

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. Is there adequate grazing, water, and possible shelter? Before leaving, it is a good idea to make inquiries as to the availability of feed, accessibility to water, and potential impact on the resources. You should also be aware in selecting 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.