



# Backcountry Guidelines: Horses and Stock

## Sequoia National Forest



To some folks, getting away from it all means loading up their trusty steed and head deep into the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The chance to travel on stock is rich in western tradition and can provide one countless opportunities for outdoor recreation without exerting too much physical energy. The task of the USDA Forest Service is to manage and provide recreational opportunities while protecting the natural resources. The following are guidelines and suggestions for minimizing impacts from stock animals. This handout does not cover all situations; rather it is intent as a refresher for experienced stock users and for newcomers alike.

### Wilderness

Wilderness travel was once unrestricted with few regulations, but with increased use by all visitors comes increased impacts to the wilderness character. These issues are mostly associated with impacts to the natural resource while another is the solitude character itself.

All visitors to the backcountry wilderness need to be responsible for their actions. **Leave No Trace, Gentle Use, and Tread Lightly** are terms describing backcountry travel philosophy, resource protection, and a general land ethic. By taking care to protect the natural resources and abiding by local rules and regulations, stock users can help to insure their these areas remain healthy and accessible for future generations.

The National Forests and National Parks in the Sierra Nevada instituted policies to improve the wilderness experience. One policy is group sizes are limited to no more than 15 people and 25 head of stock

### Before Setting Out

Before you hitch up the trailer, pack up your gear, and head out to the campground and trailhead, take the time to plan out the trip.

When planning a trip with stock, it's important to know if the trails are maintained for stock use or for hikers on foot. Undue stress, frustration, and injury to stock could be avoided by knowing the condition of the route ahead of time. Contacting the local Ranger Station will help in the planning and selecting your route.

Unconditioned stock can create undue stress and strain. Saddle and cinch sores, stone bruises, fatigue, and dehydration can easily spoil your trip. To avoid problems, condition your stock before heading out.

Train the stock with different methods of restraint (e.g. hobbles, hitch lines, bells, etc.). Be sure also to plan on packing feed. Early grazing can cause serious damage to meadow grasses. Supplemental feed packed in will reduce impact on these sensitive areas.

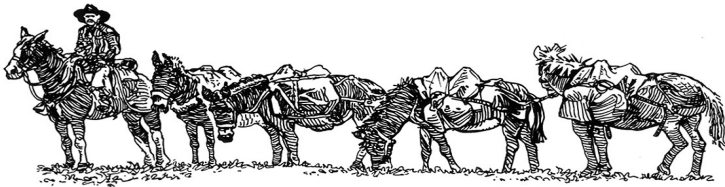
By mid-September, the nutritional value of meadow grasses is quite low. Hay pellets, cubes, and/or grains are best for pack stock in the backcountry. These feeds supply the necessary bulk and nutrition. Accustom stock with these before leaving home.

### On The Trail

Consideration of the resources takes everyone's effort. When someone cuts across a switchback, it begins a path for soil erosion and may encourage other users to follow. Repairing switchbacks can be costly and time consuming. Please keep stock on designated trails.

Cross-country traveling is permitted, but please disperse travel routes. Highly used cross-country routes that merge into designated hiking trails can confuse most trail users. By not traveling in a single file and not using the same cross-country route repeatedly can alleviate this problem.

Be considerate of other users and be polite. Good horsemanship begins with you representing stock users. Generally, stock users have the right of way, but if a situation arises where you need alter your travels, please be considerate of other visitors.



## At Camp

Selecting a good wilderness horse camp and day use area takes good planning and foresight to protect the most precious resource – water. Please do not allow stock to urinate or drop manure into any water source. Biological contamination and altered water chemistry from stocks could easily damage the ecosystem that depends on the water. Since backcountry lakes, streams and creek water is used as drinking water by the majority of visitors backpacking and hiking, please locate stock at least 100 feet away from any water source.

Poor hitching practices in the past has caused deep depressions and exposed roots by stock tied to and pawing at the base of trees. To avoid this, select a hitch line, i.e. lash or halter rope tied between two trees and on firm, dry ground. This preferred method of overnight control avoids problems of soil disturbance and root damage. A sturdy set of hobbles is also useful. Horse could learn how to move freely, so closely watch your stock.

The High Sierra has many meadows suitable for light grazing. Please take care to avoid over-grazing these areas, excessive trampling from stock, and polluting of lakes and streams from animal droppings.

To some visitors, campfires are essential to a wilderness camping experience. Unfortunately, firewood has become too scarce in highly visited areas, so consider using a camp stove for cooking and a small campfire for ambiance. Also consider having no campfire and enjoy the evening sky. For more information on campfires versus camp stoves, please read the handout “Campfires & Permits”.

**Thank you for your help in making forest visits enjoyable and safe! Plan ahead by obtaining a National Forest map at one of the following offices:**

**Hume Lake Ranger District**  
35860 East Kings Canyon Road  
Dunlap, CA 93621  
[559-338-2251](tel:559-338-2251)

**Kern River Ranger District**  
11380 Kernville Rd.  
Kernville, CA 93238  
[760-376-3781](tel:760-376-3781)

**Western Divide Ranger District**  
32588 Hwy 190  
Springville, CA 93265  
[559-539-2607](tel:559-539-2607)

**Forest Supervisor's Office**  
220 E Morton Ave  
Porterville, CA 93257  
[559-784-1500](tel:559-784-1500)



## Campfire Permits

You may want a campfire for cooking, enjoying its warmth, and roasting marshmallows.

**For campfires, stoves, lanterns or barbeques used outside a campground or recreational vehicle and some developed campgrounds, you need a campfire permit.**



The permit is free, valid for a full year from January 1 to December 31, and may be obtained in person from Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE offices, or online at [readyforwildfire.org](http://readyforwildfire.org). Your responsibilities for building and putting out your fire safely are explained on the campfire permit. 36 CFR 261.52(k) PRC 4433.

**Be aware that as fire danger becomes greater, campfires may be prohibited.** Please check to find out if there are fire restrictions in the area where you intend to camp.

You are welcome to gather dead and down wood to use for your campfire, but not to take home unless you obtain a fuelwood permit.

Firewood may be scarce in highly visited areas, so consider using a camp stove for cooking and a small campfire for ambiance. Also consider having no campfire and enjoy the evening sky.

## Packin' Up & Headin' Home

Once your camp or day use gear is packed up, take a few minutes to naturalize the area. Scatter horse manure away from any water source, refill the holes inadvertently dug by stock, and remove any trace left by other users (e.g. rails, wire, rope, or deer racks)

## Remember - Pack It In, Pack It Out

This includes all cans, bottles, aluminum foil, and any other trash found at the campsite area. Please help to keep the backcountry clean by picking up trash as you find it. A little goes along way...

Many years ago the practice was to bury and/or to burn trash in a campfire, but that no longer applies. Animals can dig up trash thus leaving trash scattered throughout an area. Burning trash in a campfire doesn't incinerate it to ash, rather the unsightly remain of garbage will stay behind in the campfire ring.

So please, pack out ALL trash...

## Practice a Leave No Trace! Ethic.

When you leave your campsite,  
Take all garbage, large and small.

**PACK IT IN!**

**PACK IT OUT!**