

“For the Loss of a Shoe!”

By Ed Haefliger

One of the most dreaded sounds to find its way to a packer or trail rider's ears is the clink of a loose horse or mule's shoe. It usually starts out as “did I hear something?” As you travel the trail a bit further it turns into “I really heard something, could it be a loose shoe?” “Na!” “It was just a shoe making rock music.” Nope! It then begins to sound off from a clink to a clink/clank and now you are committed to dealing with a loose critter shoe.

If the “I ain't got far to go,” will not apply as a solution (it is usually a very bad choice), then you have to repair it right then and there. In most cases, it is a worn shoe that was good to go one more trip or one that was damaged on the trail. In either case, it has to be dealt with. Remember; a loose shoe on this one step can become a tool of damage and destruction to a horse or mule's legs, on their next step. I have never been able to see very well with my ears. One clink/clank looks about the same as the next, and so off I climb and look for the offending ferrous object. For the purpose of this piece, there is no way this loose shoe is going to make it another 100 yards. I have to tie off the gang and get to working on this problem. How loose is it? Can I tighten the existing nails? Do I need to replace some of the nails? Is it beyond repair? Do I need to pull it off and replace, it or let that foot go bare? Oh! Boy'o is this fun yet?

A well set (fitted and tight nailed) horse/mule shoe can take a heck of a lot of abuse. I have seen one shoe with a trailer (back edge of the shoe at the heel) bent 90 degrees and still tight. Shoes normally will loosen from wear or from being overgrown by the hoof wall. Wear will affect the tightness by wearing off the metal on the bottom of

the shoe, which includes the nail head. It becomes very difficult to remove in this condition, because the nail heads are almost flush with the bottom of the feller groove in the shoe (the deep groove with the nail hole at the bottom). One over-growth will normally have the same problem with flush worn nails. Additionally, the flexing of the over grown foot tends to roll the clenches of the nails into a curl. (Note: because of this low tight nail head, never cut the clinches free until you are sure you can get a grip on its head. I will pry on the clinch until I get enough material to tap it down and check to make sure it is out of the hole before I cut the clinch.

Now we see what is ahead of us, not considering the site we must work in. How are we going to address this loose shoe? The choice is ours and calling the local farrier in is out of the picture, until we get home. How well and safely we accomplish this flat tire, kind of repair, is directly related to how well you have tooled up for this moment. Preparation is only possible with some level of working knowledge of the subject. As a packer, or a trail rider, you are dealing with your stock as a working animal. This requires that one needs to have a plan to keep this critter at work through minor mishaps. I suggest that all of us need to take on the task of learning as much as we can about the workings and shoeing of our animal's feet. I have been doing this for years. A suggestion, which has worked for me is, before the farrier shows up to replace shoes on my gang, I will pull a nail or two and replace it (in the same hole), with a fresh nail. This gives me practice without any risk. This is a drill for exactly what I will need to do to deal with a loose shoe on the trail.

Tooling is the next item on the list

for success. A driving (shoeing) hammer with a shortened handle, a Gerber tool, a Leatherman tool, and an 8-inch four-in-one file is the extent of my shoeing tools, in the past. They can get me by, but with a lot of wrestling and cussing. Until now, I found a neat combination tool: The Shoe Fix, manufactured by the Delta Horse Shoe Company, is on the Internet at www.deltahorseshoe.com.

Shown below:



Anyone with a toolbox has at least one multi-purpose tool that does nothing worth a hoot. This is not such a tool. It is manufactured by a well-respected firm, from high quality tool steel. It is designed by a farrier who I have interviewed and has successfully shod over 150 horses with this tool, prior to having it manufactured. It can replace a hammer, hoof pick (that can be used to pry up a stubborn shoe), a nail nipper, a saddle horse clincher, a hammer with claws for nail ringing, and most useful of all it has a crease nail puller. That's a lot of tools in one.

A crease nail puller is golden when it comes to getting a nail out of any shoe, with the least amount of movement to the rest of the shoe. This is exactly what you need as you replace one nail at a time in a loose shoe. (Note: The bird's beak, crease nail puller on the Shoe Fix tool).



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I have found that if I replace a nail in a loose shoe with the exact same size nail head, it may not last very long. Follow the bouncing ball. If a #5 city head nail was the original nail in the shoe and it was worn away to less than ½ its' size, then the shoe has been worn away also. If I were to replace it with the same size nail head, it would stick very proud below the shoe and could possibly be pulled out if snagged (especially if it is a rough, field clinch). I suggest that you use a smaller headed nail that will offer a lower profile and still stand up enough to allow a decent clinch. I believe that a #5 racetrack nail is just the ticket. This nail will be the same size shank as a #5 city head, but have a smaller/lower head. In most cases, one need only replace the loose nails in the existing shoe using the old nail holes. On long expedition trips, it would be wise to carry some pre-shaped shoes, if a shoe is lost.

Once the shoe is gone, or if the critter is going to continue bare foot, a small file or wood rasp is handy to round off the edge of the hoof wall (mustang roll). It does not hurt to be inventive at this point. I've seen duct tape on bare feet, pieces of inner-tube cut to make a bootie, and commercial horse boots. The sky is the limit, but it is necessary that we must offer some protection to an un-conditioned bare foot.

I hope this work has gotten you to wondering what would, or will happen, when you need to deal with a loose shoe.

Delta Horse Shoe Company will not sell direct. I obtained my Shoe Fix tool from the Olympia Farriers