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LEAVE NO TRACE

NORTHERN COLORADO

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN

Leave No Trace Principles for Horsemen

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Make your plans for where you are going, for food and personal needs. Make sure you think about

hazards and unexpected situations you or your animals might encounter so you can be

prepared. Prepare for any weather conditions, Thunderstorms can cause fires in the summer,

know an alternate way out? Weather can turn from being very hot to snow quickly, carry a jacket

and raincoat. Do you know how to get emergency help from where you are if someone has a

serious accident? When we are not prepared, we end up making choices that create

unnecessary impact.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

You create the least impact if you camp in an existing campsite and don’t make the area any

larger. If you’re riding on trails, stay on the trail and don’t make it wider or cut switchbacks.

Water runs down your tracks and causes erosion.

If you camp and travel in remote areas or off-trail, spread your use out. Don’t ride in a line when

going cross-country. That creates a trail. Spread out. It takes a lot more work to camp with horses

in a remote area and not create impact.

Dispose of Waste Properly

We have all heard of

Pack it in, Pack it out

. This includes cigarette butts, candy wrappers and

pop or beer cans. Don’t leave anything in a fire pit.

Human waste is another issue. Always bury your waste unless you pack it out. Besides being

disgusting to see waste on top of the ground, it carries germs that the flies spread. Place human

waste in small cat hole 6-8 inches deep 200 feet or more away from water. If you have little kids

or a group, erect a latrine. This is one hole everyone uses. The concentrated volume takes less

time to decompose.

Leave What You Find

Avoid damaging live trees and plants. Don’t pound nails into trees or chop on them. Leave natural

objects and cultural artifacts there.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

Campfires are a favorite thing for many people but they can create change in certain

circumstances. You should make conscious decisions when it comes to having a fire; Is there

enough firewood in the area to have a fire and not totally deplete all the wood that is around? Do

you really need a fire? Sometimes during the summer you really don’t need one.

Fires definitely do leave a trace, if you choose to have a fire, the best place to have one is in an

existing fire ring, build a small mound fire or pit fire without rocks and burn all the firewood,

don’t leave half burned logs behind.

Respect Wildlife

Avoid disturbing wildlife during nesting or calving time when babies are very young. It involves not feeding wildlife and habituating them to human food, and securing food properly so bears don’t get into it.

# Minimize Horse Impact

This is the last Principle and one that really is important to us. The main areas we influence include the camp area, the trails, the grazing area and the water. Be Considerate of Other User Groups

As members of Back Country Horsemen we are examples of horsemen with good behavior and skills. It is part of our mission to teach other users how to recreate with their horses and not create impact.

Avoiding conflict is important. We all have different values. Remember that what bothers you a lot may not bother someone else. Visualize for a minute what it would be like if you were a hiker walking up a trail a foot wide and ran into a steaming large pile of fragrant horse biscuits with

flies buzzing around it. You have to break your stride to get around it and you see that monument as disgusting as if it were human waste. That is where many hikers are coming from. We need to be sensitive to that and try to be courteous when hikers are not happy with us. In high use areas stop and kick it off the trail.

Highlines

Most of us are already familiar with highlines. It is a rope tied to tree saver straps between two trees that we tie our horses to. These should be out of the main camp area. Train your horses and get them use to being tied up for hours and hours? The animals that paw need to be hobbled and have their needs taken care of which may include bug spray or more to eat.

The Two most important things regarding highlines are to pick a durable location to put up your highline such as on dirt or a rocky area, and naturalizing the area before you leave. That means kicking your horse manure apart, filling in any pawed areas and sprinkling pine needles or twigs back over the area. Lots of horsemen forget to do this and it gives us a bad name.

Trail Etiquette

When riding trails, stay on the trail and don’t make it wider by riding side by side. Try to make your horse walk through water or snow.

If you ride off the trail and go straight downhill you will cause erosion. Water will follow those tracks in a thunderstorm. That’s why you don’t want to cut switchbacks in steep country.

If you stop for very long, it’s best to tie up off the trail so others can get by. If you encounter hikers, ask them to step off on the downhill side of the trail 6-8 feet. Your animals will be more comfortable passing them and not jump off the trail. Backpacks change a person’s shape and it scares a lot of horses. Try to be courteous to others even if they are rude to you. Continuing a rude interaction just makes it worse and gives us a bad name.

Grazing

Your horse need to graze at least an hour to an hour and a half, morning and night. They are used to grazing off and on all day when they are on a pasture and they get the munchies when they

can’t. Grain is a great tool if you are in the mountains, in getting them to know where camp is and to stay there.

We need to be careful not to overgraze an area. What is a good rule of thumb here on overgrazing? Leave at least 3 to 4 inches of grass.

There are different ways to contain grazing stock. You can hobble them and let them loose if they know they are going to get grain when they get done. When they start to get full they start to wander as they eat. Tie them up at this point and grin them or they may leave.

You can picket one by a foot on a rope but you can overgraze an area quickly doing this. A picket pin needs to be moved frequently. Your horse must be trained at home first to do this or he may

spook and rope burn his back pastern if the rope gets tight and he fights it. Don’t picket close to water either or you may pollute it.

You can also make an electric fence pasture to keep them in. Of course they need to be used to an electric fence first or they may jump out and leave. This pasture needs to be large enough to

not overgraze as well and not be close to water. Before leaving a grazing area, it is considerate of horsemen to kick apart those horse piles out there.

Water

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| What happens when horses go in water? Try not to pollute water. When riding and you stop to water, let your horse relax first away from the water. He will probably relieve himself and then you can go water without mishap.  The best place to water is on the trail in a stream crossing where it is hard or rocky. Otherwise try to use a place without banks that break down in the water. If you have to water in a lake, just get their head in and don’t ride in unless they have already relieved themselves. With a pack string, when one goes they all think it is a good idea and join in. It’s not good if a backpacker comes by when they are all doing that and he plans to use that water for dinner!  Conclusion  The fourth mission statement of the Back Country Horsemen organization is; To educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage and “leave no trace” principles.  We must prepare our members and then reach out to other equestrians or we may lose our riding opportunities. Leave No Trace is not just in the back country or Wilderness. It is everywhere in our daily lives. It is your ethic, your attitude about life and how you conduct yourself. Do you expect someone else to pick up after you? Do you like to live in a litter- strewn place? Do you try to only do things like this when someone is watching and get lazy if you think you won’t get caught?  Think about what you believe is right or wrong behavior for you and try to do your best at whatever you do. Make conscious decisions. |
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