Stock Packing Handout

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

February, 2008

Pack Trains

Transporting supplies to Idaho's remote towns is a challenge. Fierce weather and tall mountains can sometimes make it difficult to travel across our vast state. But if you think it's difficult now, imagine how it was in the late 1800's. Back then, many people lived in remote mining camps far away from big cities. Roads to these mines were very poor, some not much better than a dirt trail, and travel could be a long and dangerous process.

What would you have done if you had to haul enough supplies into an early mining camp to take care of a thousand hungry prospectors during the gold rush? Farms and ranches weren't located all over the state like they are today. Much of the food had to be imported from big cities like Boise or Lewiston. Think too about all of the heavy equipment you would need at a large mine. When most of us think of gold mining, we think of tools like shovels and pick axes and gold pans. But most large mines had much bigger pieces of equipment. For example, a stamp mill was a

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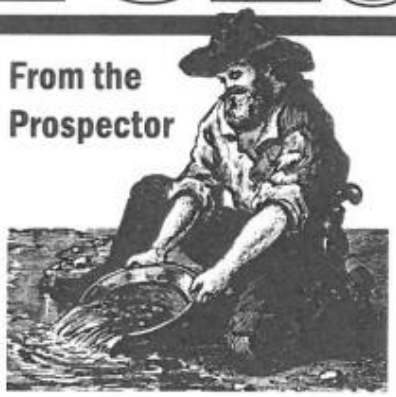
From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors!

This week it's my mule's birthday. I was having trouble deciding what to give him as a present. He doesn't wear clothes, so those are out. He has too many legs for a skateboard or bicycle. I can't even get him an iPod because the earphones keep slipping off of his enormous ears. Then it hit me. What if I picked my mule's favorite subject for this month's issue? He's always telling me that mules are what made Idaho a great state. Without those critters hauling heavy loads to and from the mines, the gold rush would have never have happened.

So this month's issue is dedicated to the pack trains of Idaho. Happy Birthday, Mule!

Lucky Noah

Pack Trains Continued

large machine that was used to crush ore into smaller pieces and the entire contraption might weigh several tons. How would you transport a gigantic machine like that along a steep, windy path?

After gold was found near the Clearwater River in the 1860's, prospectors spread out across the mountains in search of new strikes. Some of the spots where they found ore were terribly hard to reach. Look at a recent map and find the town of Atlanta east of Idaho City or the Yankee Fork region between Stanley and Challis. Mines in remote locations such as these could be difficult to operate. In some places, miners could build wagon roads in order to haul machinery and supplies to the mining camps. But for many mines, road building might cost too much or be too difficult for the men in the area. The main form of transportation to these remote mines wasn't wagons. The only thing that could negotiate the treacherous trails was a pack train.

A pack train doesn't have an engine or travel on a track like the trains we're used to. Pack trains are actually long lines of horses or mules. These chains were often twenty to thirty animals long. The team was strung together with long ropes, each animal carrying a heavy, perfectly balanced load. Even after modern railroads came to Idaho in the later 1800's, most of the food and equipment needed for many of Idaho's mines was shipped by mule and packhorse. They could travel where no wheels could run.

Packing was a tough job. Each morning the packers had to get up long before daylight so that they could pack their animals in time to leave the camp. The load on the animals' back had to be perfectly balanced, so that the horse or mule could carry a large amount of weight without tipping over. Big pieces of equipment were broken down into smaller parts, so that the entire team could share the load. Crates and bags were then secured on individual animals with a web of ropes and knots.

The trains themselves were also careful assembled. Animals were roped together head to tail to keep the long train stayed together. To make sure the animals moved along at a reasonable pace, men were stationed in the front, middle, and, back of the train. Each man was usually in charge of about eight animals. Packers always had to be on the lookout for thieves, wild animals, or bad trail conditions that might cause an animal to tumble off the path.

Every evening the group had to find a camp with sufficient grass and water. The animals had to be unpacked to give them a chance to rest. And the men had to cook and get some sleep so they would be ready for an early start.

Although packing was hard work, it could pay very well. Transport companies with good reputations could make their owners very wealthy. During the mining era, the miners themselves rarely got rich. It was the people who supplied the miners with goods and services who made the most money.

Eventually either the mines closed up or roads were built where the pack trails used to travel. Although mining continues to be important to our state, trucks and trains do most of the hauling of supplies. Still there are a few mule packers left in Idaho. People visiting Idaho's backcountry sometimes use pack trains of mules, horses, and even llamas to carry their supplies into the wilderness. The gold rush is long gone, but in a small way, pack trains continue to help people in the wilds of Idaho.

Adapted from an article in Prospeccor #4, 1972 Idaho State Historical Society

Pack Saddle History

A pack saddle is any device designed to be secured on the back of a horse, mule, or other working animal so it can carry heavy loads such as luggage, firewood, small cannons, or other things too heavy to be carried by humans.

Description

Ideally the pack saddle rests on a saddle blanket or saddle pad to spread the weight of the saddle and its burden on the pack animal's back. The underside of the pack saddle is designed to conform well to the shape of the pack animal's back. It is typically divided into two symmetrical parts separated by a gap at the top to ensure that the weight being carried does not rest on the draft animal's backbone and to provide good ventilation to promote the evaporation of sweat.

The pack saddle consists of a tree, or the wooden blocks that sit on the horse's back, the half breed which is the canvas saddle cover, the breeching and often a crupper which prevents the loaded saddle from sliding too far forward and the breast collar which holds the loaded saddle from sliding too far back on the packhorse or mule. The flexible bars on this packsaddle adjust to a horse's back and offer several options for hanging panniers, manties (packs wrapped in canvas),[1] or other loads.

There are many types of pack saddles:

- Crossbuck / Sawbuck pack saddle has crossed wooden bars to attach sling ropes.
- Otago pack saddle, known in military use as the British universal pack saddle, is a rideable pack saddle with two large cushioning pads to prevent injury to the animal and large hooks on each side of the metal pommel and cantle arches for hanging pack bags or crates.
- Decker pack saddle has two rings for tying sling ropes.

The modern pack saddle is usually not intended to support a human rider. The upper side of the pack saddle resembles a rack to let its load rest on and be tied on with ropes, straps, a surcingle, or other devices.

The sawbuck has ancient origins. Its design is simple and was used on several different types of animals like yaks, camels, burros as well as horses and mules. Variations of sawbucks have appeared on all contents throughout history. In the Americas the Spanish introduced packing and many of the names of pieces of equipment are of Spanish origin. The Sawbuck saddle was dominate a crossed the western US until 1906 when O.P. Robinett of Kooskia Idaho and the Decker brothers started building pack saddle with metal loop that were quickly adopted by miners and the Forest Service who needed to transport heavy, bulky equipment through the vast unroaded Pacific Northwest.

The Sawbuck pack saddle, traditionally used in the western United States

American 20th Century, Unrigged Pack Saddle, c. 1932, National Gallery of Art

The Otago Pack Saddle as made by J. Wiseman, saddler, Auckland, from 1863

Sawbuck versus Decker Pack Saddle

Some differences between a **Sawbuck Pack Saddle** and **Decker Pack Saddle** are obvious. A Sawbuck has crossbucks made usually of oak or metal that form an X shape at the top of the saddle tree, while a Decker has metal arches. A Sawbuck Pack Saddle does not traditionally use a pack saddle cover known as a "half-breed" (or "1/2 Breed") while a Decker style does. Lastly, most Sawbucks are "double rigged", while a Decker Pack Saddle traditionally is "single rigged".

Crossbuck or Arches: The X-shaped crossbucks on a sawbuck pack saddle are great for packing with panniers, and top loads and have been used in packing for millennia. The metal arches, either traditional or modified, are specific to the Decker style pack saddle. These provide versatility to either use panniers, or the ability to tie a manty load using ropes to secure it to the pack saddle. The metal arches also give rigidity and strength to the Decker which, in the event of a wreck, could protect the pack saddle.

Pack Saddle Cover: Traditionally on Decker pack saddles only, this pack saddle cover known as a half-breed has 2 main functions. Because the half-breed contains a wooden board running along either side, the load that you are packing is more evenly distributed across the length of your stock animal reducing its burden. This also gives you the ability to pack a larger load on a single animal. The other function is that it simply covers the pack saddle, reducing the amount of dust and debris that can and will inevitably be encountered on the trail which can provide protection for both the animal and your equipment.






Double or Single Rigged: A Sawbuck pack saddle is double rigged, has 2 rings on either side of the saddle, and requires a double cinch with 4 latigos. This rigging would be locked into a fixed position with a Sawbuck pack saddle, meaning that cinch used cannot be adjusted forward or backward on the animal. A Decker pack saddle, generally speaking, is single rigged with a single ring on either side of the pack saddle, and requires a "decker" cinch with 2 latigos. A single rigged pack saddle gives you versatility to adjust the position of your cinch from full rigged (the front most position) to a "center fire" position (the center of the pack saddle), and anywhere in between.

Classic Decker Pack Saddle Half-Breed & Quarter Breed

Pack Pads for Horses and Mules




Next to the pack saddle, the pack pad is the most important layer of your load. Don't try to skimp on this; a pack saddle pad is larger and thicker than a standard riding saddle pad for very good reason. You've heard the expression "you get what you pay for". This seems to be especially true for equine pack pads. So, how do you choose?

Rule #1: Choose the right size
We recommend that your pack saddle pad is a minimum size of 30"L x 44"W, which is about 14" wider than a riding saddle pad. This extra width provides necessary protection from a panniers or manties rubbing or banging on the pack animal's sides.

Rule #2: Choose the proper thickness
A pack pad is usually thicker than a saddle pad, averaging 1-1.5" thick. However, just because one inch is good, doesn't mean that two inches is better. You do not want a pad that is so thick that the pack saddle no longer fits well. A very dense pad, such as the 5 Star Mountain Packer, has plenty of thickness at 1⅛ because it deflects shock so well. If the outer material of the pad is mostly fleece, which compresses easily, you will want to make sure it has a fairly thick felt pad inside.

Rule #3: Buy the best pad you can afford
Look for pack pads that are built of materials that wick moisture, breathe well, and provide plenty of padding. We stand behind every pad we offer here, so you can buy with confidence, even with our least expensive pack pad offerings. The best pad on the market anywhere is the 5-Star Wool Felt Pack Pad, which is made of 100% virgin wool, so it will last a lifetime with the proper care.

Rule #4: Do not double pad if you can avoid it
It is too easy for equine pads to move against each other and for one or both of them to wiggle out from beneath the saddle. Used in conjunction with a good pack saddle, a single, well-made pack pad of adequate size and thickness will provide all the protection needed against any saddle sore that could make the going tough on your stock. And we all know that you had better take good care of your stock...because it can be a long way out on foot.

Mule Halter

The Packer's Halter is made with high-tensile, triple-thick nylon webbing. It is designed with lead rope attachment rings for "side pull", "center pull" or "no pull", which allows

the user to regulate cinching and tightening on the noseband. Designed without the leather noseband of our Mule Halter, it will fit well under any headstall.

Mohair/Wool Decker Pack Cinch

Panniers & Pack Bags

Bear Resistant Pack Panniers are ideal for packing average size loads and deliver an easy to use, economical, certified bear resistant solution to recreational packers, outfitters and guides. Designed to fill the need for a practical, all-purpose hard-sided pack pannier,

these panniers also meet USFS and Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) requirements for bear-resistance on state and federal lands, and have been approved for use as bear resistant containers for all National Parks, including Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and Yosemite National Park. Sold as a pair, complete with rigging, and a pair of rain covers.

Four Horse Highline Kit with In-Line Swivels

TrailMax Saddle Panniers | Horse Packing Pannier Bags

Durable Pack Rope for Horses and Mules

A good rope can make or break any experience, just ask a rock climber. Our curated selection of pack ropes has been developed with years of experience and trial and error. Trust us that a quality rope can make your pack trip and prevent you from viewing your precious cargo all over the side of the mountain.

LASH ROPE – 50',

36' MANTY ROPE – 3/8"

25 FOOT SLING ROPE | 1/2

Packer's Lead Rope with Loop

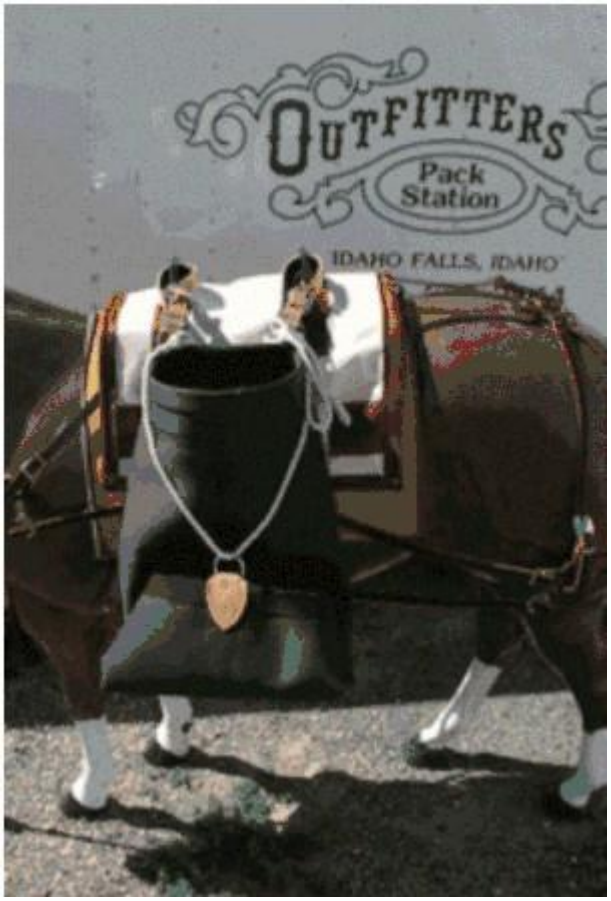
Manty Canvas is typically 7x7, 7x8 or 8x8 and 15 oz

Top packs when needed can be Manty Canvis or specialized bags.

KENTUCKY-STYLE HORSE BELL

TRAILMAX IN-LINE SWIVEL - STAINLESS

FANNO PACK SAW WITH LEATHER SCABBARD |

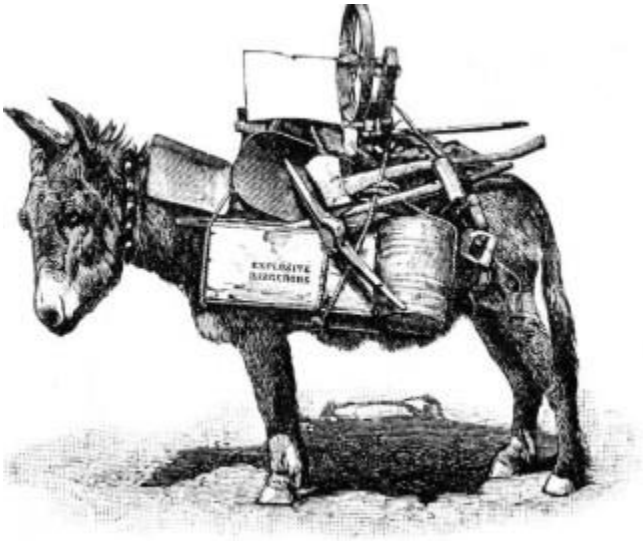

OUTFITTERS
Pack Station
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO

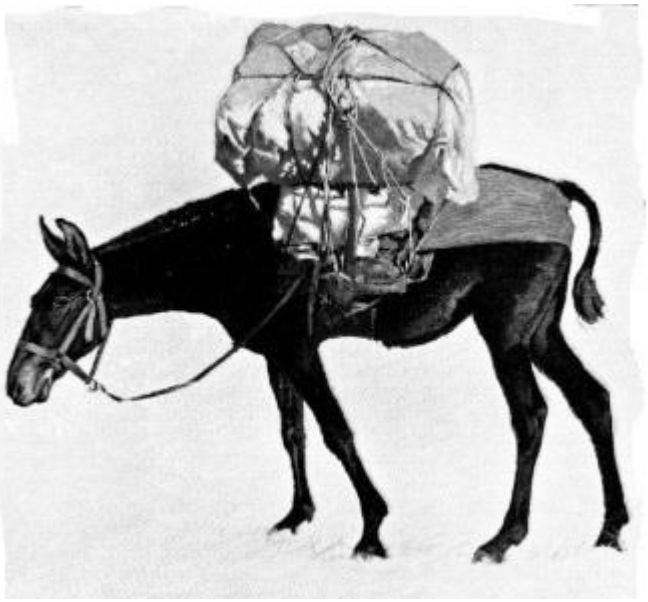

Pack
Station
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO



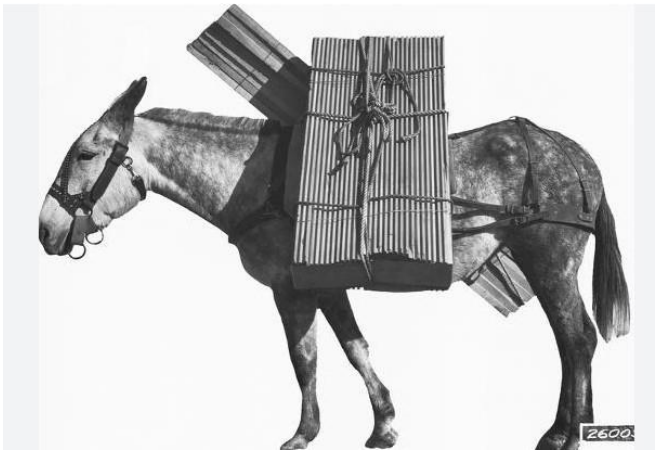


NOT BEST PRACTICES





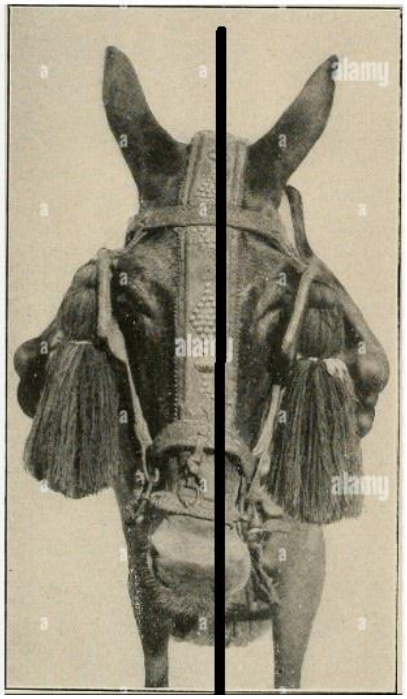
Better



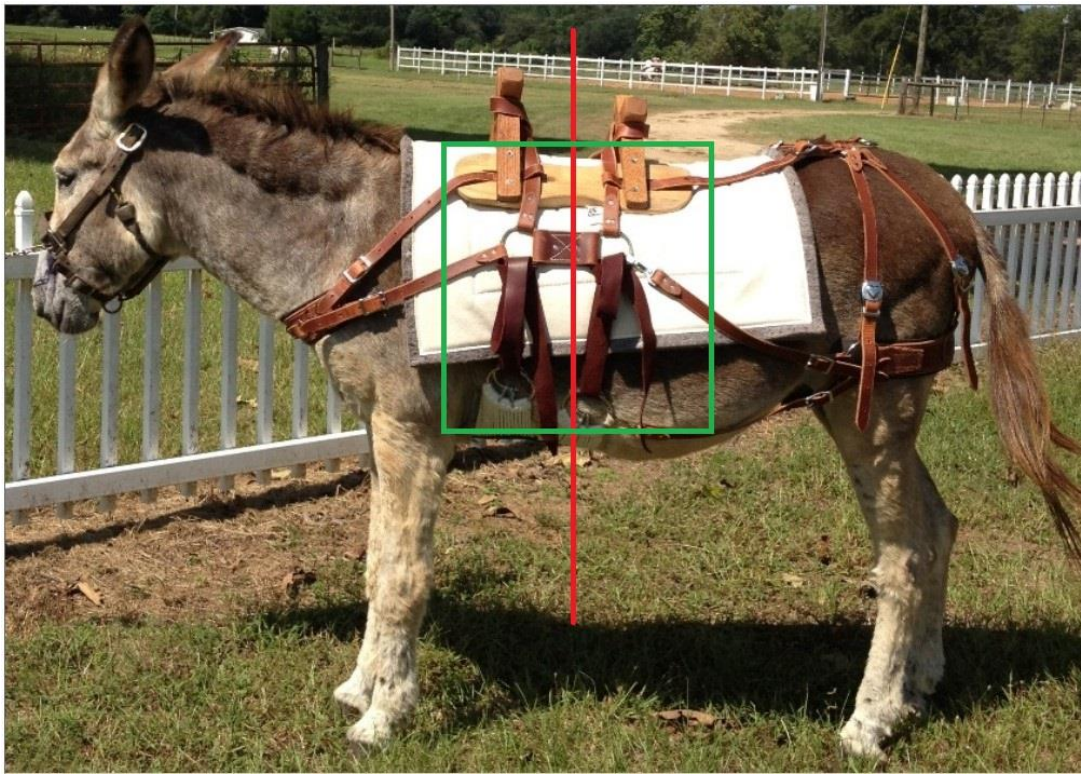
Building Loads

Some general rules

1. Try to get the loads to balance with-In 2 pounds
2. In bags or boxes – heavy stuff to the bottom
3. Try to keep the weight on the box centered – one end not heavier than the other.
4. Pack boxes so that they are quite
5. Keep load as lite as possible, for both the stock and your back
6. Make sure items can not be thrown out of the pack if the stock trips or bucks
7. Try to keep loads from not hanging below the stocks' belly
8. Try to keep loads as narrow as possible so not to hang up on trail hazards.
9. Make sure no hard item is against the stocks side where it could cause discomfort.
10. Keep top packs light, never more that 20% of the load weight.
11. Weight your loads, don't guess.
12. Watch your loads on the trail to see that they are staying balanced
13. Don't trust Decker Hooks to keep bags or boxes secure
14. Secure loads with Basket and barrel hitches when appropriate.
15. Consider using a Box Hitch with canvas cover for securing your load
16. Never HARD tie your stock together use break-a-ways
17. When leading more that one animal they have a preferred order.
18. Stop and check your loads after about a mile on the trail, fix issues before you have a wreck.
19. Loads must be close to equal on each side of the stock's spine
20. Unequal loads can be balanced by having some of its weight on the other side of the stocks center line.
21. High loads are not stable loads – avoid if possible.



Stocks center line



Ideal load’s location

The ideal load dimension is a 50-pound bale of compressed hay

Packaged Height	16.5 in.
Packaged Length	11.5 in.
Packaged Weight	50 lb.
Packaged Width	21 in.

Hands on training

1. Loading and balancing bags and boxes
2. Manty up a compressed bale of hay
3. Manty up a loose selection of items
4. Manty up trail tools

Blue Mules

1. Hang boxes and bags on a Sawbuck saddle
    a. Secure with canvas cover and box hitch
2. Hang boxes and bags on a Decker Saddle
    a. Secure with canvas cover and box hitch
3. Hang a manty load on a decker Saddle using
    a. A Basket Hitch
        i. With Crow's-foot
    b. A Barre Hitch
    c. Decker Diamond

On Livestock

1. Saddle Stock with Sawbuck Saddle
2. Check Saddle fit
3. Load stock with bags or boxes
4. Secure load with canvas cover and box hitch
5. Lead stock around arena making sure the load rides correctly
6. Unpack stock, removing backet hitch and boxes or bags
7. Discuss what you learned and ask questions

8. Saddle stock with Decker Saddle
9. Check Saddle fit
10. Load stock with bags or boxes
11. Secure load with canvas cover and box hitch
12. Lead stock around arena making sure the load rides correctly
13. Unpack stock, removing backet hitch and boxes or bags
14. Discuss what you learned and ask questions

15. Using a decker saddle with lash ropes rigged
16. Secure manty load using a **basket hitch**
17. Ensure load is balanced on both sides of the stock
18. Secure load swing with a crow's foot
19. Lead stock around arena making sure the load rides correctly
20. Unpack stock, removing backet hitch and boxes or bags
21. Discuss what you learned and ask questions
22. Using a decker saddle with lash ropes rigged
23.

24. Secure manty load using a **barrel hitch**
25. Ensure load is balanced on both sides of the stock
26. Secure load swing with a box hitch
27. Lead stock around arena making sure the load rides correctly
28. Unpack stock, removing backet hitch and boxes or bags
29. Discuss what you learned and ask questions

Leading Pack Strings

1. Discuss correct ways to attach stock into a string
2. Discuss things to consider when leading more that on animal in a string
3. Discuss the importance of a break-away
4. Discuss when it might be safer to put animals on auto pilot

Securing packing equipment

1. Correct way to secure
    a. lash ropes
    b. Manty ropes
    c. Pack saddle

Any Last Questions?

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