

Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer

During the Gunmakers Fair at Kempton I had a very nice conversation with NMLRA President, Mike Yazel. Our conversation drifted into my Ashley's Return journey and the gear we carried, or lack thereof. While discussing gear with Mike he suggested I write some short articles that are very focused on trekking gear and what you really need to survive on the trail. Today I will start with my personal cook set.

I do have to admit that some 25 years ago when I got into this crazy hobby, I quickly became a "stuff guy". Gawking at, salivating over and eventually buying "cool gadgets" for camp. Over the years I have learned that less is more, lighter is better, and you really don't need 90% of what you carry in and out of camp, especially if you can learn to do without massive amounts of food. Needless to say, I have a fair-sized collection of things I will never use again.



In the morning I boil 2 cups of water, pull off the fire, add coffee grounds, and let it steep. Once ready I pour it into my ceramic mug, drink the excess and begin cooking oatmeal. After the oatmeal I make more coffee. My eating utensils are simple. An antique fork of the period, a hand carved spoon I acquired about 23 years ago and a pig bristle toothbrush. My belt or neck knives are my cooking knives.

This setup can easily be carried in a haversack with some basic food and be all you need for trekking or a reenactment weekend. The boiler was made by Ron Robinson and the ceramic cup by Steve Sprinkle. This setup worked for 95 days straight on the ground and is a time tested and proven setup. Next time around I will discuss sleeping gear. MB

A typical meal when I am trekking will consist of oatmeal and coffee for breakfast, dried nuts and fruit for lunch and perhaps some kind of raw meat cooked on a fresh cut stick or boiled in my pot with dried food and some basic seasoning.

My personal cooking gear pictured is a tin lined copper boiler with a lid that's hold 2 cups of liquid, a ceramic cup that holds one cup and fits down inside the copper boiler, wrapped in a thin cotton "work towel" that can double as patch material. The pot is 4 inches tall and 3 3/4 wide, pot, cup and utensils together weigh a nice tidy 1 pound, 10 ounces. The utensils are held in a small leather case that was one of my daughters' old moccasins!



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This month I'll tackle sleeping while trekking, whether on foot or horseback. I like to keep my gear very simple, multi-purpose and as light as possible. Doing a fur trade era impression, I tend to use a poncho, that gives me rain protection for both me and my gear. Additionally, I use a wool poncho that doubles as a wearable poncho for warmth while traveling and a blanket at night.

Typically, I flat camp and do not carry a "diamond wedge". I cannot find documentation making them proper in fur trade use or even on trade lists. That doesn't mean tarps weren't tied up by the corners. Did they carry tents? I am sure some did until they wore out or were stolen, but they also built open face, three wall cabins to hold out in during the cold winter months. While traveling I am sure that they flat camped most of the time. In Osborne Russell's journal he notes coming into camp where 19 of 23 men did not even have a blanket in January, but were instead, curled up around a large fire for warmth.

My "sleeping kit" is simple. My ground cloth is my personal rain poncho that has a trimmed hole in the center to pull over my head. It is 7 feet long and 56 inches wide. When I am riding my horse, I also have a piece of oil cloth that hangs over the horn and can be opened to cover the saddle and gear tied to the cantle. When I have the poncho on, the water does roll off me, my gear and my horse.

Next is the wool poncho, 80 inches long by 60 wide that is folded in half the long way and laid in the center of my ground cloth. This has two functions, first as a cushion and second as a barrier to the cold ground. This is followed by my wool blanket folded in half the long way again, to accommodate for my height, and finally my top oil cloth. The last picture is

all these items folded up and ready to be tied to my cantle on the saddle or put into a pack to be carried on my back. When folded up for the saddle this entire package is 30 inches long x 13 inches wide x 5 inches thick.

Other things to keep in mind when trekking by horse are the use of your saddle blanket as a sleeping pad and a second wool blanket as a saddle blanket, that can be used for sleeping. Typically, I put the thick saddle blanket under my upper body and then the second wool saddle blanket that goes over the pad is used as an additional layer on top. They may smell a little horsey, but they are worth their weight in gold and help eliminate extra gear and serve as "dual purpose".

Once again, keeping it simple is what I have found works the best for me and multi-use is imperative in cutting down weight and bulk, especially if trekking on foot. I prefer thicker oil cloth as it is more durable. Another consideration could be to use a large "diamond fly", if you are set on using one, as your top and bottom cover by folding it in half and then in rainy conditions for a shelter. In most rain situations I simply wear my poncho until I am ready to sleep and then make up my sleeping arrangement or sleep with it on sitting against a tree. It's not ideal, but conditions in the fur trade era never were!

I hope this helps you in some small way to minimize your sleeping gear and to get more focused on lightening your load. MB



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Many of us have put a lot of miles on the trail in our period gear and as for me I have survived a lot of nasty conditions from extreme heat to bitter cold and soaking wet in hard thunderstorms, but my kryptonite is my feet!

If my feet aren't happy my entire trip is ruined, and I am miserable no matter what. I have managed to figure out three good ways to protect my feet after years of trekking, re-enactments, living history events and trial and error. My footwear of choice, depending on the conditions are double sole elk moccasins, Jefferson Boots by Fugawee, and a pair of buffalo hide high top moccasins.

The moccasins pictured were made for me by a man who is no longer with us but are of thick elk hide with double layered soles. They have served me well for many, many years and you can see the bottom of one why the double layer is critical. Because of the double layer I have had to do very little repairs to them, and they were my primary footwear during my 2000 miles Ashley's Return trek. In the saddle the comfort of moccasins is incomparable. On long rides the cushion of leather is a welcome relief as your feet do their work in the stirrups. I am very sad about this pair as they have reached their end of life and I am now relegated to finding another pair as good or tearing them apart for a pattern and making a new pair. I don't know about you, but I hate making moccasins and would rather have a root canal!



For more rugged terrain or a lot of walking on stones, in mud or where my feet are going to take severe abuse, I prefer the Jefferson Boottee. There are several names for the same boot. However, this type of footwear can be seen in paintings of English sporting scenes in the mid-1700s. It was firmly established in the "new Republic" before the Revolution. The Half Boot, four inches above the ankle, while initially Colonial, later became known as the Jefferson Boottee for the War of 1812, Seminole War and Mexican War. In general, laced shoes were called "Jeffersons" until the 1880s. These were also issued to the Corp of Discovery for their journey.



Finally, for cold weather I have a pair of high-top moccasins made from a winter bull buffalo hide. They were superbly crafted by my good friend Oliver McCloskey from Utah. I have worn them often and on a five-day winter trek in December with some nice wool sox I never had an issue with cold feet. You can see from the pictures the fur is quite thick. They are a bit expensive, but in the end well worth the investment!



All my footwear is well sealed with mink oil for water protection. Keep in mind, almost nothing that we would wear for our era(s) is going to be perfectly waterproof. Wet feet were the norm, in my opinion, offset by the warmth of wool socks!

I hope this helps you get ready for your next journey, and I look forward to seeing you around a campfire or on the trail! MB

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The Shirt off your Back

My first love in re-enacting and favorite era is the colonial period and specifically the Revolutionary War. My ultimate hero, as a retired Army Colonel, is President John Adams, who was the reason General Washington had an Army, uniforms and was supplied, even as little as they received. Adams fought continuously for Washington's every need to ensure success and a free nation.

In the beginning trekking as militia or eastern longhunter I started off with the typical cotton knee breeches, socks and shirt. In one year, I spent 65 days in the woods testing my gear and trekking skills. By the end of the 65 days the knee breeches were shredded, and the shirt had so many repairs it looked like a patchwork quilt.

So, the quest started again to find better clothing. I came to favor brain tan knee breeches, made by Oliver McCloskey, a common item in the colonial era. They were the blue jeans of today, rugged, durable, and more protection than cotton. They wear extremely well and in thick, thorny brush give great protection.

My leggings are a pair of "saved list stroud wool" leggings I replicated from an original Native American pair in a museum. They add a nice layer and when riding my horse are great protection. In the summer they really are not hot and quite comfortable, but in the winter, they add a nice layer of protection and warmth.

I have been through many shirts and even hand sewing a couple of my own but, have found that you can't beat a shirt by Danielle Crosbie who owns Four Winds Fashions. Her clothing is custom made and if you need an adjustment here or there, she can do it. Recently, Danielle sent me this new shirt and waistcoat that fit impeccably. She will machine or hand sew at your request. She also offers woodsman frocks and other clothing items.

To top this off I wear a brain tan George Rogers Clark or Metis style coat that I hand sewed myself. A picture of one can be seen in *The Longhunter's Sketchbook* by Dr. James A. Hanson. This is a great reference for all things Longhunter and trekking. The coat adds that final layer of protection and a bit of warmth.

In extreme cold weather I layer up with another wool shirt. In the heat of the summer, I call it mosquito armor to keep those pesky little flying needles off me!

To top it all off, I wear a simple wool felt round hat with a rosette cockade and pewter button holding up the left side. I have had this hat for over 20 years, and it continues to serve me well, whether keeping the rain and snow off or to fan a fire, it is rugged and functional. No matter what you choose, it will always be an evolving journey.

I always try to ensure my styles and materials are the proper time period and for ultimate representation, I default to hand sewn.

Happy trails and I hope to see you around a fire or running through the woods! MB



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What's Cooking

One of the most frequent questions we get about our Ashley's Return trek is about the food we carried and how we ate. Over the years I have tried many different things from carrying some form of original stable bread, to jerky and even pemmican. The disadvantage we have today is our inability to hunt wherever and whenever we go to the woods for a trek, whether for a weekend or 95 days.

In today's world we must follow hunting and fishing seasons and based on our jobs and time off available, cannot always trek during a hunting season. The main stay of Longhunter's, fur trappers and soldiers was always meat in some form. I read one account that one soldier's daily ration in the Revolutionary War was 7 squirrels. In the end, that is not a lot of meat, but it is a lot of shooting for a forager!

We carried a couple sets of food. Starting off with breakfast we made a simple bucket of coffee. The night before the bucket was filled with water, coffee dropped in it to soak overnight and then boiled in the morning. While the coffee was on to boil, we each made a simple breakfast of oatmeal. To that we added dried fruit and nuts. This, to me, is the perfect breakfast. No mess of carrying and cooking bacon and no digestive issues while trekking. As a bonus, oatmeal is light in weight to carry and staves off hunger well. During the day, for lunch, we passed around the bag of dried fruit and nuts to snack on. Amazingly, it is filling and gives great energy to get through to dinner.

Prior to eating dinner, we ate what our companions called "pupu's", Hawaiian for appetizer. It consisted of cut up raw cabbage, garlic, onion, ginger, and cheese. All these last a long time on the trail. Cabbage can last up to a month. These are a great combination to settle the stomach and help regulate the digestive system. This was enjoyed while one of us cooked a stew with the fresh meat we carried.

The raw meat was wrapped in cotton, then put inside the cooking bucket and put in the pannier on the pack animal where it would be out of the sun and heat, mostly. Each night we would stack all the meat on top of the cooking tripod to slowly smoke to preserve it. Meat carried in this fashion can last up to 16 days. For a weekend trek it is a great way to go. The meat was cut up and mixed with dried or dehydrated vegetables and the spices we carried to form a stew. Dehydrated vegetables are excellent to carry. Depending on what you buy, they hydrate rapidly, have great nutrition and once again, are lightweight.

A simple weekend trek or event menu for one person would be half cup of oatmeal, a pound of dried fruit and nuts in a bag, half pound of fresh meat per day and 2 cups of dried/dehydrated vegetables, spices of choice and of course, enough coffee to keep that headache away! Next month I will detail the food storage bags and how to carry your provisions the way we did. I hope this helps you plan your next event and I hope to see you around a fire. MB



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Food Storage

Last month we talked about lightweight food for the trail to get through a 3–7-day trek. The next question is how to preserve your food and not let it get ruined in the rain or crossing water? I have played with this for many years myself looking for the "perfect" solution.

One of the things I tried early on and quickly abandoned was storage tins. The problem with tins is that they are hard to pack, packed wrong are very uncomfortable on your back or they can make saddle bags bulky. Additionally, they rust. Once they rust, they can be very hard to open and if they rust on the inside you get to taste that in your food.

I have used the red canvas that is often referred to and sold in various places. While it makes a good-looking bag, I have found that canvas, even if advertised as "water resistant" almost never is after some hard use. So, what are you looking for? The bottom line for me is to be a minimalist, cross-purpose use and waterproof.



Regarding cross-purpose, I am referring to how to carry fresh meat. Last month I talked about how we carried the fresh meat in the cooking bucket in the pack saddle. Well, when on foot, I do the same. In addition to my copper boiler with the ceramic cup that fits inside, I'll carry another small tin "corn boiler" with a lid. Inside that I wrap my fresh meat in a cotton cloth and put it inside. I can either boil that pot at night before cooking or cook in my small copper boiler. By using the boiler for meat, I can pretty much ensure that my pack will not be soaked in blood. Before leaving I do wash all the blood out and dry the meat before packing it. In extreme cases I leave the ceramic cup at home and use one of my small copper boilers for everything.

For dry food nothing works better than a triple layer system. Pictured are a cotton sack with my oatmeal inside and two oil cloth bags. The pillow ticking bag gets stuffed

into one oil cloth bag and I may use a second sack if I think it may be particularly wet. If using a pack animal, boat, or canoe, you can put everyone's oil cloth food sacks inside a larger one giving it that extra layer. The big bag with the gear pictured is what we used in the pirogue for a month and 400 miles on the river, no leaks. All our individual bags were inside that.



I do want to touch on carrying medication. Most of us have some that we need to carry, and the tricky part is keeping it dry so when we take it we don't have a pile of gooey dust.

There are two things I like. One is a brass pill box by TDC Company and the other is a horn box that was gifted to me. The wood top on the horn box is "chimed in" so that it snaps shut and is watertight. I had both in a brain tan bag on my belt and completely submerged when I swam out into the flooded Missouri River to recover our bull boat and they did not leak. If you know a talented horn maker, you can get a box made like I have pictured. Don't ask me, I'm not that good, LOL!



I sure hope you find this informative and offers you some solutions for food storage. Strike a fire, get some coffee on and I'll see you in the woods! MB

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It's in the bag

Last month we talked about what food to carry on a trek or for a reenactment of any era. This month we will cover food carrying techniques that have worked for me for years.

My go to materials to make bags for food storage are pillow ticking for the inner bag and oil cloth for the outer bag. I prefer the thickest oil cloth I can get as I feel it is the most durable and be impregnated to be waterproof, or at least, water resistant. Simply cut your oil cloth to size in one piece. I usually do a rectangle and then sew up the sides with the bag inside out with a whip stitch. You can use any stitch, but the key is folding over the edges on each side to make sure it has a nice tent style seam.

For one person a finished bag of 6 inches wide and 12 inches long will hold enough food for you. The inside bag can be one big bag or several smaller bags that go inside; perhaps one with oatmeal and one with rice. Those are made with the pillow ticking and are slightly smaller in size to the outer oil cloth bag.



All my bags are tied at the top with a leather thong to keep them shut, both the inner and outer bags. On our Ashley's Return trek, these smaller bags were kept inside a larger oil cloth bag that "Papa Jack" Mitch had, so they were double layered in oil cloth. The night of the tornado and torrential rain our food inside the double oil cloth

remained dry. Normally I would say nothing is absolutely "waterproof" but in this case it was. So, if you are expecting a wet trek, I would use a double oil cloth outer bag.

Storing fresh meat for one person is easy. I highly recommend tin ware by Carl Giordano, Tin Smith. All his pieces are period correct made from existing artifacts and of incredibly durable quality. Pictured is his spice tin, perfect for about one pound of meat. This tin is five by three inches and has been in my use for over 20 years. You could use your corn boiler as well since it has a lid. Simply dry off your fresh meat, wrap it in clean cotton and put it in your tin, drop in your bag and that's it! Any left-over meat you have can be smoked over the fire to help preserve it before putting it back in the cloth and tin to carry the next day.

What about medications? I use two things, either a brass pill box lined with material, or the horn box pictured that was gifted to me. When using brass always line the box with material so your medications are not in direct contact with the brass. Some medications will have an adverse reaction to brass.

These seem like simple solutions, but I struggled with them for years and gleaned them from others who taught me! The great thing about doing living history is that it is a journey filled with good and bad experiences and learning from them and others! Hope this helps and I look forward to seeing you by a fire! MB



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The Cutting Edge

Hello again my friends! I hope this issue finds you well and enjoying the summer getting out on the ground. I have seen many of you at Friendship, The Battle of Monmouth and Guilford Courthouse this year.

Today I would like to cover knives for camp and trekking. There are so many great knife makers out there and I am a sucker for a nice knife. I could probably benefit from a knife addiction recovery program!

Over the years I have narrowed down my camp cutting edges to simple knives and most times I do not take a belt ax, tomahawk, or other hatchet. I see a lot of people expending a lot of energy in camp chopping wood rather than doing other things, even resting for the next days journey. In the woods with a fire, I simply stick the end of a log in, regardless of length and keep pushing it in as it burns. The weight of a belt ax can be replaced with food, water, or any other item of choice. Some will argue they use it to build a shelter. I never have. Tarp, dead logs, small rope in my kit and I'm all set, or flat camp. We did that for 95 days!

When it comes to knives, I've narrowed it down to three. First, a heavy duty "work knife" on my belt. I use a loop to hold it and have never been comfortable with just sticking a knife in my belt in the sheath without it being fastened. The one pictured I hand forged as an apprentice under my good friend and Master Knife Maker, Bill Smith of Salado, Texas. The blade is from an original 1800 buggy spring. It is heavy, sharpens easily and has enough weight to do serious chopping in camp.

For finer work, cooking, skinning, and eating I use my neck knife. This knife is a copy of a surviving original Great Lakes Native American neck knife that I made as well. It has a Green River blade, walnut handle and three brass rivets like the original. It is finished off with a sheath and quill work that started out looking "similar" to the original. It is the only quill work I have ever done and most of it is gone. I have a real respect for quill workers! This fella has more than 20 years of use.

Finally, I carry a backup knife in my belt bag. You never know when someone needs to borrow one or you break a blade. This one is an antler handle folder made by my good friend Jim Branson of Texas. It has a razor edge and has served me well for the last 10 years.

The biggest thing about knives is using them and getting extremely comfortable with them for daily use. The more comfortable you are with your blade the faster you can get things done. So, if you are not happy with one, try another until you get the right combination. I have abandoned some knives along the way because their balance, ability to hold an edge or it simply was not comfortable to use.

I sure hope this helps! Stop by to see me at the Gunmakers Fair at Kempton at the end of the month or at the Hawken Classic in Defiance, MO at the end of August! We can swap some stories, enjoy some liquid jollification, and catch up. See you around the fire! MB



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Ready, Aim, Fire!

When it comes to what flintlock I take on a trek, it boils down to: what will I be doing? Over the years, the period firearms I have acquired have been totally based on trekking and hunting, not reenacting. I have done, and still do plenty of Revolutionary War reenactments, but 90% of the time my weapons are used in the field with a purpose.

If I am out in the early fall for small game season, my weapon of choice is a .20-gauge smoothbore with swan shot, when I can get it, or number 6 shot. It has rear sights and is deadly on small game. I don't even carry wadding for it. Instead, I use what I find in the woods. Dried leaves, a cut piece of shelf fungus or some wasp nest if I find it. I don't believe for a minute they carried the over/under wads on the frontier. Maybe they wealthy had them back in the populated areas, but not your average guy in the wilds. They were not practical and were not readily available. With primitive wadding mine patterns nice and has killed a lot of game. I highly encourage you to go to the woods without modern over/under wads, etc., and give it a 'shot'.

If I am out later in the fall during deer season, I carry my .50 caliber rifle. It is Jim Chambers a guy built for me and shoots straighter than my eyes are probably capable of. It's a mere 7- and three-quarter pounds and is easy to carry all day long. I do have a serious hankering for a Hawken rifle in either flint or percussion. The ultimate

would be an "Ashley Hawken", but that original baby came in at almost 13 pounds in .69 caliber!

Finally, on horse treks my immediate "go to" gun is my canoe length smoothbore 16-gauge trade gun. For those that were at Kempton, I had it there. It has a repaired wrist, tacks, lots of dirt and is ugly as a stump, but shoots every time with great accuracy with either shot or ball. When riding, shorter is better. I carry it in a four-inch-wide sling on my saddle horn or carry it in my lap. It is what I took on the Ashley's Return trip and it fired every time.

No matter which one I carry, they all go to the woods with a calf knee over the lock, most of the time, or dangling from the trigger guard. A lot of people are afraid to take a flintlock out in the rain deer hunting. Not me. I have hunted in the pouring rain with a calf knee and not had a miss-fire and I have forgotten the calf knee and still hunted in the rain with a couple miss fires before it went off. However, it is a good lesson in how well you know your gun and your quick response drill when a buck is 40 yards away watching you miss fire twice only to decide to run before the third time, which was a charm, although I missed him. Smart buck.

Pictured from left to right are my rifle, 20-gauge smooth 'rifle' and the 16-gauge trade gun. No matter what, the one you own is the one you take unless you are fortunate to have a choice. Keep your fire burning and I hope to see you on the trail soon. MB



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On the Back of a Horse

Before I get going on this series of trekking by horse, I must admit upfront that I am by no means an expert on horses. I have never trained a horse and only ever owned one horse in my life, Bubbles. When it comes to horseback riding and trekking everything I have learned was from several of the finest horsemen I know. Early on in life I learned we have two ears and one mouth, and they are to be used in that proportion. So, when my friends spoke, I listened!

Horse trekking is a very different form of trekking than on foot. On foot, you realize that you must limit your gear based on what you can carry on your back and when selecting a camp there are many options if you have water with you. On horseback, this is not so much of a problem. Today we will dive into my philosophy on horses, horse care and priorities to get this series kicked off, and then dive into the required gear each month.

When trekking on horseback, it is my opinion that your horse is your priority. Everything from water, to feed, healthcare and how much it is carrying must be considered. Sitting atop your horse on a trek is not a sightseeing tour. Every moment is relegated to looking for the safest path, good water and grass, and keeping an eye out for predators, if they are in your area. Horses are prey animals, and their first instinct is flight, so with that

in mind, you must always be ready or looking to avoid the things that will spook them. We all know those pesky butterflies can devour a horse in a single bite!

Camp selection is no longer about you; it is about your horse, period. Again, things like grass and water are what your horse needs to stay well-nourished to carry you and your gear. You need enough room to picket your horse so it can graze all evening, and then a place for your camp where you can keep an eye on them.

When selecting gear, if you thought what you carry on foot is minimal, it gets even more minimal when on a horse. A horse can carry about 20% of its bodyweight. Bubbles is about 1100 pounds, which means she can comfortably carry about 220 pounds that includes me. Typically, I weigh around 190, which leaves about 30 pounds for gear. Bubbles is a Kiger Mustang of Spanish descent, and they are known for their ability in endurance riding, so after a lot of training she can carry a bit more, but each horse is different.

This brings me to the point that horses are athletes just like us. A trip like I made of 700 miles is not something you do on a whim. They must be exercised to reach that ability just like an Olympic athlete. That means starting with short 5-mile rides and over the course of

6 months making them longer each week. If you have the means to own and keep a horse, then invest in the gear, horse trekking is very rewarding, challenging and exiting. I prefer it over foot trekking!

Next month I will dive into the horse gear that you will need piece by piece. For now, enjoy this great picture of Bubbles with all my gear loaded on her during our ride on the Ashley's Return trip. Happy trails and it was good seeing many of you at the Hawken Classic! ^{MB}



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Heads It Is!

Last time we got together around the fire we talked a little horse philosophy. It is hard in a one-page article to get into depth, so I try to hit pertinent things. Remember, you can always contact me with questions at amm2046@reagan.com.

Today we start at the front of Bubbles. Like any other genre of riding, we use a bridle and halter. One difference between trekking and pleasure riding is control. When pleasure riding typically it is a few hours, tacking and untacking in a controlled environment, most likely a barn or stall. But when horse trekking you will lose that control and will be doing all the work out in the open. That leads me to answering the question I get most often by modern riders. Why is the halter on underneath the bridle?

I get asked because modern riders will almost always remove the halter to put on the bridle. When horse trekking you are out in the wilderness and need to control your horse for those unforeseen circumstances that may spook them. Without a halter and lead rope, if your critter spooks, they are GONE! Additionally, it makes it easy to pull of the bridle and hold your horse while they graze on a break.



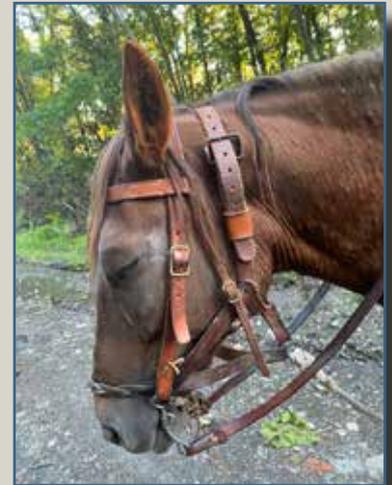
If you fall off, you need to be able to grab the lead rope, that is tucked into your belt as many riders do. I daisy chain mine and let it hang. I have only ever had to intentionally bail off Bubbles once due to what I believe was black bear scent

spooking her and my wife's horse. When I got off, she did not move, but waited for me. That is due to her training, a lot of horses will run off.

The halter pictured I made myself. It isn't pretty, but it is based



on period drawings and fit to her head. The cute braid on the front makes it smoother across her nose but is a real pain to do! Over that is the halter, hand made by my good friend "Black Powder" Jim Branson. He gifted Bubbles to me. Jim is a superb tack maker and people often mistake his hand sewing for machine sewing. He is very meticulous about stitch spacing and quality as a lifelong horseman and tack maker.



The pictures show you Bubbles posing nicely to display the bridle over the halter and how I tie off my lead rope. On long treks and in sketchy areas I too, will tuck the lead rope into my belt; you can never be too sure. The individual pictures will give you an idea of design.

As for what bit to use, people will argue that you must use a period bit. However, I say this, your horse doesn't know what year it is and it is not reenacting, but working, so you really need to use the bit that your critter is used to, trained on and gives you control. Never sacrifice safety and comfort of the animal over something as trivial as a bit.

I sure hope this helps you out and perhaps our next chat will be around a real fire - well after the snow is gone! MB



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Saddle Up!



This month we will look at saddles and blankets, which are important for horse and rider. Let's start by talking about what's underneath, the blankets. When trekking horse saddle blankets have two uses. First, to protect the horse and second, your bed pad. They make

great padding under you at night and can provide a higher level of comfort than foot trekking.

For fur trade era the only choice is wool, which is probably the best choice of all options even in today's market. You can find a lot of information about how thick they should be, but I like about 1 ½ inches. My base blanket is the light brown one, with a small wool blanket folded in half that goes over top hanging down further. I have found this to be a great combination to protect Bubbles and for me to sleep on. The key to blankets is really the comfort and protection of your horse.

There aren't a lot of options to ensure you have a proper, period correct saddle as there are almost no known surviving saddles. This is where you must defer to the people who have done extensive research. My saddle was built by Mitch Alexander, the man I consider to be the expert in period correct saddles of the fur trade era and beyond; and he builds and rawhides them. His research for the St. Louis Saddle came from studying the books, Man Made Mobil by the Smithsonian and The American

Military Saddle, 1776-1945, Dorsey, Stephen R. & Kenneth L McPheeters. Mitch also uses various paintings from Alfred Jacob Miller. The main design came from a sketch in Man Made Mobil of what the Smithsonian believes the Thornton Grimsley saddletree looked like.

Mitch has been building saddle trees for more than 30 years, so for a proper saddle, he is the go-to guy at Old Time Saddlery. If you are serious about getting a saddle, he gave me permission to include his contact information here: 608-732-7460, alexandersaddles@hotmail.com. His work is superior, and you will never need another saddle!

Pictured are my saddle and another Mitch built as close to the St. Louis style as possible. They aren't fancy and they surely don't have gel cushions! Mine has a simple buffalo epishemore over the top for a bit of added comfort. I built and added tapaderos to my stirrups. These are fantastic in all conditions. In the sage brush of Wyoming, they protect your feet and in the cold winters of the east they help keep your feet warm. Additionally, hanging over my saddle horn is an oilcloth tarp that always rides there. In the rain I unroll it to cover my saddle and gear that is tied to my cantle.

Underneath is a Mitch Alexander handmade mohair cinch with brass rings. My saddle has adjustable rigging. While trekking, if her underside gets sore, I can move the cinch forward or backward to give Bubbles relief.

I know this is a very brief over-view, but if you really want to trek by horse, you can contact me for help, or I can point you to someone in your area. It is a real game changer and more fun to trek by horse! I hope to see you looking over your horses' ears in the future. MB



Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer

Packing Your Horse

Now that you have your halter, bridle, and saddle, what goes on the horse? To carry my gear, I use hand sewn saddle bags made by my good friend Jim Branson. I do believe we traded for them. Remember, you cannot overload your horse so try to keep it to 20-25% of the horse's weight, including your weight.

In my bags are lots of leather straps, a sewing kit, personal items, pipe tobacco, copper pot and cup and about 2-3 days of food. When using a pack horse, this will sustain you if you get separated or lose a pack animal. If doing a weekend trek without a pack animal, this is more than enough food. It's the same things I have covered in other articles. Oatmeal, dried fruit and nuts, some kind of dried vegetables, and raw meat, unless I will be hunting. On the saddle are two canteens for water, my gun and picket hobbles with rope and pin.

On the cantele is my Metis Coat, wool poncho, oilcloth ground tarp, oilcloth poncho and one wool blanket. In the winter I will change out my short saddle blanket and use a full-size wool blanket on top of the wool base pad. This gives me two wool blankets for sleeping. This is about the maximum I can carry since Bubbles is only about 1100 pounds. If you have a bigger horse, you can get away with more. The longer the trip the more you will need to condition your horse and then you can get away with more weight.

When loading your gear nothing is more important than balance. That's why I have two canteens on the pommel, to balance out the weight. Everything must be equal, as best as you can. When tying things down on the cantele getting them tight and compressed is necessary. When you must move faster than a walk you don't want gear flying everywhere and off your rig.

Only one time have I improperly loaded everything and had my saddle slide. Eventually I found myself on the ground looking up at Bubbles' belly. Once you do that, I can GUARANTEE you will never load an unbalanced load again! That "lesson" was in January, in a blizzard. Let me tell you, re-saddling and loading your gear in snow coming that fast is miserable and embarrassing.

Once in camp I unload my gear, picket Bubbles, and then set up camp. I cannot stress enough that setting up camp and placement of your gear should be the same every single time. When living by fire light, I don't carry candles, you need to know where everything is in the dark, especially if you must pack up and leave before morning. When my saddle is on the ground, I pull the saddle oilcloth over it to protect it from the elements and to store things under it.

Key items should be close and somewhat protected. On our Ashley's Return trek, we did have about 12 horses stampede through camp. We were able to protect ourselves and important gear while the rest was scattered about with some of it damaged. Around horses, this WILL happen.

The pictures show both sides of my horse loaded, and me departing on the winter ride where you can see my load is simply not going to make it.

I sure hope these horse trekking articles are igniting a spark in some of you to get mounted. For fur trade it is the way they all traveled and to truly portray a trapper between 1810 and 1840 you need to be mounted. Feel free to contact me at amm2046@reagan.com with questions and I'll see you on the trail. MB



Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer
Keeping Horses

While writing about horse trekking, it dawned on me that even as some may want to own a horse, they think they can't. People assume they don't have room, that horses require acreage, big barns, and experience. We knew nothing when we jumped into horses!

We live in a village on 1.5 acres with two horses, chickens, two gardens and at one point four dogs! Before moving horses here, we spent a lot of time talking to our farrier, veterinarian, and other horse experts. We decided to implement a dry lot system. Our area is roughly one tenth of an acre with a 24x12-foot barn/shelter. The shelter for the horses is 12x12 and the enclosed hay storage area is 12x12.

We are fortunate to have friends near us where we can get our hay at a fair price. Using our 16-foot flatbed trailer we stock the barn, which holds about 140 bales. To deal with manure we have three 4x4x4 compost bins to make black gold. Manure mixed with kitchen scraps gives me ample compost to keep my garden and yard vibrant. For a couple years I put heavy amounts on my vegetable garden to enrich previously very poor soil.

Parked near the dry lot is a 6x10 dump trailer we bought used with a ramp I built to empty the wheelbarrow of manure into each day. Amazingly, I have no shortage of people who want a load of manure every 3-4 weeks. Obviously, you will need to be able to tow trailers.

In addition to hay, they get grain twice a day with supplements and have a salt block in the pen. The beauty of the dry lot is you can control their diet. Our tack room is the horse trailer tack area, so no need to clutter the hay barn with saddles. It is a tidy setup and very convenient. We love the horses close to the house and when we can't ride, we still interact with them at least twice a day when we feed. They are well integrated into the family and our bonding with them gets better every day.

We do have a section of the yard I planted with a forage grass mix where we picket them out on a weekly basis to graze. With many visitors out for a walk stopping to visit they have become more sociable and accustomed to loud vehicles so when we ride along roads they are desensitized to the distraction. They are so comfortable in their dry lot they lie down regularly to get their much needed REM sleep. Horses won't lay down unless they feel safe.

Finally, people talk about bedding and the cost of wood chips. We use something you can get free anywhere and people are happy to give it up! Leaves. Just avoid walnut. Instant bedding.

Keeping horses can be simple, compact, and enjoyable. You may see me on the trail this coming year with the 4th Light Dragoons doing Rev War events. Time to try something new! Hope to see you around a fire and happy trails! MB



Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer

Wet your whistle with Canteens

Canteens have been around for ages in many forms and the military has used them nearly continuously in every era. There is a question of whether the mountain men of the fur trade carried them. My belief is that they did not, as I have never read a journal that mentioned them, but that doesn't make me right! Water is plentiful in the Rocky Mountains and carrying water seems pointless and unnecessary weight considering they were trapping beaver in water.

Today, however, regardless of where you go a canteen is a necessity and even packing away a small water purifier if you are in a remote location. In the days of yore, they did not have to deal with the pollution we do, whether animal, factory, or pesticides. On our Ashley's Return trip, we carried water purifiers and used them, at times, no more than 20-30 feet downstream from animals urinating in the water!

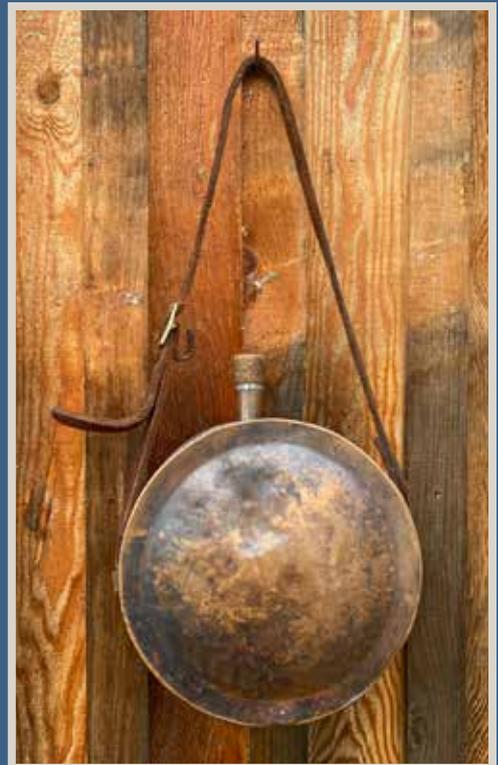
While horse trekking, I recommend tin lined copper. There are several makers, but copper is rugged and can take a beating. I carry two with leather covers and adjustable straps to hang off the pommel. When I do Revolutionary War events, I carry the proper tin canteen for a militia soldier. Those I cover with wool and attach a strap to carry over the shoulder. The one pictured is a Hessian canteen with a lid that is a cup.

When horse trekking, you can carry bulk water on the pack critter. Use a one-gallon size for cooking, coffee and refilling personal canteens. Pictured are some canteens I have carried over the years. I do not recommend wood. If you use wood, it will last about as long as the originals, 6 months or so.

When trekking away from a clean supply of water, carry a water purifier! Unless you are 100% sure of the water source, it is better to be safe than sorry. Buy the best purifier you can afford and replacement filters. Make a pillow ticking bag and tuck it away in your gear.

We carried two for six men and that seemed about right. While boiling water eliminates bacteria in the water, it does not make the water pure. Water can contain other contaminants such as microplastics, pesticides, fertilizers, industrial chemicals, hormones, medications, heavy metals, and neurotoxic microorganisms which are not removed through boiling water. You will thank me one day for this tip!

My first event of the year will be Guilford Courthouse and I hope to see some of you there for a cup of coffee around my fire. If you are in the area stop by. Happy trekking in 2024! MB



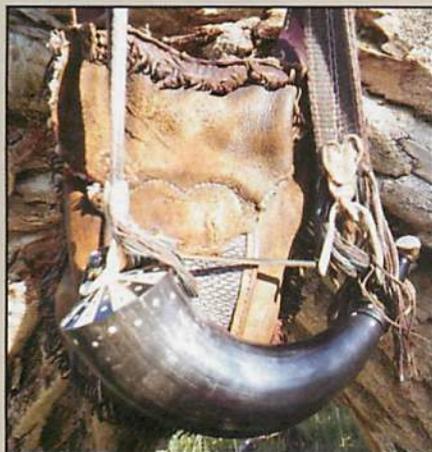
Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer

The Hunting Bag

I have always marveled at the amount of stuff people carry in their hunting bag, or as people call it, the "possible" bag. I have never found a historical reference to that term in more than 25 years of research. "Possible bag" came out of the 1960's rendezvous era when all kinds of crazy things surfaced that have no historical existence.

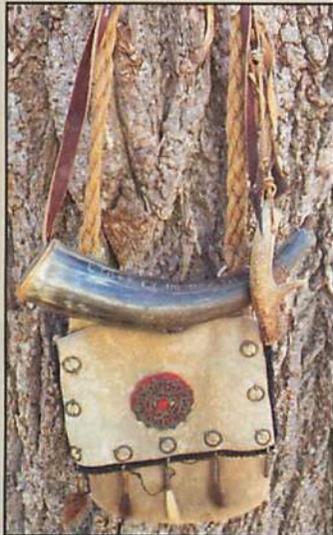
First person documentation lumps the bag, horn, and knife into their historical term, "hunting tools". A lot of us carry the same three items for fashion and not function. Sometimes I walk around camps and the only thing I can think is, "he with the prettiest accoutrements wins". But are they functional?



When it comes to my hunting bag, it has very little in it, and what is floats around freely. My horn rides on the flap to keep it closed and the bag rides high under my arm to keep it from bouncing around, especially when on the run, both foot and horseback.

Inside is loose ball, patching material, and a couple flints. In a hurry, the last thing I want is to reach into my hunting bag, to pull out another bag to get at ball or flint. I have read journals that talked about loose ball in the bottom of their bag, and so I do. Once in a great while I will have a flint and steel in there with char cloth in a tin, but usually that is in my saddle bags. When I am on foot my fire kit is in my haversack. Keeping it simple makes rapid reloading a snap.

Pictured are the only bags I have ever owned. The first is an Eastern Native American bag acquired from my first mentor in

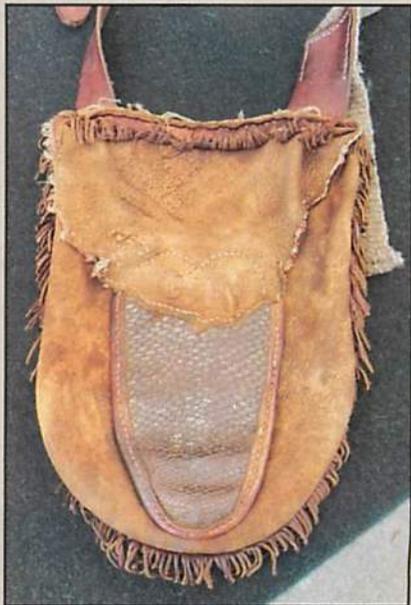
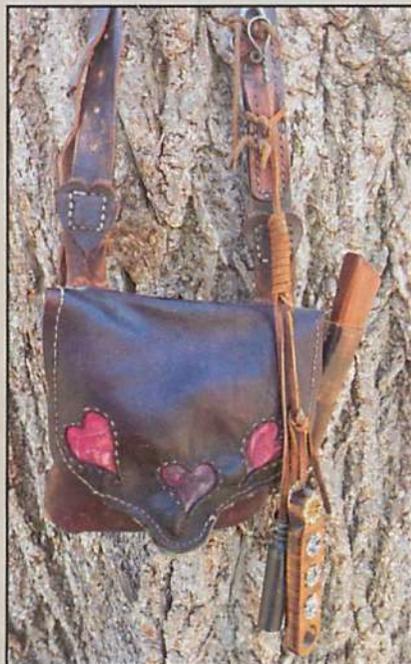


the hobby, Ron Poppe, when I was with Captain Benjamin Logan's Company of Kentucky County Militia. The heart bag I made along with the patch knife on the side. It is hand forged from an 1800's buggy spring.

The last one is my favorite, a beaver tail bag made by Jeff "Po-Boy" Luke. He is one of the finest bag makers in the country and I carried this bag on my Ashley's Return trip for 95 days in all conditions. The bags performance and craftsmanship is impeccable. The two pictures are of it before and on the trek.

When trekking, I have a strip of patching material hanging from the strap. I don't carry patch lube (neither did our forefathers) and very rarely a loading block, only recently adding one to a bag. It was made by Spark Mumma, good friend, and superb craftsman. Hanging from each bag is a vent pick, brush, and powder measure. That's it. It is a hunting bag, not a purse or haversack. For me it has a simple function to load and shoot, period. Not to hold everything "possible".

I am looking forward to seeing folks at Friendship this June. I'll have a fire and coffee on, stop by for a chat! MB



Lucky's Trekking Tips

By Gerry "Lucky" Messmer

Trekking by Bull Boat

When planning our Ashley's Return journey, we tried to get as many people as we could to join us on different legs of the journey. We were surprised at the lack of interest to join in, even for a few days. One common theme was that many people were afraid of the water portions of the trip.

Since the trek I have been researching William Henry Ashley and his exploits. In this process I have read about the various modes of transportation that were required by the mountain men. They were experts in horse travel, keelboat, surviving on foot and traveling on the water by "bull boat". Ashley used bull boats on his way in to the 1825 rendezvous and on his way out, of course. Many times, they were a field expedient way to cross a river.



Making them is not difficult if you have the right materials and a buffalo hide. The hides work with or without the hair on. The first step is collecting willow branches and soaking them in water to soften them up to bend. Tying the frame together can be done with sinew, raw hide or cordage made from local plants, like yucca in the southwest.

Once the willow is ready. Start with a circle for the bottom of the bull boat, then another for the top of the bull boat. The dimensions are determined, by estimation, based on the size of the hide. The two are then joined by vertical 'ribs' spaced every six inches or so with horizontal ribs forming the base as seen in the picture. While you are building the frame, soak

your buffalo hide in water so that it can be stretched over the frame. Be careful to not leave it in the water to the point where it falls apart. A couple hours should do. Once it is soft, sew shut any holes.

With the frame complete, lay the hide out flat, place the frame on top and start stretching the hide over the frame and to the 'top rail' and tie it off. It helps to stand inside the frame to hold the hide in place if you are working alone. We used raw hide as you need strong material to hold the buffalo hide as it dries and shrinks. Continue this around the top until it is fastened tight. Do not puncture the bottom to tie it off to the bottom rail. That won't end well. Allow the hide to dry in the sun. It will shrink and tighten onto the frame.

Finally, you will need some form of paddle to 'steer' the boat. Steering is relative as you won't have much control. Traveling is more of drifting with the current. It is best to always stop early in a bull boat so you can get it to shore, turn it upside down and let it dry in the sun before the next day's travel. Scott "Amish" Staggs really perfected traveling in "Little Runaway" on our journey.

Ashley's men made 23 or 24 for them and the hides. In other journals by his men, from what they documented, they stopped around 3 or 4 pm to rest, eat and dry their bull boats. They lasted the entire 400 hundred miles they drifted down the Big Horn and Yellowstone Rivers to the Missouri River. If you are looking for a new adventure, give this a try. To emulate the men we read about, we should be versed in every aspect of their skills and modes of travel. MM

