

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

Saturday, March 17, 2018; held at Secret Valley Horse Ranch
Shingle Springs, El Dorado County, California

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Engineering Geologist; A.E.R.C. Trail Master; Member of BCHC-MLU; Member, Pacific Crest Trail Association

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 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 Horse Ranch 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. Our MLU President Randy Hackbarth welcomed the entire class. We had classmates from the Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Tahoe National Forest, Pony Express National Historic Trail, the 100-mile Western States Trail for the Tevis Cup, and P.C.T.A.

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, 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**



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?**



Secret Valley Horse Ranch, Shingle Springs, El Dorado County, CA



Master Packer Jerry Heitzler of Backcountry Horsemen explaining the dynamics of mules as herd animals.

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.

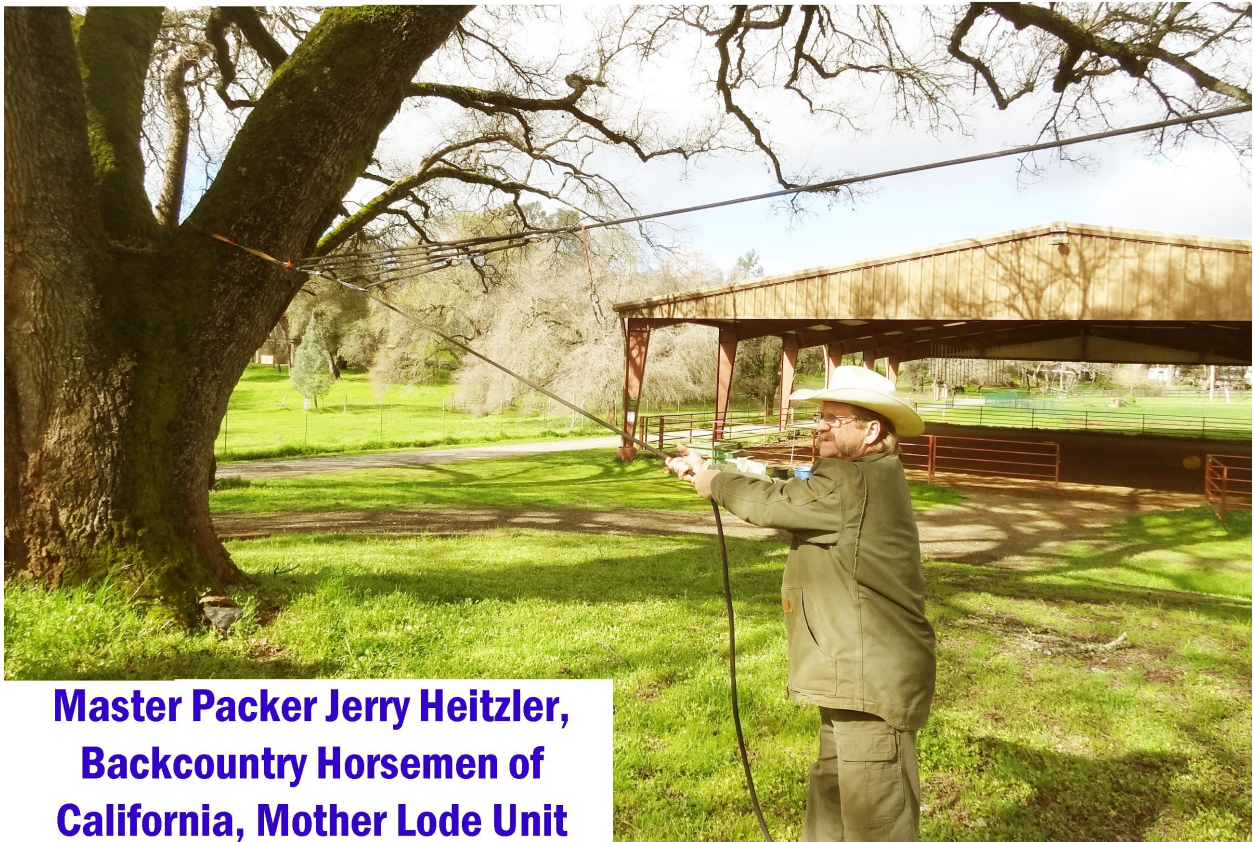
P.C.T.A. Course #306, with Master Packer Mike Kohlbaker of BCHC-MLU



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



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



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

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**