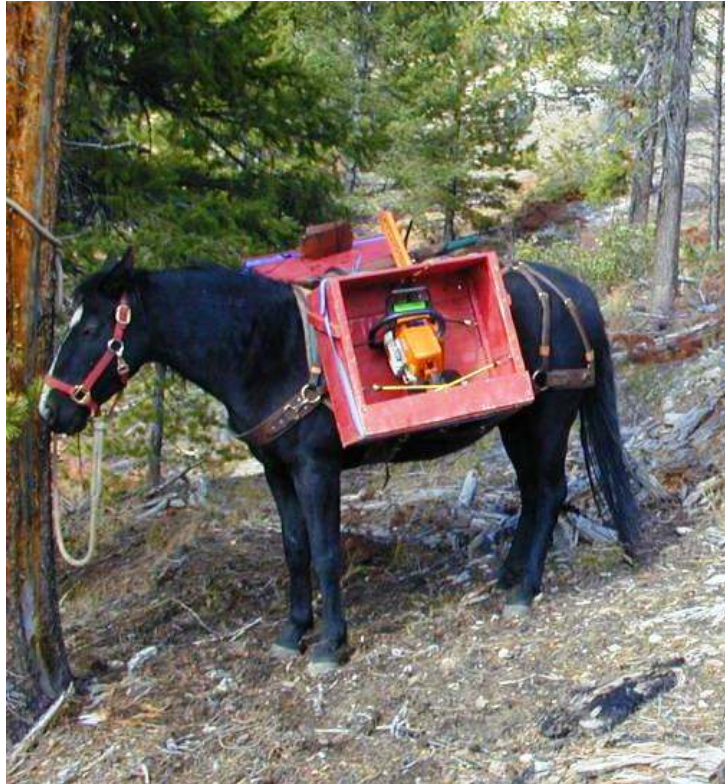


Packing Tools – Rob Adams

Over the 12 years that I have been a member of Squaw Butte Backcountry Horsemen of Idaho, I have seen and tried a number of ways to carry the array of tools needed to perform the various type of trail work our chapter does. A typical load out will include two chain saws, a saw maintenance and safety pack, fuel, Pulaski, shovel, wedges, single blade axe, double blade axe and trimmers. Depending on the trail we also pack a modified limb trimmer. If we are working in wilderness, the chain saws get left home and cross cuts replace them.

Trail work required access to the correct tool when you need it, and should require minimum un-packing and packing each time it is used. When I first started with the chapter we were using some specially built plywood boxes that the tools fit into. There were special slots for the saws, and holes for the axes, shovels, and Pulaski. The other items including safety pack were either packed on a lead horse, or another pack animal. This system worked pretty well, but lacked flexibility. The tools in the boxes were often pretty noisy as that rattled around.



About five year ago, I worked out a system for packing tools that is much more flexible, and allows all the items to be carried by the tool mule. One of my pack saddles is a modified decker with flat tops on the arches. On top of the arches, I have bolted a Stihl plastic saw case. I used 3/8 inch machine screws with large washers to prevent the bolts from pulling through the bottom of the case, and nylon lock nuts

to secure it to straps running under the arches. I have reinforced the hinges of the case with nylon straps and install two nylon straps that secure the case closed. After a couple of years of hard use the plastic hinge on the case will fail, but the hinge staples will keep the system working for years. This arrangement will hold up to a 5hp saw with a 26 inch bar. It only takes seconds to remove the saw from the case for use or to replace it and be underway again. My experience is that the saw rides very well in this position. I have a couple pieces of high density foam that I put inside the case to keep the saw from bouncing around.



I also hang two ironcloth Utah bags. Iron cloth pannier is much stronger and more durable than panniers made of canvas, leather, nylon and cordura and are almost indestrucable. Won't fray or tear when panniers constantly rub trees and rocks on narrow trails. The open top bags can carry almost anything and are easy to open by unbuckling one strap to get out what you need.

If you are unhappy with the system you're using to carry tools, consider using a system like ours.