Introduction:

The purpose of this brief photo-report is to showcase a successful one-day practical field course taught for trail-crew leaders about how to work with packers and packstock while performing maintenance on horse trails. The trail-crew leaders typically supervise a crew of volunteers who may not be familiar with mule-packing for week-long work schedules that involve camping many miles from the trailhead.

The Pacific Crest Trail Association has developed 17 courses for all aspects of trail-maintenance and trail construction for their Trail Skills College Course Curriculum. These 17 trail courses were developed with the U.S. Forest Service, and are available here: [https://www.pcta.org/volunteer/trail-skills-college/trail-skills-college-course-curriculum/](https://www.pcta.org/volunteer/trail-skills-college/trail-skills-college-course-curriculum/)

The successful training session was held on Saturday, March 17, 2018, at Master Packer Jerry Heitzler’s own Secret Valley Farm in the Shingle Springs area of El Dorado County, California. There were 15 in attendance, including five members of the Backcountry Horsemen of California, Mother Lode Unit. The M.L.U. President Randy Hackbarth welcomed the entire class. We had classmates from the American Endurance Ride Conference (= AERC Trail Masters); Tahoe Rim Trail Association; Tahoe National Forest; Pony Express National Historic Trail, the 100-mile Western States Trail for the Tevis Cup; and the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

The morning class began inside the horse-barn with a comfortable propane heater for the winter chill, and folding chairs for everyone. After two hours, the lectures then moved outside to several paddocks. After lunch and hot coffee, we enjoyed watching Jerry's favorite 19-year old mule (calm and relaxed when tethered) get curried, groomed, then saddled with a Decker pack-saddle.

Several kinds of panniers were then demonstrated, including: ① bear-proof heavy aluminum panniers, ② heavy canvas with leather-bottom panniers, ③ bear-proof heavy plastic panniers with detachable legs, ④ steel packing racks for over-sized lumber for trail bridges, chainsaws, trail signposts, ice-chests, drainage culverts, bales of hay, and ⑤ gravel-carrying bags.
P.C.T.A. Course #306, Working with Packers and Packstock

Which trail crew tools and supplies are safe (or not yet safe) for mule packing?
Phillips Formfitter Decker Pack Saddle
http://www.outfitterspackstation.com/index.html
Wade Mauhl Weiser, Idaho 800-657-2644
Bear-Proof Panniers for Packing Food and Cooking Gear for Trail Maintenance Crews

Canvas & Leather Panniers

Decker Pack Saddle

Decker Pack Saddle with Metal Rack to Haul Oversized Heavy Loads

Examples Include:
- Bags of Concrete;
- Timbers for Bridges;
- Signposts;
- Long-Bar Chainsaws;
- Wheelbarrows;
- Culvert Pipes

Decker Pack Saddle with Gravel Carrier

Release Latch

Bottom Dumping
Master Packer Jerry Heitzler explains how to secure the safety guard for the wilderness saw for preparation for packing on a mule.

Dutch Ovens for Trail Crew Cooking

Steel Canister for Hot Ashes from Charcoal Cooking

How to Securely Tension a High-Line Picket for Mules & Horses

Master Packer Jerry Heitzler, Backcountry Horsemens of California, Mother Lode Unit

Securely-tied guard for saw teeth; ready for mule packing

Decker Pack Saddle with Panniers

Pacific Crest Trail Association, Course #306

Master Packer Jerry Heitzler explains use of prussic loops to properly space-out mules along a high-line picket for overnight camping.