



## BCHC Packing Policy

The purpose of BCHC's packing policy is to establish the best practices that ensure a safe and successful packing event.

- These best practices encompass basic stock training.
- The purpose and jobs of the ground crew.
- The purpose and job of the outrider and the lead packer responsibilities.

At the core of all our packing activities are integrity, excellence, other-centered and team oriented.

- Integrity:** we expect honesty, accountability and respect for our fellow volunteers, and agency partners.
- Excellence:** we strive for excellence by setting and achieving high goals.
- Other Centered:** we are committed to assisting our colleagues and helping them be the best.
- Team Oriented:** more gets accomplished through a **healthy partnership**

### BASIC STOCK TRAINING:

- Respecting your space:** The more your stock respect the "where you are" space the safer you will be. Teach them this first and foremost.
- Ground manners:** A pack string has to have good ground manners or else the loading/unloading becomes quite hazardous. Load and unload pack stock while they are NOT in a string. Once loaded then string them. When you get to where you are going unstring them then unload them. Practice this at home in a safe environment.
- Ropes:** desensitizing stock to the use of all types of ropes. They have to be used to ropes being tossed and laying all around them.
- Day Rides:** are the key to you becoming familiar with your stock and them figuring out their respective jobs. Use the rides as much as possible prior to ever going in the back country.
- Stock:** needs to be able to stand quietly while under load and while being loaded. This training is critical. Stock on the trail will get catch their breath breaks while climbing which is when they will need to stand the best. On work parties it will be ride a little, tie-up and work some and then ride some more. This routine of standing quietly while still having all their pack gear on them has to be acceptable to the stock.
- Physical Conditioning:** takes time, time that is a worthwhile investment on your part. Practice conditioning with a light load on the pack stock. The least conditioned animal

is the one that sets the pace of the string. Hot, humid weather coupled with climbing is very hard on stock. Slow down and watch your string carefully.

- G. **Transporting, Loading, and Unloading:** removing stock from trailers should be a calm, controlled event, if not then practice at home until your stock can load/unload well. Once stock are out of their trailer tie the lead rope at least 5 feet above the ground to preclude entanglement. Only packers are authorized to lead and tie stock.
- H. **Basic riding etiquette:** The lead packer will hold a tailgate session during which s/he will discuss the order of departure of the pack stock, any trail issues, proper procedures for approaching stock on the trail and s/he will point out any issues on the trail with the best way to navigate them. The purpose of the tail gate session is to reinforce safe practices when around pack stock, especially for the ground crew if any. The pace and distance of the ride will be discussed. Ride in a calm manner, no shouting or galloping around pack stock, in addition, keep a safe distance between riding animals and the pack string. Increase separation distances when climbing or encountering trail obstacles.
- I. **Feeding & Watering:** Stock should not be allowed to graze as you traverse the trail. The one exception to this is in the dry summer months it is best to allow all stock to water at each location where possible, especially at stream crossings. Allow each string the time to water then move ahead until the next rider can water their stock but do not leave the area until all riders have watered their stock.

## GROUND CREW

The Safety Guide Lines below cover most aspects of stock-human interactions but does not cover everything.

- A. **Understanding Equines** (horses, mules and donkeys): It has been said that horses may become afraid of any object that moves, makes a noise, or lives outside their stall or pasture. Training helps, but all ground crew personnel should be aware of the risks and consequences of a spooking horse or mule. Learn to talk in a low, soft voice to reassure the stock. Anything raised above shoulder level will usually get the attention of a horse or mule. Be aware and watch stock for signs of excitement: head raised, vocalization, white around the eyes, ears locked forward, trembling, etc. Minimize sudden movements. Equines are herd animals and will usually be more relaxed if they are close together or at least within sight of each other. The “tie within sight of each other” rule helps when there are skirmishes between animals as well.
- B. **Terminology:** lead rope, string, panniers (sometimes pronounced pan-yards), pack-saddle, pack-pad, break-aways, shoes, lash ropes, latigos, and easy-boots. Be familiar with the items above or ask the packer before starting.
- C. **Do not:** walk between a string of horses or mules.
- D. **Unless instructed by a packer:** don’t load or unload pack animals while the animals are tied together. Tie them individually, but within sight of each other before proceeding.
- E. **When approaching:** pack animals remember to “Stop, Talk and Move on down”. That is, stop and wait for the animals to acknowledge your presence; continue to talk in a low reassuring manner; move to the downhill side of the animals. This is less threatening to

them. If the animals show signs of stress, be prepared to retreat and approach again (multiple times if needed). This “approach and retreat method” can be useful in the event that an animal breaks loose and needs to be re-caught.

In the rare event that ground crew needs to hold a pack string, or hand a lead rope to a packer, check with the packer before proceeding. Hold the rope of the lead animal, and strive to keep the animals in order in which they are tied. If the animals start to get stirred up, attempt to circle the string, and talk in low reassuring voice.

### **OUT-RIDER:**

Equipment and skills needed to be a safe out-rider.

- A. **Halter and long lead rope:** to allow for fast tie up (lead rope needs to be at least 10’ long). The halter needs to be under your riding animal’s bridle or it will take too long to tie up in an emergency situation. Need to know how to tie their horse with a quick release knot. This is far more important than most people realize!
- B. **Carry a knife:** that is sharp and can be accessed quickly, it may be needed to cut ropes in an emergency situation. Always cut with blade turned away from flesh! Do not panic and start cutting ropes unless there is no other alternative. Almost all of the time these situations can be worked out without cutting ropes and equipment.
- C. **Riding Animal:** should be trained for being mounted and dismounted from left or right side. There may be times when the only safe place to get off and on is from the right (off) side of the animals, such as narrow trails with drop off etc. They should also be trained to stand still when tied, while mounting and on the trail. It is far too dangerous to try to get on or off of an animal that is dancing around on a narrow trail and or with a pack string involved.
- D. **Condition:** Stock should be in sufficient condition to be on the trail. We have seen many times when animals that have been ridden on a regular basis in the valley simply cannot make it up the trails in the mountains! Conditioning is critical! It won’t be safe for you if your animal is stumbling because they cannot handle the terrain in the mountains!
- E. **Out-rider:** should be willing to assist the packer with lifting and tying loads on the pack animals when loading and unloading. Must be willing to pay attention to the pack animals ahead of them. Know what to look for such as a load that is shifting, a lead rope that is loose, a lash rope that isn’t riding right etc. This is your job when you are an out rider. You can see things from the back that the packer cannot see. Know how to adjust a slipping pack. Sometimes it is as simple as adding a couple of rocks to the light side of a load to make it ride right and tightening the cinch. Needs to be able to evaluate whether a pack can just be shifted back into position or if it is it so loose that it needs to be totally repacked. Communicate with the packer! Needs at least an overview knowledge of: Box Hitch, Single Diamond Hitch and Barrel Hitch for mantle loads. Needs to know how to work around mules and horses to assist in loading and unloading packs. ALWAYS let the animals know you are there. They can’t see you if you are coming from behind them and they have a pack load on. Talk to them! This is for your safety! Out-rider needs to know how to tie a lead rope to the breakaways that are used

between pack animals and how much slack to leave between them. The out-rider may be in the best place to help with this.

- F. **Breast Collar:** It is also recommended that your saddle have at least a breast collar on it to keep the saddle where it belongs on the long uphill climbs. A britching or crupper can be very helpful in keeping the saddle where it belongs on the downhill runs. If you are going to use these, your riding animal must be accustomed to them!

Remember, you should be “ready to ride” when the pack string is ready to leave. You should saddle your riding animal and do whatever else you need to do in order to be ready (get your water, lunch, rain slicker, etc. on your animal) and then help the packer. You only have one animal to saddle and get ready; the packer who you are there to help may have five or six animals to get ready.

### **PACKER:**

The duties of the packer are all that is expected of an out-rider plus the following.

- A. **Lead Designated Packer:** shall ensure that personnel assigned to pack and ride stock are competent in these tasks. It is strongly recommended that there be at least two packers on each trip.
- B. **Riding Animal:** needs to be accustomed to leading other animals. Also the riding animal needs to be able to deal with the rope getting under their tail or around their back legs without getting upset. Stock that are going to be in a string together will be a lot easier to handle if they have been worked in a string together before you get to the trail head. Start out in a relatively safe environment, such as the pasture that you keep them in and then graduate with them to day rides etc. For safety sake, breakaways are strongly suggested. Carry extra breakaways on your riding saddle or in your saddlebags.
- C. **Hitches and Ties:** Lead packer needs to know a variety of ways to secure a load. Here is the recommended list.
  1. Box Hitch
  2. Basket Hitch, Crows Foot and the Christensen Hitch, these are all a variation of each other and can be used for different situations, depending on the cargo being loaded.
  3. Double Diamond Hitch
  4. Barrel Hitch
- D. **Develop Good Habits:** to avoid a wreck. These habits should include, but are not limited to:
  1. Keeping a close watch on how the loads are sitting on your animals. You will spend a lot of time looking back at your pack animals.
  2. When crossing creeks or downed logs etc., always watch to make sure that the last animal in your string gets through without being jerked along.
  3. Leads between animals should be kept short enough that they do not step over them
  4. Packer needs to be aware of the condition of all of their tack, keep it in good condition and avoid the accidents that happen from broken straps etc.
  5. Needs to be aware of the proper fit of all the tack being used.

6. Needs to be able to balance the loads correctly. Realize how critical it is that each side weighs the same. Need to include everything when figuring the weight of the load, i.e. panniers, saddle and blanket, ropes, etc. in addition to the cargo.
7. Be able to lead multiple pack animals through creek crossings, over bridges, over downed logs, and around switchbacks (this is the best time for the packer to look over the loads!).
8. Proper use of breakaways.
9. Generally yield to loaded strings or larger strings when encountered on the trail.
10. Hikers should yield to strings on the downhill side of the trail.
11. The packer should experiment at home to determine the correct order of the pack string. If there are combinations that work well or NOT, this should be part of the trail gate briefing. If new stock are meeting at the trail head for the first time, it might be best to circle the group to check for compatibility issues.
12. Do not bring a green riding/pack animal to a work party packing event and expect the event to be your training grounds.

E. **Problems on the Trail:** Packer needs to be able to handle the following events:

1. Lead rope caught around front feet of packhorse that you are leading. Need to know how to correct the situation with as little problem as possible.
2. Pack animal that you were leading is loose. What to do and what not to do. Know when to let go if you need to!
3. Able to take off at a lope with the pack animals (BEES)!
4. On the trail---able to tie up riding animal and then adjust, etc., the pack on the pack animal. Then be able to remount with the pack animals in tow and not get tangled up in the lead rope from the pack animal.
5. When hauling dirt and or gravel it is best to only use very gentle animals with three individuals in attendance (one to hold the animal and two to load). Load and unload in an open area that will allow an easy exit for the loaders if the animal spooks.

F. **High Line:** Packer needs to know how to set up a high line for an overnight stay:

1. There are a number of different ways that work very well.
2. When setting up a picket line or a high line, pick a place for your high line that will be the least impacted by your stock. In an already impacted campsite (heavily used) the impact should be concentrated in areas that have been used on a regular basis.
3. The high line should be a least 100 feet from any water source or trail and camp, 200 feet is better.
4. Tree saver must be used so there is no damage to trees.
5. Use trees that are no less than 8" in diameter to tie to.
6. Distance from tree to first animal should be 8 feet to keep the animals from damaging the root system and the bark of the trees.
7. The difference between a hitch line and a high line are, the Hitch Line is set up at chest level with the stock and they are generally tied to both sides of it. The high line is set up well above their heads (at least 7 feet up) and they are tied under it (less likely to get in trouble).

G. **Grazing:** When turning out your stock for grazing, several things that can work to your advantage are:

1. Horses and mules are herd animals, if you keep the lead animals or their buddies in the area, they will stay with them. This can be done by rotating which animals you keep on the high line, and turning the others out to graze and/or water freely. (It's always a good idea to keep at least 1 riding animal tied.)
2. The grain and bell method works. If stock is accustomed to getting a little grain in the morning and in the evening, they will "usually" be there looking for it. If you are going use a grazing bell on any of your animals, they need to be accustomed to it. The backcountry is not the place to strap a bell around your horse's neck and see what happens, do that at home. Let them wear it for a day or two, the neighbors will love you for it. Generally an hour or two in the morning and in the evening is plenty of grazing time if the feed is decent. "If their heads are up, it is time to tie them up."
3. Drift fences are wonderful if they are in good shape and the gates are kept closed.
4. Portable electric fencing is another option. It needs to be moved before the area of confinement is beaten down. Remember--Leave No Trace.
5. Grazing Hobbles, Sidelines, Picket lines and pins are other possibilities for keeping stock in the backcountry.

The least restraining method will be the best for your animals and the easiest on the land!

Just a few suggestions, these are in no particular order.

- Keep vaccinations and worming current on your animals.
- **Pack a first aid kit for you and for your stock and know how to use it.**
  - *Keep it-available without having to dig through a pack load to get to it.*
  - *The first aid kit should be a Type IV, Class B:* Intended for portable use in outdoor applications where the potential for damage due to environmental factors and rough handling is significant. The class B is a broader range and quantity of supplies to deal with injuries in more complex or high-risk environments. See BCHC's sawyer first aid kit for content and quantities.
- Shoeing tools and nails, a few extra shoes and/or Easyboots.
- Axe-in a scabbard, for clearing trees out of the trail and knocking the stubs off of the bigger downfall before crossing them. Tie it on top of the load so that it is handy when needed.
- Rake for scattering manure and for repairing holes dug by stock; it also works well for clearing the area around the campfire.
- Phosphate free soaps—they are less harmful to the environment. Never use any kind of soap in a stream or lake, even the biodegradable soap is harmful to fish and wildlife.
- Good quality bug repellent for you and for your stock.
- Electrolytes for you and your stock. It is easy to become dehydrated and not realize it until you don't feel good. This can be prevented from happening to us by drinking lots of fluids. You can also help prevent this from happening to your stock by feeding them electrolytes.
- Pack a map with you and let someone know your trip plans, someone you can count on to notify the right people if you don't show up at home when you should.

- Always pack rain gear with you! Preferably on your saddle. Hypothermia is nothing to joke about and when one person in a group is in trouble, it affects everyone.
- When figuring out how much weight your riding animal is carrying, be sure to include the saddle weight, the saddlebags and anything else you strap on---it may surprise you.
- Always anticipate problems and be ready to deal with them!
- Normally all packers and pack support are welcomed by BCHC packers but when working with the USFS on a work party that has a volunteer agreement only employees of the Forest Service or volunteers authorized under a signed Volunteer Agreement by the District Ranger/Forest Supervisor may ride and/or pack stock.

## **The Seven Leave No Trace Principles**

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impact
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors