

Pacific Crest Trail Association, P.C.T.A. Course #306

“Working with Packers and Packstock”

Practical field course for trail-crew leaders,
taught by Jerry Heitzler, Master Packer and U.S. Forest Service Certified Sawyer;
Backcountry Horsemen of California, Mother Lode Unit

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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/>

The Pacific Crest Trail Association has about 9,000 members and 17 full-time staff. In a typical year there are about 1,700 volunteers who perform 118,000+ hours per year on nearly 400 separate trail maintenance projects in California, Oregon, and Washington state along the **2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail**. So, uniformity of instruction is needed for 400 volunteer trail-crew leaders in these Pacific Crest states.

“**Working with Packers and Packstock**” is P.C.T.A. Course #306. The complete **11-page official curriculum** is available for download at the P.C.T.A. website:

<https://www.pcta.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/306-Working-with-Packers-and-Pack-Stock-v0417.pdf>

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, chain-saws, trail signposts, ice-chests, drainage culverts, bales of hay, and ⑤ gravel-carrying bags.

**Master Packer Jerry Heitzler teaching Course #306
“Working with Packers and Packstock” for the
Pacific Crest Trail Association trail maintenance foremen**



**Master Packer Tim Durbin, BCHC-MLU,
lectures to the P.C.T.A. Class #306**



**P.C.T.A. Course #306, with Master
Packer Mike Kohlaker of BCHC-MLU**



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?**





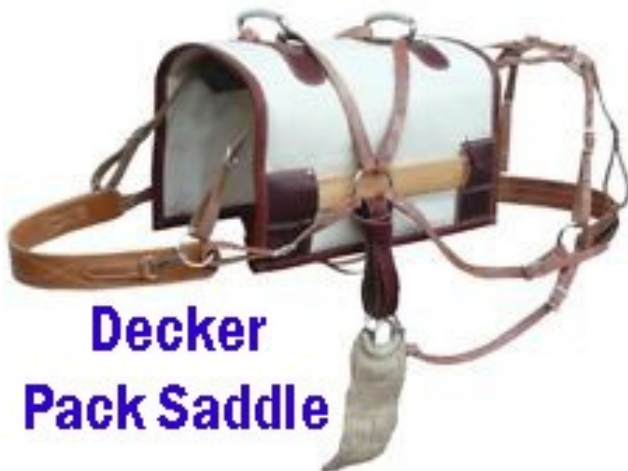
Phillips Formfitter Decker Pack Saddle

<http://www.outfitterspackstation.com/index.html>

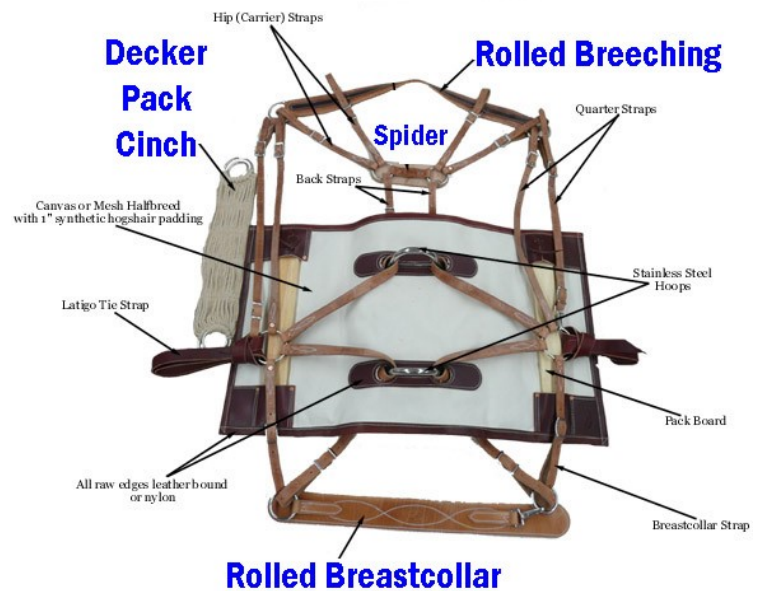
Wade Mauhl

Weiser, Idaho

800-657-2644



**Decker
Pack Saddle**

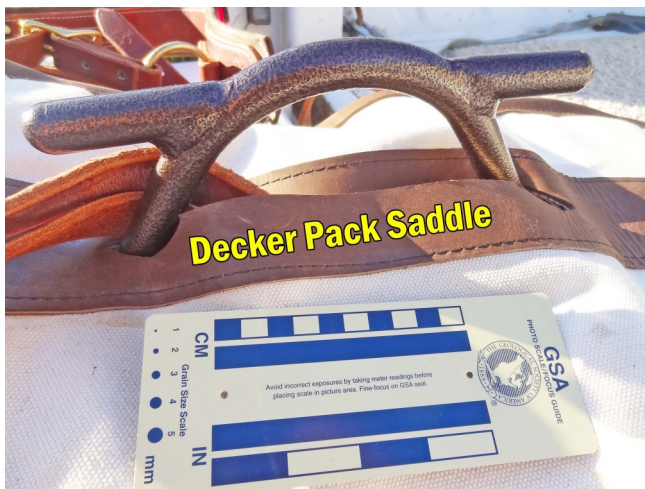




Bear-Proof Panniers for Packing Food and Cooking Gear for Trail Maintenance Crews



Canvas & Leather Panniers



Decker Pack Saddle



Sturdy "Bear Cloth" Pannier

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



Bottom Dumping



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



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



Dutch Ovens for Trail Crew Cooking

Steel Canister for Hot Ashes from Charcoal Cooking



Decker Pack Saddle with Panniers



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

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



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