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SAFETY PRECAUTIONS IN THE CARE AND HANDLING OF LIVESTOCK

Animal caused accidents are often very serious. In our work with the National Park Service the personnel who use stock are usually working or traveling alone. In addition, they are usually a long way from help or medical care in the event of injury. Recognizing the potentials for injury and even death from horses or mules we must learn to identify the hazards and be alert to anticipate and avoid them. Otherwise, our careers may be greatly changed in an instant!

We train ourselves to become mechanically minded. A first-class machine operator is subconsciously alert to the pulse of the machine at all times. A good horseman is equally alert to the possible reactions of his horse under any set of conditions. These are reasons why a good horseman is not so likely to become injured. Experience and training make it possible to anticipate the reactions of a horse or mule.

The inexperienced man who must use a horse or mule needs a few simple instructions in safe use and care of them. A horse or mule is a dangerous creature if he gets into the kind of jam that requires struggling for survival. When a horse becomes foul, is being subjected to pain or injury, or is going through an experience that causes him to have fear, his reactions might not be predictable. At such times even an experienced horseman cannot always anticipate the animal's reaction or his next move.

We have many very good horsemen using stock and it is natural that some of their everyday practices would not be in one hundred percent agreement with these safety instructions. Some of the more serious injuries from the use of stock have been received by the better horsemen in the Service. This may be due to two factors: (1) they sometimes use horses more days per year than do less experienced men; (2) they usually do more dangerous work with horses than does the novice, such as leading stock, shoeing stock, fast riding, gentling or breaking broncs and colts. Commonly the novice uses gentle stock and the experienced man has more fractious animals. One thing is sure; if there are accidents there is room for better practices in the use of animals.

This is only an introduction to the subject. Good horsemen spend a lifetime with stock and never stop learning. Some men never become

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good horsemen.

In making suggestions for safe practices in use of animals, consideration is given to instincts and habits of the horse and mule and to the vulnerable phases of their use. There is a reason for each suggestion. If each is practiced faithfully, some expensive and painful experiences can be prevented. Remember, that these suggestions are given to prevent accidents.

Use safe practices always

Always speak to an animal when approaching from any direction.

Stand opposite the shoulder when working with an animal.

When it is necessary to put a hand on a horse or mule, approach from the left side and place hand on the neck just in front of the shoulder.

If an animal is loose and will only allow you to approach it from directly in front, place your hand upon it as far from the tip of its nose as possible. If you can't reach its jaw or neck, pat very lightly between the eyes.

If an animal is tied solidly always stay away from a position directly in front of him. A tied horse or mule can only go two directions, back and forward. If it is tied solidly enough that it can't go backwards and it has any fear, of you or anything else, it is surely going forward right over the top of you.

If you are on one side of an animal and need to be on the other side, go around him. If the animal became fractious while you were crawling under the tied lead rope you would be in a more dangerous position than if you were crawling under his belly.

When you tie a horse, tie him to a solid anchor about four feet from the ground. If he is tied to a rotten post, or rotten limb, or a piece of machinery, there is great danger to you and the animal, should stress on the lead rope cause the anchor to move and frighten him. Anything that can be moved is a dangerous anchor for a horse or mule.

Select a place to tie the horse or mule that is situated so he cannot walk around it in a complete circle. Should an animal walk around a tree or a post until his rope becomes short there is danger of him pulling back and either breaking loose or breaking his neck. And, should you be near at hand and try to give assistance while he is floundering there is great danger that you will get injured.

Always tie an animal with a knot that can be untied easily if he

becomes foul. The bowline knot is easily learned, is easily tied, and can be untied under strain. The knot on the animal's neck must not be a slip or draw knot that will close off the wind of the animal and choke it to death.

In tying an animal it is a dangerous practice to tie with a rope around its neck. It is much better to use a halter or hackamore, or if they are not available, it is a good idea to slip the lead rope through the chin strap of the bridle before tying the animal solidly to an anchor or trying to lead him behind another animal. If the rope is tied around his neck and he puts his head down and maneuvers the rope so it pulls between his ears, there is a good chance that even a gentle horse will hang back and either break the anchor, the rope, his neck, or choke to death. You may receive injury trying to release him while he is floundering.

When a horse is tied there should be about six inches of slack in the halter rope when the horse's mouth is touching the ground. Too much slack invites danger of him stepping over the rope and becoming foul. If he does step over the rope there is danger of him breaking the rope or his anchor or injuring himself. There is danger of you getting hurt trying to release him when he is floundering with his foot over the rope.

Protect your horse or mule against having a sore back. Always be sure his back is clean. Be sure his blanket is clean and smooth. Keep wrinkles and folds out of the blanket. Always ride straight in the saddle with your weight well balanced. A good horseman never sits lopsided in the saddle so his weight bears harder on one side than the other. If possible, avoid carrying a lot of weight over the horse's kidneys. Heavily loaded saddle bags are first-class back chewers. Most cowboys will wear their coats on a hot summer day rather than tie them on the back of their saddle.

An easy way to keep a blanket clean is to wash it during the noon hour when it is already soaked up with sweat. A little rubbing with the hand will take off all sweat and grit. Washing a horse or mule's back is a good practice if his back is not hot and if the water is not too cold. A cold bath on a hot, sweaty back makes it tender and liable to injury. (Try a long, cold soaking on your hot sweaty feet and notice how tender they become.)

The hot sun will cake the sweat on a wet blanket. If your horse is hot at lunch time, either loosen your saddle a little, let the air under it and leave it on him, or take it off and lay your blankets wet side down.

Keep sticks and leaves out from under your saddle. If you are riding in brush, clean out from under your saddle often.

Let air under the blanket often if your animal's back is hot. When you stop to rest on a hill, get off, loosen the cinch and lift the saddle and blanket up to allow air onto the bare back.

A cinch should be just tight enough to allow you to slip your flat hand under the cinch with ease. If you cannot slip your hand under the cinch, from front to rear, without pressure, the cinch is too tight.

Walk your horse a few steps after cinching him up. When you are ready to mount him, examine the cinch and be sure it is the right tightness. Develop the habit of always examining the cinch before mounting. Also, if you get off your horse and intend to stay off for some time, loosen the cinch about two holes or seven inches on the loose end of the latigo.

When you prepare to mount, examine your cinch and stand at the animal's left shoulder facing toward his rear. Hold the reins evenly (same amount of slack in both reins). There should be just enough slack in the reins to relieve any tension on the bit. Hold the reins at the top of the horse's neck just in front of the saddle and grasp a lock of mane in the same hand to use as a balance. Holding the stirrup with the right hand, put the toe of your left foot into the stirrup and pull yourself up and into the saddle with the right hand by using the horn of the saddle. If you cannot perform this operation without unbalancing your horse and making him catch his balance by stepping towards you, try this alternate method. From the same position, place the left hand on the horn with a grasp of the reins. Place the toe in the stirrup with the aid of the right hand as before, and then grasp the swell (pommel) on the right side of the saddle tree, and with the right hand pull yourself into the saddle.

It is important that you be mindful that the bit in the horse's mouth has a design that gives a prying leverage on the horse's jaw. Proper use of the reins calls for just enough pressure to serve as a signal to the horse. Too much pressure is distressful to the horse and is dangerous to the rider. Excessive pulling on the reins may force the horse to back up and be completely and dangerously out of control or it may cause him to rear over backwards. Many serious injuries have been caused in this manner.

To direct the horse forward the signal is given by a touch from the heel of the rider. A light touch is usually sufficient. A harder kick is sometimes needed with less sensitive animals. The amount of persuasion is learned by the trial method. The direction of the animal is indicated by pressure from side to side on his neck by the reins. If the horse is to turn left, press the reins (lightly at first) on the right side of his neck. If he is to turn right, direct the pressure on the left side of his neck. To stop the horse, say

"whoa" and lightly pull on the reins. As soon as he has stopped, release the rein pressure. To dismount stop the horse and do exactly the reverse to mounting, landing on the ground standing beside the left shoulder of the horse facing to the rear.

Some cautions: when mounting and dismounting, place horse in position so his left side is up hill or have him on level ground. Be sure to keep your shoe with a sole that will hold the stirrup. Do not ride with hobnail shoes or other soles that will not slip out of the stirrup. Cowboy boots are best.

When leading an animal while riding, hold the lead rope in your right hand and your reins in your left hand. Keep the rope free of the saddle and your feet to eliminate danger of becoming foul with it in case the horses become fractious. Experienced horsemen use the horn of the saddle to lead by. This is done by wrapping the lead rope around the horn and holding the end of it with the right hand. Remember, it is never safe to tie the lead rope to the horn of your saddle or to make a solid loop in the end of the lead rope and hook it over the saddle horn.

Two main dangers from leading a horse while riding are: (1) Getting the lead rope under the saddle horse's tail, (2) Getting tangled up in the lead rope, getting the saddle horse tangled up in it or getting the lead horse tangled up in the lead rope.

Keep the slack out of the rope so your horse can't step over it, especially with his hind foot. Also, keep the lead horse from stepping over the lead rope.

Use your arm to maneuver the lead rope to keep it out from under your horse's tail. Watch this particularly on switchbacks on the trail. If your horse gets the rope under his tail, stop him. If he won't raise his tail and release the rope, get off and lift his tail up and let the rope drop. If the rope is drawn through, by pulling, while the tail is clamped down on it, it will burn the horse. A horse that has been burned is fractious about a recurrence. If flies are bad and it seems to be impossible to keep your horse from switching his tail over the rope, there is one simple and safe way of leading your animal. Just tie your horse's tail to the saddle string on the left side. If the situation is really troublesome, this stunt might save you from getting hurt.

Be sure you untie the tail before you loosen the saddle cinch.

If you are leading more than one animal, be sure to use halters or hackamores. If none is available, put the bridle on, tie your lead rope around the animal's neck and run it through the nose band of the bridle. If there is no nose band on the bridle, run the rope

through the chin strap.

If you are leading more than one saddle horse, the safest way of tying them together is to tie the lead rope to the front horse's tail. Use the sheet bend knot. To tie this knot, double the tail, slip the rope through the fold, wrap it around the doubled tail and slip the loose end under the tight end where it came up through the fold of the tail. Several wraps of the rope around the tail will serve to use up extra rope and also to take care of the extra tail. This is the same knot used to tie two ropes together.

Leave just enough slack in the lead rope to allow the horse being led to drink at a creek crossing, but not enough that he might step over it.

The safest way to fasten the lead rope in a pack string is to tie a rope to the front rigging ring of the pack saddle on each side. Leave enough slack in the middle of the rope, where it passes over the top of the saddle, to allow it to be doubled back through the rear fork of the saddle tree. Extend it about one foot to the rear. An overhand knot tied in the doubled rope makes a loop over the pack animal's hips to tie the lead rope into. Use the same tie knot in the lead rope as was described for tying into a horse's tail. This rigging rope should be about 3/8-inch rope so it will break if the pack string gets dangerously fouled up.

Always avoid becoming entangled in a rope that is tied to a horse or mule. Keep your feet free of lash ropes while packing. If two animals are tied together, keep clear of a position that may result in your becoming foul between them.

It isn't safe to try to carry things on a horse. It is always dangerous to try to mount an animal with something being carried on your back or in your hand. If you must try to carry a tool or any other article, first try to tie it onto the saddle in such a way that it can't possibly become loose, and can't chafe or hang against you or your horse. Be sure all cutting edges are well sheathed. If you cannot tie your tool on the saddle, mount your horse first, then have someone cautiously hand you the tool. If your horse shows fear of the tool, don't take it. If you are alone, place the tool on a log, stump, fence, or someplace where you can reach it, then mount, ride to it and take it, provided your horse doesn't object. Once more, let me caution against mounting with the tool, knapsack or even a lunch basket. It is a dangerous practice. Permanent, painful, and costly accidents are on record from this dangerous practice. It is always dangerous to have a knapsack on your back while you are mounting or riding a horse.

To be really safe in the use of stock, one must give proper care to

the stock. Besides keeping his animal's back and saddle blankets free from sweat and grit, and cinching properly to avoid injury, the horseman has the responsibility of seeing that his stock has rest, feed, water, salt, and foot care in the proper amounts and at the proper time. He must also work his stock with feelings and judgment to prevent abuse, exhaustion and crippling, or other injury. A horseman must always remember that he is afoot, regardless of where he is, whenever his horse becomes incapacitated.

Be sure your animals are not thirsty when you start your day's work. Water, if possible, at least every two hours of the day. If you water each two hours and if you intend to keep moving immediately after watering, the animal may be allowed to drink all he wishes. If he has not been watered at frequent intervals and if you are stopping for an hour or so for noon period, or if it is at the end of the day and your animal is very thirsty, he should not be allowed to drink but a small amount until after he has cooled off. As soon as he has ceased to be nerved up from the strenuous work of the day and has cooled off, he should be allowed all the water he wishes. If he is confined to a corral that has no water in it, he should be watered again later in the evening and also before breakfast in the morning.

Next to the demands made of the horse or mule in the way of energy expended as labor, and water needs, the most important item in his care is his feed.

The factors in which you are interested are the proper kind of feeds, amounts needed, and schedules. The cost of feeding the animal enters into the picture, but more important is the health and efficiency of the animal as a working tool.

Some additional suggestions on feeding might be helpful. If it is possible to allow your animals to eat for an hour at noon a great deal of difference will be seen in his endurance during the trip and his condition at the close of the season.

A horse should not be fed grain while he is hot from sweat or when he is tired and nervous from a strenuous day. Avoid cholic and indigestion by feeding him some hay or grass first at the close of the day, then water him and feed him his grain.

If he is not going to be grained at noon, give most of his grain allowance up to six pounds in the morning. Don't feed more than six pounds in the morning. Don't feed more than six pounds to a feeding.

Keep salt available to the animal at all times. Salt should be in all pastures and corrals where stock is to be kept for extended periods. In purchasing salt it is suggested that you ask for sulphur

salt as the sulphur acts as a repellent to insects.

Guard against injuries to your animal. A crippled horse is dangerous or even useless to you. Keep all loose barbed wire picked up or fastened to the fence posts. If there is a horse on the other side of a barbed wire fence, avoid tying your horse to the fence. Don't allow your horse to visit with a horse that is on the other side of a barbed wire fence. If a horse paws the fence he is sure to get injured and you may become injured trying to free the foot.

Keep your horse well shod and regularly reshod for safety to you and for lasting service from the horse. Shoes should be changed between six weeks and two months. It is dangerous to use a horse longer than two months without reshoeing.

A step towards having a good safety record in use of horses and mules is having pride in your outfit. A good looking, well groomed and cared for outfit helps to generate interest in your stock and equipment. If you have interest in them you will enjoy using them and through use you will develop knowledge of use and care of these working tools.

An important safety factor in use of stock can probably be called behavior or manners. Always respect the position of the other person while you are maneuvering around or working horses or mules. If another man is working with an animal be sure to approach them on the same side. Never approach the other side unless both man and animal are expecting you to and unless you have a good reason. Don't forget to speak to the animal if you come within working distance. Be mindful of other riders and their horses in your handling of your horse. A good horseman never starts out in the morning before other members of the party are ready to ride. If one rider dismounts to open a gate, move an obstacle from the trail, or for any other reason, other horsemen respect his action by waiting for him to mount and have his horse under control before resuming the journey. Most horses and mules are easily frightened by someone approaching rapidly from behind them. A warning of intention to ride up to a party, given at a distance, and an orderly approach is customary.

Loading, hauling and unloading stock in trailers

A safe practice in loading horses in trailers is to drive them in rather than to lead them. There just is no logical inducement for a horse to crowd into a trailer with you and run a chance of hurting you. If he is difficult to load, locate the trailer in a position that allows use of barriers to act as aids. A simple way to load a contrary horse in a trailer is to back the trailer into the corner of the corral. Have the right side of the trailer so close to the corral fence that the horse cannot walk around the trailer. Have

the back of the trailer less than the length of the horse from the back fence. Then the horse should be backed into the corner of the fence and the lead rope threaded through the tie ring of the trailer and pulled from outside the trailer on the left side. If the position of the trailer is proper the head and neck of the horse will be over the ramp if it is a ramp type of tailgate, or just inside the trailer if it is a swing type tailgate. When the lead rope is pulled the horse will have to walk in or hang back. He can't run backwards because of the fence. A little urging will force him into the trailer. Use the tie ring on the right side of the trailer as a lead ring to prevent him walking around the trailer to the left.

Do not use a barbed wire fence for this kind of an arrangement.

If a corral fence is not available, a tree and a log, or a bank may be used as a substitute.

If for any reason it is necessary to walk into a trailer ahead of a horse, use the bridle reins to lead him with. Have a hold on the reins about one foot from the bridle bit. This gives very good control of the actions of the horse. He is not so apt to go around the end of the trailer, or to leap in and hurt you. Remember, a horse always leads better if you are not looking at him. Also, if you are facing away from him, and are standing to the left side as far as you can get, you will have less chance of receiving injury should the horse become excited. Always keep the hold on the reins one foot from the bit and let your hand direct the actions of the horse.

Always take the bridle off the horse after the tailgate is fastened. If you try to haul him with the bit in his mouth he may injure his jaw or mouth seriously. His floundering in the trailer may even cause a traffic accident.

In fastening the tailgate the safe position to work is always at the side. There is danger of getting kicked from a position directly in the rear. Also, if it is a ramp type of tailgate, serious injury might result from standing behind the tailgate should an animal back up before the gate is fastened.

Always tie an animal in the trailer with a lead rope as soon as the tailgate is up. Tie him to the outside of the trailer if there are two animals in one trailer. This will prevent them from biting each other. A horse in the trailer needs enough slack to allow him to stand up to the front of the stall, against the manger. In case of two horses, the slack should be just enough to protect the other animal from being bitten. If the animal is fractious or for any reason there is danger of him going over the front of the trailer (an example is a trailer without a manger on it), tie another rope

in the halter ring, run it along the other side of the animal and tie it to the rear end of the trailer. Have it tight enough to hold him back.

An animal should be tied in a trailer with a knot that will untie easily and rapidly. It is dangerous to take up extra rope by tying a bunch of knots in it. Lay the surplus rope in the manger or even let the horse stand on it in the stall of the trailer rather than use a bunch of knots to use up extra rope.

Untie the animals before you let the tailgate down. This is always a safe practice.

Many horses and mules have become mean to load in trailers and vicious about hauling by the practice of hauling two in a trailer without a partition. To prevent accidents and to teach horses to enjoy riding in a trailer, always use a partition where two are being hauled at once. Many horses have been injured and trailers have been tipped over because there was no partition.

If one animal is being transported in a two-horse trailer, fasten the partition to one side so he can use the entire stall. If only one animal is standing in the trailer and the partition is fastened in the middle position there is much danger of him falling over the partition and landing upside down on the other side. This is very dangerous to the animal and the driver.

Feeding

Proper feeding will result in more economical use of horse feeds and more efficient returns from the horse in the form of spirit, energy, endurance, and sometimes longevity. By proper feeding, the horse may be maintained in condition without danger of injury.

It is evident that pound for pound, alfalfa hay is superior to timothy hay or oat hay.

Oats and timothy hay make a good combination of feeds for an idle horse or one that is doing light or fast work.

A balanced ration cannot be computed for timothy hay with corn or barley as the only concentrate.

Oats and alfalfa are not as suitable for a combination for severe work as is alfalfa hay and corn or barley.

Alfalfa hay and corn or barley make a good combination for all types of conditions.

Oat hay is suitable for horses at lighter degrees of work but is too bulky to be used for horses at severe work.

It is generally more economical to maintain stock whether idle or at work by adding grain to the ration than to feed straight hay.

Finally, these suggestions are written as protection to man and beast. They may not appear to be the best methods to some. If there are better ways of getting the job done safely, everyone should be happy to use them. These suggestions may help a novice or one with some experience to enjoy his work in the use of horses and mules and help him feel he is doing the job safely.