



Suggestions for Low Impact Horse Camping

It's up to you! There is only so much "back country" and a growing population continues to put increasing pressure on these limited areas. It is in the interest of all those who enjoy the backcountry to impact it as little as possible. The alternative is escalating regulation and restricted use.

Camp

A low impact camp does not happen without planning ahead. Planning can be an enjoyable part of the trip. Take only what is required. The less you take, the fewer stock will be required. Make a neat camp and keep things together so nothing will be left behind. Many National Forests require stock groups to carry an ax, shovel and bucket. A hand saw is handy.

Select your campsite at least two hundred feet from trails or water. Pitch your camp in an area where it will have the least visual impact. No one wants to go to the wilderness for solitude and camp within sight or sound of other people.

Conserve the site. Others will almost certainly use it. Plan ahead. Do not cut trees for picket pins, tent stakes or ridge poles. Restrain your stock in an appropriate area. Don't set your corral in a place which someone else might choose for their camp's kitchen or bedroom. Use existing camp sites if possible.

Toilet sites must also be at least two hundred feet from any water. It is better to dig a "cat hole" than a deep latrine. Make the hole no deeper than eight inches as this is where the soil breaks down waste the quickest. Be sure the toilet paper is completely buried. No one likes to come across these "tissue flowers".

Consider cooking over propane or white gas stoves in order to save firewood. Gather firewood away from the campsite. Be sure the campfire is built with an eye towards safety and visual impact. Allowing a hot fire to burn out leaves less charred wood than throwing a bucket of water on a burning fire. Be certain your fire is out when you are finished with it. Fire safety must be ingrained in every backcountry user.

Don't use nails or wire on trees and do not leave pole corrals standing. Don't build permanent structures or caches.

No one should be able to find your campsite after you leave. Do not bury garbage. What cannot be burned must be packed out. If you packed it in – pack it out. Make an effort to preserve the backcountry by bringing any litter out with you.

Feeding stock

Horses and mules must eat and they do trample the grass. How much of an impact this makes depends upon the horseman. Train your horses to be hobbled and staked out. Move stakes frequently.

Many areas require any hay or straw brought in must be certified to be weed-free. This may be difficult and a good alternative is pelletized feed. Be sure to accustom stock to pellets before the trip.

Restraining stock

Many areas lend themselves to pole corrals. Protect the bark of trees to which you lash poles. Take the corral down before you leave.

Many horsemen are finding their stock least troublesome when held inside an electric fence. There are many portable units available. The stock must be introduced to the electric fence before the trip.

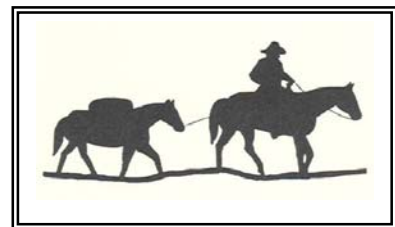
Nothing causes horsemen such bad marks as tying stock to trees. Many animals will chew the bark off the tree. Inevitably damage occurs to the root system. Use a high picket line and move it before any permanent damage occurs.

Before you leave a place, spread the manure. While moist, it is easy to break up and spread. Once dried, it is difficult to break up and becomes unsightly to many backcountry users in addition to attracting flies.

Be aware of the damage your horses may do and try to eliminate it. Keep improving your minimum impact camping techniques. While it is tough for the horse camper to leave no trace, it can be done.

Summary

A pack trip through beautiful backcountry is a great experience. We must take care of the backcountry so future generations will be as fortunate as we to ride good horses through the same unspoiled country.



Bridgerland Back Country Horsemen
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