

# Backcountry Horsemen of California



SHASTA - TRINITY  
UNIT



## February 2007 Newsletter



### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Make sure you contact John Ellery, our Education Officer to sign up for two great classes! He needs to know in advance how many will be attending these FREE classes: Don't Miss Out!!

April 7<sup>th</sup>: 1:00 pm @ Junction School in Palo Cedro  
A class on human medical aid when you're in the backcountry.

April 28<sup>th</sup>: 1:00 pm A "hands-on" packing class @ John's barn (Patience & humor are requirements)

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Here we are; mid-February, and our calendars are already filling up quickly for the coming season: the NorCal Sports Show is rapidly coming up: March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> at the Anderson Fairgrounds. Contact Larry Shuman @ 527-8907, if you can help with set-up, answering questions of passersby; participate in the Dutch oven cooking demonstrations, and of course, helping pack up our display when the fun is over.

BCHC's annual Rendezvous is also in March. Once again, it will be held at the Turlock fairgrounds. This year's dates: March 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>. Please join us for classes, learning (or re-learning) techniques for packing, camping, cooking, along with meeting friends (old & new) and other fellow BCHCers from all around the State. The BCHC Rendezvous is the one time each year we can all get together to compare notes, exchange wisdom learned this past year, and share the good times of enjoying the great outdoor adventures California has to offer.

In April, our Shasta Trinity Unit is offering two great educational opportunities: The human first aid course is specifically intended for people who enjoy the backcountry. It will be held April 7<sup>th</sup>, @ 1:00 pm at Junction School in Palo Cedro. The course is taught by a medical doctor who also backpacks in wilderness areas. His expertise in the backcountry is a reality check we all can benefit from. April 28<sup>th</sup> around 1:00 pm will find us at John Ellery's barn, fine-tuning our packs (and notes) on live animals. Unit members who are expert packers and are willing to guide our "newbie fumbling fingers" will be there to gently correct creative knots that won't hold a pack securely. Like last year, this "hands on" class will be fun for all. I hope to see many of you at these various events.

Larry Shuman

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To assist new members in getting ready for packing, here are some horse packing basics that will allow both you and your animals a more enjoyable, SAFE journey each time you venture into the backcountry:

### **BASIC CONDITIONING & TRAINING**

The more training that can be done prior to going into the backcountry, the more fun you will have. Treat all stock with the respect they are due. If you have an animal that is likely to kick out or shy, have the courtesy to tell others in your party. Nothing ruins an outing quicker than someone or another's animal, getting hurt. Teach your stock to respect you and your space. Ground manners are very important. This includes getting the stock used to being caught and tied to a highline without pawing or getting upset. The more you work with your animals, the better they will get.

Stock needs to be used to ropes falling around them, under their feet, etc. It takes time and patience for stock to get comfortable with surprises such as a rope under the tail. Day rides can take a lot of the kinks out. Get your stock used to doing what they will be expected to do on Backcountry trips. If you need help, ask someone with the proper experience to work with you and your animals. It will be time well spent. Stock should be trained to stand quietly with figure 8 hobbles: this allows them to stand quietly and not tear up the ground. Training a horse or mule to stand quietly doesn't need to be a big fight, and should be done at home, not in the backcountry. If your animals will stand without pawing, wonderful. If not, then the animals need to be hobbled. When picking a place to tie your animals for a short break, choose a place OFF the trail, and in an area that can handle the impact. Tie to trees 8" or larger in diameter. You spray yourself with insect repellent, remember to spray your animals and bring along bug repellent to re-spray after 6-8 hours. Your animal is working hard and will be a lot more comfortable when tied if not having to defend itself against biting flies, knats, mosquitoes, etc.

For your animals' sake, and your safety, get your stock conditioned for the mountains. We have easy access to several areas to do this here in Shasta County. Stock that is properly conditioned and fed correctly will be a lot more fun than having an animal sore, or worse, collapse on the trail from being overworked or overheated because the animal is out of shape. Physical conditioning takes time. It takes several weeks of regular riding to have stock fully conditioned, and this includes taking pack stock out with loaded packs on. (It also helps get you in condition, too!) When going riding for the day, keep a close eye on how all of your animals are doing. Push them to the point that they break a sweat, and then back off. Give your stock a break if they really need it. Repeat each time, and you will see their stamina and yours build up. It will take longer each time you ride before the animals break a sweat and begin to breathe hard. Remember not to push your stock beyond their limit. This can be hard to judge, but remember, when riding with a group of animals, the least conditioned animal will govern the speed of all the other animals. Pushing your stock beyond their capability can be dangerous. Remember that hot weather, humidity levels and altitude can effect your animals, especially ones that aren't physically ready for that day's challenges.

Stock that are going to be in a string together will be a lot easier to handle if they have been worked in a string before you get to the trailhead. (Remember those day rides??) Start out in a relatively safe environment: the pasture you keep them in, and enclosed riding arena or corral area, then perhaps a loop around your property, if it's perimeter-fenced. Once your string is accustomed to that, graduate to day rides. For safety, breakaways are strongly suggested. Carry extra breakaways on your saddle or in your saddle bags. Pack and riding stock have the right-of-way on backcountry trails, but courtesy should prevail. If hikers are open to listening to suggestions, let them know they are safer stepping off the downhill side of the trail. This allows the stock to see them better and are less likely to be spooked. Be sure to thank the hikers! If there is a better place for you to take your animals off trail safely, then do it. This always makes for better relations between hikers and stock users.

Good habits help avoid wrecks or at least minimize their consequences: Keep a close watch on how the loads are sitting on your animals. You will spend a lot of time looking back at your pack string, especially when crossing creeks or downed logs, always make sure your last animal gets through without being jerked along. Leads between animals should be kept short enough that the animals do not step over their leads. An animal that has stepped over a lead rope in a string will suffer rope burn very quickly, and could be dragged down by it. This is where "outriders" can be extremely useful by watching the string from their vantage point, and alerting you if there is a need to stop and readjust packs, tack, breakaways, etc.

Things to remember for optimum trail enjoyment: Along with conditioning you and your animals, don't forget your equipment! Check to make sure your cinches and saddle rigging are in good repair; check your pack rigging... are the leathers solid? Do the pannier boxes close and lock properly? Do you have emergency stuff for repairs on the trail? Even leather shoestrings from your saddle ties can help get you safely to a campsite if a breast collar or britchen requires extra support due to a trail mishap. Remember, be flexible: if your string breaks loose and your trail is 18 inches wide with a 5,000 foot drop off, don't try to work your way back to the loose animals. Keep moving until you can safely stop and have room to resecure the pack. The animals will follow you; they don't want to go off the trail's edge, either.

Have fun, enjoy the outdoors, but be realistic: Don't plan on leaving the trailhead at 4:00 pm for a 16 mile trip to "The Lake". The terrain, altitude and weight of the packs and condition of you and your animals will determine how fast you travel those 16 miles. It feasibly could take two days of riding if something unexpected happens on the trail. Being in condition and being prepared will allow you and your stock to handle whatever nature surprises you with. As you ride up the trail, bear in mind that should the unexpected happen, there is a good campsite back down the trail that could provide pasture, shelter, water, and a chance to regroup for the next day's ride.

Picking a place for your picket line requires thinking about others, not just yourself or your animals: Pick a place that will be least impacted by your animals. In an already impacted campsite, the impact should be concentrated in areas that have been used on a regular basis. A picket line needs to be at least 100 feet out of camp and off of the trail. It also needs to be in a dry area that will allow you to tie your picket line to avoid trampling or pawing of the trees' root systems. Tree savers work and are convenient. Keep your stock within the core camp area only long enough to unload, unsaddle or to load up. ALWAYS be sure to sprinkle manure piles and repair any damage done by stock before leaving.

Another practice for at home, before you hit the trails: Turning out stock for feeding requires a little practice. Horses and mules are herd animals. If you keep their lead buddies in the area, the rest of the pack will stay with them. This can be done by rotating which animals you keep on the picket line and which ones get turned out for grazing and water. The grain and bell method works, if you've practiced it at home. If stock are accustomed to getting a little grain in the morning and evening, they will "usually" be there looking for it. If you are going to bell any of your animals, they need to be used to the bell, (practice @ home). The backcountry is not the place to strap a bell around a horse or mule's neck!! Such excitement you don't need in camp!! Drift fencing is also an option, if in good condition and the gates are kept closed. Portable electric fencing can be used, but when wildlife gets tangled up in it at 2:00am, your campsite can have a "Kodak Moment" while re-catching your stock. Grazing hobbles, sidelines, etc are other possibilities for keeping your stock in the backcountry.

Also keep up-to-date: vaccinations and worming, first aid kit for your animals, (including dogs, if they are part of the camping family.)

Important items to remember to pack and have easy access to:

Axe: for clearing trees out of the way and knocking stobs off of bigger downed trees

Rake: for scattering manure and repairing any holes dug by stock

Shovel: for cleaning out fire pits, digging latrine, trail repairs, etc

Shoeing tools, nails and a few extra easy boots

First aid kit for humans, any regular medication you may take daily... bring 3 days' extra, just in case you need it

Have this available without having to dig through a pannier to find it.

Phosphate free soap

When calculating how much weight your riding animal is carrying, be sure to include the saddle weight, saddle bags and anything else you strap on. The total weight may surprise you!

Last, but not least: Remember to have fun! The backcountry offers vistas that no tour bus riders will ever enjoy. It's your backcountry; relish those sunrises and sunsets. Camping correctly is hard work; but to see nature up close is pure delight.