

Horse Sense

San Bernardino National Forest



You've packed the finest horses and mules, explored every ridge in the National Forests around your home, and used your favorite spots every year. The problem is, more and more people visit the backcountry every year, and careless use often results in polluted creeks, campsites covered with ash and beat to dust, trampled tree roots, and overgrazed meadows.

We'd like to remind you of a few simple ways to lower your impacts in the backcountry. Let's take a look at Minimum Impact Philosophy: Disguise the sight and sound of your passage, leaving no sign that you were ever there.

Planning

Before you go, contact local ranger stations for maps, regulations, information and rules concerning permits, campfire, party size, grazing, weed-seed-free feed, trail conditions and closures, and more. Make alternate plans in case of bad weather.

Physical Fitness?

It's easier to travel outdoors when both you and your animals are in shape for the trip.

Stock?

Know your stock: Which animal leads best? Which ones follow better? Which is the slowest traveler? The slowest animal determines the speed of the pack string. Are they familiar with trails, packing, and with the equipment you plan to use? Get your animals used to highlines, pickets, hobbles, and various temporary corrals before you go.

Bear Safety?

Food odors can attract hungry or curious bears and other animals too, so it is important to store your food properly. In some areas, this means using bear-proof boxes and panniers.

Supplemental Feed?

Don't get caught unprepared when you find your favorite grassy meadow is dry or overgrazed. Plan to take supplemental feed and get your stock used to it at home. Ask local land managers about grazing and restrictions, so you know how much supplemental feed to bring.

Certified Weed-Seed-Free Feed?

While planning, find out if hay and uncertified feed are allowed where you're going. It may not be required, but you can help prevent the spread of noxious weeds by using certified weed-seed-free feed.

Nosebags and Mangers

Use these to feed your stock hay, pellets or grain. They help reduce waste, you don't have to feed stock on the ground, and it's easier on the land.

Packing

The Bare Essentials

Lightweight, compact camp equipment: sleeping bags, tents, camp stoves, cookware, and utensils help reduce the number of pack animals, allowing you to take what you really need.

Safe Drinking Water

For short trips, carry enough water for the area you're in. Or, check into water filtering devices for longer trips.

Food

Try prepackaged meals, dehydrated or freeze-dried food, or repackage food to save space and to reduce weight. Use lightweight, reusable plastic containers and plastic bags instead of glass and cans.

Around Camp

A shovel, axe, and water container are useful for fire safety and keeping camp clean. Use these tools to clear brush and trees that fall across trails when you can do so safely.

Minor Mishaps

Take insect repellent and a first-aid kit for both yourself and your stock. Be sure you know how to use first-aid kits.

On the Trail

Use your "horse sense!" It's easy to overlook, but your own or your animals' lives could be at risk in rough country. Let your stock pick their way through boggy places, slide zones, on slick and steep trails, and through deep water and snow. Or get off and lead them through treacherous stretches.

- Please stay on trails. Cutting across switchbacks tramples plants and creates parallel paths which erode severely.
- Although it's tricky, keep your stock from skirting shallow puddles, small rocks, and bushes. This helps prevent the creation of wide, deteriorating trails.
- At rest stops even short ones tie your stock off the trail. This is courteous to other trail users and helps reduce wear and tear on the trail. Before you move on, scatter the manure.
- Because wildfires are common here, **NO SMOKING WHILE TRAVELING!**

Trail Courtesy

Making Friends in the Backcountry

In the backcountry, say hello! A little simple courtesy makes life more pleasant for everyone. Observe the basics of trail courtesy:

- In steep, rough country, down-hill traffic usually yields to uphill traffic. If you have a better place to pull off, do so, and let the other folks pass through.

- People on foot or on mountain bikes should yield to stock traffic because it is easier for them to move off the trail. If they don't, smile and yield the way, or ask them to stand below the trail and wait quietly for your stock to pass.

Camp

At last, you've found your spot. Hmm, looks like other people like this place, too. Some areas receive lots of visitors, and they don't all follow the 'Pack it In, Pack it Out' philosophy. Should you stay here and clean it up, or let the next person take care of it? You've decided to improve your site? Good for you!

Like most people, you enjoy campsite privacy and solitude. Where should you put stock and gear? You can follow the "200-foot guideline": camp at least 200 feet from the nearest lakes and streams, meadows, trails, and other camps. In designated Wilderness, camp in designated spots only.

- Soaps and Detergents: For washing chores, use a basin at least 200 feet from water sources. Water plants and fish are extremely sensitive to soap, even biodegradable soap, and can die from it.
- Cleaning up: To prevent contaminating water sources with stock or human waste, dump it at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Use biodegradable, unscented, white toilet paper. Bury human waste in a small "cat hole" in the top 6 to 8 inches of soil. Pack out your toilet paper.
- Campfires: On the San Bernardino National Forest campfires are only allowed within developed campgrounds and Yellow-Post sites in agency-provided rings. Keep your fires small, attend them while burning, and let them burn down to a fine ash; then stir, scatter or pack out ashes according to local practice for that site.
- Gas Stoves: Campfires are not allowed in Wilderness Areas on the San Bernardino National Forest. You can use a gas cookstove instead of a fire: it's light, convenient, and reduces impacts to the land.
- Structures: Rock walls, log benches, lean-tos, and other structures detract from and needlessly impact the natural landscape. If you need temporary structures, bring lightweight equipment with you.

Where to Put Stock?

Keep pack animals at least 200 feet from streams, lake shores, trails, and camping areas. This helps keep water clean, protects the soil and plants, and keeps trails and campsites clear of loose stock. Rotate stock throughout the area to reduce trampling and prevent overgrazing.



Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
www.fs.usda.gov/r5



San Bernardino National Forest
www.fs.usda.gov/sbnf

Tree-Saver Straps

Used with highlines, these make a big difference in keeping your stock from girdling trees.

Highline: A highline is one of the easiest, lightweight ways to keep your stock in camp. It is easier to put up with a tree-saver strap. The highline prevents stock from trampling roots and chewing bark. See the picture of highlines and tree-saver straps for details.

Highlines How to use them

- Choose a hard and rocky spot.
- Place the tree-savers and rope about 7 feet above the ground.
- Stretch the line between two trees using adjustable nylon tree-saverstraps.
- Run the rope between the straps, tie with a quick-release knot, and pull tight.

Picket Ropes and Pins

Bring an easy-to-move picket pin such as a metal one. Avoid areas with obstacles so the rope doesn't get hung up. If you walk your animal to the end of the rope before turning it loose, it's less likely to injure itself by running past the end of the rope. Move the picket pin frequently, to prevent trampling and reduce overgrazing. When you break camp, be sure to take that picket pin with you.

Hobbles

Wandering horse? Hobbles work for some animals, but others can move fast while wearing them. Again, get your stock used to them before going into the backcountry.

Temporary Fences and Corals:

When you plan to spend several days in one spot, a temporary corral or fence is a good way to keep your stock in camp. Make sure your stock are trained to stay in temporary corrals before leaving home. If you find permanent corrals at trailheads or designated horse camps, use them!

Breaking Camp

"Pack it in, Pack it Out"

- Pack out all refuse - including garbage, food scraps, cans, grease, aluminum foil, and paper.
- Break up and scatter horse manure and fill in pawed holes.
- Finally, scatter a covering of needles and cones over the site.