

This fascinating article, based upon Long Rider research and observations, was written by the international equestrian investigative reporter, Tom Moates, and appears here courtesy of our editorial comrades at Eclectic Horseman magazine. The Eclectic Horseman magazine was founded in 2001 to serve the North American equestrian community's need for educational material. The bi-monthly publication is eagerly anticipated by a dedicated and diverse group of readers, all of whom exhibit an intense interest in reading fact-based articles from leading equestrian writers. For more information about the Eclectic Horseman magazine, visit their website: <http://www.eclectic-horseman.com/>



Global Horsemanship

Pack Saddles and Sudaderos

by Tom Moates



Jeremy James

In the late 1990s Jeremy James ventured into the northern mountains of Viet Nam. The Welshman was on a mission for that country's government to study the native horses and make an official report back on their overall welfare. During this mission he found, quite by accident, a most curious equestrian invention — a girthless pack saddle.

If anyone else reported being in a remote Hmong village as a local couple came along the trail with a stout native pony heavily laden with supplies fastened to a pack saddle that was not tied in any way to the horse by a

girth, I'd say they were nuts. But, let me introduce you to one of the most knowledgeable and incredible equestrian explorers of all time.

Jeremy James rode 1500 miles from Turkey to Wales, and then 1200 miles from Bulgaria to Wales in the 1990s. He has written numerous books, including *Saddletramp* and *Vagabond* about those journeys, as well as *The Byerley Turk* (an unbelievable history of the first foundation sire of the Thoroughbred line), and *Debt of Honour - The Story of the International League for the Protection of Horses*. His equestrian knowledge is encyclopedic.

A founding member of The Long Riders' Guild (LRG: the world's first international association of equestrian explorers, www.thelongridersguild.com), CuChullaine O'Reilly admits: "Jeremy is totally charming, witty, and knows more about horses, on a global scale than anyone we have ever met. He has crossed Africa with a native camel caravan, ridden horses in a host of countries, and had seen more equestrian cultures than most people know exist."

Jeremy scrutinized the oncoming travelers, walked over out of curiosity, then stayed to examine the rigging (or rather, lack thereof) when he realized he wasn't imagining things. It was true. No double cinches, spider-webbing of ropes, or intricate array of knots. It was a system, very likely, completely unfamiliar to the entire Western world.

This pack saddle sat low down along the rib cage of the horse, with a high-riding breast plate. There were, however, no cinch or knots whatever. The crouper had been constructed with a series of leather discs strung together acting as "rollers" under



Hmong Horse

the horse's tail and along his flanks which eliminated the friction burns common with western-style croupers.

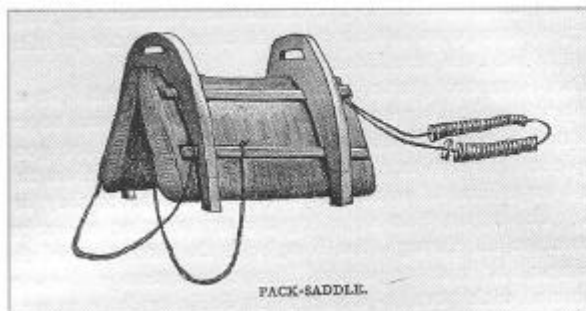
The Hmong horse, as it turned out, was carrying a very heavy and unstable load of water. Yet, after stopping, the couple first lifted off the water casks and then simply removed the pack saddle by lifting it with ease off the horse's back.

"Though Jeremy was the first Westerner in modern times to recognize the unique qualities of this pack saddle system," CuChullain O'Reilly explains after the LRG became aware of the finding, "we eventually found other Long Riders in the 19th cen-



Sattel der Haultiere.

Asian Girthless Pack Saddle



Japanese Pack Saddle

tury had also encountered this unique Oriental system. While still unsure exactly where in the Orient it originated, The Guild was able to find episodes of Long Riders in Viet Nam, China and Burma who also used this system."

The German Long Rider, Otto Ehlers, as it turns out, found this style of saddle in the mountains of Burma. It was around the year 1890.

"Yet," CuChullaine shares another example, "the most detailed account was recorded by the English Long Rider, Henry Savage Landor, who in the 1880s had been the first foreigner to ever ride around the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. Landor recorded this sketch of the pack saddle used by these remote Japanese horsemen, complete with a detailed drawing of the friction-free crouper."

"Nor was this the only time The Long Riders' Guild discovered that other equestrian cultures had stumbled upon answers to perplexing equestrian puzzles," he says.

When Australian Long Rider Tim Cope was half-way through his 8,000-mile solo journey from Mongolia to Hungary, following the route of Genghis Khan's mounted army, this young equestrian explorer discovered that mounted descendants of the Mongol general living in Kazakhstan were still using the same type of horsehair saddle pad invented by their warrior forefathers.

This unique, soft horsehair saddle blanket absorbs sweat, doesn't gall the horse, and is completely natural. Cope sent the photo to LRG headquarters and shared his intriguing finding. It seemed to be one of a kind, and from an ancient and remote



Kazakhstani Saddle Pads



Mary Ellen Eckleberg

land. It seemed to be unique.

"Imagine our surprise," CuChullaine exclaims, "when an email came in from a resident of Arizona. This fellow had read about Tim's discovery and written in to say that the Mexican vaqueros had perfected the same horse hair system! Called the sudadero, it appeared to match the Central Asian saddle pad."

But the last piece of this Long Rider puzzle fell into place when this previously unknown Arizona resident informed the LRG that not only does the sudadero work, but that one of the most important North American Long Riders had used one during the course of her historic ride. It was true.

When Mary Ellen Eckleberg set out from Canada in 1976, determined to follow the Mississippi from its headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico—and back—she had used a sudadero.

"When we telephoned Mary Ellen," CuChullaine says, "she confirmed this, saying that her saddle had been handmade in Arizona by the noted Jack Carrol and that the old saddle maker had sworn that the best saddle pad she could use was a sudadero from across the border. Three thousand miles, and one historic journey later, she proved he was right."

Those of us long enthusiastic about the non-glossy, growing-encyclopedia (note the 3-ring binder holes pre-punched in the spine of each issue) approach of *Eclectic Horseman* likely remember its mission statement as set forth by the editor "...to bring 'just what works' information to a knowledge-hungry public...and create and present ideas and techniques that work with and educate humans about the nature of the horse."

With that in mind, it is a pleasure to report these findings from The Long Riders' Guild. The girthless pack saddle and horsehair saddle blankets not only fall into the practical category of "just what works," they transcend that. These examples prove, as CuChullaine O'Reilly pointed out recently, "that none of us have all the answers, and that other equestrian cultures possess ancient equestrian wisdoms that have worked for generations, yet we have never heard of them."

For more information please visit thelongridersguild.com.