Fitting the Aparejo Pack Saddle

Charles Johnson Post, 1914

Selected pages from Horse Packing.

Drawings show how to shape, pad and fit a traditional pack saddle so its load rests evenly on the animal.

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THE APAREJO.

In reality the load lashed on the aparejo is carried virtually on the ribs; their resilience taking up the galling pounding of a dead load, or adjusting it to a most remarkable extent. In addition to this the manner of padding the aparejo is such that galls, bruises, bunches, etc., can be cared for, or rather the pressure of the padding on those parts can be eased away so that Nature itself can relieve and cure the point of hurt.

Ribs for the Aparejo.—A reference to the accompanying diagram and illustration will clearly show what is meant by "ribbing" the aparejo, and also demonstrate the essential principle of the aparejo as against other forms of pack saddle.

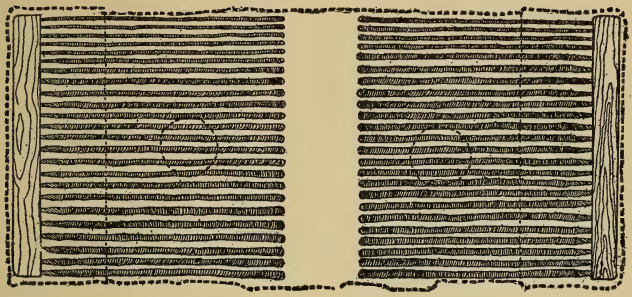
The important principle in ribbing the aparejo with these small sticks is that the diameter of the first one shall be greatest at the front of the aparejo and then the others shall lessen gradually in diameter till the slenderest rib is at the rear.

An aparejo will require from fifty to sixty sticks, or from twenty-five to thirty on each side.

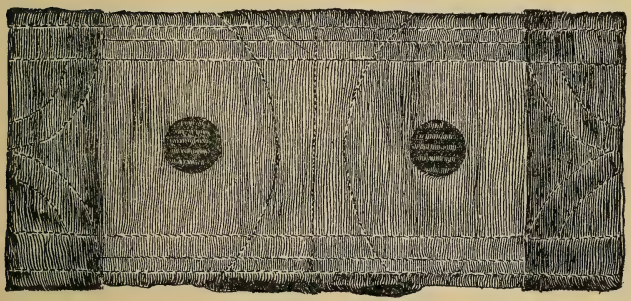
The first stick on each side that is placed under the collar or forward end should be of about 3/4 of an inch in diameter. The diameter of the last stick must be 3/8 of an inch. The sticks should be selected and laid out beforehand in a row in the order of their diminishing diameters. Any not clear, straight and sound must be rejected. This is for the ordinary load of 250 pounds. For heavier loads slightly, very slightly heavier ribs must be made.

The butt end of each rib should be cut square across, i. e., flat, and have been cut to a slight taper for about two inches. This is for greater ease in holding to the flat surface of the boot stick.

Kind of wood for ribs.—The ribs must have toughness, springiness or resilience, straightness, freedom



X-Ray of Aparejo showing arrangement of strips. The Aparejo is laid out flat.



The Aparejo showing hand-holes.



Wedge shape stick for tamping grass in boot of aparejo.

from any irregularities or knots or blemishes, and a slow, even taper.

Natural sprouts are generally most available where pack transportation is needed and are ordinarily quite as good if not superior to any fancy woods from the shop. Also they are most easily renewed when necessary and without delay. (For standard hickory ribs made in shop see Hickory Ribs.)

The willow is excellent and found in some variety almost everywhere. The gray, black, red, button, and desert willows are the most suitable. Dogwood and arrowwood are generally too short and irregular but are good if the other conditions are met. The guayaba (generally known in the United States as "guava") of tropical countries has been found to furnish excellent sticks for ribbing aparejos. But ash, hickory or pecan sprouts have been found to give the very best results when it is possible to secure them.

Boot-sticks.—These boot-sticks are of a hard wood, 21½ inches long, 2½ inches wide, and ¾ of an inch thick. The ends must be rounded on one side.

Ribbing the Aparejo.—The aparejo should be first soaked in water for about a half an hour; if the water is slightly warmed one-half that time will be sufficient and then drained.

The boot-sticks are then inserted so that the rounded ends face the inside of the back piece of the aparejo. Under no circumstances must a boot-stick be forced into place for then as the leather dries the strain will burst the stitching or rapidly wear a way through. The boot-stick is introduced through the hand hole and adjusted across the bottom of the boot, the flat surface of the boot-stick to face the inside belly piece.

Now introduce through the hand hole the largest rib, butt end first, placing it in the forward corner of the boot, the end of the stick resting against and over the flattened surface of the boot-stick. The rib must be of the right length and never too long or too short.

It is best that the ribs be selected, or graded as to diameter, in pairs so that the corresponding ribs on each side of the aparejo are put in place practically together.

Each rib should be measured for the position it is

to occupy before inserting. Place butt end on the aparejo resting on the lower edge of the boot-stick in line with the stitching of collar at its forward end. Cut the stick at the place indicated by the forward part of the stitching and round off the end.

The aparejo should be ribbed as described with a gradually diminishing diameter of ribs until the forward half of the ribs are in place. Then begin at the rear in the same manner as described and rib forward, beginning at the rear with the rib of smallest diameter and steadily increasing toward the center.

The aparejo is now ribbed.

Padding the Aparejo.—Hay, of the proper quality, is the most easily obtained padding under almost all circumstances. The best hay is the thin, wiry grass such as is often used for the ordinary packing of merchandise. It must be of even quality and of such a character that it does not mat, but can be easily separated and diminished in any spot desired yet without disturbing or distorting the whole mass of adjoining padding. Moss or similar substances may be used in emergencies.

A stick for tamping is now needed and the end is shown in the illustration; the grooved end shown is for the purpose of holding a grip on the hay.

Stand the aparejo up on its boots with the hand holes facing out. In small quantities the hay is introduced into the aparejo and pressed into the corners of the boots. Tamp well with the stick. The four corners should each be equal.

Along the center of the boot the hay is tamped lightly. The boot when tamped should have a thickness of about 4 inches and a depth of about the same.

Now spread the aparejo out upon the ground with the hand holes uppermost. Examine it to see that the ribs are all in place and adjust any that have been worked out of position.

Through the hand holes introduce one layer of hay spreading it evenly over the ribs. The tamping stick may be used to reach the more remote sections. Be sure that the hay lies evenly and of an equal thickness, without lumps or variations in thickness. Then lay in a second course of hay. Experience alone can de-

termine the amount—and the ease with which more may be added or some taken away makes this a matter of less importance than were the paddings to be sewn in—but after the hay has been well settled in place by a little actual use the thickness throughout the body of the aparejo should be about 2 inches.

The aparejo should have a rather thin appearanc and not appear fat with padding.

The thickness of the padding at the boots is 4 inches, from this it decreases to the hand holes to about 2 inches. At the top or center the normal thickness extends to within about 4 inches of the center stitch line and then gradually decreasing to the middle seam where it is practically nothing.

This is the basic padding. Additional padding for the aparejo is now added in order to conform to the shape of the animal.

Each front boot is now dressed or faced, as it is called. Extra padding is inserted in the front corner to a distance of about 7 inches from the corner. The original bed of padding must not be disturbed in this process; it can be avoided by introducing the additional padding with the palm of the hand up. For the next 4 inches the padding rapidly decreases in thickness toward the hand hole.

The front boot should be better padded than the rear; for ordinary mules the difference is about 1 inch in thickness. This is a matter of judgment and experience and will vary with the conformation of the mule; the larger the girth the more padding is need to make the aparejo sit well on the animal.

Under the collar of the aparejo should now be placed padding to fit the withers of the animal. Insert the hay with the back of the hand down so as not to disturb the previous layer and carry the hay well into the corners of the front. Increase the width and depth of the padding as you get away from the corners. Then decrease the thickness of the padding as the center and hand hole is approached. The thickness of padding is governed by the height to the animal's withers.

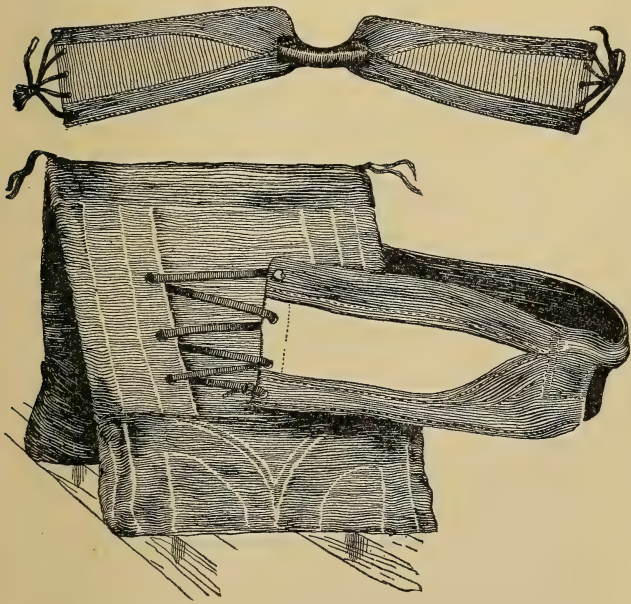
These paddings should be of such thickness and adjustment that when the aparejo is cinched the top

should be level and the bottom of each boot level and even with each other.

The front edge, between the boot and collar may now have an additional line of padding added between the boot and collar so that the aparejo may better conform to the body of the animal in cinching.

The aparejo is now set up.

Lacing the Crupper.— Fasten the leather thong through the upper hole on the crupper. (There are 2 thongs each about seven feet long, one for each side.) Lace the crupper to the forward facings as shown in the illustration so that the tie shall come at the last hole of the crupper. The lacing must begin at the top and work down.



To fasten Sobre-jalma or Aparejo Cover.—Punch two holes at each end of the aparejo and in the center (they will come just over the back bone of the animal) and fasten a short thong in each. Punch two holes in corresponding positions in the aparejo cover or sobre-jalma. Lash the sobre-jalma in place with the thongs.

The aparejo is now ready for use.

Adjusting the Aparejo.—This can only be done ap-



The Sobre-jalma

proximately at the time of the first saddling. An animal should be fitted with its aparejo and worked in it, such changes being made in its padding as are apparently demanded so that it will the better conform to the shape of the animal, and such as are needed from time to time by the development of bunches. (See Care of the Pack Animal, Bunches and Swellings.)

Sore Docks or Tails.—Should the crupper cut the animal's tail or dock it is an indication that the aparejo does not fit properly; that there is too much filling in the boots to the rear. If the boots at the rear are too thickly filled, or the aparejo generally too heavily padded at the rear, it cannot grip the animal's body properly so as to prevent a too great forward motion in travel that the crupper against the dock and chafes it into a sore.

An aparejo should never be less than 24 inches wide in order that there may be a sufficient bearing surface on the body of the animal to hold it properly in place. With too small a bearing surface the aparejo works

out of its position and either makes a constant and wearing adjustment necessary throughout the march or wears sore tails.

Care of the Aparejo.—The leather equipment should be cleaned whenever they become dirty with dirt and grit or dust and whenever they become saturated with the sweat of the animal. Do not separate the crupper from the aparejo. Wash with a lather of castile soap and water. If the leather is hard and dry apply a little neat's-foot oil after the washing with castile soap. The surplus oil should be sponged off with soap and water lightly applied.

There are in general use the 62, 60, and 58 inch aparejos, i. e., measuring from end to end 62, 60, and 58 inches, respectively.

