

PICKING UP A MULE'S HIND FEET

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Many people own mules that are weary of having their feet picked up or having their hind feet handled. There are many reasons why your mule could be like this. Your mule might have not been trained to pick up his hind feet or might have had bad experiences with this before. Whatever the reason, we cannot change it. All we can do from this point forward is teach our mule that it is OK for us to handle their hind feet.

Tapping his foot, pinching his tendon or dropping his foot and letting it hit the ground all cause the mule pain or discomfort. These are not the best ways to handle this issue.

To accomplish your goal of picking up his feet, begin your lesson by putting a halter and lead rope or a bridle

with a snaffle bit on your mule. I like using a snaffle bit because your mule will learn the lesson faster. Prerequisites for this lesson are the "Go Forward" cue (featured in the July 2009 issue of *Mules and More*) and "Disengaging the Hindquarters."

An important note to remember: never assume that your mule will not kick. Always stay in a safe position when dealing with the hind feet. A mule that is sensitive to you being near his hind end may react quickly if he is nervous or pushed too hard. Use caution.

The ultimate goal of this exercise is to teach your mule to take the weight off his hind foot so you are able to pick up the foot with ease.

We will work with the left hind foot first. With the left rein in your left hand and a dressage whip in your right hand, ask the mule to "Go Forward." The mule should circle around you with his nose tipped in towards you with no pressure on the rein.

Next, ask the mule to disengage his hind quarters and stop. The hind-quarter should move away from you to the right. The mule



TIM is now asking Angel to disengage her hind quarters and stop

should be facing you when he stops. If the mule disengages his hind-quarter, but does not stop, keep disengaging the hind-quarter until the mule stops. Remember to release the rein each time the mule disengages his hind-quarter.

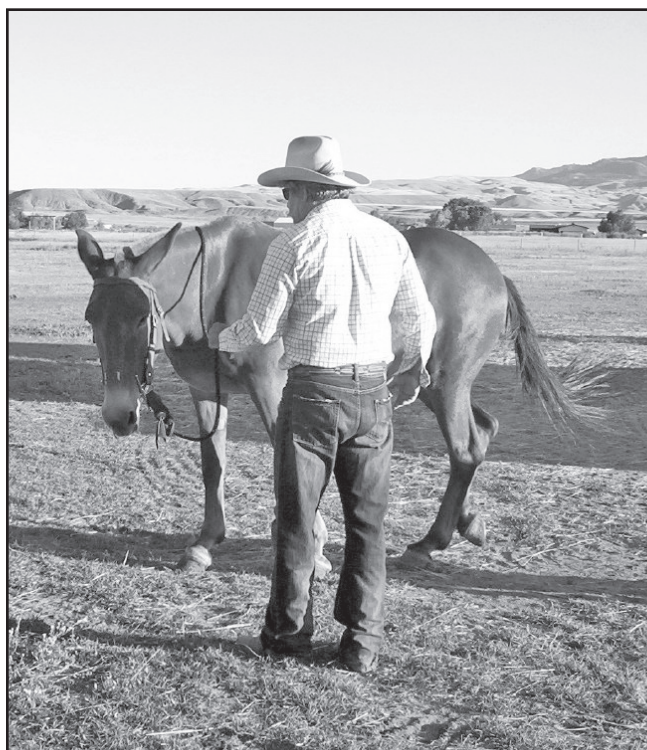
Again, you are looking for your mule to take the weight off his hind left leg and rest his foot on his toe – cocked, if you will.

If the mule stops and does not take the weight off his left hind leg, take slack out of the rein and ask the hip to take another step away, to the right.

Continue working on "Go Forward"



ANGEL has taken the weight off her hind left leg and is resting her foot on her toe



DIAMOND CREEK ANGEL has been cued to "Go Forward" and is moving around **TIM** with her head inwards

and “Disengaging the Hindquarters.” Each time you “Disengage the Hindquarters,” look for the mule to take weight off the left hind leg. However, each time the mule keeps weight on his left hind foot, ask him to “Go Forward” a few steps again and take slack out of the rein and again ask him to disengage his hind-quarter and stop.

When you are successful and the mule does rest his foot on his toe after the stop, allow the mule to stand still. Continue allowing him to stand as long as that foot is resting on his toe.

At the moment he decides to put weight back on the foot, begin the process all over again.

When your mule is consistently standing and resting his left foot on the toe, you can begin “Sacking Out” the foot. Make sure that the mule will not kick out before you start sacking out the foot. If you believe the mule will kick out, stop the lesson and fix the problem of your mule kicking. I will cover kicking mules in another article.

To begin “Sacking Out” your mule, stand at the mule’s left side. While his foot is resting on the toe, take your right hand and “Sack Out” the mule by

slowly rubbing him from his head, working your way down his back towards the hip. Once you are at the hip, return to the mule’s head and praise the mule. By returning to the mule’s head, you are releasing any pressure applied to the mule.

Another tip, be patient when sacking your mule. Some mules may only allow you to sack to the shoulder initially. It may take several “releases” before you reach the hip.

Pay attention to the mule for any reaction to your “Sacking Out,” flinching, ears pinned, tension. Any of these reactions means you must spend more time sacking him out.

After your mule is comfortable with you touching him to his hip, work your way down to the left hind foot, constantly returning to your mule’s back for a release. Again, make sure your mule is completely relaxed and work your way down the mule’s leg until you can pet



After “Sacking Out” Angel, TIM is now picking up Angel’s foot by the heel

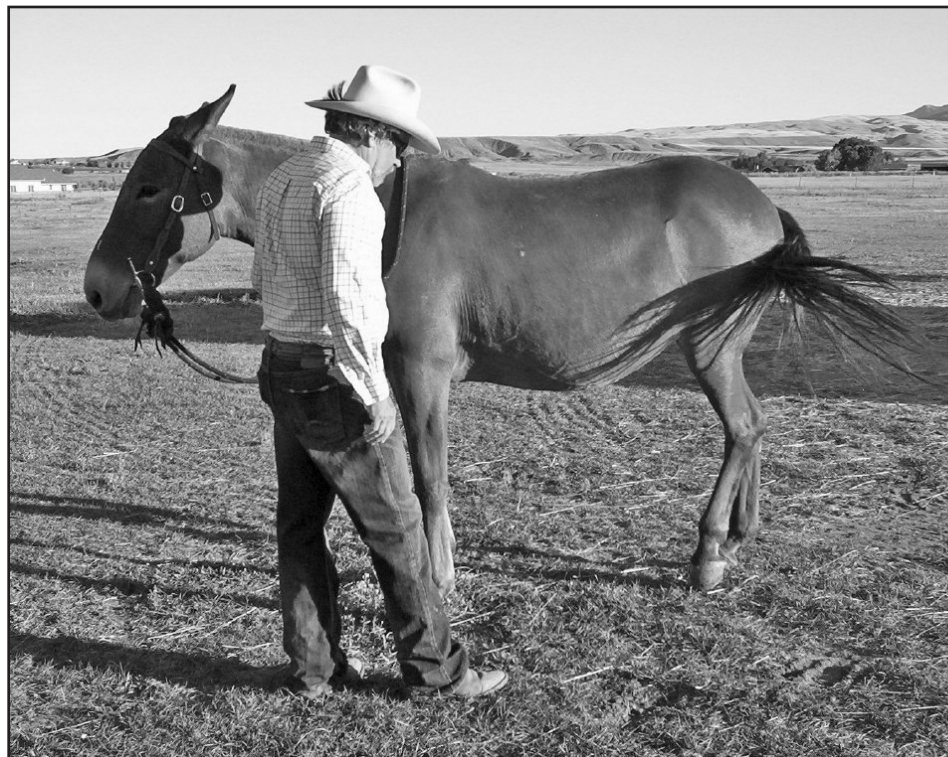
the foot while the foot is resting on the toe.

Remember, even while you are sacking out your mule, if he applies weight to the foot at any time, pick-up the rein and ask the mule to step his hind quarters away until he is resting the foot on the toe.

Next, work your way back down to the foot and pick-up the mule’s foot by the heel, one inch off the ground, then immediately set the foot down, return to your mule’s head and praise him.

As he gets comfortable with you picking up the foot for a second, one-inch off the ground, progress by picking up the foot for longer periods of time. Set the foot down before the mule takes the foot away. Also, do not let the foot drop to the ground, set the foot down.

Once your mule is comfortable with the hind left foot, you will need to repeat the entire process on the right side to train your mule to pick-up his right hind foot. With many reputations on both sides of the mule, your mule will calmly and willingly pick-up his hind feet for you.



AFTER SEVERAL repetitions, Angel has taken the weight off her hind left leg and is resting her foot on her toe