



**Hay Poles and Hay Bags In Your Paddock Paradise**  
by Jaime Jackson

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# Hay Poles and Hay Bags In Your Paddock Paradise

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(Above) One of five “feed stations” in the AANHCP Paddock Paradise, ensconced in the dramatic coastal mountains of Central California. There is no external fence along this half mile stretch of our tracking system, and only a single strand of low voltage solar powered electric fencing separates them from the 10 acre inner pasture. Paddock Paradise simulates the “home range” of the Great Basin wild, free-roaming horse. When the horses’ vital needs are provided for they stick to their track lives like “metal filings to a magnet.” Two of our horses have arrived first at Station #2 (see map next page), three others are just out of view on the left and will be joining them at their own poles, although they frequently will share their hay bags.

## Hay Pole sizing versus your t-posts

I have designed my hay poles in two diameters to fit over the 6 foot/1.8 meters or 6½ ft. (1.98m) metal t-posts sold at Home Depot stores in North America.<sup>1</sup> Because these t-posts may vary in diameter coming from Home Depot’s manufacturer, it is best to confirm sizing before you order your hay poles. This would also apply to t-posts sold by other stores that you might wish to use. To eliminate any uncertainty, order my *PVC pipe sampler* on the hay pole ordering page to make sure my hay poles will fit your t-posts. My hay poles come fully assembled. All you have to do is set them over your t-posts and attach your hay bags. Your horses will take it from there!

<sup>1</sup>According to Wikipedia, “[Home Depot] operates many big-box format stores across the United States (including the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands); all 10 provinces of Canada; and the 31 Mexican states and Mexico City. MRO company Interline Brands (now The Home Depot Pro) is also owned by The Home Depot, with 70 distribution centers across the United States.”



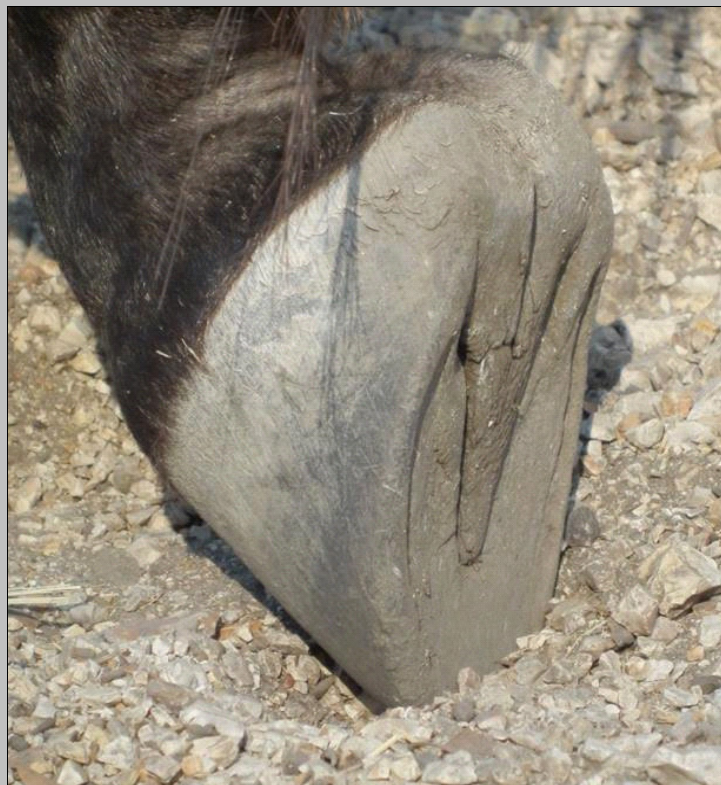
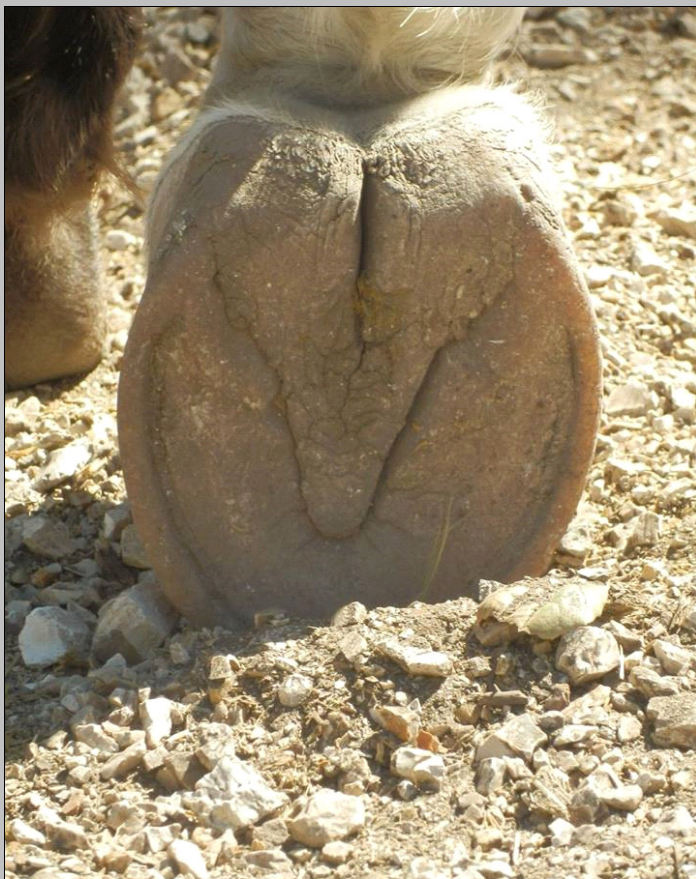
Aerial view of AANHCP Paddock Paradise. Upper track is highlighted.  
 FS – Feed Station  
 Gate ———  
 Solar power station ●  
 Electric fence ㄦ

### Hay Poles in Paddock Paradise

I recommend assigning one hay pole per horse. Group the hay poles in distinct “colonies” separated from each other along your track. These colonies are called “feed stations.” At the AANHCP Paddock Paradise near Lompoc, California (USA),<sup>1</sup> our five horses visited 5 feed stations with 5 hay poles per station. The stations were spread out over a half-mile stretch of track, the approximate distance around 10 acres of land. Locating all your hay poles in just one spot defeats the purpose of Paddock Paradise, as its primary objective is to encourage movement along the track, not “camping” and eating in just one place. In fact, this also applies to the horses’ water source. Our horses had to travel another half mile beyond the feed stations down the mountain just to reach water to drink and then return to the feed stations. And the section of track that linked the watering and feeding areas was a very steep path, so they really had to work to get to and fro. And because our entire track was comprised of gravel, all this movement blessed them with tough, healthy, naturally shaped hooves (see images on next page).\*

<sup>1</sup>Association For the Advancement Of Natural Horse Care Practices (AANHCP). For photo essay of the AANHCP Paddock Paradise, see either of my books *The Natural Horse: Lessons From the Wild* (2020 edition) or *Paddock Paradise: A Guide to Natural Horse Boarding* (2018 edition).

\*For a detailed description of their hooves forged in our Paddock Paradise – where they lived 24/7 – and how I trimmed them over an 8 year period, see my book, *The Natural Trim: Basic Guidelines* (2019 edition).



Naturally shaped hooves at the AANHCP Paddock Paradise near Lompoc, California (USA). [Photo: Jill Willis]

The track should be wide enough around these feed stations to give horses ample room between their hay poles to forage their hay without necessarily disturbing each other. Two “horse lengths” between hay poles puts horses beyond immediate kicking range of each other, should temporary “food possessiveness” or a fleeting bad mood, become an issue. Possible exception: a new horse being introduced to your band may need their hay pole set further away until they are accepted by the band. Once accepted, move their hay pole into the feed station. This can take a few minutes to several days or even longer. Although rare, total acceptance may never occur if two confirmed alpha (“monarch”) personalities are cast together, such as a temporary “visitor” horse. In this instance, keep a relatively close-by hay pole for the lesser alpha to attend, and then pray for some modicum of civility! T-posts with hay poles make this sort of accommodating easy enough.

### T-Posts

Use a *t-post driver* to set the t-post. The t-post should be driven into the ground so that its blade (which is attached near the bottom of the t-post) is beneath the surface. The blade helps to stabilize the t-post.



T-Post and Driver – t-post blade has been driven beneath ground surface.



T-Post Driver



T-Post Blade

You will notice that the bottom of the hay pole may not reach the ground. You can leave it be, or remove the hay pole and drive the t-post further into the ground until the bottom of the hay pole is resting on the surface of the ground. But because horses typically exert great downward pressure on the hay bags when eating, this action may drive both the hay pole and t-post together downward without you doing a thing. This tendency for the hay pole and t-post to sink into the ground is greater during rainy weather when moist earth is more likely to absorb the t-post, or if the t-post is set on any surface with a loose or giving substrate. The hay pole will then cease to swivel because a section of it will be below ground level. This is not good as the hay bag itself can come into contact with the ground and soil the hay. There are two ways to correct or circumvent this problem:

### T-Post Puller

Reset the t-post and hay pole elsewhere; in this case, use a *t-post puller* to remove the t-post from the ground, as they are usually next to impossible to pull out by hand. Also handy is the t-post puller plate with chain should your t-post sink further into the ground than the jaw of your puller can reach.\*

\*The t-post driver and puller are essential tools to have on hand if you're going to run a Paddock Paradise using my hay poles. They are a relatively minor expense and will last you for many years.



T-Post Puller



T-Post Puller Plate

T-Post Disk



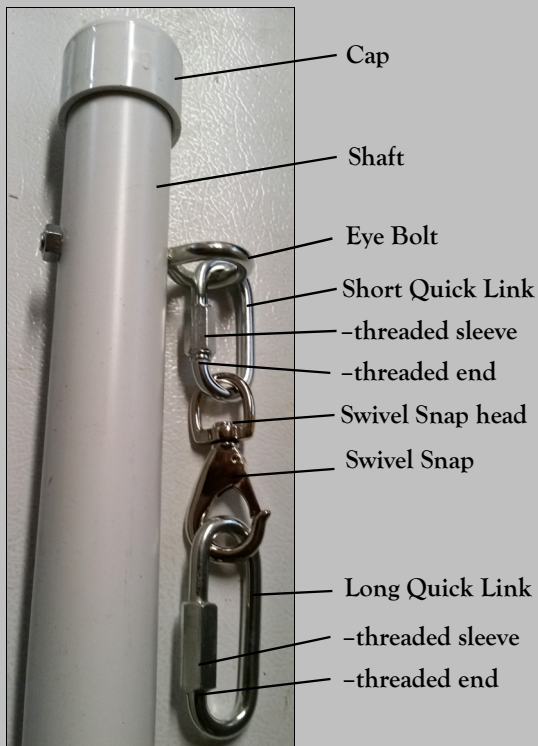
### T-Post Disks

Alternatively, slide one of my metal *t-post disks* down the t-post, then reset the hay pole over the t-post so that it sits flush with the disk. As with confirming the right size t-post for your hay poles, order my *PVC pipe sampler* to confirm that the *t-post disks* will fit your t-posts. Downward pressure applied to the hay bag by the horse when eating will now transfer from the hay pole to the disk, which will prevent the hay pole and t-post from sinking any further into the ground.\*

**\*Please note:** These disks are cut with a laser, which may leave minute (barely visible), but very sharp, slivers of metal debris on their surface. So handle these with leather gloves to spare yourself the misery of having to find and pull metal splinters out of your bare hands. I learned the hard way myself.

### Hay Poles

My hay poles are designed to suspend either of my netted or gusseted hay bags. I recommend that you experiment with both. Follow instructions on the following pages so that your bags are attached correctly to the hay poles.



Netted hay bag



### Suspending netted hay bags from your hay pole.

My hay poles include the PVC *shaft* and *cap*, *eyebolt*, *Short and Long Quicklinks* (also called *maillon*, French for “link”), and *swivel snap*. You will use them all to suspend the netted hay bags. Notice in nearby image that the threaded sleeves of both Quicklinks are situated above the shorter (threaded) ends. Movement caused by the horses eating may cause the threaded sleeve to unscrew and open the Quicklink if they are screwed on the short threaded end from below. I assemble these correctly for you, but it’s important to be aware if you change them out in the future for new ones. The Long Quick Link secures the hay bag, through which it is threaded after removing the closure rope; it is suspended from the swivel snap. Pack and clip the netted hay bags at your barn and then take them to your feed stations. At the AANHCP Paddock Paradise, we kept extra hay bags on hand to fill and replace those emptied on the track.

I recommend that you keep a back up supply of the swivel snaps on hand. Constant pressure on them causes the snap head (see in nearby image) – a moving part – to wear. You can monitor the thickness of the head when you change out the hay bags. When it wears thin, be prepared to replace the entire swivel snap. At the AANHCP Paddock Paradise, most of our *hay bags* had been deployed for years, most for the 8 years the track was open. Swivel snaps lasted a year or two and some longer. Quick Links will last for many years. All the hardware on the hay poles are zinc or nickel plated for rust protection. However, you may need a crescent wrench to open the sleeve of a Quicklink that’s been in use for years.\*

\*I’ve used DW-40 to loosen up stubborn bolts. If all else fails, use a bolt cutter!





Gusseted hay bag. Horses can forage from top or from center hole on front side of bag.

### Suspending gusseted hay bags on your hay poles.

The hardware used is slightly different than with the netted hay bag pole, dispensing with the *Long Quick Link*. The bag itself includes a *Double-end Snap* which is attached to two *D-rings* that are sewn into the top of the bag. The bag via the *D-rings* is suspended from the *Swivel Snap*. The *Double-end Snap* serves to keep the bag closed after it is filled with hay and transported to a feed station for hanging; it is *not used to suspend the bag from the hay pole's eye bolt*, and is left to hang from the *D-rings* as shown in the nearby photo. Alternatively, you can dispense with this snap and instead use the large *Quick Link* that is also included with the hay pole.

Sewn onto the back of the bag is a *Swivel Trigger Snap Hook*, which is secured to the hay pole by means of a *D-Ring* I've attached to the hay pole with a heavy duty *cable tie*. This snap prevents the hay bag from flipping over and blocking the horse's access to the foraging hole on the front of the bag.

Hay poles ordered with the gusseted hay bags come fully assembled.



Cable tie, D-ring, and Swivel Trigger Snap Hook.

### “Which Hay Bag should I use?”

This question is best answered from personal experience, in other words, experiment with both. There are advantages to each, and I’ll point those out, but leave it up to you to decide for yourself. The netted bags may hold a bit more hay than the gusseted bags. But packing them is a bit more tedious, since the Long Quick Link has to be fed through each loop vacated by the rope that comes with the hay bag. Having said this, with practice the netted bag can be closed off with the Quick Link in less than a minute. Packing the netted bag is a bit more challenging too, unless you stretch the bag open from side to side as we did at the AANHCP Paddock Paradise. Then you simply stuff the bags until full.

The gusseted bags are just plain simple to pack, snap shut, and cart off to the feed station. In the nearby image you can see what I do, having dedicated two hay poles for stuffing purposes at the barn. I packed three flakes into this bag. The Cable tie, D-ring, and Swivel Trigger Snap Hook help stabilize the bag during packing.



Hay packing station.



Bag packed and hung from hay pole.

### Hay forages

I recommend feeding a variety of grass hays – “Who or what on earth wants to eat just one thing?” At the AANHCP Field Headquarters we used four or more different hay species, including different sub-species as well as a constant flow of new hay crops which also adds to nutrient variation.

Vary hays by station. For example, use Bermuda at one station, Teff at another, and hay mixes (Bermuda and Teff, Teff and Orchard, Teff and Timothy, etc.) at yet another. Give horses time to “pick and choose” which hays, or which stations, they want to access. However, if it becomes clear they are refusing any hay, consider moving it to a new location to see if they will eat it there. If not, remove the hay and check if there’s a problem (e.g., mold) or it is not the hay you actually thought you purchased.

If hay bags are rained on, it is still safe to leave the hay in place so horses can feed from them. If rain accompanied by temperate high humidity in your region proposes a mold problem, then consider putting out fewer hay bags or less hay per bag until rain passes. The idea is to keep more than enough hay available at all times, but less than what would mold in the same period of time.

Consider hanging more than one hay bag per hay pole as necessity suggests; for example, you are not able to put out hay every day due to your personal work schedule.

Avoid feeding the “rich” legume forages such as Fescue, Clover, Alfalfa, Oat, etc., which have been implicated by the AANHCP as triggers for laminitis and other metabolic disorders. By using a variety of grass hays, your horses will be “founder free.” Use the official AANHCP NHC Recommended Diet for nutrient supplementation in addition to the grass hays used in the feed stations of your Paddock Paradise.

### Hay Pole Salt Licks

We suspended our mineral rich salt licks from the hay poles.



Hay pole salt lick.

### Hay pole safety in Paddock Paradise

Horses are naturally curious (and mischievous), and they will investigate anything new that arrives in your Paddock Paradise, including your hay poles and bags. Mouthing, licking, biting, chewing, tasting, shaking, rubbing, and tossing are all typical of this investigative behavior. Expect some or all of this to happen when they reach one of your feed stations for the first time. Best you be there too the first time to see what happens. But all should go well as they figure things out, soon settling into eating rather than “playing” with the new devices.

Horses are also notorious for getting themselves into jams. If it's possible, they are likely to get themselves in trouble. As with any system of horse confinement, the owner's responsibility is to check on them daily in Paddock Paradise. The feed stations shouldn't be a problem, especially since the t-posts are shielded by the hay poles. And if your horses aren't wearing halters, there won't be a chance of snagging themselves that way on something. Horses will gallop in Paddock Paradise, so I think it's a good idea to arrange the hay poles in such a way as to provide a swath through the feed station they can run through. If the feed station is wide enough, this shouldn't be a problem anyway, providing the station isn't overflowing with hay poles!

So, when checking out the feed station, look for hardware that might have worked loose (unlikely if you maintain my assembly instructions) and fallen onto the ground. Check that the Quick Link sleeves are shut (but not overly tightened). Check the swivel snap heads for wear – replace them if they are too thin.

If a t-post is bent above the blade, replace it unless you can press and straighten it out.

Replace hay bags that are ripped open from wear or whatever reason, as they can become catch points.

My hay poles were used 24/7 over an eight year period without any problems. But this isn't to say that problems can't or won't occur. Be vigilant and monitor your horses in Paddock Paradise, just in case.

## Resources

*Paddock Paradise: A Guide To Natural Horse Boarding* – If you don't have this book, order it as an important resource for ideas and links to relevant information about natural horse care and Paddock Paradise, specifically.

*AANHCP Recommended Diet for Horses* – This document explains our current feeding guidelines researched at the AANHCP Field Headquarters in Lompoc, CA (USA) with horses living 24/7 on track in Paddock Paradise. Go to [www.AANHCP.net](http://www.AANHCP.net)

Facebook: *Paddock Paradise Track System - Enrichment for Horses*

Facebook: *ISNHCP, AANHCP, the Wild Horse Model, the Natural Trim & Paddock Paradise*

## Image Credits

### P. 2–3

- Jaime Jackson

### P. 4

- Jill Willis

### P. 5

- (Left) Rhonda Mullens
- (Center, right) Everbuilt (Home Depot)

### P. 6

- (Left) Walmart
- (Center) Powerfields.com (Walmart)
- (Right) Powerfields.com (Amazon)

### P. 7

- (Left) Rhonda Mullens
- (Right) Jaime Jackson

### P. 8

- (Left) Jaime Jackson
- (Center, right) Jill Willis

### P. 9

- (Left), enter Jaime Jackson
- (Right, bottom) Rhonda Mullens

### P. 10

- (Left) Jaime Jackson
- (Right) Rhonda Mullens

### P. 11

- Jaime Jackson