



## **B10a ANIMALS - Horses and Ponies**

**Chris Blessington (2007)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This section cannot be regarded as a definitive guide to the use of horses and ponies on expeditions. Some of the principles and sources for further information will be mentioned but the onus for ensuring that riders are properly trained and that the animals used on expedition, whether for riding or pack purposes are properly cared for, remains the responsibility of the expedition organisers.

Riding may be enjoyed at many levels. The use of horses and ponies may increase the scope, range and enjoyment enabling an expedition to reach areas beyond that generally to be achieved on foot. At its simplest it is a means of transport at its most developed it is a most rewarding example of the partnership that can exist between man and animal.

When planning the use of horses or ponies consider the experience of the riders and the capacity of the animals to undertake the challenges facing them. The first consideration must always be the welfare of the animals and the experience of the riders. Unfit or badly treated animals will not be able to what is required of them. Unfit or in-experienced riders will not be able to cope.

In the United Kingdom most riders will know about the Pony Club and the British Horse Society. Both organisations are reliable sources of advice, standards and training. Expedition organisers are advised to seek their advice at an early stage.

Their contact details are as follows:

**The British Horse Society**  
Stoneleigh Deer Park  
Kenilworth,  
Warwickshire  
CV8 2XZ

Telephone: 08701 202244

Fax: 01926 707800

Email: [enquiry@bhs.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@bhs.org.uk)

**The Pony Club**  
Stoneleigh Park  
Kenilworth  
Warwickshire  
CV8 2RW

Telephone: 024 7669 8300

Fax: 02476 696836

[enquiries@pcuk.org](mailto:enquiries@pcuk.org)



## **SAFETY**

Before embarking on an expedition it is essential to assess the risks associated with the use of horses or ponies, and to take appropriate measures to ensure that the equipment is correct and in first-class condition, and that the expedition members have adequate training. For example most injuries from falls are to wrists, forearms, shoulders and collar bones. Riders should be taught to roll away from a horse if they fall and tuck their chin in as they do.

### **Helmets**

Helmets must be of an approved pattern and most importantly they must be well fitted. Accidents involving helmets are usually because they are badly fitted causing the peak to break the nose, or if the helmet falls backwards the chin strap breaks the neck. In some foreign countries it is not the custom to wear helmets, and people wearing them may be subject to some ridicule! However no expedition of young people should ever consider riding without them.

### **Clothing**

Good stout breeches and long sleeved shirts are recommended. Correct footwear is also important: shoes/boots must have adequate heels to prevent the foot slipping through the stirrup.

## **PREPARATION**

1. If you are thinking of hiring horses or ponies as riding or pack animals check the sources thoroughly for reliability and obtain references. Your priorities must be the health and the suitability of the animals for the task and their general welfare. Check whether tack and saddlery is in good order, that spares are available and whether instructors or grooms will be accompany the animals.
2. If you are hiring animals abroad you will need to check for local regulations (for example in the USA crossing from one state to another may require an expensive check from a vet from the new state).
3. Be certain that the expedition members who will be required to ride or work with animals have the experience or are trained for the task.
4. Good management consists of paying attention to a number of details. The neglect of any of these is likely to result in the loss of efficiency and affect the health and comfort of the animals. Watering, feeding, grooming and care should be carried out routinely and systematically and must be supervised.
5. All saddlery and harnesses must be fitted correctly and examined to see that at no point is it rubbing or chafing when in contact with the animal's body. Stitching should be examined for soundness, especially if the tack is hired or from an unfamiliar source. It is particularly important to check that saddles are properly fitted and that where saddle blankets or numnah pads are used that they do not press down on the animals' withers thus causing pressure sores. If pack saddles are used make sure that as with saddles



that they are properly fitted and the loads are evenly distributed. If there is any doubt on the quality, the fitting or the safety of the tack replace it. If these items are provided by contractors insist that they are changed. The safety of the expedition and the welfare of the animals may depend upon it.

## **DURING THE EXPEDITION**

### **Watering**

1. Horse lines should be sited as close to the watering place as possible. Every effort must be made to ensure that a plentiful supply of good water is available.
2. A horse requires 5 to 15 gallons of fresh water a day and in normal conditions should be watered four times a day. In hot weather horses should be watered more often and horses should be watered first and fed afterwards. Bits should be removed and girths slackened before watering.

### **Feeding**

3. The three guides to feeding are: feed before and not after watering (except in very hot conditions), feed in small quantities and often and do not work horses immediately after a feed.
4. All the horses should be fed at the same time; otherwise those without feed are likely to kick, bite and injure others.
5. Horses should be fed at least four times per day. If they are not at grass they should be fed with grain and chaff and twice with hay. This principle may be altered to suit local conditions or native animals.

### **Grooming**

6. Good grooming is as important as good feeding to the condition of a horse or pony. Every horse should be groomed at least twice a day in order to keep the pores of the skin open and free from scurf or dirt. It is a fallacy to imagine that animals on active duty and in the open require no grooming. If it is warm and there is access to water, washing the sweat off a horse can be cooling and comforting and will aid recovery.

### **Care of the Feet**

7. It is common sense to take the greatest care your animal's feet. Pick out the feet using a hoof pick or similar suitable article with a blunt point to remove any stones that might be lodged between the frog and the shoe and to remove damp material which could cause thrush. Special attention must be paid to the cleft of the frog, the sides of the frog and around the inside of the shoe.
8. If the animal has no shoes look for splits in the hoof or ragged frogs.



9. When examining the feet check for the fitting of the shoes. Check that they are not loose, that clenches are flat, that clips are well fitted, that there is no daylight between the foot and the shoe or other signs of uneven bearing. If you listen you can hear if a shoe is loose. Hammer in the clenches or remove the shoe completely before it causes damage.
10. Check for signs of lameness that might be detected by trotting up the horse.
11. Deal with any obvious cuts and abrasions.

### **Care of the Horse at Work**

12. Notice and report the least sign of any injury to a horse. Small lumps or evidence of pressure sores can often be relieved by altering the fitting of a saddle or saddle blanket. A loose shoe should be attended to at once. A tired horse might begin to brush (knock one leg against another causing pain and bruising). If this happens fit a brushing boot or strapping to prevent further damage until such time as the shoeing can if necessary be altered.
13. Saddle up carefully and methodically in the morning making sure the saddle pads are not folded with any seams that will cause rubbing and do not put saddles on a moment earlier than necessary.
14. Opportunities for giving horses small feeds at frequent intervals and for allowing them to graze, even for just a few mouthfuls should not be missed. Even when starting out early a small feed should be given before starting.
15. Think about ordering a halt between 15 and 30 minutes after setting out and encourage horses to stale. At the same time check saddlery for fitting and look for chafing spots.
16. Dismount during halts wherever possible, loosen girths and ease the saddle slightly to relieve pressure and enable circulation. When moving at a walk, dismount frequently and lead horses, especially when going downhill.
17. Saddles should be removed once during the day during a long march. Backs should be immediately given a hard hand-rubbing to prevent chill and restore the circulation.
18. Heavy or stony ground should not be covered at a fast pace.
19. During the last 15 or 20 minutes of a march the expedition should dismount and lead their horses at a walk so they can reach their destination cool and dry. This will make grooming easier and prevent chills.

### **Picket Lines**

20. If proper stabling is not available to an expedition and horses are to be secured in temporary lines considerable preparation is required. If picketing is proposed the expedition members will need to practice the quartering of their horses, the safety and comfort of their mounts is paramount.



21. The main considerations will be that they are near to water, on firm ground, protected from the prevailing wind and close to the expedition accommodation. A slight slope is desirable in order to facilitate drainage.
22. Picketing may either be on an air-rope breast high, secured between trees or posts or on a ground rope secured by means of picketing pegs. The former is to be preferred. The rope in both cases should be strong and kept taut. For animals on a ground line the head-ropes should be just long enough to allow the head to be held in a natural position over the line. On a breast-line it must be long enough to allow the animal to get his head to the ground.
23. A picketed horse requires five feet between horses and 12 feet between lines if multiple lines are to be used.
24. Picketed horses must never be left un-attended. Line guards must attend to ensure that horses do not injure themselves or escape, are able to feed freely and remove droppings.
25. The group pecking order must be observed and horses tied accordingly to ensure a peaceful night without injury and fighting.