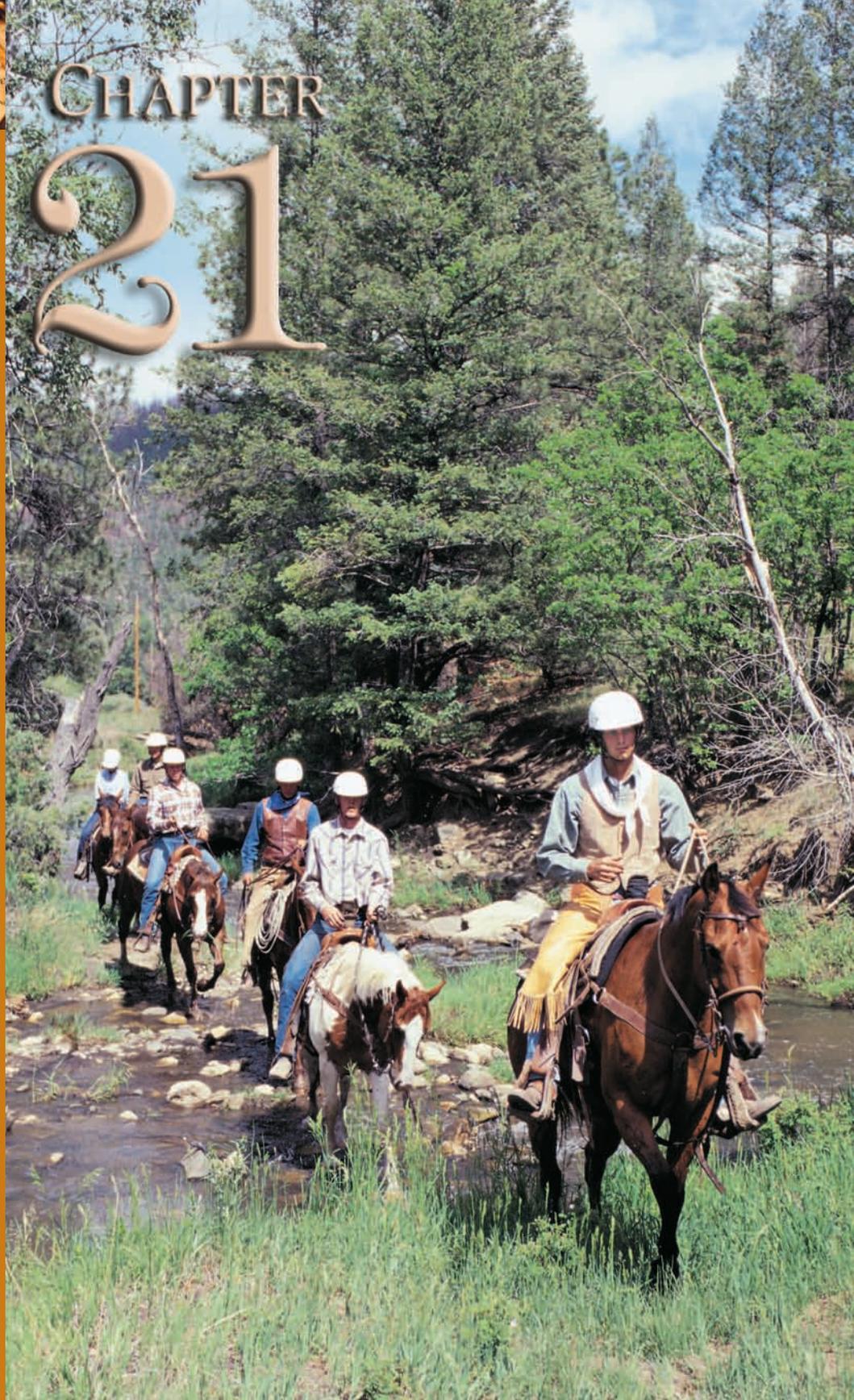




# CHAPTER 21





## Riding and Packing

*"The surest thing there is is we are riders,  
And though none too successful at it, guiders,  
Through everything presented, land and tide  
And now the very air, of what we ride."*

—Robert Frost (1874—1963), American poet



Explorers, mountain travelers, American Indians, miners, cowboys, soldiers, and settlers all have used horses and pack animals, and for good reason. The animals increase by many miles the distances that travelers can cover, and allow them to haul heavy loads over rough terrain. Today, you can swing into the saddle, touch your heels to a horse's sides, and know the pleasure of riding. You can feel the confidence that comes with knowing how to groom a horse, saddle it, and care for it in the stable and on the trail. You can learn to manage mules and burros, too, getting to know their habits as they carry your provisions and gear on extended treks.

Much of the American outdoors can be enjoyed on horseback and with pack animals. A successful trip requires sound planning, dependable livestock, and a commitment to using the principles of Leave No Trace. Veteran horse handlers can give you guidance as you learn the ways of saddle and pack stock, and to get you equipped.

Members of a Philmont Cavalcade ride horseback over some of Philmont's most scenic trails. Designed for chartered troops or Venturing crews, Cavalcade participants acquire riding and packing skills long in use in the American West. The final day of the eight-day Cavalcade is spent in competition at an equestrian gymkhana.





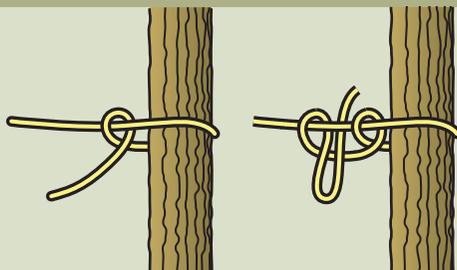
## Horses

For much of human history, horses provided the fastest means by which anyone could travel. Horses were introduced to North America by Spanish explorers, rapidly becoming an indispensable means of transportation for many American Indians, explorers, settlers, and wilderness wanderers. The traditions and techniques of those riders have been passed down through the centuries, forming the basis of the ways in which humans and horses still relate to each other.

A calm, reassuring voice can be one of your best tools for dealing with horses and pack animals. So can an understanding of the ways in which horses perceive the world. Each horse has its own set of preferences and habits. Perhaps it is shy about gates, doesn't want to be approached from a certain direction, or likes to have its nose rubbed. Moving objects might alarm a horse until it is able to identify them, usually with its keen senses of hearing and smell. When horses feel threatened, their first instincts are to run or to fight. On the other hand, horses will respond well to your confidence, kindness, and quiet authority and, over time, likely will come to trust you and be willing to work easily with you.

### *Quick-Release Hitch*

Use a quick-release hitch when tying the lead rope of a saddle horse or pack animal. The hitch will hold even if the animal pulls against it, but unties easily when you tug the end of the rope.





## Bridling and Saddling

Getting a horse ready for the trail will become second nature after you've done it several times, especially if you've mastered that skill with the help of experienced wranglers. Begin by catching your mount, slipping the halter over its nose, and leading it to a hitch rail near the tack room or saddle shed. Tie the lead rope to the rail with a quick-release hitch, then use a curry comb and brush to groom the horse's back, sides, and belly. Remove any dirt, sweat, and matted hair by combing in the direction that the hair naturally lies. Lift and inspect the hooves, cleaning them if necessary with a hoof pick, and check for loose shoes.

### Saddle

The Western stock saddle is the most versatile saddle for trail riding. Rugged enough to take a hard pounding, the saddle has a shape that helps a rider stay seated on steep climbs and descents. Sturdy blankets or pads placed beneath the saddle help to cushion and protect the horse's back.

### TACK

The gear used for preparing a horse to ride is called **tack** and includes a saddle, bridle, and halter.



Western saddle

**Halter**

A halter with a lead rope is used to control a horse—to lead it around or to tether it for brief periods, such as for grooming, bridling and saddling, or hoof care. For trail trips, leave the halter on your horse before bridling; then, you can snap the lead rope onto it and use that to tie your mount to hitching posts. (A horse should not be tied with the reins; if the animal spooks and jerks its head, it can break them.)

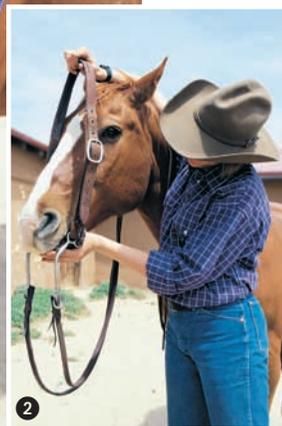
**Bridle**

A bridle consists of a headstall, bit, and reins, and is used to control and guide a horse from its back. Bits come in various shapes and sizes to match the age, experience level, preference, and training of different animals.

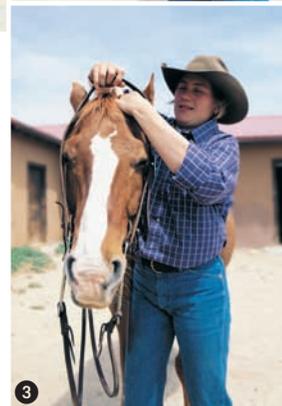




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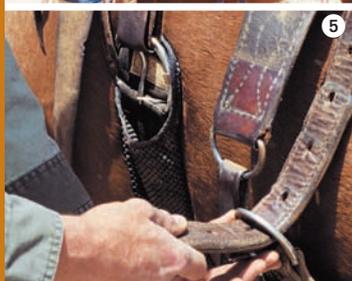
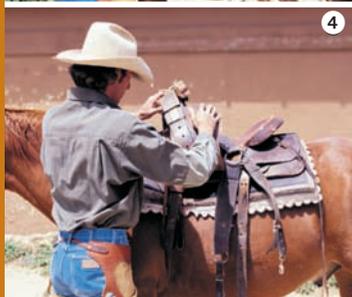
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### ***Bridling a Horse***

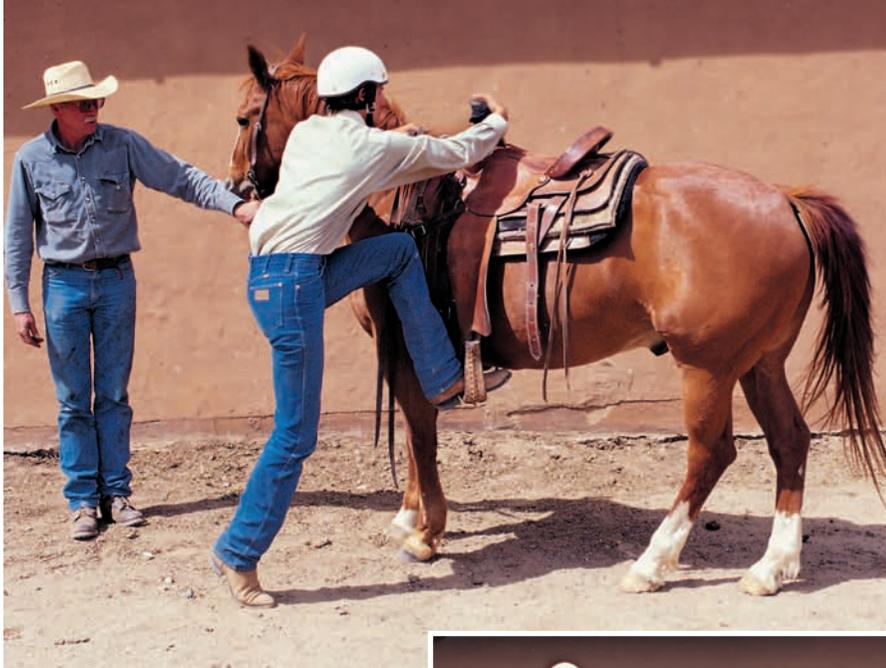
- 1 Working from the left side of the horse, put the reins around the horse's neck. Hold the top of the bridle in your right hand and the bit in your left.
- 2 Without bumping the teeth, ease the bit into the horse's mouth and pull the headstall over its head. Be gentle with the horse's ears.
- 3 Pull out the forelock, straighten the brow band, and buckle the throatlatch.



### **Saddling a Horse**

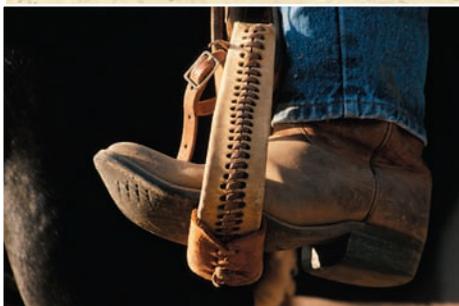
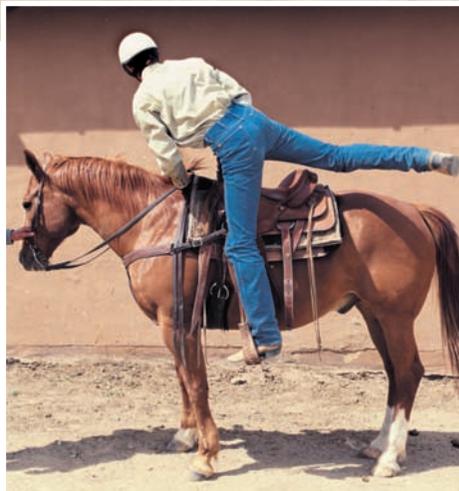
- 1 Use a curry comb and brush to remove dirt, sweat, and matted hair from the horse's back, sides, and belly.
- 2 Position the saddle blankets or pads well forward on the horse's back. The hair beneath must lie flat.
- 3 Lift the saddle onto the blankets or pads and shake it into position. Straighten the cinches on the far (right) side of the horse.
- 4 On the near (left) side, place the stirrup over the saddle seat and reach under the horse for the front cinch ring. (Note: Another option is to hook the stirrup over the saddle horn to prevent it from slipping.) Thread the latigo twice through the cinch ring and rigging ring, then pull it snug and secure it.
- 5 Buckle the rear cinch just tightly enough to be snug against the horse's belly.
- 6 Buckle the breast collar onto a near-side rigging ring, snap the lower strap into the center ring of the cinch (6a), then buckle the other end of the breast collar onto a far-side rigging ring.





### Mounting a Horse

First, check the front cinch and retighten it if necessary. Then, standing on the horse's left side, grasp the reins around the animal's neck in front of the saddle horn, holding them short enough in your left hand so that you can control the horse if it should move while you are mounting. With the same hand, grab some of the horse's mane. Use your free hand to position the left stirrup and guide your left foot into it, then grasp the saddle horn and step up in the stirrup. Swing your right leg over the horse and ease yourself into the saddle. The balls of your feet should rest in the stirrups with your heels slightly lower. You might need to dismount and adjust the length of the stirrups if they are too long or too short.





### ***RIDING HELMET***

**Riding helmets are growing in popularity, and are strongly recommended to help protect horseback riders from head injury. A helmet must be correctly sized, adjusted, and always worn with the chin strap secured.**

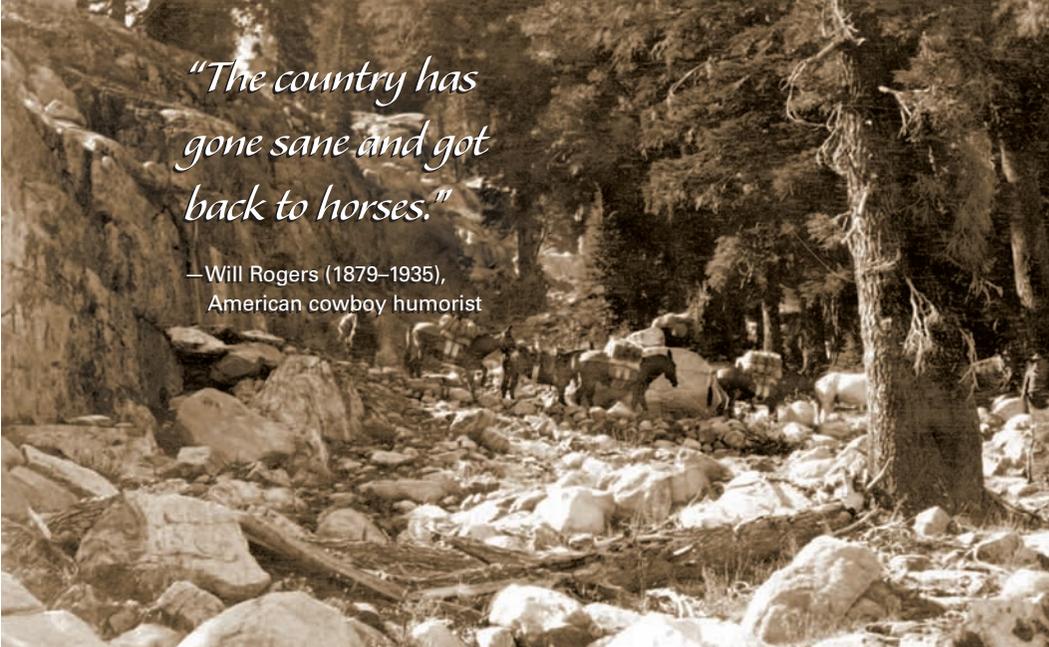
### **Riding**

Holding the reins with one between your thumb and index finger and the second between the index and middle fingers of the same hand, squeeze the horse with your legs or tap with your heels, and the animal should move out. Many horses are trained to *neck-rein*, responding to the pressure of reins against their necks. To turn left, move the reins to the left and touch the horse's neck with the right rein. For a right turn, move the reins the other way. To stop, pull back lightly on the reins and then release the pressure. The bit serves only to cue the animal; too much force on the reins can cause pain and perhaps injury.

Match the speed at which you ride with the terrain you are covering. Allow your horse to walk when the grade is steep or rocky, and whenever you are leading pack animals. To ride up a steep grade, stay seated in the saddle but shift your weight forward so that the horse bears more of your weight with its shoulders and front legs. When riding downhill, lean back in the saddle. You can let the horse lope across level ground where the footing is sure. On a long day's ride, get off your horse and walk now and then to give the animal a breather.

*"The country has  
gone sane and got  
back to horses."*

—Will Rogers (1879–1935),  
American cowboy humorist



## Pack Animals

No history of the American West is complete without the image of prospectors making their way through the mountains, their pack animals loaded with shovels, hardtack, beans, and maybe even a poke of gold. Mules, burros, and pack horses provided the power to move settlers across the continent, pull the plows of farmers, and transport the supplies of soldiers and trappers as well as prospectors.

You'll probably get your first taste of working with pack animals under the watchful eyes of veteran packers. They might begin by explaining that a burro is a species that can reproduce its own kind, while a mule is a sterile cross between a male burro and a female horse.

## Equipment

Pack animals need saddles if they are to carry heavy loads. The most common pack saddle is the *sawbuck*, named for its resemblance in appearance to the wooden stand used to hold logs for sawing. Each saddle is shaped to fit a particular size of animal. The saddle will be rigged with a double cinch to keep it and its load on the animal, and a breast strap and back breeching to prevent the saddle from sliding backward or forward.

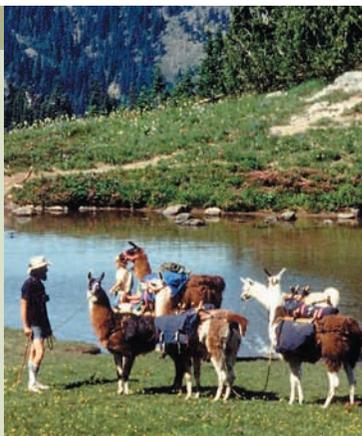


*Sawbuck saddle with panniers*

A pack animal is groomed and saddled in much the same way as a saddle horse, the sawbuck resting on two or three saddle pads and the cinch pulled tight. The breast strap and breeching should be snug, but not so tight that they hamper the animal's movement. A pack animal doesn't wear a bridle; a hiker or horseback rider can control it with a halter and a lead rope.

### ***Llama Packing***

Woolly haired natives of South America, llamas are being used with increasing frequency as pack animals on North American trails. They are easy to handle and train, and they travel at a pace comfortable for most hikers. Even though their foot pads cause less environmental impact than do the hooves of horses and mules, llamas must be managed according to the same principles of Leave No Trace.



### **Packing Up**

Pack horses and mules can carry up to 180 pounds each, a llama can carry 90 pounds, and a burro can haul about 60 pounds. Even though pack animals might be able to bear much more weight than you can, keep their loads light. There's no reason for them to haul equipment you don't really need. A smaller load makes it safer for the animals to travel rugged trails, and will ease your challenge of following the principles of Leave No Trace.

Provisions and gear are commonly stowed in *panniers*—wooden or plastic boxes, or large leather or canvas bags designed to hang by loops from a sawbuck. Use a scale hung from a tree branch or fence rail to check pannier weight. Each pannier in a pair should weigh the same, since an unbalanced load can cause the sawbuck to slip or rub sores into an animal's back. Pack provisions and gear in such a way that nothing will rattle. Strange noises coming from a pannier can spook even the steadiest trail animal.

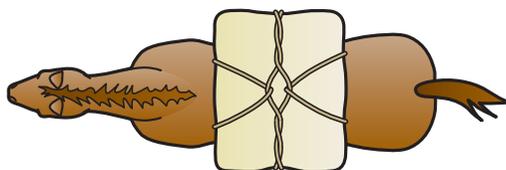
### ***Clothing***

The traditional clothing of the American cowboy evolved over many years to serve the needs of horseback riders. A long-sleeved shirt and long denim pants will guard you against the sun and dust. The wide brim of a cowboy hat will shade your face and keep rain from running down your collar. A bandanna around your neck can be pulled over your mouth and nose when the trail becomes dusty. The pointed toes and slick soles of traditional Western boots evolved to slide easily into and out of saddle stirrups. Avoid riding while wearing boots with big soles that could get caught in the stirrups.

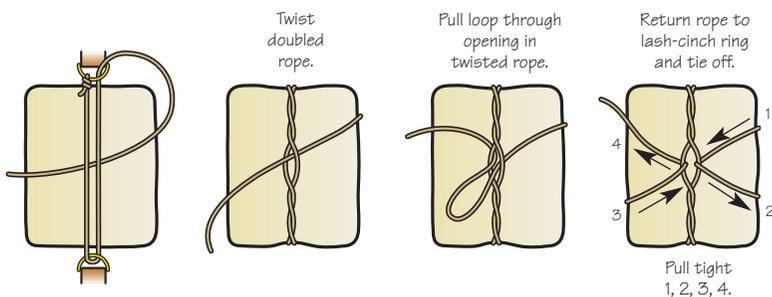


### Loading Panniers on a Pack Animal

- 1 Set a balanced pair of panniers on a sawbuck so that they hang evenly. Place tightly rolled tents, sleeping bags in stuff sacks, and other soft baggage on top of the saddle.
- 2 Position a tarp over the load and tuck the ends under the panniers.
- 3 Toss a lash cinch over the load and pull the end under the animal's belly. Keeping the rope taut, secure the load with a diamond hitch.



*Diamond hitch*



### **Mantie Loads**

Another traditional means of packing grub and gear is to form *mantie loads*. Mantie loads offer greater flexibility than panniers for securing odd-sized equipment, and are ideal for food supplies packed inside square plastic buckets with snap-on lids. Items are placed on a tarp, then folded into a tight bundle and tied with a mantie rope.

### **On the Trail With Pack Animals**

If you will be riding, you might find it most convenient to mount your horse and then have a partner hand you the lead rope of your pack animal. Hold the rope in your hand as you travel, or give it one loose wrap around the saddle horn, but *never* tie it to any part of the saddle or wrap it around your hand in such a way that it will not easily come loose.

When leading several pack animals, tie the lead rope of one animal to the pack saddle of the animal in front of it. Keep each lead rope short enough so that the animals cannot step over it, but not so short that they impede one another's motion. Ideally, a second rider following the pack string stays alert for signs of shifting loads, loose saddles, or fatigue or lameness in the animals. Correct problems as soon as you notice them so that they don't become serious.





## Leave No Trace Riding and Packing

Lightweight gear and well-planned menus will allow you to minimize the number of animals required to support a trek. Choose animals that are fit, calm, and accustomed to rugged travel. Take care to prevent hoof damage to stream banks, wetlands, tundra, and other sensitive areas. Well in advance of a journey, contact the management agencies of the area you wish to visit and learn about any permits you will need and restrictions affecting the use of livestock. Land managers also can provide information about trailhead access, designated sites for horse camps, and trail conditions. Check for updates a few days before departure; there could be trail closures or other developing situations that would make it necessary for you to alter your plans.

### Selecting Campsites

Use sites designated for horse groups whenever possible. Most will have hitch rails or corrals to accommodate livestock. Allow animals to graze only if there is enough feed for them *and* for native wildlife—livestock overgrazing an area could be removing food needed by deer, elk, and other wild animals during winter months. Avoid soft meadows and fragile shorelines that could be torn up by hooves. Water the stock by leading them to stream banks that can withstand hard use.

**Horses, mules, and burros, generating pressure of up to 1,500 pounds per square foot with each hoof, have great potential for causing wear and tear on the land. Horseshoes intensify the shearing force of hooves on soils and vegetation. Pack animals and riding stock that graze can compete with wildlife for available feed. Responsible riders and packers can lessen these concerns by following Leave No Trace principles as they plan and take part in trips with livestock.**



### Confining Stock in Camp

Take care of your animals as soon as you reach your destination. They've worked hard for you and have earned their rest. Get the weight off your pack animals before you unsaddle your riding horse. Loosen the sawbucks, then fold the cinches, breast straps, and breechings over the top. Place the saddles on a log or pole, lay the pads on top (wet side up), and cover everything with tarps. Then do the same for the riding horses.

After the animals have been cooled, brushed, fed, watered, and checked for saddle sores and foot damage, you may be able to set them out to graze. Allow them freedom to wander, and thus reduce their impact on the land, by using as little restraint as possible. *Hobbles*—leather or nylon straps buckled onto the lower front legs of animals—permit livestock a degree of freedom without straying too far. If livestock must be tied to stakes, picket pins, or high lines, keep an eye on your animals and move them before signs of trampling become evident.

Taking along supplemental feed for livestock can help prevent overgrazing around camp. In areas where grazing is not permitted, you will need to bring enough feed and hay for the entire trip. Land management regulations might require the use of certified feed and hay that prevents the spread of noxious plants.



### Breaking Camp

Scatter manure to aid in its decomposition, to discourage concentrations of flies, and as a courtesy to other travelers. Fill areas dug up by animal hooves. Remove excess hay or other feed, and pack it with you. When all is in order, swing back into the saddle, tap your horse with your heels, and set off to see where the trail will take you next.



*"When you are on a great horse, you have the best seat you will ever have."*

—Sir Winston Churchill (1874—1965),  
British statesman, prime minister,  
and author