

BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMAN OF IDAHO

EDUCATION PROGRAM/LNT

AN INTRODUCTION TO LEAVE NO TRACE NARRATIVE

Backcountry Horsemen is an organization found in 23 states across America. Most people just call us “BCH”. The (Chapter Name) BCH is a chapter of Backcountry Horsemen of Idaho.

Our members introduce interested horsemen to the use and enjoyment of trail riding and the backcountry, work with many different agencies to help maintain and establish trails and trailheads, and help educate and inform users about the impact of recreational use on our lands.

Working with The Forest Service, The Bureau of Land Management, and other public land agencies in Idaho State, Backcountry Horsemen of Idaho actively participates in regulatory issues and actions to protect our right to use stock on our public lands. BCH shares ideas on lowering impact on our lands through an educational program known as “Leave No Trace”. Through this educational program, trail maintenance and construction, and other activities, BCH of Idaho, during the last three years, has contributed over (need the number here) hours of volunteer work for an economic value in excess of \$ (Need the dollar amount here) Million dollars!

Education of the public on methods of low impact horse use is one of the main goals of Backcountry Horsemen. Leave No Trace, or LNT as it

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is usually called, has been a great success in our area. One of its basic concepts is that education is more effective than regulation in modifying backcountry behavior. Making regulations and rules to control people and certain practices in the outdoors has been proven to be ineffective. Also, regulation requires enforcement and all agencies have a manpower shortage. Enforcement personnel can not be everywhere at once, and it has been shown that modifying people's behavior in the outdoors through education is much more effective and costs much less than a regulatory approach. Therefore, we believe that education is the key to preserving the health of our outdoors.

One of the basic philosophies of Leave No Trace is that we should disguise the sight and sounds of our passage and leave no sign that we were ever there. Once understood, these concepts are easy to practice.

There are seven principles of Leave No Trace that are useful to remember and apply whenever you are out in the outdoors: Plan Ahead and Prepare, Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces, Dispose of Waste Properly, Leave What You Find, Minimize Campfire Impacts, Respect Wildlife, and Be Considerate of Other Visitors. It is important to remember that LNT principles are only guidelines and not hard and fast rules. When using the outdoors, you must consider your surroundings, local regulations, weather concerns, and your skill level when choosing the best way to apply these principles. No two situations are the same and your methods of low impact use will vary depending on your given

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circumstances such as the number of people in your party, the time of year, local rules, etc. Many factors can and will modify what you can and can not do on your outing.

Let's go for a ride and see how we can enjoy ourselves and our horses and still take care of the outdoors. Planning ahead is essential to a safe and successful trip. What kind of riding are you and your friends planning to do? Will this be a day ride, will you be staying overnight at trailhead, or packing out for several days. It makes a BIG difference on how much equipment and livestock you will need! Since most folks trail ride in their local area or camp at a trailhead and day ride out from there, let's go for a ride and camp overnight at trailhead with some friends.

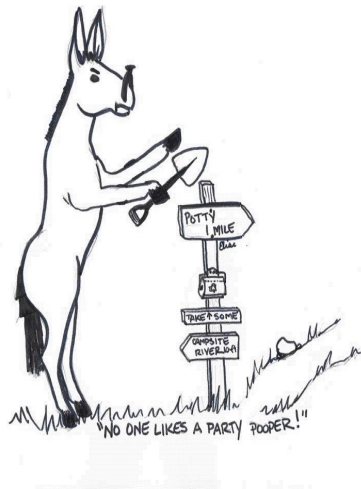
Obviously, we will not need to take extra horses to pack equipment and supplies which automatically reduces impact. Always keep the number of animals to a minimum on any trip.

The time of year and expected weather will affect many different areas of planning such as the type of clothing needed, camping equipment, trail conditions that will be encountered, feed for livestock, and available camping space, to just name a few. Lack of planning can greatly increase our impact. For example, everyone comes back from our ride soaking wet from the unexpected thunderstorm. We forgot to pack adequate rain gear and clothing for the conditions encountered and now we have a serious problem. We need to dry everyone out as soon as possible and a large campfire seems to be our only solution because we don't have any

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other way of getting warm and dry. Who brought the ax, bucket and shovel for the fire? What do you mean that no firewood is available without chopping down a tree? As you can see, pre-planning can make a big difference on our impact, safety, and comfort.

Let's select a camp area at least 200 feet from lakes and streams to help protect the land. Good campsites are found not made and altering is not



necessary. While we're setting up camp, let's consider that self-supporting lightweight tents require no trees chopped down for tent frames. Cooking over a

camp stove is convenient and doesn't require a campfire or wood. Obviously, anything that you can bring that is self-contained will have a lower impact than something needing natural materials from your camp site. There is nothing wrong with our having a campfire in the evening, but did we check to see if wood was available or if we should have brought our own. If wood is available at our camp site, we should only use dead and already downed wood of small a size, since small wood burns hotter and will burn down to ash easier than large pieces of wood. This will help us leave a clean campsite. We need to avoid damaging live trees and never cut down a standing tree dead or alive. Even though the

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fire pit isn't exactly where we would like it to be, we'll need to use the existing one to lessen our impact. Multiple fire pits in one area is a definite eyesore. By minimizing our campsite alterations, we can keep the hardened and dead part of our site from getting bigger and bigger.

Checking ahead of time on facilities at trailhead and local regulations can also save us a lot of headaches. Are water and feed available? Even if feed is available, are we allowed to graze stock? Is supplemental feed going to be needed?

What restraint system will we need to contain the horses at trailhead? Many trailheads have hitch rails, but will there be enough room considering other users and when we plan on arriving. Hopefully, our horses are trained to stand for extended periods of time. Many stock users find that their horses stand quieter and do less pawing and damage to the area where they're tied if hobbles are used. So, do we need to train any of our horses to use hobbles? Let's be sure to do this training before we leave home. Another possibility for containment is a portable electric fence if our horses are trained to respect a hot fence. Keep in mind, an electric fence requires quite a bit of room and many trailheads are limited in space. Many stock users option for using a "highline". The highline is one of the easiest, lightweight ways to keep your stock tied up, quiet, and it doesn't require much space. A highline consists of two pieces of nylon webbing, called tree saver, and a long length of 7/16 or 1/2 inch rope. The tree savers, which prevent girdling the trees, are placed around two

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trees and the rope tied between them at a height of about 6 feet from the ground. This rope is stretched tight and makes a place to tie your horses. By tying to the highline, your stock can be kept away from the trees so that no tree roots are trampled or trees girdled. The stretched rope acts like a bungee cord letting the horses move around, but still be secured. They tend to stand quieter since there is some degree of give and take with the highline. The horses can graze and even lie down. At trailhead if space is limited, you can even use your trailer for one end of the highline.

We are now on the trail doing what we enjoy the most - - riding. Two critical ideas that minimize the signs of our passage are to stay on the trail and do not cut switchbacks. On a wide established trail it is OK to ride side by side, but on a narrow trail we should ride single file. Woven trails are a result of not staying in one path and are seen all too often. Although it's tricky, we should keep our horses from skirting shallow puddles, small rocks, bushes, and small trees in the trail. Ever widening and multiple trails form very fast around obstructions. After all, a little mud is just part of the experience! As appealing as it may seem, riding cross country and making our own way quickly leads to very noticeable impact. Please stay on the trails!

One of our greatest challenges in the outdoors is trash and garbage; both ours and those who have gone before us. The old saying "Pack it in, Pack it out" is still one of the best. Being on horseback allows us the option to really help out. Other people's trash can be easily picked up and

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dropped into a zip-lock or trash bag carried in our saddle bags, leaving the land better off because we rode through there. At rest stops, even short ones, we should tie our stock off the trail. This is safer and more courteous to other trail users and helps reduce widening of the trail by people trying to pass. Just be sure to tie to a tree that is at least 6 inches in diameter. Horses can pull back and their lead rope can girdle a small tree very easily. Only tie to trees for a short period, so make that lunch break quick. And speaking of lunch, while its tempting to share with that squirrel, don't feed wildlife or leave food behind. Orange peels, nut shells, and some other food stuffs take years to break down, are not eaten by wildlife, and leave an eye sore for the next visitor.

An even worse eye sore are Charmin flowers. These are becoming all too common a sight while out riding. A Charmin flower, also known as toilet paper, does not break down immediately and disappear as many people believe. Please dispose of human waste and toilet paper properly by burying it in a 6 to 8 inch deep hole. Hiding it under a rock or log doesn't work either. Sure glad we remembered to carry that little folding shovel in our saddle bags! And speaking of waste, don't forget to scatter all the manure that our horses left after lunch and at trailhead. Manure piles that are scattered quickly decompose and disappear. If left in piles, manure takes years to break down and can actually sterilize the ground beneath it because of the concentration of acids. Also, manure piles are the number one complaint of non-horse users.

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Please respect wildlife when riding, remember we are visitors in THEIR backyard. As we mentioned earlier, we should never feed animals or leave food behind, and we should always observe wildlife from a distance. If pets are allowed where we are riding and we've decided to bring Fido along, we must keep him under control so that he does not harass the wildlife.

Last but not least, we should be considerate of other visitors. We all like to think that we're the only ones around, and by being aware of our noise level and choosing natural colored equipment, we can blend in. Being considerate of other users and practicing good camp and trail etiquette helps ensure that everyone enjoys their visit.

More and more people are utilizing the same areas and we must all strive to promote understanding and appreciation between different user groups. A little conversation as we pass others can promote a positive impression of the horse community. All user groups must learn to work together for the common good of our public lands.

Thanks for going camping and trail riding with us! Hope to see you out on the trail. Remember, take only pictures and leave only hoof prints!