

# HOW TO SET UP A HIGHLINE -STEP BY STEP

By Uli Schnabl

A highline is a long rope tied very tightly between two trees, or other suitable and stable objects such as two hitched horse trailers, and used to securely keep horses tied over a long period of time.

There are many advantages to a highline. It is easy to pack, takes little space and is relatively safe. Even most young horses readily accept being tied to a highline. Horses can move around, eat and even sleep on a highline, without causing damage to themselves or to their environment.

Any time a horseperson spends time in the back country, the reputation of all horse people is at stake. "Leave no trace" should be our mantra, and a highline offers a low impact solution to securing horses. Tying to a tree should only be a very temporary arrangement, as it can be highly damaging to bark and root systems.



To make a highline, gather a relatively long, pliable, easy to work with rope, two tree saver straps (available in outfitter stores, but an old cinch or- my personal favourite- an old seat belt from a car wrecker with two loops tied in the ends will work just as well), and a swivel (also available at outfitter stores). You will need to know how to tie a bowline knot, a butterfly knot and a half hitch.

## STEP ONE

Select a good location. Make sure the trees you use are alive and sturdy. The

ground should be firm and relatively free of brush.

## STEP TWO

Wrap a tree saver around the first tree and tie your highline rope to the ends of the tree saver by using a bowline knot. This will ensure you will be able to untie it again later. As the highline should end up well above the tallest horse's head, do this as high up as possible.



## STEP THREE

Pull your rope out and determine where your horse will be tied to the line. Ideally this should be past the drip line of the tree to ensure minimal damage to the root system. Integrate the swivel piece into the rope. If you are planning to tie more horses to the line, put in more swivels.

A swivel is handy, because it ensures the lead rope does not wind up higher and higher towards the horse's head. You can tie a highline without a swivel, but then will have to unwind the lead rope from time to time.



## STEPS FOUR, FIVE AND SIX

Tie a butterfly knot at about arm's length from your swivel. This is not absolutely necessary, but can be useful for tying a hay bag next to the horse.

Tie a butterfly knot at another arm's length from the last one.

Tie a final butterfly knot close to the second tree. You will need these last two butterfly knots to tighten the highline, the last thing you will do.

#### STEP SEVEN

Wrap the second tree saver strap around the second tree. Again remember to keep it nice and high. Pull your rope through the rings/loops of the tree saver; the butterfly knot closest to the tree will be pulled through as well. Try to keep tension on the rope.



#### STEP EIGHT

Pull the rope through the butterfly knot further away from the tree and then back through the butterfly loop closest to the tree. Pull the rope as hard as you can to tighten the rope- throw your entire weight into it. Remember that horses will be applying force to it later.

#### STEP NINE

Tie the rope off by securing it with a few half hitches.

#### STEP TEN

Test your highline for tightness. You may have to re-tighten it now and probably will have to re-tighten it once in a while. It's crucial the highline stays high and tight above your horse's head (Fjord people have a clear advantage here.) It can be disastrous if a horse gets a foot over the rope.

#### STEP ELEVEN

Tie your horse to the swivel piece in the highline. I use a bowline knot for this, but any type of quick release knot will work as well.

Your highline is finished but there are several other things to consider. Any time a horse stays unsupervised on a

highline, he/she should be tied short. I allow my horses to eat from the ground rather than from a hay net. While they eat, I give them a longer lead rope, but make sure I keep an eye on them. I reserve the hay net for the busybody horse.

Only put horses that know each other and get along together on a highline. Bad things can and will happen if horses on a highline get into a fight.

Use a regular halter instead of a rope halter; the horse should not feel he/she is getting punished just for moving around.

Keep a knife and flashlight close to the highline in case of emergency. Some people will also tie a bell to the highline to ensure things are ok, especially during the night.

Once the highline is removed, make sure to clean up after your horses. Old hay and manure should be removed and the site should look as undisturbed as possible. 🐾



The bowline knot



The butterfly knot



The half hitch knot

