

“Storing saddles in a back country camp!”



Photo above: Shows pack saddle sling ropes tied between 4 trees supporting all of our saddles and covered over with 3 pack tarps.

Man you did it! You've rolled into camp all in one piece. The gang is all tied to trees and unloaded. You strip off the pack and riding saddles, dropping them in the first dry and clean spot you can find. Surprise, you remember exactly where you packed the highline gear. Next, you had to put it up and now the critters are all tied secure and half of them are already snoozing after a long days work.

The dust has finally, kind of, settled and it is time to clean up and prepare for your stay in this camp site. Remember, I said the saddles were dropped around. It does not make sense to leave them on the ground and out in the weather. But what to do with them?

The first thing I do is to gather up at least one of my 3/8" sling ropes and find some small trees that are growing reasonably close together. I tie the rope approximately 4

feet off of the ground to these trees. I then carry the saddles and tack over to this spot and sling them over the horizontally tied on rope. It is a bit of a balancing act, but if you work at it a bit and hold your mouth just right, you can get it done. I stack all of the saddle blankets and pads over the suspended saddle. I then throw a pack tarp over the whole kit and caboodle. It is surprising how much moisture your warm and salty tack will pick up if exposed to the damp night air or rain, not to mention the pine needles that will fall onto them.

There is a school of thought that a handy way to store saddles and tack in camp is to stack it up on a pack tarp and cover it all over with the same. It is no doubt handy, except for salt. Salt and other trace minerals are in short supply in many mountain environments. It is in such demand by the wild animals living there, that a urine puddle will be a happy day party for the local rodents or deer. So you see, depending on the numbers of the local mouse population, you could see some serious damage to your leather and string gear. (Wonder out what you are going to do if you were to begin to saddle up, only to find that a couple of your string girths were chewed through?)

Sue and I were headed up to the first divide to drop off supplies for a couple of back country rangers. Because we were going to be running late, a couple of friends, who followed us into Nine Stream camp in the Olympic National Park, set up camp for us. We had just enough light to get our high lines set up before the big day candle was blown out. They had thrown down the before mentioned system, using tarps, so I just added to the pile and put another tarp over the top. Ok! It was dark and I was tired (lazy). The next morning as I pulled the tarp off to get to my saddles and tack, I got one heck of a surprise! Right in the middle of my riding saddle was a pile of mouse stored grain. I guess the little rascal must have picked it up from what was spilled while filling nose feed bags.

I learned my lesson right then and there. I never store my saddles or tack on the ground over night, but instead hang it up. This was in a site where I have since had those little critters running over my bed roll and bouncing off of my mosquito net all night long. I think we just got off easy, with just a bit of grain on my saddle seat.

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