

PONY CLUB



Field Safety Achievement Badge

Workbook



- Objectives** To build knowledge of the appropriate behaviour and methods when handling ponies at grass to ensure safety and welfare of both ponies and other people
- Key points**
- Be aware of the dangers when entering a field with more than one pony
 - Know what may cause ponies to act aggressively
 - Understand how behaviour of ponies might differ in windy, cold, hot, and wet conditions when turned out
 - Understand that stout boots or shoes should always be worn when around ponies
 - Understand the correct way to turn a pony around when turning out in the field
 - Know how to catch a pony safely from a field of other ponies
- Additional reading** The Manual of Horsemanship
- This workbook is a summary of the most important points on the given subject. Note that studying only the contents of this workbook will not be sufficient to allow you to pass this achievement badge assessment. All badges have a very strong practical component, and it is vital that you receive hands-on training, and carry out all the practical activities of this subject enough times, until you are confident and can do the tasks efficiently and effectively. Thereafter, this handbook will serve as a revision aid for assessment of the achievement badge and later when you are ready to do efficiency tests.

NAME

BRANCH

Ponies in a Herd

When we keep our horses and ponies living in a big field together, we are mimicking how they would live in the wild, in a herd.

They enjoy being together because it is their natural way of living, but you need to understand that they create a herd structure amongst themselves, and you have to fit into that structure if you go into their field.

It is best if they see you as the herd leader, because then they will respect you and respect your personal space.

Horses have individual characters. Some are friendly with everyone, some don't like certain horses; some are confident and calm leaders, while some are bullies; some are shy or scared and try to stay out of the way of all the other horses. Sometimes the biggest horses are the gentlest.

By watching a group of horses for a few hours, you can learn what character each one has.

Horses quickly learn how to relate to each other, and develop a hierarchy of who goes to water first, goes in for food first, etc. The 'top' horse can get another horse to move out of his way by baring his teeth, putting his ears back, or threatening to kick.



But sometimes the other horse doesn't move, and then he might get chased or kicked or bitten.



Ponies also make friends. Those ponies that are friends with each other will often stand or graze together, and may even groom each other.



Watch to see who is the leader, who is domineering, who are friends, and who is at the bottom.

Ponies can be aggressive

Even though ponies like being in a herd, they can sometimes be unfriendly to each other. They like to have their personal space respected. Ponies that are too squashed together are more likely to fight, so make sure that the field is big enough for all the ponies to be able to move around freely.

- Any shelter in the field must also be large enough for all the horses to be able to get shelter, without having to be crowded
- If you are feeding the horses cut hay in winter, make sure that they don't have to fight over the food. In the morning, before you put the horses into the field, put out piles of hay for them ensuring that you put out more piles than there are horses. That way, even the shyest horse gets a pile to eat
- The water trough must also be placed in such a way that no horse can get trapped (by another horse) between it and the fence. Ponies lower down in the hierarchy must always have the space to get out of the way

Windy or wet weather can make horses more restless, and more likely to start barging or kicking, while very hot weather could make them irritable (or even become dehydrated).

Ponies that have lived together for a while, tend to live together quite happily, as they know who is the 'top' horse and who are the followers. But if you bring in a new horse or pony to join the group, they will often have an argument to work out where the new pony is going to fit in.

If you are going to be bringing in a new pony, it is a good idea to put him in a smaller field on his own at first, next to the main pony paddock. This way, the herd can see him and start getting to know him, over the fence. Just by 'talking' over the fence, he will already start learning who are the top ponies, which ponies to avoid, which ponies he likes and might become friendly with, and where he will fit in. After a few days, you can put him in the field with the others, and they will probably all be quite calm, and will settle quickly.



Entering a field with more than one pony

When you go into a field with a lot of horses, you might disturb them, and then they will start moving around, and moving each other around. It is then that you have to make sure you stay out of their way so that you don't get hurt accidentally.

The horses may not mean to be aggressive towards you, but as they are bigger and heavier and faster than you, you can easily get knocked over if you get caught up in a crowd of them. Be sensible about keeping safe distances if they are milling around.



- Make sure you are dressed safely – wear your riding hat and strong, sturdy, closed shoes. You also need to have gloves if you are going to catch your pony. These will provide you with some protection if you get crowded by the horses
- Watch the ponies first, for a minute or two, before going into the field. Make sure they are behaving normally, and not running around or chasing each other. Wait until they calm down
- Disturb the herd as little as possible. If they start racing around in the field while you are there, you are in danger
- Lock up any dogs that might chase the ponies, before you go to the field
- You must walk calmly and unhurriedly – don't run, scream, or make sudden movements in the paddock
- It will be useful if your pony knows your voice or your whistle, so that you can call him when you go into the field. Otherwise, you are perhaps going to have to get him out from amongst a group of his friends, if you want to talk to or catch him
- If he doesn't come to you when you call, and is in a group of ponies, you need to get the group to disperse (spread out) so that you can get to the pony you want!
- Often just walking purposefully towards the group while LOOKING AT THEM will get them to start moving apart
- Ponies are very good at watching for signals from other horses, and so will see your signal too
- Don't shout or wave your arms around, because then they will run, rather than just walking quietly out of the way
- If you are not used to catching your pony out of a field, take an adult or responsible person with you. They can help by approaching the other ponies and keeping their attention away from you, or by gently shooing them off, so that you can catch your pony
- Don't take food, or any food container, with you. If the ponies think you are carrying food, they might all come rushing up around you to get it, and might knock you over

Catching your pony in the field

1. Find an adult or an older person to go with you to help catch your pony or to help with the gate
2. Enter the paddock, and close the gate securely behind you so that no ponies can escape
3. Remember, you must always catch a horse with a halter or head collar, not just a lead rein around his neck!
4. Have the halter sorted out and ready for use. It must also be the right size for your horse
5. Address your horse calmly, talking to him quietly, and give him the opportunity to come to you

6. If he doesn't, approach his shoulder – from the side – not straight in front or behind him. Make sure you don't walk immediately behind another pony as you approach him – move other ponies aside or walk around them safely. When you reach him, you could offer your closed fist to him to smell, in greeting
7. Once you are standing on your pony's near (or left) side, and he is standing quietly, you are ready to put the halter on. Don't try and make a sudden grab at him as this will make him move away. By draping the lead rein over his neck as the first step, he will believe he is already caught, and shouldn't try to run away. Fit the halter as you have practiced, so that it is comfortable and secure. Now you can pick up the lead rein from where it is draped over his neck, and you are ready to lead



Never mount your pony in the field while there are loose ponies around. Don't be tempted to ride up to the stables bareback, or on the halter.

Lead your pony from his left side, holding the rope with two hands. If you need to turn him around, make sure you turn him AWAY from you. Step towards him and move him away from your feet as you turn, so that you are on the outside of the turn. That way he can't step on you. NEVER wrap the lead rein around your hand, arm or wrist.



Once you are at the gate, ask your helper to open the gate for you, and to close it again once you have walked through.

Your pony is safely caught

When you get back to the stables, look him over for any wounds, sore places or blood before you do anything further with him. You can 'teach' him to be happy to come to you in the field, by giving him a treat now or spending some time grooming him. He will remember that he got something pleasant as a result of coming with you – that you didn't just catch him to make him work! If you are going for a ride, remember to clean out his feet of any stones or other objects before you tack up.

Releasing your pony back into the field

Take someone with you to help at the gate, especially if there are already ponies in the field.

Once through the gate, turn your horse to face you and away from the field, before you take his halter off. This should stop him from rushing off, and perhaps kicking you in his excitement at being back in the field and with his friends. Don't smack him on the bum to make him run off!



Self-assessment

1. You are going to catch or turnout your pony from the field. Are these behaviours good, or bad? Tick the box.

Activity	Good	Bad
Take a bucket of food		
Leave the gate open		
Wear a riding hat		
Run towards your pony		
Chat on your phone		
Turn your pony towards the gate		
Take lots of dogs with you		
Walk up behind a pony		
Wear flip-flops		
Push the pony away from you when turning him		

2. Put in the correct order:
- Push pony away from you when turning him
 - Put rope around the pony`s neck
 - Open and shut the gate carefully
 - Carry the correct size halter
 - Approach the pony at his shoulder
 - Wear a riding hat
 - Talk to pony
 - Wear suitable footwear
 - Be aware of other ponies in the field
 - Lead pony from the near/left side
 - Put halter on the pony

Correct order:
