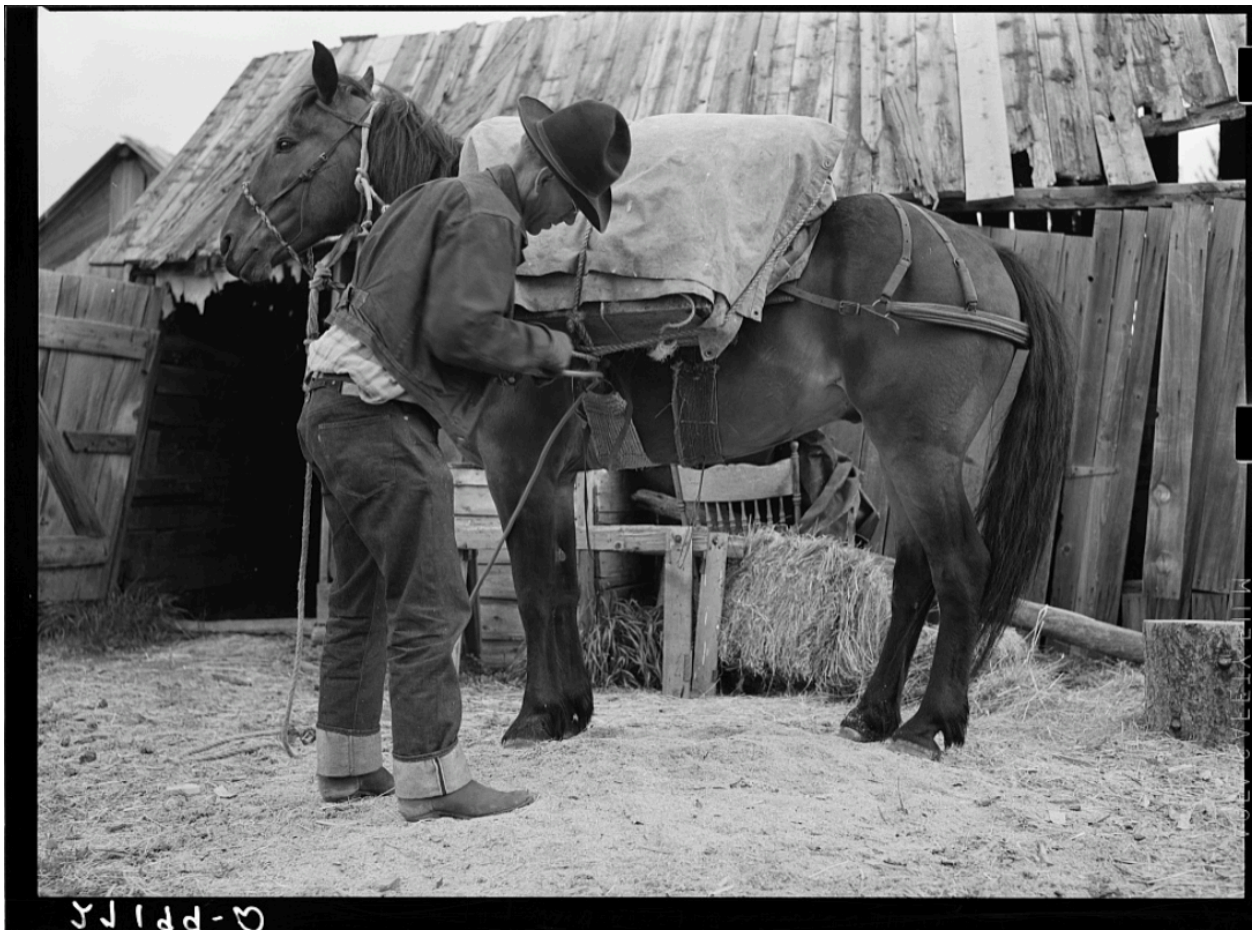
The Importance of Horse Packing in the American West

Packing Demonstration

Created by: Savannah Deuter



1939, June-July, Bozeman, MT, camera film negative.



Sheepherder Packing Burro at Camp

1940, March, Dangberg Ranch, Douglas County, NV, camera film negative.

Contextual Paragraph

In the American West, horse, mule, and donkey packing were commonly used during expansion westward in the 1800s. Packing was used to freight medicine and supplies to towns that were not connected to railroads, and cattle operations and ranch hands often used pack stock to carry food and equipment when going on multiple week-long range checks to monitor cattle. Horses were used in lumber yards to transport wood, and mule packers would go in to navigate difficult landscapes and build roads and bridges that other modes of transport (wagons and stagecoaches) could later use. Fur trappers that lived high in the mountains would load their pelts and furs on pack stock to bring down to towns and outposts for trading. In the early 1930s, horse packing was implemented

by United States Forest Service rangers to bring supplies to the remote fire lookouts and cabins that employees and their families stayed at.

Key Questions

1. What do you think the harvested timber pulled by horses may have been used to build or construct (besides roads and bridges)?
2. Why would a town that has a railroad running through it not need a string of pack horses or mules?
3. Why is there a variety of pack stock between horses, mules, and donkeys?
4. How can the use of packing be a traditional use as well as a conservation minded use today?

Assessment

1. What is the importance of horse packing during the construction of the American West? Give at least 2 examples.
2. As time has gone on, where and why might horse packing still be valid today in supporting conservation of our public lands?