are softer so they readily sharpened with a file. Also, quality hard metal used in knives would be too expensive for the amount of metal needed in an axe head. We always pack one or two smaller #8 cross cut bastard files. Keep your blades sharp.

Avoid hatchets, they are of limited value. They are not really effective for limbing or clearing trails.

Your axe needs a good sheath that can be slung from your saddle. Attach some red tape, flagging, or color it brightly in some way so that you can find it in the grass or brush.

If your axe head becomes loose on the shaft, pound the wedges in as best you can and soak the head end in water or oil in order to swell the wood.



We prefer the feel of a wood handle and have become confident with the wide, narrow blade of a limbing axe. The axe on the right is our choice. The middle axe has a Swedish head and is very effective - preferred by many packers. The axe on the left is a metal handled model.

This axe is slung where we like it. If we carry a gun scabbard, then the axe goes on the other side. Always balance the weight of gear on either side of your saddle. The heavy duty axe sheath is wrapped with red tape to prevent it from getting lost.



We always pack a folding shovel on longer trips. They are useful for digging and filling in fire pits and latrines, and good for levelling a flat spot to sleep.

Saws

A saw can do just about everything an axe can do, except pound in stakes, and do it safer. If you gave us a choice of using either an axe or a saw on a given trip it would be a tough decision. A saw can cut through a large diameter dead fall faster than an axe. It can limb trees, cut firewood, make tent pegs, cut up wild

game, and do it safely.

We used to use a small bow saw but now prefer a simple 9 - 16 point compact saw commonly found in hardware stores. There are some excellent trail saws, complete with sheaths, available from suppliers. These longer bladed models can effectively cut branches and deadfalls while you sit in the saddle!



Some trail riders feel that their saw is more useful than their axe. The packers saw in the middle is a favorite model. We use the compact hardware store variety on the right. It has a 'sharptooth' design - it cuts on both the push and the pull stroke. It is sturdy and very effective. It is eighteen inches long and can have nine to sixteen teeth per inch.

PERSONAL GEAR

There is so much excellent gear on the market these days it is difficult to wade through it. Personal gear really is personal. If it works for you and you like it – use it. Our suggestions here are mostly suggestions. Here are some ideas that you may appreciate when buying and using gear.

From the house to the horse - ready to go with a Blue Creek gear bag and bed roll. Two gear bags or bed rolls pack great opposite each other.

Bed Rolls

Bedroll covers are important for horse campers. First, they keep your sleeping bag protected; clean and dry while travelling and in use. Second, they add a good amount of warmth on cool nights. Third, they roll up into perfect size cylinders that make a nice top pack when matched with another bedroll or gear bag of a similar weight. Also, they contain a foam or air-rest for added sleeping comfort. A bedroll laid out over two pack pads makes for a comfortable sleep.

Our bedrolls are waterproof and most have a canvas top that wicks away the moisture that your body and your sleeping bag shed. You should be able to lay damp socks inside your bedroll for the night and wake up with dry

Gear Bags

Heavy-duty gear bags are great. They keep things clean, dry, protected and they are very versatile. Ours go from the house to truck to horse to tent to the end of our bed – handy to access. And they pack wonderfully with a mate or bedroll. We like a full-length zipper and sturdy handle on our weatherproof bags.



socks. We make ours 34-inches across and long enough on the bottom so our heads are on fabric rather than ground. Our sleeping bags are generally tapered or rectangular backpacker type bags. Large arctic bags may need more room than the bedroll allows for.

We place our tie straps and buckles at the head end. This allows us to open the air rest valve and allow air to escape as the bag is being rolled up. Otherwise you have to unzip the bag each time to get at the valve. When you pack in the morning ask a partner to roll up the bag with you – see how tight you can make your bedroll – it will pack much better.

Hats

Hats are critical. They moderate variations in body temperature – keep you cooler on hot days and warmer on cool or windy days. Cowboy or “outback” type hats are standard fare. They keep the sun out of your eyes, the wind off of your head, and the rain from leaking down your face, neck, and glasses if you wear them. As you ride along in bushy country it is common for branches to very suddenly attack your face – you only have time to dip your head and have the brim of your cowboy hat take the scratch rather than your face, or worse, your eyes. A trail-riding friend of ours claims his hat brim is wore out from the abuse it has taken

from bushy trails over the years. Spray your hat with scotchguard to repel rain or, if you want to keep your hat in store bought shape, wear a clear plastic hat cover in poor weather.

Always pack a touque or watch cap type hat for sleeping during cold nights or cold windy days. Be sure your watch cap is closely knit to keep the wind from penetrating. Wear ear plugs or put a wad of paper in your ears on very windy, cold days to prevent an earache. A scarf, bandana or ear band wrapped around your head can work with your cowboy hat over top on poor weather days.

White straw hats and baseball type hats work well during moderate and warm weather but they are not as versatile as cowboy hats. We always have a tie string on our hats.



Cowboy hats are like fingerprints - no two are quite the same. Be sure your hat is waterproofed and has a tie string.

Clothing

Now this is really personal – we like our underwear pink with yellow flowers. Not really. Here are some things we like. Take along a warm vest that comes down to cover below your lower back. Wear longer coats, not short ones that expose your backside. Check out some of the very light, quality, long underwear

available – they are comfortable to wear in most weather and handy to sleep or sleepwalk in. Wear quality socks when you can. There are excellent wool synthetic blends available. We often wear two pairs with a light cotton inner sport sock and wool blend outer. Have a wind proof layer on somewhere, either in your jacket or a light pullover you can put on during windy, cold, weather. Take a few extra pairs of socks.

Rain Gear

There are two routes we go with rain gear. One is the full length slicker or Aussie oilskin that keeps your legs and saddle covered as you ride. The other is a light jacket and pants rain suit. The Aussie type is great if you are primarily riding or packing but we prefer a quality, light, rain suit if we expect to do some



This poncho shows the exposed legs and arms. The author is wearing 'shotgun' style chaps - good for walking as well as riding.

walking or trail work – and we usually do. We buy our rain suits over size to allow warm clothes underneath.

We avoid cheap plastic rain gear as it tears easily and we avoid heavy, rubberized gear. Ponchos have the advantage of becoming a ground sheet or tarp if you need one but they leave arms and legs exposed and they are loose and floppy.



Slicker - Aussie type is great for riding but we use a light weight, quality jacket and pants rain suit if we expect more walking or trail work.

Chaps

Riding chaps are not necessary on good trails but they are your legs best friend when you start pushing brush. They also protect your leg if you happen to get rubbed against a tree.



Slim, supple chaps protect your legs while keeping you warm, dry, and are nice to walk in. Leather is common but heavy duty, treated canvas also works well.

They keep you warm and if treated with conditioner they serve as rain gear. Chaps also take the daily abuse your pants would have to put up with so they do help keep your clothes in good shape. Considering the benefit of chaps, we nearly always wear them. Because we do a fair amount of walking we want them trim so we prefer “shotgun” models as opposed to “bat-wing” types. Biker chaps work very well. Keep them supple and water repellent with a good conditioner.

Footwear

Packer type lace boots are great for riding, as are standard cowboy boots, but they may not be the best for back country use as they do not offer enough support, their soles are too slippery, and they are not warm enough. With any outdoor boot always consider size – keep them as slim as you can so they can be easily removed from your stirrup. We usually bring a pair of runners for wearing around the camp.

You may need to use wider stirrups and/or tapaderos to make your saddle safer for outdoor boots. Practice losing and finding your stirrup as you ride. Only put the toe of your foot in if you are afraid to get hung up. We insert a quality insole with good arch support in just about all of our boots. They can make a noticeable difference in how tired you feel later in the day. Here are some of our favourites used by the author. These are scratch and sniff photos so choose one, scratch, and enjoy.



The boot on the left is a 'packers' boot. It is a great riding boot, similar to a cowboy boot, but it is not really intended for wet and cool weather or rough terrain. The boot second from the left is lightly insulated, weatherproof, has good support, and is not too wide. It is a great choice for wilderness journeys. The rubber lace up 'miners' second from the right is one of the authors favorite bush riding boots. He wore this type of boot for over 1000 wilderness miles in the Cordillera! journey. (See the book or movie.) Use a good insole or liner that can be removed and dried every night. The boot on the right is a light 'pac' boot - rubber bottom and leather or Gortex upper. We prefer a removable liner and not too wide of a boot. This is a great cold weather riding boot.

Gloves

We always carry a few pairs of cheap, two-dollar cotton gloves for general use and cooking. A slim fitting, light, soft leather pair are nice for riding. In poor weather we like the

modern insulated sport models – thinsulate lined, waterproof, and easily dried when wet. We also like neoprene for wet weather as they keep your hands warm even if they are damp. We avoid lined, rubber gloves, as once they get wet they feel cold and they are hard to dry.



We take more than one pair of gloves on a trail ride. We take a few pair of the cheap cotton gloves second from the right for cooking, light work duty, or cool weather. The second from the left gets the most use late in the season. It is a thinsulate lined, Gortex covered, sport glove that keeps hands warm in cold weather. They are waterproof and dry well. The glove on the left is a Neoprene glove that keeps damp hands warm enough in very wet weather. The leather riding glove on the right fits snug and is nice for general riding.

Multitool

Multitools are a great help. They work well for grabbing, poking and cutting during leather repairs. The pliers are useful for a number of chores including picking up hot pots and stove lids. We like ours with a serrated knife blade, which works great for cutting rope. The file is useful for touching up the edge on your axe. They seem to get used just about

daily and it makes us wonder how horse packers and trailriders ever got by without them. Actually, for years many guides and outfitters carried a small set of pliers on a waist pouch, as well as their knife.



If you do not have a multitool in your belt, you should try one.

MINIMAL IMPACT CAMPING

Minimum impact camping is partly caring about mother nature and partly common sense. Generally speaking horse riders are very conscious about taking care of the natural world around them. In past years it was not uncommon to come across old camps and find pits full of garbage and cans and bottles scattered about. These days, most camps are found in clean order.

Garbage

Natural burnables like food waste and bits of paper should be burned, and cans and plastics need to be packed out. Minimize the amount of garbage you need to pack out by minimizing the amount of garbage you pack in. Cans can be flattened to vastly reduce the bulk when packing out. If you burn them first they are easier to flatten. We often pack food items like flour, sugar, porridge, rice, and pasta in plastic ware containers that stack together when empty. In other words, reduce the amount of packaging you pack in. Burying garbage is not a good idea as animals dig it up and scatter it about, and, old garbage pits are not nice to see.



Huge amounts of waste packaging can be eliminated before you pack in.

Sod and Tree Damage

How you control and feed your horses can impact trees, shrubs, and the ground. Even if we are camping in an area for two weeks we choose not to cut rails for corrals and saddle racks. If we all cut rails at campsites there would be many trees cut for no good reason. On the other hand, camps that are used by many, over the years, often come complete with existing corrals and saddle racks for all to use.

The least damage our horses make while on a trip is when we tie them to trees only as long as it takes to put a saddle or load on or off, then they are hobbled and turned out to feed. Trees can be used like this for years with no visible damage. However, when you leave horses tied to trees for several hours or over night they tend to paw, break branches, and chew bark. By the time some horses get through with a tree it looks like a bulldozer ran over it.

If you are concerned that hobbled horses are going to leave the country and you need more control, try tethering two or three of the leaders while the rest graze with hobbles. This is less destructive than making corrals, hitch rails, or high lines.

Another friendly grazing method is to use a portable electric fence kit. Our fencer kit weighs less than eight pounds. Provided you move the fence regularly, and provided you confine a small number of horses, it is very nature friendly. Be sure the horses are trained at

home to respect the string. If not, walk the horse up to the fence to give him a shock or two before you turn him loose. Leave hobbles on while confined because some horses are good at breaking out. Also, use the plastic hot wire rather than the metal wire as the metal wire can tangle and seriously cut a horse.

High lines are often associated with minimum impact horse camping. When given a choice of tying horses to trees all night or on a high line, then the high line is less damaging. However, we have seen several horses fed and secured on a high line off and on for a week and the result was a twenty by sixty foot area that looked like a hog wallow. Hobbles on high line horses reduces vegetation damage. Every blade of grass and shrub had been churned and pulverized into a dirty mess. Try to use high lines where they have been used in the past, generally hard ground areas, so that the harsh treatment is confined to one area. We place our high lines high above the height of the horses head and leave the lead ropes long enough to allow the horses to lay down but not long enough to get a leg over. (See Chapter 5 - Wrangling.)

Damage to trails by horse use is a double edge sword. On one hand, repeated horse use churns up a trail and creates new churned up paths. On the other hand, most trails in our area, and I am sure many areas, only exist

because horses made them and keep them open. High use areas like parks do have serious challenges when trying to assimilate hikers, bikers, and horses on one trail or in one valley. Because we travel in many remote areas we often have little patience for hikers or civilized types who criticize trail conditions or horse poop on the trails. We find it frustrating to accept criticism when we know that the only reason that the hiker and biker is there is because horse people established the trail. As trail use increases and wilderness shrinks we find more “designated” routes – some for horses and some hikers and bikers. Joining a trailriding club is a sensible way to keep your

activity alive and your options open.

Mother nature plays a big role in shaping trails. It always amazes us how spring run off and stream flooding can seriously erode and “ribbon” a trail. Horses are often forced to make small detours around wash outs, mud holes, and exposed rock that was not present the previous year.

We try to pitch in and cut out dead falls across our path in an effort to make travel easier on horses and people and also to reduce the extra trails we are creating in detour.

Double wrapping your lead around a tree will minimize bark damage if the horse pulls. A cinch can be used to wrap a tree rather than a rope when tying high lines or other lines.



Avoid building corrals, hitch rails, and saddle racks - but use them if they already exist.

A cinch around a tree rather than a tight rope reduces tree damage.



Feed Choice

There is no doubt in our minds that the more hobbled free grazing your horse does, the less damage that occurs. If you choose to or need to haul in feed, you run the risk of horses chewing bark because they lack enough bulk feed. Also, hungry horses become agitated and destroy whatever is around or under them. Feeding pellets or cubes is great, but add bulk if you can.

There has been serious inroads by destructive weeds into natural areas, and the



prime culprit is hay being packed in that contains weed seeds. Make or buy your hay as weed free as possible. We find it plain stupidity when do gooders force horse riders to pack in hay that *does* contain weed seeds while acres of grass is readily available. If an area truly is over grazed then that is another issue, and it needs to be controlled. A blanket policy that helps five percent of camp areas while it contaminates everything else can only make sense to a misguided soul sitting in an office.

When give a choice, even compared with hauling in feed, we feel that free grazing with hobbles is more environmentally friendly than highlines, picket lines, tether ropes, corrals, electric fences, or tying to trees for long periods.

Fire

Most outdoors people enjoy the friendly glow of a camp fire. We use fires to cook on, lounge by, tell stories by, and to warm ourselves with during long, cold, days on the trail.

First and foremost never make a fire on peat moss type soil as organic matter below your fire pit will smoulder deep below the surface, later to emerge and cause a forest fire.

We generally allow our fire to burn to a desired size then make sure all of the



smoldering edges are put out. Trim back grass and brush. Using a pit or rocks to rim the fire will help to control it. Often, fire pits are provided, use them rather than damaging new areas. In a sod type soil you can remove chunks of sod for a pit then place the sod back before you leave. Keep an eye on burning sticks and logs that reach beyond the fires' edge, as they will carry a fire away from the pit. *Make sure* fires are out before you go to sleep or leave the area.

Leave extra firewood under a shelter or evergreen tree to keep it dry for the next traveller - who may arrive on a cold, wet, day and truly appreciate it. Try and leave more firewood than you found.

If established fire pits exist, use them. If not, be very careful about creeping fires, both on the surface and underground.

Latrine

We prefer to build a simple toilet when we stay for several days in one area. If you do not, after four or five days a few careless campers can turn the area around camp into a disgusting mine field. The toilet does not need to be elaborate – a down fall log may act as a toilet seat – but identify the area for everyone's use.

We never build structures for a few days stay simply because we like to keep structures to a minimum.

If you build a pit toilet – a good idea for several users, be sure to fill it up with the removed soil before you leave.

Soap

There has been legitimate attention given to the harmful chemicals we send into our water systems. Do your part and use biodegradable soap for personal hygiene and cleaning cookware. We will all feel good about your choice. Scatter your waste water in the forest, not in or beside streams and lakes. Giardia can also attack you through poor cooking and cleaning habits. Cook and wash with boiled water and soap.



Feel good - use biodegradable soaps. Although this cowboy is washing directly in the stream, it is less harmful to do it in the forest.

CARING FOR GEAR

Camping and Trail riding is an outdoor affair. The great outdoors can be a harsh environment full of dry and wet, warm and cold, mood swings. Outdoor gear is meant to be used in this environment. We have weathered some miserable seasons when it seemed as if the world forgot what a clear sunny day looked like. And yet, the saddles, tack, tents, and various gear comes through in fine shape. Here are a few simple things we do to keep trail gear functional and looking healthy.

1. Once a year clean all saddles and tack with saddle soap and treat with a conditioner. For recreational riding you may never need to “oil” your cleaned saddle. As outfitters, our saddles and tack (bridles, reins, chin straps and britch’n) get so weathered, used, and abused, we want them treated so that they repel water and stay supple and rot free over the years. You may want to avoid neats foot compound as over the long run it can rot threads and leather. Neats foot oil will darken your saddle more than some other conditioners. Oils and conditioners help repel chewing rodents.

2. When storing saddles and packs keep them free of dirt, evergreen needles, burrs, grass and twigs. Use saddle racks and logs to lay saddles upon only if they are free of sap, twigs, and scaly bark. Lay a tarp on the ground,

place the saddles in a manner to keep the edges from folding under, lay the pads on top, and cover with another tarp. Let the saddle pads air out and dry before covering them.

3. Latigo straps, basket ropes, and lash cinches should be wrapped up and stored neatly.

4. Collect all gear and keep bridles, lead ropes, and lash cinches in separate spots – it makes locating items much easier the next morning or in the dark. During freezing weather keep lead ropes and canvas cinches in the warm tent. Working with frozen lead ropes or lash cinches is difficult at best. Hang up lead ropes, bridles and lash ropes if possible. Squirrels, mice, rats, and horses appreciate a good chew.

5. When setting up or dropping your wall tent, lay a clean tarp down first. A soiled tent is very difficult to get clean, likely to carry smudge marks for the rest of its life.

6. At the end of your trip or season rub a light coat of oil over bits, propane stoves, pots and pans.

7. Check for damaged and worn gear and tack well in advance of a trip. Then the repairs can become a leisure almost pleasant chore, rather than an over night panic that may not be completed at all.

8. Store gear in the off season where it is dry and the varmints won’t get at it.



Wrap up all riggin, basket and lash ropes, and store them neatly. Keep all lead ropes, halters, and bridles separate and hung in one spot.