BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMEN OF CALIFORNIA

Hellooo Camp!

A COMMON SENSE GUIDE FOR SELECTING

A CAMPSITE AND USE OF FIRE

It's been a long day and you've been in the saddle for most of it.
Now it's time to find a good campsite, take care of your animals, and make camp for the night.
What kind of place will suit your needs and the needs of your livestock?

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CAMPSITE ?

When camping with livestock, one of your primary considerations in selecting a place to camp should naturally be the well-being of your animals. Before leaving on your trip, it is a good idea to make inquiries about the availability of feed, accessibility to water, and potential impact on the resources. You should select an area where your impact will be minimal. All of these things require awareness on your part and prior planning before your trip.

Existing Campsites

Many times on public lands, campsites are already established. These sites have been used traditionally many times over the years and should be utilized whenever available. All campsites should be 100 feet from water. Of course, before deciding whether or not to use a particular campsite, you should consider several things — how much use is the area already receiving? What kind of impact will your group have on the area? How fragile is the soil and surrounding vegetation? You also need to consider the impact your livestock will have on the availability of winter feed for local wildlife.

Choose an area that is large enough to comfortably accommodate the number of animals in your party without compromising the resources. In order to recover from grazing pressures, meadows should be left in the best possible condition. The rule of thumb is, when plant height has been removed by 50 percent, it's time to relocate.

Processed and pelletized feed can be used not only to supplement feeding but also to decrease the impact on grazing. Animals should become accustomed to pelletized feed a few days before going into the backcountry, to minimize the possibility of colic.

New Campsites

In camping in a pristine area, it is essential that you not only allow adequate time to select an appropriate camping spot, but also try to avoid previously used campsites in order for them to have sufficient time to recover. You should locate your camp at least 100 feet from water. Consider this a minimal guideline, but check for any local regulations in your planned destination for the best information.

As with existing campsites, you should locate areas that will provide feed for your livestock and which is still well-suited for low impact camping. Look for a durable surface when selecting areas to place kitchen and tents. Such areas include exposed bedrock or dry grassy areas. In high desert locations, gravelly areas with minimum vegetation are ideal.

When using a campsite in a pristine area, vary the routes you take to water or to use the bathroom in order to prevent formation of permanent trails. Be aware of any activity that might endanger or harm the existing natural features of the site, especially those that regenerate slowly, such as trees, mosses, or lichens. Impact on the area can many times be avoided if you limit your stay to only one night.

Water for your livestock is another key factor in choosing a good campsite. The banks of small streams and vegetated lakeshores can be relatively fragile, so care should be taken in selecting stock watering areas preferably located at fords or even low gravel banks where damage will be minimal if any.

Campfires

At one time, campfires in the backcountry were not only nice, but a basic necessity for cooking and warmth. With the advent of modern efficient camp stoves, campfires, in some instances, may not be necessary. Campfires may not be possible in high elevations or high use areas where no or very limited fuel is available. Granted, huddling around a fluorescent lantern at night may not be an image that most people think of when dreaming about a trip to the mountains, but a modern camp stove minimizes the impact you and your party will have on the backcountry.

In established campsites, there are often rock campfire rings that have been used for years. If you feel a campfire is important and there are no restrictions prohibiting a fire, make sure there is plenty of dead, downed wood available and the risk of fire danger is minimal. Use the established campfire ring instead of constructing a new one. Always check with the administrating agency beforehand in order to obtain a campfire permit if necessary.

In a pristine area, it is possible to have a campfire and still have a minimal impact on the area. As always, select a durable site for your fire. Fires can be made utilizing either the mound fire with a fire blanket, or by using fire pans, metal oil pans or roasting pans lined with a few inches of inorganic soil and elevated with rocks. You may consider packing out ashes and disposing of them properly and safely.

By using these simple guidelines and common sense in selecting a campsite, your impact will be minimal and that ideal camping spot will remain a favorite for you and others for years to come.

MY CAMP .... YOUR CAMP

- Recognize durable surfaces.
- Concentrate use in popular areas.
- Use established campsites if possible.
- Camp away from trails and water sources.
- Leave a site cleaner than you found it.
- Disperse use in new areas.
- Avoid areas where impact is just beginning.

RESPONSIBLE CAMPFIRES

- Know the regulations and management techniques.
- Judge the wind, weather, location and wood availability. Decide if it is safe.
- Use an established fire ring if possible.
- Where there is no fire ring, bring a fire pan or make a mound fire.
- Use dead and downed wood.
- An unattended fire is dangerous.
- Always have a shovel and bucket for saturating the ashes with water.
- Restore the appearance of the fire site.

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