

Leave No Trace for Horsemen



What is Leave No Trace?

It is a National educational program designed to instill an outdoor ethic and to teach minimum impact skills to recreationists, which will help protect the outdoor areas they recreate in from degradation.

It is administered with a Memorandum of Understanding between three groups.

The National Outdoor Leadership School is the educational arm of the organization. They provide the curriculum and instruction, training Master teachers who train Trainers, who in turn teach others.

The next group includes the four Federal agencies that manage public land. Leave No Trace benefits the land they are managing.

The third group is LNT, Inc. They are the marketing arm, which works with private industry and gets corporate sponsorships. Many companies have endorsed LNT. They are manufacturers of recreational clothing and equipment of all kinds. Nike is one of the major sponsors of the corporation.

The Leave No Trace philosophy encompasses awareness, an attitude and a set of guidelines.

Awareness

Being aware of the outdoors is the first step of Leave No Trace. Realizing that things are changing, resulting from more people recreating, sometimes creates situations we don't like. It might be that there is garbage left where we like to camp or regulations have restricted the area.

- Why do you like to ride your horse?
- Where do you like to ride?
- Why do you like to ride there?
- Has this area changed in your lifetime? How?

Attitude

Every individual has a set of values or a conscience, which determines his behavior. It tells him what he believes is right or wrong. This is his ethic.

What is your ethic? Have you ever thought about what you believe in? It is good to know what kind of integrity you have. Make conscious decisions about how you act and the choices you make. Look back and see if you like the decisions you have made.

- OK, how does this apply to LNT?
- Do you care about the places you go outdoors to play?
- Do you want them to still be there like they are for years to come?
- You need to make conscious decisions to try to keep them that way by how you conduct yourself.
- Do you take responsibility and clean up after yourself and your animals?
- Do you try to leave the area nicer than when you got there? If you don't, it won't change.
- Do you care just about yourself or about others who may use the area too?
- Do you care just about today or 20 years down the road when your kids may want to have the same experience?
- What kind of example are you for your kids? It all depends on your attitude to our public lands.

A Set of Guidelines

Leave No Trace has a set of Guidelines for recreating in the outdoors. It applies to any geographic area and to different seasonal conditions.

There are different skills associated with each guideline, from one creating definite changes to one on the high end of the scale with no impact.

You choose which skill to use that you are most comfortable with depending on the conditions you are in. You might do something very

different in the same place with horses in the spring than you would in the fall when the ground is dry and hard.

Your good judgment is the best tool you have to Leave No Trace. Using good judgment is based on your awareness and your attitude.

The LNT Principles are the guidelines.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Make your plans for where you are going, for food and personal needs. Make sure you think about hazards and unexpected situations you might encounter so you can be prepared.

Thunderstorms can cause fires in the summer. Do you know an alternate way out? Weather can turn from being very hot to snow. Do you have a jacket and raincoat?

Do you know how to get emergency help from where you are if someone has a serious accident? What are some other hazards you might encounter?

When we are not prepared and something comes up, we end up making choices that create impact or someone suffers unnecessarily.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

You create the least impact if you camp in an existing campsite and don't make the area any larger. If you're riding on trails, stay on the trail and don't make it wider or cut switchbacks. Water runs down your tracks and causes erosion.

If you camp and travel in remote areas or off-trail, spread your use out. Don't ride in a line when going cross-country. That creates a trail. Spread out. It takes a lot more work to camp with horses in a remote area and not create impact.

Dispose of Waste Properly

We've all heard of Pack it in, Pack it out. This includes cigarette butts, candy wrappers and pop or beer cans. Don't leave anything in a fire pit.

Human waste is another issue. Always bury your waste unless you pack it out. Besides being disgusting to see waste on top of the ground, it carries germs that the flies spread. Do a good job with this one. Digging a small cat hole 6-8 inches deep is the best way if there are no outhouses where you are. The waste decomposes fastest this way. If you have little kids or a large group, a latrine works best. This is one hole that everyone uses. This concentrated volume takes a lot longer to decompose.

Leave What You Find

Avoid damaging live trees and plants. Don't pound nails into trees or chop on them. Leave natural objects and cultural artifacts there.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

Campfires are a favorite thing for many people but they can create change in certain circumstances. You should make conscious decisions when it comes to having a fire.

Is there enough firewood in the area to have a fire and not totally deplete all the wood that is around? Do you really need a fire? Sometimes during the summer you really don't need one.

Fires definitely do leave their trace of being there if you're not using an existing firepot unless you build a small mound fire or pit fire without rocks.

If you choose to have a fire, the best place to have one is in an existing fire ring. To leave no trace, one should burn the firewood all up. Don't leave half burned logs behind.

Respect Wildlife

Avoid disturbing wildlife during nesting or calving time when babies are very young. It involves not feeding wildlife and habituating them to human food, and securing food properly so bears don't get into it.

Be Considerate of Other Users

We should be examples of horsemen with good behavior and skills as members of Back Country Horsemen. It is part of our mission to teach other users how to recreate with their horses and not create impact.

Avoiding conflict is important. We all have different values. Remember that what bothers you a lot may not bother someone else at all and vice versa. Visualize for a minute what it would be like if you were a hiker walking up a trail a foot wide and ran into a steaming large pile of fragrant horse biscuits with flies buzzing around it. You have to break your stride to get around it and you see that monument as disgusting as if it were human waste. That is where many hikers are coming from. We need to be sensitive to that and try to be courteous when hikers are not happy with us.

Minimize Horse Impact

This is the last Principle and one that really is important to us. The main areas we influence include the camp area, the trails, the grazing area and the water.

Highlines

Most of us are already familiar with highlines. It is a rope tied to tree saver straps between two trees that we tie our horses to. These should be out of the main camp area.

Why do we use high lines? How many of your horses are used to being tied up for hours and hours? What do they do when they are bored or unhappy? The animals that paw need to be hobbled and have their needs taken care of which may include bug spray or more to eat.

Two important things regarding highlines are to pick a durable location to put up your highline such as on dirt or a rocky area, and naturalizing the area before you leave. That means kicking your horse manure apart, filling in any pawed areas and sprinkling pine needles or twigs back over the area. Lots of horsemen forget to do this and it gives us a bad name.

Trail Etiquette

When riding trails, stay on the trail and don't make it wider by riding side by side. Try to make your horse walk through water or snow.

If you ride off the trail and go straight downhill you will cause erosion. Water will follow those tracks in a thunderstorm. That's why you don't want to cut switchbacks in steep country.

If you stop for very long, it's best to tie up off the trail so others can get by. If you encounter hikers, ask them to step off on the downhill side of the trail 6-8 feet. Your animals will be more comfortable passing them and not jump off the trail. Backpacks change a person's shape and it scares a lot of horses. Try to be courteous to others even if they are rude to you. Continuing a rude interaction just makes it worse and gives us a bad name.

Grazing

Your horse need to graze at least an hour to an hour and a half, morning and night. They are used to grazing off and on all day when they are on a pasture and they get the munchies when they can't. Grain is a great tool if you are in the mountains, in getting them to know where camp is and to stay there.

We need to be careful not to overgraze an area. What is a good rule of thumb here on overgrazing? Leave at least 3 to 4 inches of grass.

There are different ways to contain grazing stock. You can hobble them and let them loose if they know they are going to get grain when they get done. When they start to get full they start to wander as they eat. Tie them up at this point and grin them or they may leave.

You can picket one by a foot on a rope but you can overgraze an area quickly doing this. A picket pin needs to be moved frequently. Your horse must be trained at home first to do this or he may spook and rope burn his

back pastern if the rope gets tight and he fights it. Don't picket close to water either or you may pollute it.

You can also make an electric fence pasture to keep them in. Of course they need to be used to an electric fence first or they may jump out and leave. This pasture needs to be large enough to not overgraze as well and not be close to water. Before leaving a grazing area, it is considerate of horsemen to kick apart those horse piles out there.

Water

What happens when horses go in water? Try not to pollute water. When riding and you stop to water, let your horse relax first away from the water. He will probably relieve himself and then you can go water without mishap.

The best place to water is on the trail in a stream crossing where it is hard or rocky. Otherwise try to use a place without banks that break down in the water. If you have to water in a lake, just get their head in and don't ride in unless they have already relieved themselves. With a pack string, when one goes they all think it is a good idea and join in. It's not good if a backpacker comes by when they are all doing that and he plans to use that water for dinner!

Conclusion

The fourth mission statement of the Back Country Horsemen organization is:

To educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage and "leave no trace" principles.

We need to start with our own people and then reach out to others or we may lose our riding opportunities. It's happening in places, especially in the National Parks.

Leave No Trace is not just in the backcountry or Wilderness. It is everywhere in our daily lives. It is your ethic, your attitude about life and how you conduct yourself. Do you expect someone else to pick up after you? Do you like to live in a litter- strewn place? Do you try to only do things like this when someone is watching and get lazy if you think you won't get caught?

Think about what you believe is right or wrong behavior for you and try to do your best at whatever you do. Make conscious decisions.

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