

WORKING WORLDWIDE



THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY

HOW TO MAKE, FIT AND USE A PACK SADDLE

A Donkey Sanctuary Harness Resource



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INTRODUCTION

This resource, combined with the accompanying video, is designed to help you to create a simple, affordable pack saddle.

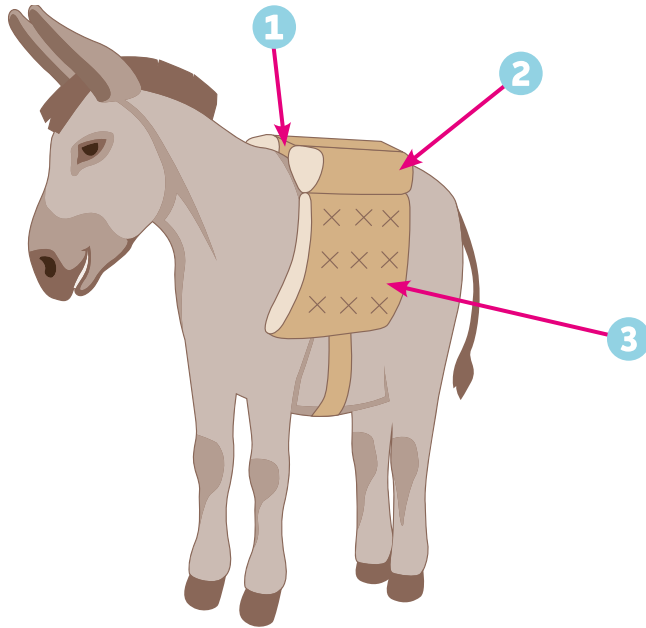
- Does your current pack saddle or cargo cause painful wounds on your donkey that do not heal?
- Does your donkey show pain or discomfort by refusing to move, refusing to receive a load or trying to avoid being touched?

One possible way to help could be to improve your donkey's working life by making a better pack saddle from affordable, available and appropriate materials. Without pain or wounds, your donkey will work better for you, stay fitter and possibly live longer.



REMEMBER: A perfect pack saddle does not solve all welfare problems! Do not load more than half your donkey's weight onto its back, balance the load and remember to account for journey time, terrain, water and other essential parts of care.

A GOOD PACK SADDLE DOES THREE THINGS



- 1 It provides a gullet space to protect the spine
- 2 It distributes the load through firm side bars
- 3 It protects the donkey from the cargo/load with panels

YOU WILL NEED



MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Sisal sack
- Straw or hay (a large sackful at least)
- Strong thread
- Bucket of water
- Piece of blanket or other soft cloth (optional)
- Rope



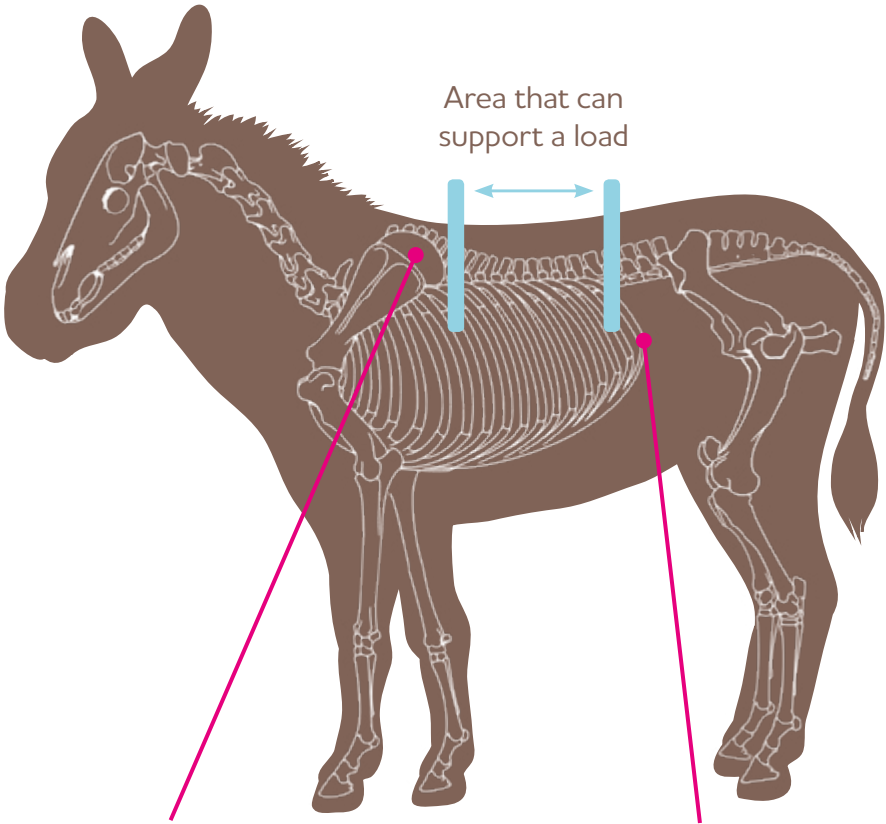
TOOLS NEEDED:

- Tape measure
- Marker pen
- Knife or scissors
- Large needle, (we use 5" mattress needles, but any large needle will do)
- Stuffing rod, about 1 metre long (you can use a broomstick with a flattened 'V' shape carved in one end)

NOTE: You can use different materials to stuff the pack saddle (e.g. rice husks, peanut husks, dry grass, felt, etc). The best materials to use are natural (not synthetic), locally available in case you need to repair it, lightweight and will not become heavy or rotten when wet.

SIZE CHECK

Before making your pack saddle, check the size for your donkey:



At the front, the pack saddle should allow the shoulder blade to move freely

At the back, the pack saddle must not go beyond the final rib

If your sisal sack is too wide, cut it to the maximum size above.

PREPARING THE SACK



Start by closing the opening of the sack. Fold the two sides a little to form a hem and stitch it shut using whip stitch.

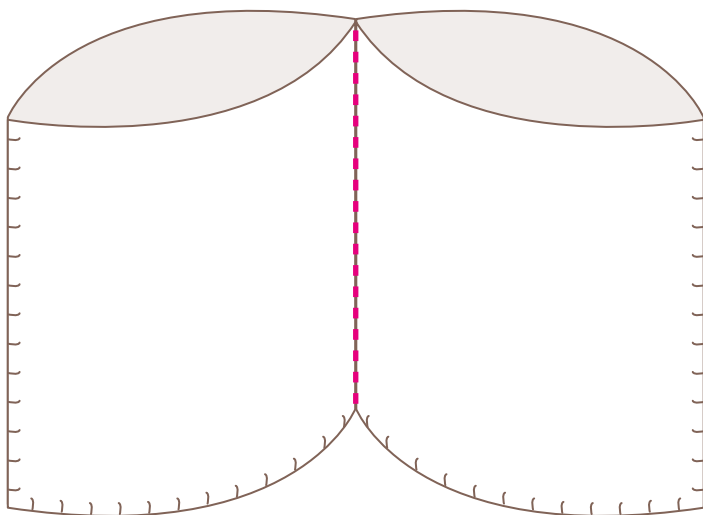


Stitching method for whipstitch.

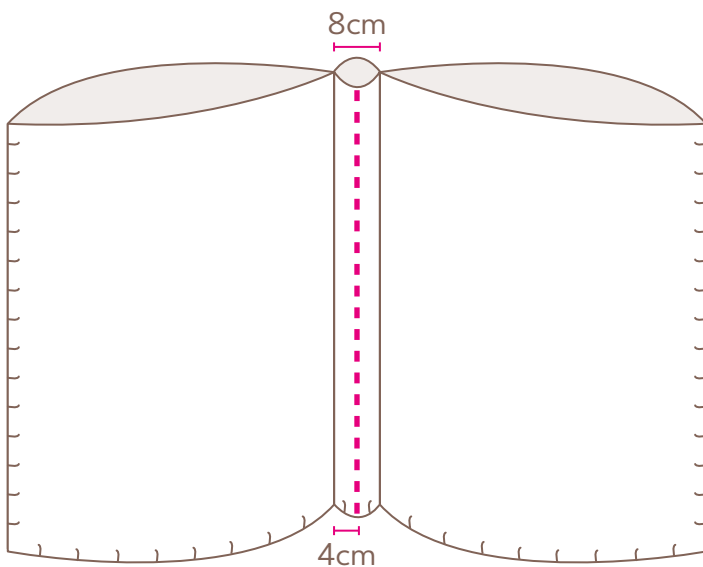


Once the open end has been sealed, open up the sack along its length like this.

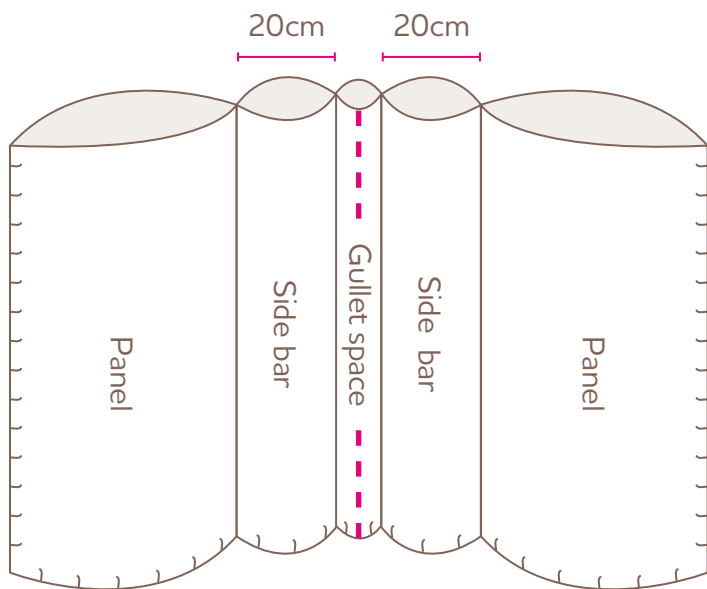
MARKING OUT



Fold the sack in half and mark the centre line.



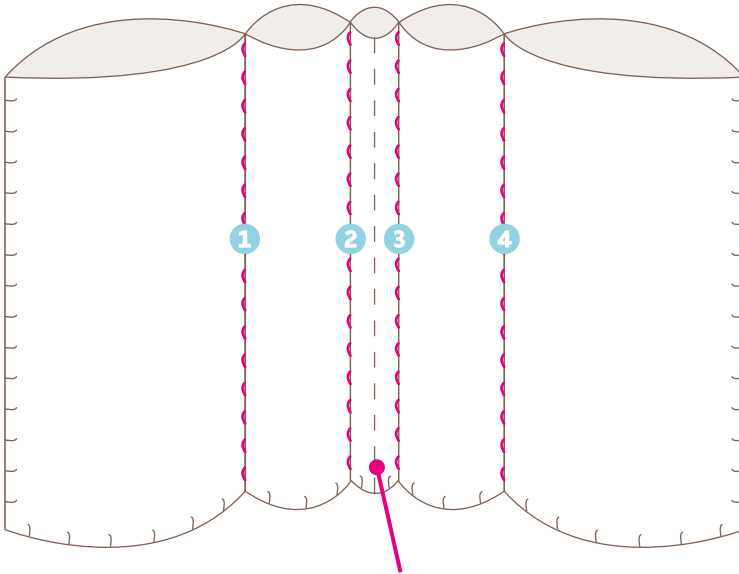
To make the gullet space, make a line 4cm each side of the centre line. The gap between these lines will now be 8cm for the gullet space.



For the side bars, make two lines 20cm out either side the gullet space.

STITCHING

Use a simple running stitch on these four lines (you do not need to stitch the centre line).



Do not stitch the centre line



A running stitch.



You will now have five pockets. Four need to be stuffed with straw or hay. You do not stuff the gullet space.

STUFFING

Start by sprinkling some water over your pile of straw or hay to make it easier to bend and twist without breaking.

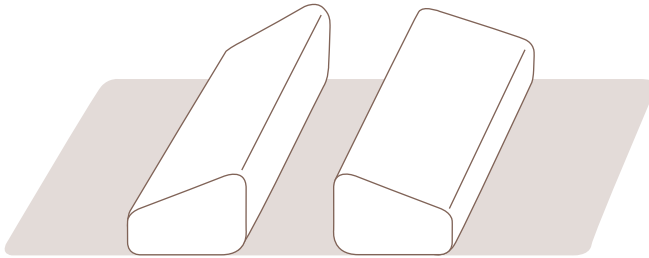
1. START BY STUFFING THE SIDE BARS

Twist and fold small bundles of straw. Use the 'V' in your stuffing rod to force each bundle into the side bars.



When the side bars look full, beat them down hard with the stuffing rod and put more straw inside them. More straw in the side bars will mean a better, longer-lasting pack saddle.

The ideal shape to create looks like this:



Try to create wedge-shapes, not sausage-shapes.

NOTE: Make sure there are no bumps or hollows in the side bars as these will create pressure points, wounds and pain. If there is a bump or hollow, beat it flat with the stuffing rod, stuff more straw inside and check again for more bumps and hollows.

2. NEXT, STUFF THE PANELS

They should only be about $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ as thick as the side bars so less stuffing is needed.

Use the stuffing rod to beat the panels into a flat shape with no bumps or hollows.



NOTE: Do not stuff the gullet space.

SEALING THE SECTIONS

Using whip stitch, seal the ends of each section. Add more straw to the side bars if some falls out.



Your pack saddle will now look like this:

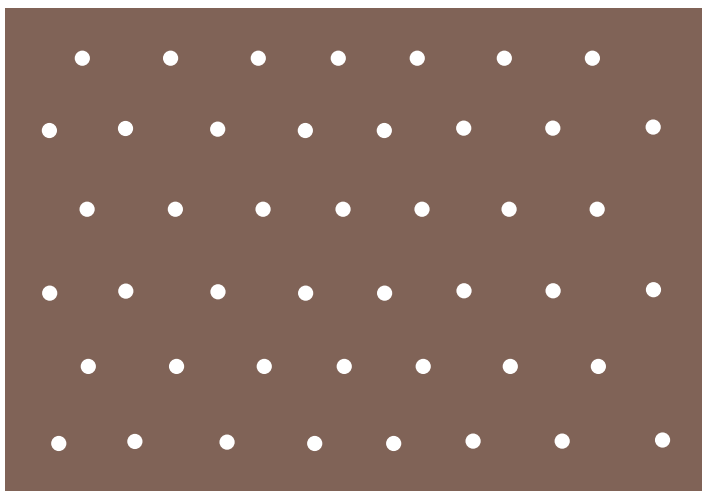


QUILTING THE PANELS

You need to add some quilting stitched to the panels to stop the loose straw from moving around.

Mark points 5cm apart on each panel and use quilting stitches to create a pattern of quilted squares.

The pattern should look like this:

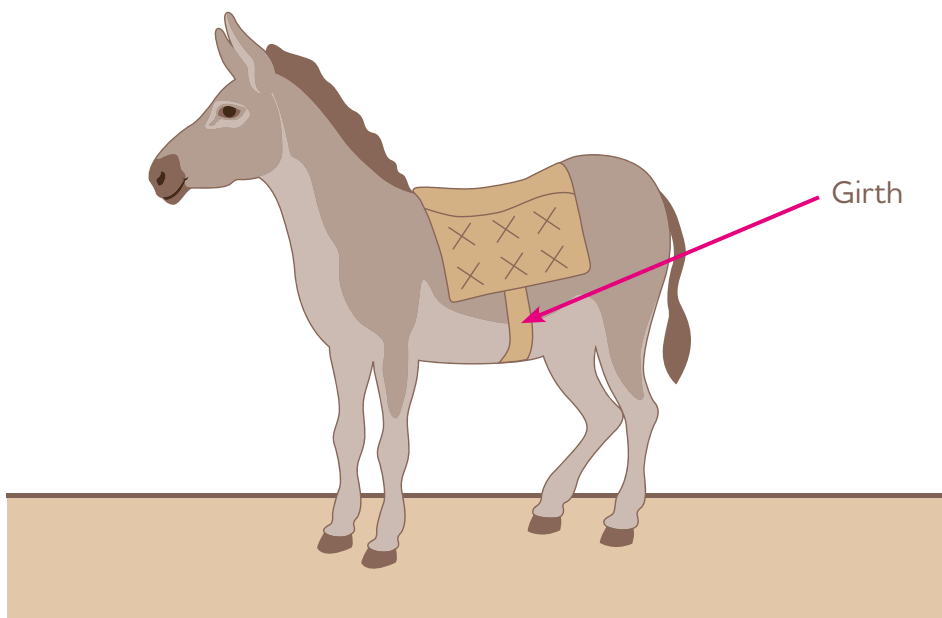


Stitching method for quilting:



GIRTHS

You will need to add a girth to your pack saddle to hold it in place. It should be 6-10cm wide and made of natural material.



Stitch the girth onto the top side of the pack saddle so it is out of the way of the cargo and your donkey.



NOTE: When tying the girth, it can be tied quite tight. Make sure no straps or cargo ropes go over sensitive areas such as under the legs or over the genitals. Try to put any cargo ropes over the top of the girth strap as shown in the image to the right.



BREAST COLLAR AND BREECHING STRAPS

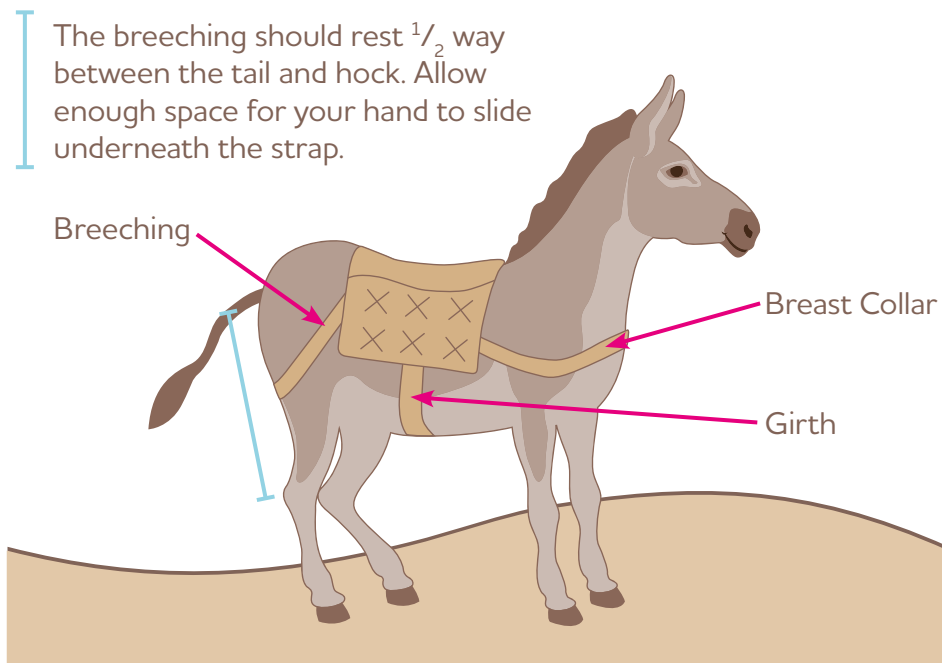
A donkey working on hilly ground will also require a breast collar and breeching straps.

All straps should be 6-10cm wide and made of natural fibres (sisal, cotton, leather, etc). Nylon web is very strong but it is not natural so does not allow the donkey's skin to breathe. If you use nylon, wrap it securely in denim, cotton or wool wherever it touches the donkey. It must be flat, and keep any seams away from the donkey.

Add a padded breast-collar and breeching by stitching a 6-10cm strap around the front and back of the pack saddle. Securely stitch the strap to one side of the pack saddle and stitch a loop to tie the strap to on the other side.

The position of the breast collar should not restrict breathing or leg movement. The position of the breeching should avoid the legs.

The breeching should rest $\frac{1}{2}$ way between the tail and hock. Allow enough space for your hand to slide underneath the strap.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: My donkey carries water and the pack saddle gets wet, heavy and rotten! What can I do?

A: Use a sisal sack as usual for the side of the pack saddle touching the donkey but use a nylon sack for the top. It is fairly waterproof and often cheaper.

Q: There are no sisal sacks available in my town. What can I do?

A: You can use a woollen blanket instead. You can use a nylon sack but line the side touching your donkey with some natural material like a blanket or heavy duty cotton. Don't use materials with seams, buttons, zips or buckles as these will cause wounds; only use smooth, flat material on the donkey's back.

Q: My donkey is developing a wound under the side bar. What should I do?

A: Rest your donkey until healed. Clean the wound 2-3 times daily by washing with clean, salty water and allow it to dry. If the wound doesn't heal within 5 days, contact a vet for advice. Check the cargo, ropes and pack saddle itself for lumps or pressure points and remove them. If you can't rest your donkey, beat a depression in the side bar in the exact area where the lump/pressure-point was and put 2-3 stitches in to hold that part of the side bar away from your donkey's skin to allow it to heal. When healed, remove the stitches and beat the side bar flat again.



Q: My donkey is developing a wound on its spine. What should I do?

A: Rest the donkey until healed. Clean the wound 2-3 times daily by washing with clean, salty water and allow it to dry. If the wound doesn't heal within 5 days, contact a vet for advice. Check that when loaded, there is still a gap under the gullet space; the pack saddle should not touch the spine. If it does, unstitch the side bars, stuff more straw inside and reseal. Also, check you are not overloading your donkey.

Q: My donkey is developing a wound under/near the panel. What should I do?

A: Rest your donkey until healed. Clean the wound 2-3 times daily by washing with clean, salty water and allow it to dry. If the wound doesn't heal within 5 days, contact a vet for advice. You need to find and remove the cause of the wound so check the cargo isn't rubbing on your donkey's skin. Check there are no bumps or hollows in the panel. If you find a bump or hollow, beat it flat.



CARING FOR YOUR PACK SADDLE

If you want your pack saddle to last a long time, keep it dry (remember that donkeys sweat when working), clean and check the stitches and shape regularly. The side bars should be packed as hard as possible and without lumps or hollows. If it becomes soft, open the stitches and add more straw.

You could put a piece of cloth over the pack saddle to protect it from the cargo.

REPAIR

If your pack saddle develops a tear, you can easily patch it up by cutting a piece of soft material in the shape of the torn area and stitching it inside.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email us at enquiries@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk with any questions and for a copy of 'The Good Harness Guide' or any other resources you may need.

For information and fact sheets on caring for donkeys, visit:
www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/donkey-health-and-welfare

To download The Donkey Sanctuary's Donkey Care Handbook for free, visit:
www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/donkey-care-handbook

Qualified vets can get up-to-date information about treating donkeys, including our latest research findings here:
<https://en.wikivet.net/donkey>

TELL US HOW IT GOES!

We want to hear from you about your harness projects!

Please send your stories and photos (max 6mb per email) to us at enquiries@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

Thank you and good luck!

Please visit www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/packsaddles for our pack saddle resources, including:

- A downloadable video
- The video script (for local translation)
- This booklet (for local translation)

WITH THANKS TO...



Chris Garrett, International Harness Consultant has worked with The Donkey Sanctuary since 2007 to develop a global team of harness makers, officers and champions around the world.

Poor or inappropriate harness design, materials, use and maintenance are key causes of poor donkey welfare. Chris and the harness teams work to improve existing harness designs and train people to make and use the improved models.

Chris's excellent technical input and guidance have been fundamental in creating this resource and we are sincerely grateful for his time, energy, skills, passion and good humour.



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