



GAP Information Leaflet

Equine handling facilities



Mobile system based on a modified cattle corral (The Broads Authority, see example 1, page 3 for specification and 'handler' contact details).



Welsh pony in 'race' (narrow area with gates at either end), between corral (out of shot) & boarded work area (in background)

About this leaflet

This leaflet aims to provide basic principles for site managers considering handling facilities for semi-feral equines (i.e. those not used to regular handling) grazing wildlife sites.

The Equine Industry Welfare Guidelines on handling equines simply states "*where animals are kept in a semi-feral state and are not halter trained (such as those used in conservation grazing) special handling facilities will be required ... These should be built for the purpose and designed to induce the least amount of stress to the animal and to avoid danger to either animals or handlers.*" However, few suitable 'off-the-shelf' handling pens are on sale at present so site managers have to develop their own.

GAP's welfare guide highlights the fact that equines respond to the unknown by 'flight' – the constraint of handling facilities can be very stressful for semi-feral ponies as they are unable to flee. As a result, they can be liable to injuring themselves in attempts to jump or push through barriers and, if flight is denied them, their instincts may manifest themselves in 'fight'.

This leaflet draws upon existing facilities designed to minimise the risk of injury to animals or handlers. We recommend that you arrange to see a corral being used if you do not have experience of semi-feral ponies. The way in which the corral and race is used is also very important if ponies are to be persuaded to enter a corral more than once.

Caution...

Semi-feral equines behave differently from other livestock - as well as kicking and biting when confined they may rear, buck and are large, heavy animals. If you are not experienced in handling semi-feral ponies you should enlist the help of someone who is - their skills will be invaluable in rounding up animals calmly and preventing accidents to ponies or people. You may wish to use handled ponies or head collar trained animals to gain experience before considering semi-feral equines.

This leaflet is about equine handling 'facilities' and does not attempt to fully cover good handling or management practice.

Important Points in Designing a Handling Facility

Tip...

Train your ponies from a young age to things they are likely to encounter on site and what you will do to them, for example: people and dogs, rounding up, handling systems, head collars, worming, foot inspection, transport etc

The type of handling facility appropriate for a particular situation depends on the experience of the handlers, how trained or accustomed the pony is to being handled, the size of the pony and the size and sensitivity of the site.

How handled are your ponies?

- Trained equines usually need only a secure tying-up point alongside a solid barrier for most routine procedures
- Head-collar trained animals may require a simple pen for invasive treatment e.g. worming, foot trimming, injections
- Semi-feral equines require a substantial handling facility that prevents animals jumping out, allows handlers to be separated from animals at close quarters, and a 'work pen' for treating sedated individuals when necessary

Mobile vs fixed site handling facilities

- Mobile pens are flexible, and can be a cheaper option where several sites are to be grazed. They allow you to find the best place to catch your ponies – even if you are considering installing a fixed set-up later. They can also be moved if animals get over cautious of the round-up place. Mobile corrals must be available quickly in emergencies
- Permanent/fixed facilities are quick to use once in place. They can be made to a more elaborate design with extra handling pens; however large set-ups may need to be located on less valuable habitat because of the level of trampling. You can familiarize ponies to a permanent structure by getting them used to running through it without doing anything to them. Putting feed in the holding pen over several days prior to a round up may also encourage them to enter the pen, thus reducing the anxiety of rounding up

Whichever the type of facility, a flat area is essential to reduce the risk of ponies slipping. If the corral and race is sited next to a fence, to act as a guide when rounding the animals up, it will need to be of a non-injurious design and heightened to deter jumping.

Design and dimensions

- Height: sides must be higher than ponies' heads e.g. **1.7-1.8m (5'6"-6')** for Exmoors (c12.2 hands high). Rearing animals should not be able to get purchase on the sides or they will climb out. NB different breeds vary in size!
- Corral side construction: In holding areas sides are typically post and rail construction but care should be taken to prevent animals getting their heads through or legs trapped e.g. **rails at 30cm (12") intervals**. Sides need to be strong - a 13.2 hand pony might weigh $\frac{1}{3}$ ton. For fixed corrals the **spacing of posts at 1.5m-1.8m (5'-6')** is usual but reducing the spacing gives more support; on wet sites posts should have $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of their length in the ground. Mobile cattle corrals are usually strong enough but *need modification (extra height and added boarding)*. 2m (7') mobile hurdles are available from some equine equipment suppliers (see example 2, page 3). Added strength can be given to mobile structures if a concrete pad is laid with post-holes to slot hurdle feet into
- Race side construction: **High, solid sides are important** in helping to prevent ponies' legs getting trapped or feet from going over the top if they rear - animals will be under extra 'pressure'. Race sides, approach and working pen **should be solid and at least 1.7m (5'6")** high – the same height is recommended for race gates. Panels can be attached to the inside of railings/hurdles or the side constructed of butted-up planks - **supporting posts and horizontals should be on the 'outside' of the wall**. Race width should be as narrow as possible to prevent ponies turning round, adjustable design (0.6-1.2m/2'-4') available (see example 4, page 4) otherwise a **race width of 0.75m (2'6")** is common. The entrance and exit should have barriers to restrain the pony, **boarded gates provide the safest option** for semi-feral animals but ponies may be reluctant to enter a dark 'dead end'. Pole barriers that act in place of gates (as breast and breech bars) are not recommended. Very wary animals may enter more readily if accompanied by another pony - having space for more than one animal, or the option to lengthen the race, may be useful

Operating the race

If you anticipate needing a vet or farrier, consult them well in advance about the facilities and staff they require – if they have not been involved before they may well wish to see how the ponies behave in the handling facility to assess what to bring. All those involved with the race should be calm and quiet so as not to stress ponies unduly.

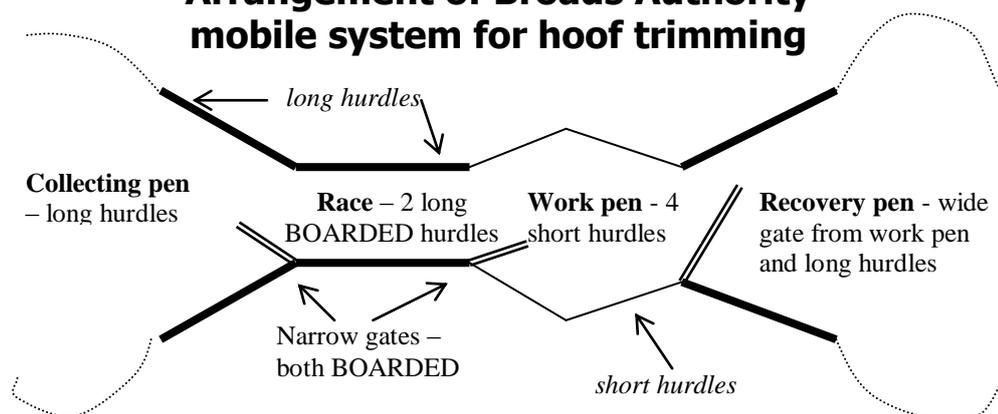
- A raised platform for handlers will make it easier to see into the race and reach the ponies (e.g. for worming)
- A firm, flat floor will enable ponies to stand level and the angle of the hoof to be checked. NB semi-feral equines may not be safe to have hooves trimmed without sedation
- A self-contained area should be designed to allow animals to be loaded safely onto a vehicle without risk of escaping. An extension of the pen 'hurdle' on one side and the open gate of the pen (fixed in position) on the other can be used as a tunnel between holding/handling pen and a backed up vehicle (see example 5, page 5)

1. The Broads Authority - Sue Stephenson and Sandie Tolhurst, 18 Colegate, Norwich, Norfolk NR3 1BQ Tel: 01603 756 070 Fax: 01603 756 065 E-mail: sue.stephenson@broads-authority.gov.uk; sandie.tolhurst@broads-authority.gov.uk Design for semi-feral Konik & Welsh Mountain ponies (see plan below & photos on front page).

Fixed corral – a basic triangular shaped corral was designed to fit into a corner of the field because the mobile system would not be big enough to entice the ponies into a pen. The corral, now built, is probably at the highest and strongest end of the spectrum (one pony was witnessed jumping 5' from standing still). It consists of one big corral with no internal structures for individual handling – should we need to isolate an individual for treatment, we use the big corral to round up the whole group, our vet then sedates the pony and the others are let out. We then erect a small handling pen around the pony using our boarded hurdles. **Specification:** Gateposts: 3m x 200mm x 200m. Intermediate railposts: 10' x 6-8" diameter round, pointed and peeled. Horizontal rails: 3m x 100mm x 47mm. Gates: continental 7 rail 12' galvanized cattle yard gates with hooks and plates. **Installation:** Gateposts 4' (min.) in the ground. Rail posts 5' (max.) apart and 4' (min.) in the ground. Rails: 6 vertically with the top rail at 6'.

Mobile Corral - consists of a series of galvanized metal hurdles and gates, originally designed for penning cattle, which we have amended by adding plywood sheeting to handling areas for pony safety. All of the components of the corral are joined together with galvanized metal joining pins - 3 way joints can be made and the hurdles and gates can be erected in a whole host of combinations. **Specification:** Large hurdles: 9' long x 5'6" high with 6 horizontal rails. Small hurdles: 6' long x 5'6" high with 6 horizontal rails (useful for our smaller Welsh ponies). Large hoop gate: opening gate sits within rectangular metal frame which stands 7-8' high and 3' wide. Small hoop gate: opening gate sits in frame as above but 2'6" wide.

Arrangement of Broads Authority mobile system for hoof trimming



NB both Veterinary surgeon and Farrier are required for hoof trimming

Hoof trimming procedure:

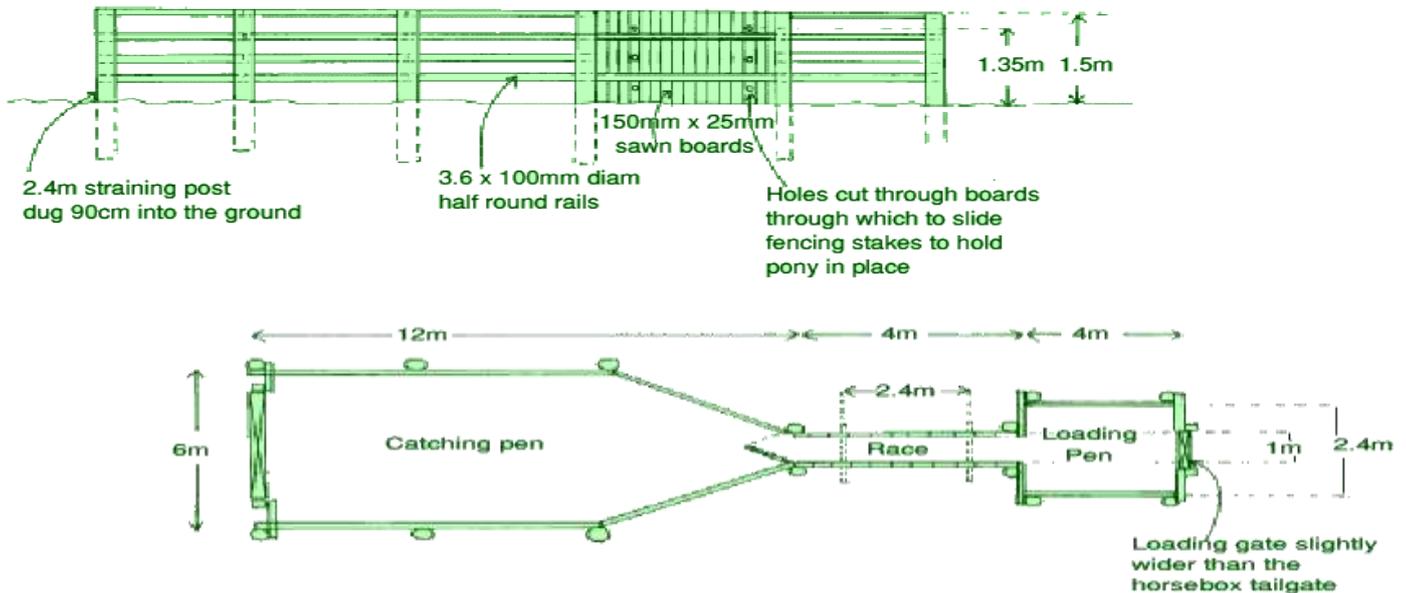
- 1) 1 or 2 ponies are herded from collecting pen into race and stand while a visual foot check is done.
- 2) Any pony with too long hooves is sedated in the race (vet gives a double dose of sedative by dart); once 'dopey' a head collar is fitted and pony is let into work pen and either tied up or held by an assistant standing outside the pen.

NB. wormer dosing is done this way but without sedation.

2. Countryside Council for Wales – Wil Sandison, Llys y Bont, Parc Menai, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4BN Tel: 01248 716422 E-mail: w.sandison@ccw.gov.uk Mobile arrangement for semi-feral Welsh Mountain ponies.

Both permanent and mobile handling facilities are used. **Mobile Corral** - has a concrete hard standing with slots for the legs of the mobile panels. Sections consist of interlocking galvanized mesh panels supplied by a specialist horse supplier. **Specification:** Mesh panels: 7' high by 8' wide and have a sheeted 12" high lower section to protect against legs getting trapped (c.£900+VAT in Jan 2003). Gate panels: 7' high by 8' high (c. £115+VAT). Paddock Pen panels and gates were designed and supplied (for a small delivery charge) by Monarch Equestrian, King Street, Willenhall, West Midlands WV13 1QT Tel: (01902) 605566 E-mail: sales@monarch-equestrian.co.uk

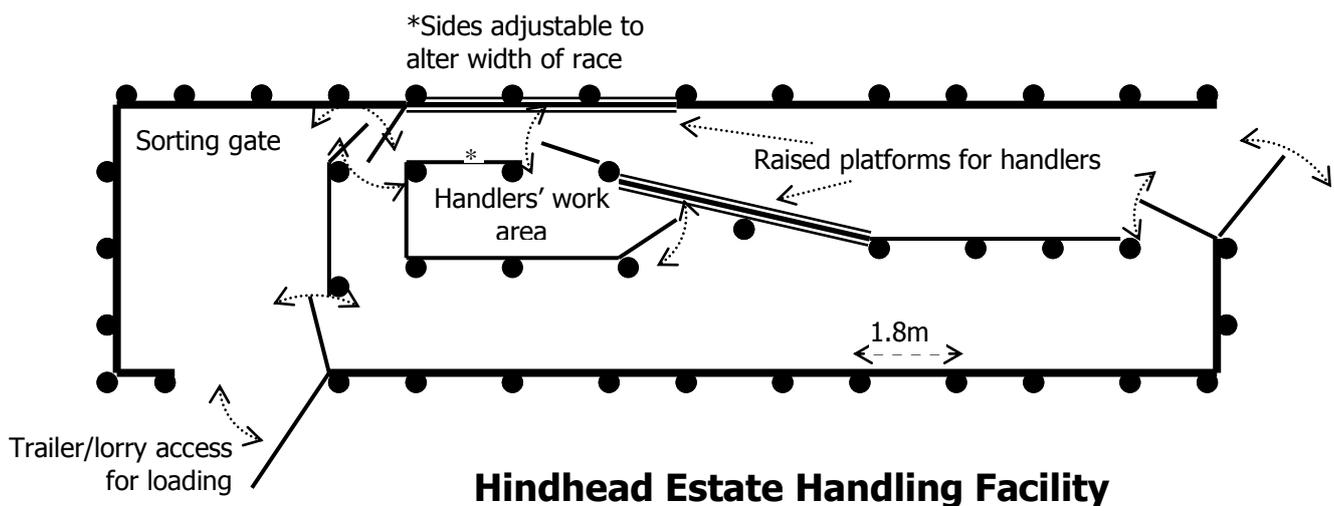
3. Knettishall Heath Country Park, Suffolk - Stephen Grimshaw The Countryside Ranger, Knettishall Heath Countryside Park, c/o 37 Waterside, Isleham, Ely, Camb. CB7 5SH E-mail: stephen.grimshaw@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk Design for use with semi-feral Exmoor ponies (see plans below).



Diagrams from *Epicentre* article "A beginner's guide to handling free living Exmoors" available on: <http://users.quista.net/epic/issue2/ca.htm> With thanks to EPIC.

4. Hindhead Commons, Surrey – Andrew Storey, The National Trust, Hindhead Estate Yard, London Road, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 6AB Tel: 01428 604040, designed for semi-feral Exmoors (see plan below).

Fixed corral - Specification: Posts: square oak 12.5x12.5x250cm at 1.8m distance. Rails: Five 15x4x360cm rails per section spaced at 150cm intervals up poles to 1.7m high. Gates: 1.2m wide on 15x15x250cm strainer posts. Race: sides, approaches and gates are lined with ply wood; sides are adjustable from 60-120cm width so that cattle can be also handled; additional containment is achieved with breast and breach bars inserted through two horizontal rows of holes (at 50cm and 100cm height) in race sides. (Scale plans and details available from The GAP Office)



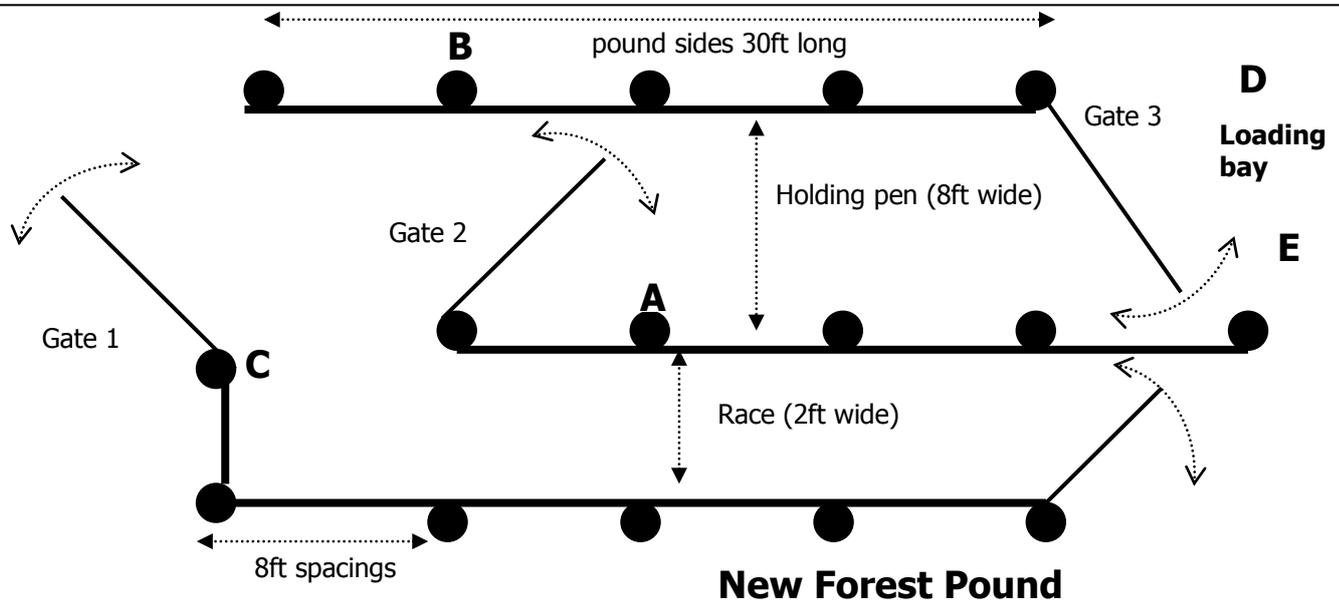
Hindhead Estate Handling Facility

5. New Forest, Hampshire - Sue Westwood, Clerk to the Verderers, The Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7NH Tel: (023) 8028 2052 E-mail: clerk@verderers.org.uk Design for semi-feral 14 hands high New Forest ponies (see plan below).

Fixed corral - the pound (shown below) is the latest of a series of designs that have evolved over the years. Most pounds are situated in lanes or narrow Driftways between fence lines where large numbers of ponies can be held before being sorted in the pound. The Agisters often work alone handling and loading ponies and the design reflects this. The design allows animals to be either directed through the race or into a holding area ready for loading onto a vehicle.

Specification: Posts: 8' long hardwood round posts (6"-8" diameter) driven /dug 2'6" into the ground, spaced at at 8' distances. Rails: 15'-24' long softwood round 2"-4" rails which are evenly spaced up the posts, the lowest being 1' off the ground, the top rail being 5'6" high. The rails are round to reduce ponies catching themselves on rough edges. Gates: are a minimum 4'6" high and hung so that the top is level with the top rail, gates 1, 2 and 3 are 8' wide. Race: width is crucial to prevent ponies turning; 2' is good for ponies up to 14 hands high.

Operation: Gate 1 shuts ponies into the pound. Gate 2 opened to post A (with Gate 1 open) allows ponies to enter holding area and (with Gate 1 closed) to herd individuals into the race; closed to B ponies can be herded onto a vehicle backed up to gate 3; when closed to C it shuts the race. Gate 3 forms the second side of the loading bay when opened to point D with a vehicle reversed to point E.



New Forest Pound

6. Bureau of Land Management, Reno, Nevada



The bureau manages wild mustangs and 'burros' on publicly owned land in several states. They use handling facilities constructed using design principles taken from Temple Grandin – www.grandin.com. They also use a squeeze crush to restrain the horses

Contact:

John Neill, BLM, Reno, Nevada
Tel: (001) 775 475 2222
Email: John_Neill@nv.blm.gov
Web: www.blm.gov/wo/st/en.html

CIRCULAR RACE AND PENS WITH BOARDED SIDES

7. Norfolk Wildlife Trust

The Norfolk Wildlife Trust use mobile pens for handling their ponies. They have recently added solid boarded and some hessian material sides to these pens (again according to temple Grandin principles – www.grandin.com); because animals can't see through the sides of the pens and race, they do not see distractions that would stress them and therefore they are calmer.



Contact: Mel Sote Tel: 01603 625540 Email: mels@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

8. Pony handling training

If you would like training on handling ponies in extensive grazing schemes, there are various courses available. The Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust, in conjunction with Positive Horsemanship, can run courses to meet your needs:

DPHT:

Dru Butterfield
Tel: 01626 355314
Email: butterfield71@tiscali.co.uk

Positive horsemanship

Vanessa Bee
Tel: 01409 221166
Email: mail@positivehorsemanship.com



Further advice and information

- Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust - www.dpht.co.uk
- Exmoor Pony Centre - www.exmoorponies.co.uk/index.htm
- Grazing Advice Partnership – www.grazingadvicepartnership.org.uk
- Logical horsemanship - www.logicalhorsemanship.co.uk/index.html
- Positive Horsemanship - www.positivehorsemanship.co.uk
- Sussex pony grazing and conservation trust - sussexmoors@yahoo.co.uk
- Temple Grandin - www.grandin.com
- US Bureau of Land Management - www.blm.gov/wo/st/en.html

