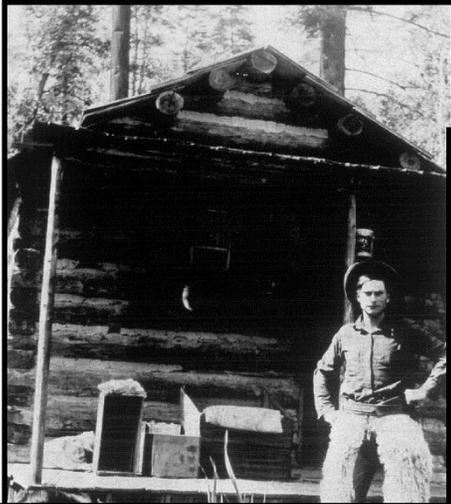


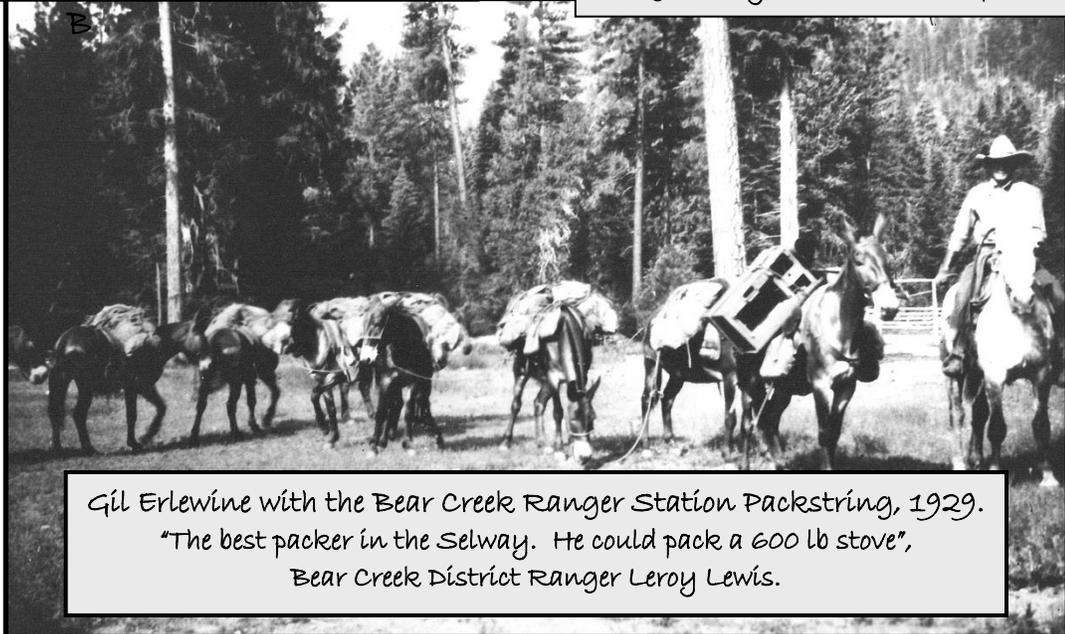
History of Packing in Idaho's Selway Country



Martin Bardoff was hired by contract to pack for the Selway National Forest in 1919.



Johnny Cassetto, Bear Creek District Ranger Leroy Lewis and his wife Mabel.



Gil Erlewine with the Bear Creek Ranger Station Packstring, 1929.
"The best packer in the Selway. He could pack a 600 lb stove",
Bear Creek District Ranger Leroy Lewis.

By Cindy L. Schacher, Archaeologist
Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests
Updated 7/15/2016

History of Packing in Idaho's Selway Country

The Partnership Between the Forest Service and Packing

In 1891 Congress authorized the President to withdraw public lands and create forest reserves. This led to the 1897 establishment of the Bitterroot Forest Reserve by President Grover Cleveland. The Forest Reserves were initially under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Forestry of the General Land Office, Department of Interior. In 1905 the Bureau of Forestry, its personnel and the forest reserves, were transferred to the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service was created as a department agency. By an act of Congress in 1907 the Forest Reserves were changed to National Forests. Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the Bureau of Forestry, scouted the Selway area in the 1896. An outfitter from Montana, Fred Printz, led Mr. Pinchot on the trip, providing the needed provisions and pack animals. Thus began the partnership between the Forest Service and animal packing, which has served as the principal means of transporting personnel and goods into the backcountry by the Forest Service since its infancy.

Early Forest Service Rangers

The dream of many young men was to become a ranger, and being a ranger required that you had the skills of a packer.

Establishment of the Forest Reserves, and later the Forest Service, presented a need and opportunity for would-be forest rangers to pursue their dreams. It was 1907 in the small central Idaho community of Kooskia where the first Forest Ranger examination was held

in the area. Each candidate had to supply three head of horses and tools to build trails and cabins. He also had to demonstrate that

he knew how to use the tools and pack items like a barrel, tools, bedding, and a tent on his animals using a diamond hitch. There was a compass and pacing exercise where a tract of land was staked off. The men had to pace and give the acreage of the tract. Lastly, there was a written examination, which required the candidate to furnish practical solutions to various problems. Those who passed the exam were given jobs in the order of their scores and appointed at \$75 per month.



Bitterroot Forest Reserve Rangers, 1899.

George V. Ring photograph, courtesy of St. Gertrude's Museum.

MEN WANTED!

A RANGER MUST BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF AND HIS HORSES UNDER VERY TRYING CONDITIONS; BUILD TRAILS AND CABINS; RIDE ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT; PACK, SHOOT, AND FIGHT FIRE WITHOUT LOOSING HIS HEAD

ALL THIS REQUIRES A VERY VIGOROUS CONSTITUTION. IT MEANS THE HARDEST KIND OF PHYSICAL WORK FROM BEGINNING TO END. IT IS NOT A JOB FOR THOSE SEEKING HEALTH OR LIGHT OUTDOOR WORK

**INVALIDS
NEED NOT APPLY!**



USDA Forest Service Ranger Recruitment Poster c. 1905.



Selway National Forest Ranger, Adolph Weholt, 1910.
Adolph Weholt photograph, courtesy of Don and Esther Morrow.

Adolph Weholt, a Ranger on the Selway National Forest, told of choosing his crew from husky 18 to 20 year old mountain kids. The workers were required to provide their own riding horses, and board themselves. After his tryout in a corral full of half wild horses, Loyd Rupe was judged the most adept at handling stock and throwing the diamond hitch, so he became the official packer.



Forest Service Pack String at Elbow Bend, October 1911.
Lew Lester, Loyd Rupe, and Sam Weholt on horseback.
USFS photograph.



Sam Weholt (left) and Loyd Rupe (right) near Montana/Idaho Divide on Idaho side. Taking time to hunt mountain goats. October, 1911.
USFS photograph.

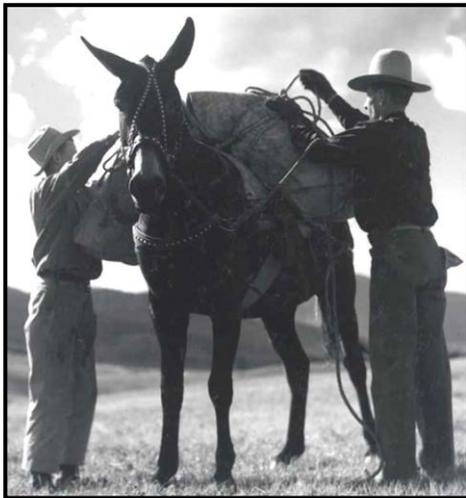
Mr. Rupe later told of traveling through Blodgett Pass on the Idaho/Montana divide on a steep and dangerous trail. On many of the switchbacks the horse's heads would protrude into space as they made their turns. He also found it necessary to reduce his loads to 35 pounds to keep the horses from tipping over backwards as they clawed their way up the rock bluffs. The bleached bones of rolled animals could be seen far below—bleak evidence that an unfortunate hunter or trapper had met with disaster.



**Early 1920s crew at Elk Summit Ranger Station.
Third from right is ranger/packer Bill Bell.**
Arthur M. Brown Collection, Montana Historical Society.

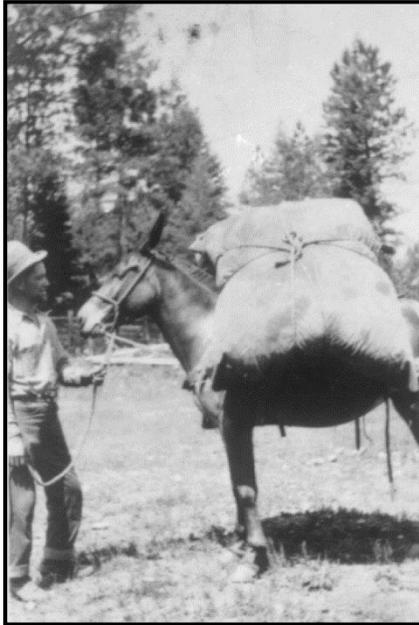


Construction of Elk Summit Ranger Station, 1926.
USFS photograph.



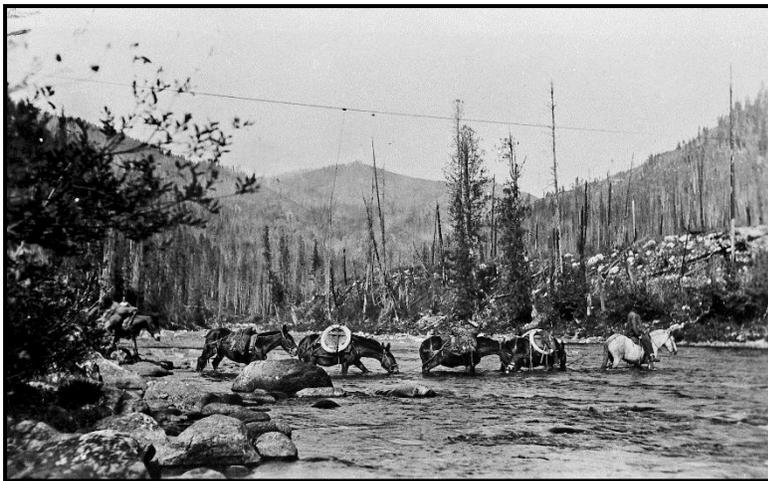
**Bill Bell giving packing
advice at Ninemile Remount
Station in Montana, 1941.**
K.D. Swan photograph

Bill Bell and his family moved to Grantsdale, MT during the 1890's where his father farmed and logged with a team of horses on the west side of Hamilton. Bill worked for Marcus Daly riding and breaking horses and later as a commercial packer and guide. Eventually he began work with the Forest Service and was promoted to ranger of the Elk Summit District where he served from 1917-29. While working at Elk Summit he constructed a sawmill on Hoodoo Creek where he cut lumber for the construction of the new ranger station which still exists today. In 1918 he also served as ranger at Bear Creek Ranger Station, along the Selway River. In 1929 Bill resigned from the Forest Service. He wasn't gone long though, returning around 1934 as chief packer and saddle shop foreman at Nine Mile Remount Depot. He and his partner Monty Payton were declared "World Champion Packers" at the Northern Montana Fair in 1937, packing nine mules with loads of firefighting gear averaging 250 lbs. per mule in 8 minutes. After his retirement from the Remount in 1947, he contracted the shoeing of government stock all over Region One. He gained additional notoriety in Norman Maclean's book *The River Runs Through It. The Ranger, The Cook and The Hole in the Sky* is a story based on the era when Maclean worked for Ranger Bell at Elk Summit. A movie was subsequently made starring Sam Elliot as Ranger Bill Bell in 1995.



Left: Packer Sid Poppe, Selway National Forest, 1926.
Above Right: Sid Poppe and crew. Sid is second from left.
 Sid Poppe photographs, Dick Walker Collection.

Sid Poppe was another early horseman, packer, and skilled builder of cabins, trails, roads, and bridges. Mr. Poppe came from French Canadian stock, and his father was in charge of the horse remuda for the XLT cattle ranch in Eastern Montana. He grew up tough, breaking horses with the stock of the Cramer Brothers Rodeo Shows. Sid worked for the Forest Service from 1920 to 1940, spending much of that time stationed at the Bear Creek Ranger Station on the Selway National Forest. He was skilled at working with animals and there were few better packers. Sid's mongrel dog could pack 30 pounds.



Packer Jeff Hendren crossing the Selway River in-route to Otter Butte, circa 1910. Note the fire scorched landscape.
 USFS Collection

The Hendren family has a long history of packing for the Forest Service in the Lochsa and Selway areas. Elbert Hendren, who later had a home on the lower Selway, followed in his father Jeff's footsteps and began packing for the Forest Service in 1909. Several of Elbert's sons also worked as Forest Service packers over the years.



Elbert Hendren and Fred Reimler loading radio antennas for Disgrace Butte Lookout on "Ink Spot", 1949. Elbert worked for the Forest Service from 1909 to 1959 as a packer. Bob Smith photograph

Packing, Outfitting, and Guiding

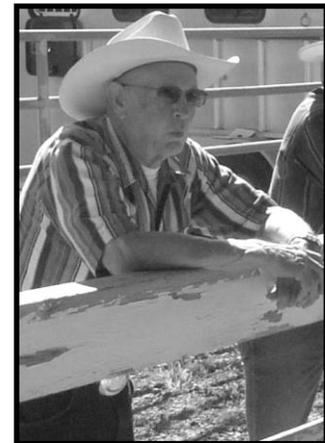


Hunters that Bill McPherson packed in – up Bear Creek in the early 1930s.
Don McPherson photograph, Dick Walker Collection.



Bill McPherson in 1960 showing the last batch of shoes he made. He contracted horseshoeing for the Forest Service and others for 40 years. During that time he shod 70,000 head of horses and mules.

Don McPherson photograph.



Don McPherson, 2007.
Cindy Schacher photograph.

Bill's son, Don McPherson, an officer with the Idaho State Fish and Game department, started packing fish to many of the remote mountain lakes in 1946. Don also packed hundreds of pounds of salt into the backcountry for elk until the salting program was discontinued in the 1970s. The purpose of the salting program was to draw big game off winter range earlier and to regulate elk distribution throughout the summer range. It was assumed that salt was necessary to the health and vigor of animals: this was later determined to not be the case.

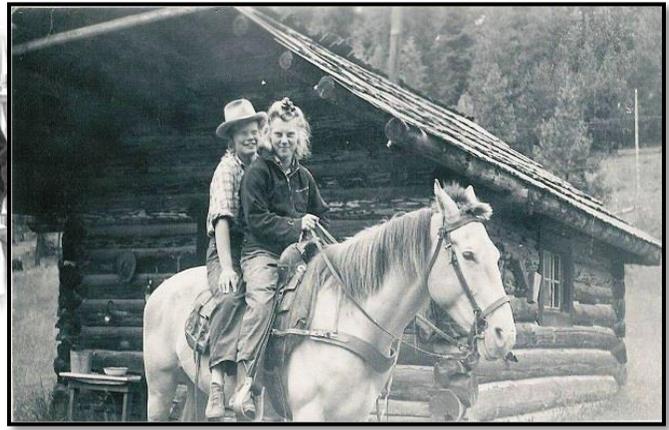


Don McPherson and Paul Flinn, officers with the Idaho Fish and Game Department, packing milk cans full of trout fry from Fog Mountain to Cove Lake, 1947.

Paul Flinn photograph.



Jim Renshaw giving a packing demonstration, 2003.
Cindy Schacher photograph.



Jean and Billie Renshaw, 1946.
L.M. Powell photograph

At the age of thirteen, Alvin Renshaw was hired as a wrangler for the Forest Service. In 1931 Alvin, by then married and with a family, bought the Pettibone Ranch near the mouth of Bear Creek along the Selway River. In 1932 he packed his wife and three small children to their new home deep within the Selway National Forest. For the next sixteen years the Renshaw family hosted numerous guests from all over the country at their Selway Lodge. Alvin sold the business and lodge in 1948. Over the next few years Alvin's son Jim packed for the new owners of the Selway Lodge. He later bought an old homestead at Trout Creek, near Three Forks in the Moose Creek drainage and operated his own outfitting business in various locations in the Selway area, retiring in 1998.



Moose Creek hunting camp in 1926 or 1927. L-R: Joe Seigel (hunter), Clive Hill (hunter), Howard Engle (guide). Photograph shows elk meat being smoked for jerky and Howard Engle shoeing a horse.
Howard Engle photograph, Dick Walker Collection.

Howard Engle operated an outfitting business from the Three Forks of Moose Creek in the 1920's and 1930's. His wife Francis was often by his side. Being a "jack of all trades" was key to a successful outfitting business. An outfitter and guide had to be a proficient hunter, skilled packer, horseshoer, good host, and know his way around in the backcountry.

In the summer of 1940 Howard was employed by the Forest Service out of Moose Creek Ranger Station as a packer. On July 12 he was assigned a job that was an historic first for his profession. He was tasked with packing out two smokejumpers and their gear from a jump site on Marten Creek. The smokejumpers were Earl Cooley and Rufus Robinson who had just performed the first smokejump in Forest Service history.

Howard Engle and his wife Francis near Rainbow Lake.

Mrs. Ken Maryott photograph, Dick Walker Collection.



Howard Engle on Selway River Trail, 1936.
Howard Engle photograph, Sam Martin Collection.



Howard Engle's camp October 1927 at Moose Creek. Bailey Mountain in the background. Howard Engle photograph, Dick Walker Collection.

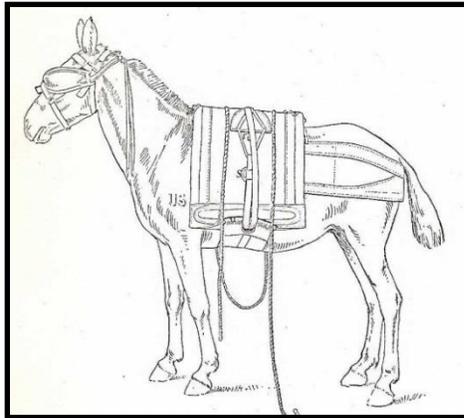
The Decker Pack Saddle

Initially various methods were used to transport supplies and equipment to isolated areas. One of the more unusual was rawhiding. Supplies were wrapped in a green cow, elk, or deer hide and dragged over the deep snow, which prevented the use of other methods. The rawhide was pulled by man or horse equipped with special snowshoes. A variety of saddles were commonly used for pack animals. However, early pack saddles were not designed to properly fit an animal or to carry a heavy load.

Some of the early saddles used were the Sawbuck, the military McClelland and the Aparejo. Many packers experimented with ways to move more tonnage without galling the backs of their animals.



The Sawbuck Pack Saddle.



Aparejo Pack Saddle. This saddle was developed in eighth century Spain. Spaniards brought it to Mexico and South America. It was eventually introduced to Americans and was a popular pack saddle prior to the Decker.

Manual of Instruction in Pack Transportation, H.W. Daly Packmaster, U.S. Army, 1904.



“Throwing the two-man diamond hitch”, circa 1900.
George V. Ring photograph, courtesy of St. Gertrude’s Museum.

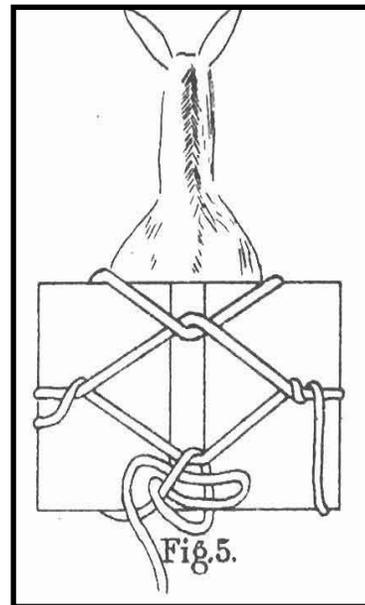
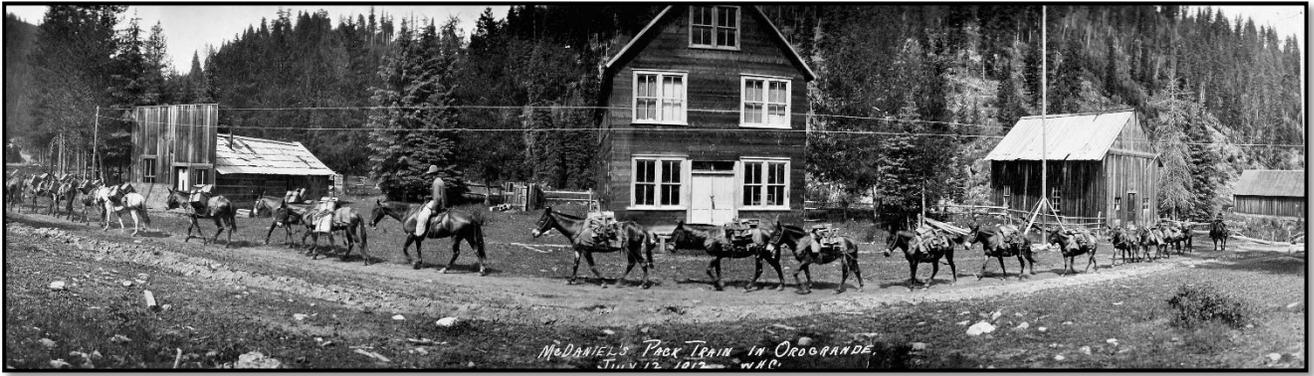


Illustration of the single diamond hitch.



Modern Day Decker Pack Saddle.



McDaniel's Pack Train at Orogrande, Idaho 1912.

Where the idea for the Decker Pack Saddle originated has been debated for years. It is commonly thought that the first pack saddle tree of this kind was brought to the area from Colorado by S.C. McDaniel, a well-known packer in the north-central Idaho mining camps. However, it is without doubt that O.P. Robinett perfected the tree for the saddle and began manufacturing them in 1906.

In 1906 a Kooskia, Idaho packer and blacksmith, O.P. Robinett, began building a packsaddle with forks of ¾ inch round steel, which could be heated and bent to fit the saddle to each animal. He first used pine for the bars but soon discovered that the pine split too easily. He then began using green cottonwood, light as the pine but less prone to cracking.

The advantages of Robinett's packsaddle were obvious. Soon there was a demand for his saddles from local packers and the Forest Service. Bert and John Decker, also of Kooskia, packed with several large mule strings. The Decker brothers developed the half-breed or padded canvas cover for Robinett's saddle to protect the animal from hard or sharp loads. The half-breed is heavy double canvas, leather bound and padded with horsehair, beargrass, or any other material that would protect the animal.

The Decker brothers made an agreement with Mr. Robinett to market his saddle. This is where the name of the "Decker Pack Saddle" originated. Robinett, a good natured, easygoing man, did not object to the name, but in doing so lost an opportunity for his name to become a permanent part of every packer's vocabulary. He did, however, always carve or burn his initials into the trees of each saddle he made.



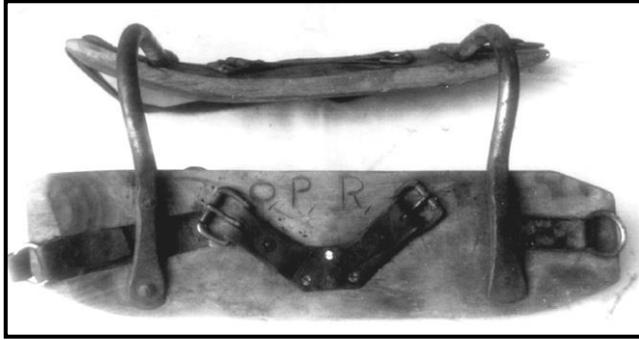
O.P. Robinett at his home on the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River. He was packmaster from 1914 to 1919 at Number One Ranger Station on the Middle Fork. He broke new mules, shod them, and fitted them with saddles before turning them over to other packers.

Emmett Rynearson photograph



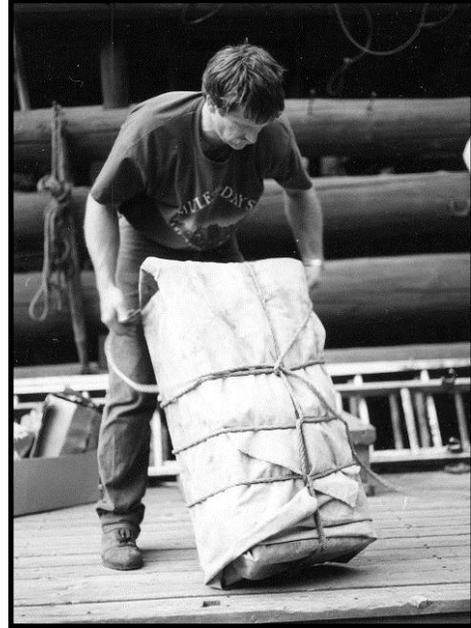
John Decker and Adolph Weholt loading dynamite on a mule, 1919.

USFS photograph



Decker pack saddle tree with O P R initials carved into the wood.
USFS photograph.

Loads for the Decker are cargoed in a canvas mantee and fastened to the saddle with the regular swing or sling rope. The advantage of this arrangement is that the load on each side of the animal has some “give” to it if the pack animal hits a tree or rock. When displaced, the load immediately shifts back into its original position. When the diamond hitch was used on the aparejo or crosstree, the load was solid, creating a treacherous situation—the mule went with the load.



Cargoing a pack. Moose Creek District Packer Doug Hunt, 1999.
Roger Inghram photograph

Robinett built several “little” pack saddles for the Forest Service during their attempt at using burros for packing. This experiment didn’t last long; the burros were too stubborn and their legs too short to get across fallen trees. He left the Forest Service in 1927 to build pack saddles full time, and before his death in 1946 he had produced some 12,500 of them.



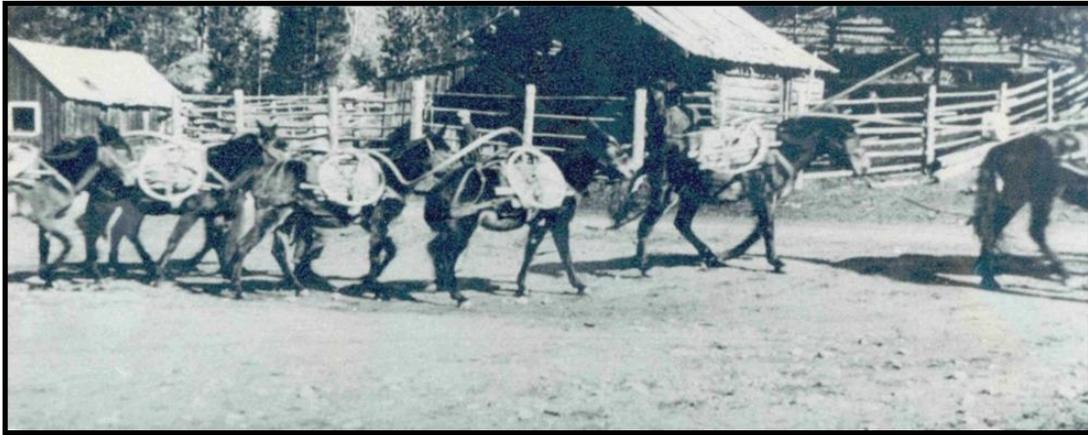
Jack Rice attempting to pack burros at Pettibone Lookout, Selway National Forest - 1930's. Note the small pack saddles. Sid Poppe photograph, Dick Walker Collection.



Burros were used for one year to pack small trail crates, but they proved to be too stubborn for much use, 1933.
Esther Case photograph, Dick Walker Collection.

Challenges of the Job

The packer was often asked to load odd, long, or bulky loads on his animals. The stories of packers and unique loads they carried abound in local folk-lore. Pack animals carried a cast iron bathtub to the Moose Creek Ranger Station along the treacherous Selway River trail. The L4 Lookout kit commonly came in a package designed for easy packing on a mule. The large cables for the original Selway Falls Pack Bridge were carried by packstring. One loop of cable would be put on a mule then strung to the next mule and looped on its saddle and so forth.



**Packing cable on mules. Note the cable is looped from one animal to the next.
Unknown location.
USFS photograph.**



**Packstring loaded with timbers for a lookout construction project.
Bear Creek Ranger Station, Selway National Forest, 1925.
Sid Poppe photograph, Dick Walker Collection.**



Packing fish at Blodgett Lake, 1939.
USFS photograph.

Fish were even transported on mules. Most of the high mountain lakes did not have fish in them in the early 1900's. Pack mules often carried fish in 5-gallon cans for stocking backcountry lakes. The packer and mules had to stay in motion so that the water in the cans would stay oxygenated.

Tying a large number of horses and mules together and taking them down a treacherous trail was problematic. Some packers would tail their horses and mules together by tying the halter rope of one animal to the tail of the animal in front of him with the trusty half hitch. However, in the event of a wreck, one animal falling could pull the entire string off the trail with him. Some packers did not tie their animals together at all, allowing them to pick their own way along the trail. This too proved to be a challenge. According to Dean Harrington, former Forest Service employee, the general procedure was to have two men with each packtrain. The head packer would lead the bell mare while all the other animals were turned loose. The man in the rear of the packtrain kept the string moving. When a horse in the center decided to stop and graze, he would throw a rock and holler until his voice played out. Some packers used BB guns to get the animals moving down the trail. Others were known to use stock dogs to keep the horses motivated.

SELWAY REMOUNT

In the early 1900's pack stock was much in demand because of large fires in the area, trail construction, lookout construction, and general transportation of goods and supplies. The Forest Service commonly hired pack strings from private individuals. Eventually pack animals were purchased by the Forest Service for the use of its employees.

The Selway National Forest owned and used over 200 head of pack and saddle stock in the late 1920's, but during severe fire years even this was not enough. In August of 1929 the Forest Service scoured the entire inland northwest in search of pack outfits. Unfortunately the additional stock arrived after the dire need for them had passed. They came unshod, poorly equipped, half broken and were not organized into workable strings.

In 1930 the Selway Forest cancelled several grazing permits on Coolwater Ridge and built some corrals, creating the Selway Remount. During its first year a few top-of-the-line strings were organized. The Forest Service shod and equipped the strings and kept a reserve of good packers. Again this was not enough, so between 1931 and 1934 additional holding pens and pasture fence was built. Experienced horsemen and packers, Art Spivey and Lawrence Howard, were in charge of finding stock. They contracted strings from as far away as Enterprise, Oregon and Walla Walla, Washington. Upon arrival they were organized, shod, and put into a rotation schedule for training. The government covered all maintenance expenses for the animals but paid their owners for service only when the strings were actually used. This eliminated the need for winter feed and assured there would be no big administrative overhead costs.



One of the buildings at the Remount on Coolwater Ridge, circa 1950. All of the buildings have since been removed.
USFS photograph.

The Remount eventually held 300 head of pack and saddle stock. Pasture was managed on a rotation schedule. The strings were carefully organized and practice drills held on a regular basis. The Selway National Forest was proud of its strings, with some of the country's most experienced hands and efficient pack train organizations. However, despite the size of the Remount herd, it still proved insufficient for the demand in three of the five years of its existence. An astronomical number of pack animals were used during the 1934 fire season (August 7 to September 20), 150 head of government stock and another 324 head of contract animals.



Shoeing a horse at Selway Falls Guard Station, 1962.
USFS photograph.

The 21st Century

Today the Moose Creek Ranger District, Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests, still relies on the skills of packers to transport materials, supplies, and personnel to the remote backcountry of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Two pack strings consisting of approximately 25 mules and horses are used. The pack strings are also used for education and awareness associated with traditional and low impact stock use. The historic art of packing has remained essentially unchanged and is still an important wilderness management tool in the new millennium.



Roger Inghram, Art Seamans and USFS photos.