Horse Sense

PACKING LIGHTLY ON YOUR NATIONAL FORESTS

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

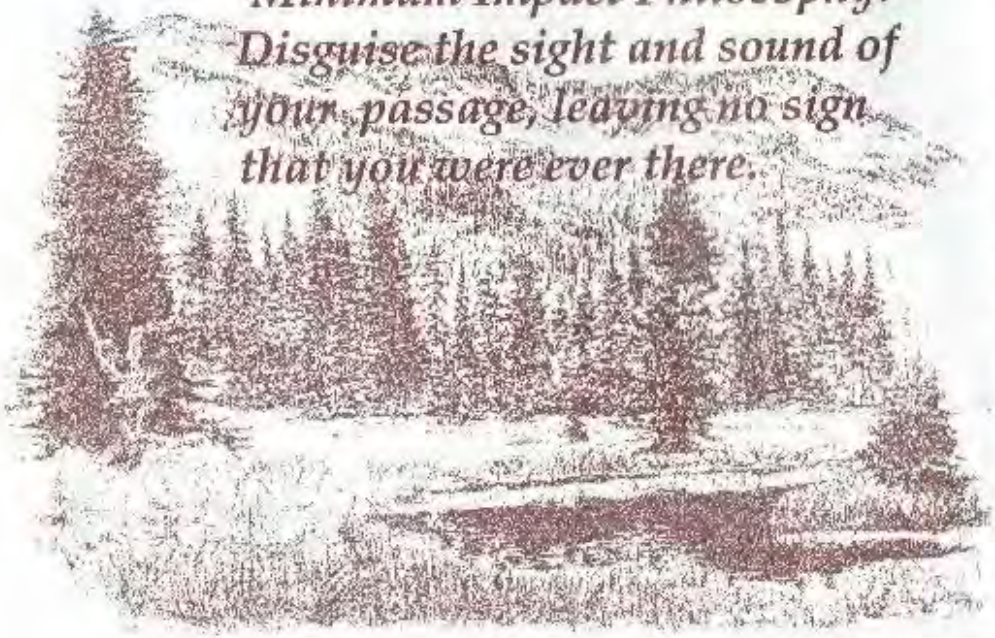
Minimum Impact

HOW'S YOUR HORSE PACKING SENSE?

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, most good campsites, even in remote places, are used all season. Careless use often results in polluted creeks, campsites covered with ash and beat to dust, trampled tree roots, and overgrazed meadows.

Since more people visit the backcountry every year, we'd like to remind you of a few simple ways to lower your impacts in the backcountry. Let's take a look...

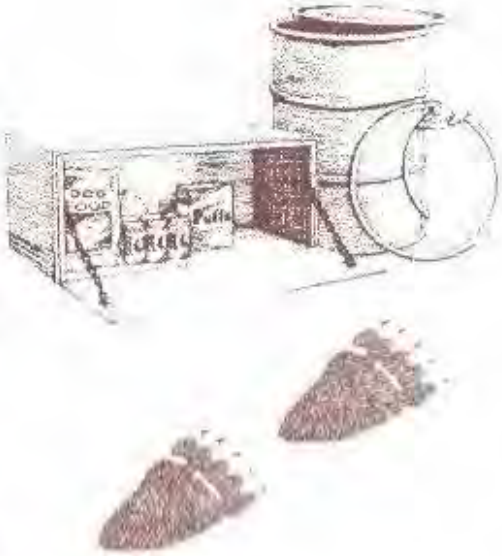
Minimum Impact Philosophy: Disguise the sight and sound of your passage, leaving no sign that you were ever there.



PLANNING:
Before You Go

Information?

Before you go, contact local land managers for maps, regulations and opportunities for your area(s), 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?

If you plan to pack in bear country, especially grizzly country, make sure you obtain and understand special safety and food storage regulations. Be aware of where bears live, eat, and travel. 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.

Feed

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 available grazing and restrictions, so you know how much supplemental feed to bring and where to camp.

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.

Why Weed-Seed-Free Feed?

Many areas permit only certified weed-seed-free feed because some feed contains seeds of noxious weeds and non-native plants. Once established, noxious weeds such as spotted knap weed and leafy spurge can spread and destroy grazing for your stock and wildlife.

Some offenders: Leafy Spurge and Spotted Knap Weed.

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.

Food -

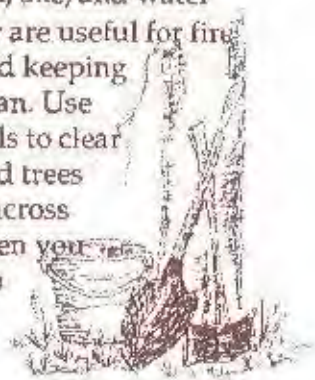
Try prepackaged meals, dehydrated or freeze-dried food, or repackage food to save space and to reduce weight. Use lightweight, reusable plastic containers and plastic bags instead of glass and cans.

Nosebags and Mangers-

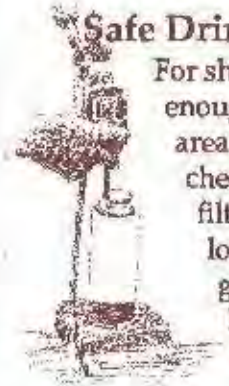
Use these to feed your stock hay, pellets or grain. They help reduce waste, you don't have to feed stock on the ground, and it's easier on the land.

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.



Safe Drinking Water -

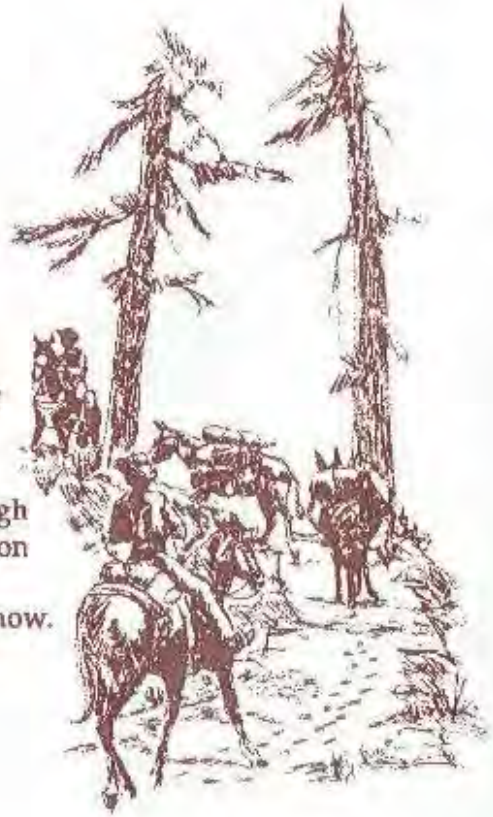


For short trips, carry enough water for the area you're in. Or, check into water filtering devices for longer trips. A giardia filter is highly recommended.

Minor Mishaps -

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

ON THE TRAIL:
Hints For Smooth Trails



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.
- Especially during fire season, 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 with llamas, 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.

In the backcountry, say hello!

IN STEEP COUNTRY, DOWNHILL TRAFFIC YIELDS TO UPHILL TRAFFIC

STOCK:
Keeping Them With You

Your animals are important—if they wandered off, you'd have a heavy load on your shoulders! *Be sure to familiarize and refamiliarize stock with all containment methods you plan to use before you ride into the backcountry.* A few ideas are listed below.

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.

Methods:

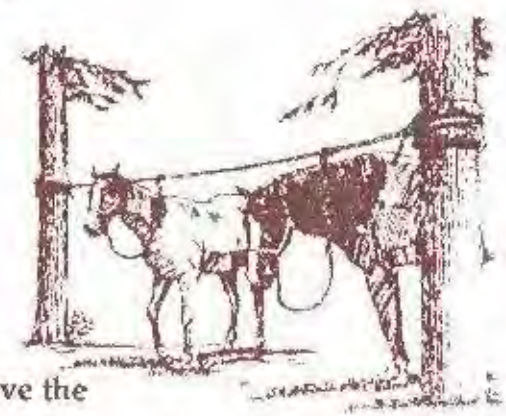
Tree-Saver Straps: Used with highlines, these make a big difference in keeping your stock from girdling trees.

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.

Hitching Rails: If you must tie stock to a hitching rail or dead pole, tie a four-to-six inch round pole between two trees. Place padding or wooden shims under the lash ropes to protect the bark. Use rope or twine instead of nails or wire. Again, take it with you when you leave.

TREE -SAVER STRAPS AND HIGHLINES

Highlines



How to use them:

1. Choose a hard and rocky spot.

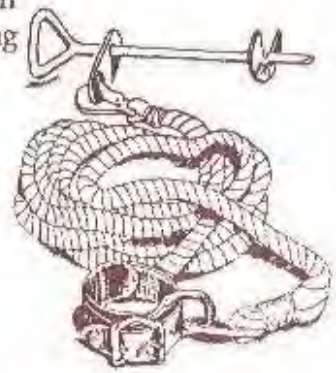
2. Place the tree-savers and rope about 7 feet above the ground.

3. Stretch the line between two trees using adjustable, nylon tree-saver straps.

4. 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:

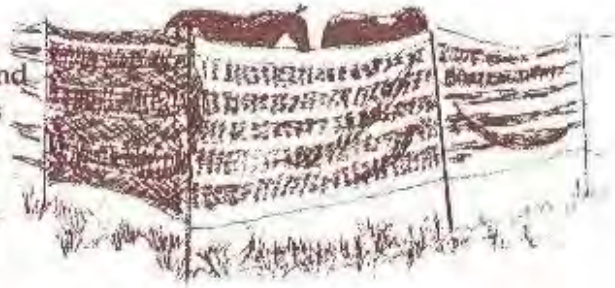
Wandering horse? Hobbles work for some animals, but others can move fast while wearing them. Again, get your stock used to them before going into the backcountry.

Temporary Fences and Corrals:

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! Try some of these temporary fences and corrals (don't forget to take them with you!):

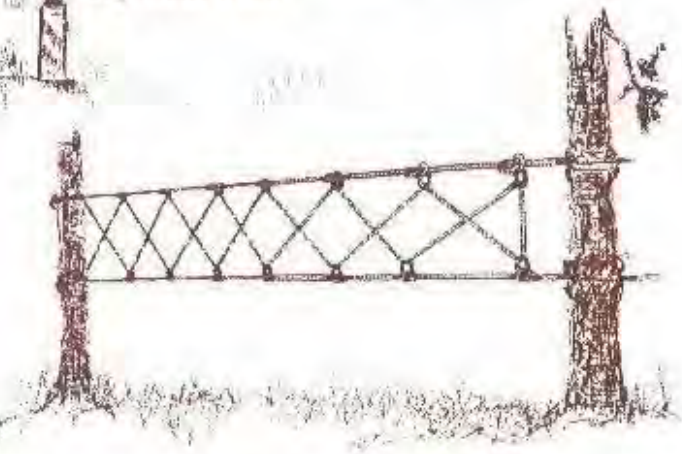
Plastic Snow Fences:

This fencing is lightweight, easy to pack, and comes in colors such as green and black. Some people use a strand of electric fence at the top to prevent stock from escaping.



Electric Fences:

Portable, electric fencing is a convenient temporary corral for stock trained to respect it. It is lightweight, portable, and can run on flashlight batteries. Wildlife sometimes go through electric fences, so be sure to place it away from game trails and any other trails.



Rope Corrals:

Rope corrals are relatively easy to rig and move, but they do require extra rope. One method uses two parallel ropes tied with loops or bowlines and threaded with cross ropes for a more secure enclosure.

CAMP:
Keeping it Clean

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": keep stock and gear at least 200 feet from the nearest lakes and streams, meadows, trails, and other camps. In designated Wilderness, this is a requirement which helps keep streams and lakes clean, protects the soil and plantlife, and keeps trails and campsites clear of loose stock. It's helpful to follow it in all areas.

TIPS TO REMEMBER IN CAMP:

- *Picking a Spot:* Select an open, well-drained, level spot. In Wilderness areas, you must follow the 200-foot guideline. Rotate stock throughout the area to reduce trampling and prevent overgrazing.

- *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 and toilet paper in a small "cat hole" in the top 6 to 8 inches of soil, or use a latrine for large parties or long stays. Cover your latrine completely.

- *Campfires:* Where fires are allowed, we all enjoy the romance of a campfire. However, campfires sterilize the soil, blacken rocks, and leave long-lasting scars on the land. Build them where campfires were previously built. 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.

- *Fire Pans and Cookstoves* are good alternatives to traditional campfires. Fires built in fire pans are similar to campfires on the ground, but cause less damage. You can also use a 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.

BREAKING CAMP:

"Pack it in, Pack it Out"

1. Pack out all refuse, burned cans, unburned campfire debris, and garbage - including food scraps, grease, aluminum foil, and paper.

2. Burn what trash you can. Burying garbage or burning aluminum foil is not an acceptable disposal method and is illegal in some locations.

3. Break up and scatter horse manure and fill in pawed holes.

4. Finally, scatter a covering of needles and cones over the site.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THESE POINTS FOR PACKING LIGHTLY?

TRIP PLANNING AND PACKING

- ☐ Know the area you are visiting.
- ☐ Check with the local land manager for maps, regulations, information on permits, campfires, party size, grazing, supplemental feed, and trail conditions and closures.
- ☐ Take only as much gear as you need.
- ☐ Repackage foods and use lightweight, compact equipment.
- ☐ Take the fewest animals possible. One pack animal to two persons is generally enough.
- ☐ Remember insect repellent and first-aid kits for you and your stock.

TAKE SUPPLEMENTAL AND WEED-SEED-FREE FEED

- ☐ Get your stock used to all new feed before you go.
- ☐ Find out if certified weed-seed-free feed is required.
- ☐ Help prevent spreading noxious weeds: remove weeds and burrs from animals, tack, trailers, and trucks.

IN CAMP

- ☐ Remember the "200-foot guideline"? Camp 200 feet from water sources (lakes, streams), camps, and trails. Also, dispose of human waste and dirty washwater, and wash yourself at least 200 feet from these areas.

TRAIL USE AND ETIQUETTE

- ☐ Stay on the trails and avoid shortcuts.
- ☐ Be courteous and yield to others when you can.
- ☐ Travel in small groups.

STOCK CONTAINMENT

- ☐ Use highlines and tree-saver straps.
- ☐ Learn about various temporary corrals and fences.
- ☐ Keep stock at least 200 feet from shorelines and streams.

BEAR COUNTRY

- ☐ Be aware of where bears live, eat, and travel.
- ☐ Learn to store food properly so food odors don't attract bears.
- ☐ Store food, drinks, stock feed, and things like toothpaste and chapstick in bear-proof containers. Check on specific regulations for your area.

PACK IT IN - PACK IT OUT

- ☐ What comes in must come out—no exceptions. Pack out extra trash in the sacks or bags in which you brought supplies.
- ☐ Check for a clean site and leave nothing. Pack out cigarette butts and other "junk".
- ☐ When you leave, scatter rocks, logs, unused wood, and horse manure so your spot looks undisturbed.
- ☐ Pack out other garbage you find on the trail.

A few days in a remote campsite can refresh and restore a tired spirit. Mount up and head for the backcountry. Have a great trip!

The Horseperson's Creed: When I ride out of the mountains I'll leave only hoof prints, take only photographs...and all the extra garbage I can pack out!

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