

Mitchell Farm Volunteer Packet

2021

BECOMING A VOLUNTEER

To discuss your interest in volunteering at Mitchell Farm and the possible necessity of a training session, please contact our **Dee Doolittle** at **dee@mitchellfarm.org**.

The following are some considerations to review prior to contacting us:

- 1) Volunteers should be able to work independently and with minimal staff supervision once completing their training sessions or instructional meetings.
- 2) The minimum age for volunteers is 16. On a case by case basis, Younger children may volunteer with adult supervision (e.g. volunteer families) and can participate in some of our special events geared toward children.
- 3) All volunteer opportunities require a general volunteer orientation to the farm. Equine work requires a separate training session.
- 4) **A firm knowledge of your own physical and emotional limitations is a prerequisite.** Work on the farm involves a moderate amount of physical activity and agility as well as mental focus and an alert nature. A tired or distracted volunteer can lead to injury or worse for either our two legged or four legged friends.

Because Mitchell Farm is a retirement farm the sad fact is that every horse that comes through our gate will pass away eventually. We have to remember that we have done everything we can to make their last years happy and comfortable. Volunteers need to be able to handle the grief of those losses.

- 5) While there is not a firm schedule of volunteer times, a commitment to regular participation is appreciated. The daily working of the farm and care of the horses is made much easier when there is a scheduled corps of volunteers. This also enhances your experience and allows for a closer connection between volunteers and our residents.
- 6) Please complete your **Volunteer Registration and Release Forms** prior to coming to the farm if possible. If you do not have access to a computer, forms can be mailed to you upon request.
- 7) Due to the nature of Mitchell Farm and the care it provides, we reserve the right to make the final determination as to the appropriateness of volunteers and their participation.

Welcome!

Thank you for choosing to volunteer at Mitchell Farm Equine Retirement, Inc. (MFER). As a volunteer, your dedication and hard work allow us to care for and support retired and injured horses. How rewarding to know your efforts are really making a difference. Most of the opportunities on our farm do not require special skills but MFER will provide any necessary training and/or guidance you may require to make your experience safe and enjoyable. This packet is designed to help you become familiar with the farm and its residents. It should serve as a resource and a guide regarding the various aspects of our work. Your willingness to help care for these majestic animals will always be appreciated and you can rest assured it will enrich your life as well as those of our charges.

Mission Statement

Providing a safe and comfortable retirement alternative for aged and infirm horses to live out their lives, and offering educational opportunities to the public on senior equine care and management.

General Information

Purpose of Orientation/Training Sessions

All new volunteers are required to attend a general orientation session and, if working with our horses, an equine training session or supervised on the job training. Your orientation session can be scheduled before you start to volunteer or can be handled as a one-on-one session the first day you come to the farm. This will enable our staff to keep the environment of the farm safe and enjoyable for all our volunteers. All sessions will include general information on the farm, our residents and in the case of equine care, hands on training with our staff. This time will also allow for a review of barn rules and safety precautions.

Volunteer Opportunities

The following are the areas where volunteer services are invaluable:

EQUINE CARE - Volunteers will have some opportunity to work directly with the horses on the farm. Volunteers who wish to work directly with our residents must first attend a volunteer orientation and training sessions. This will allow the staff to assess your knowledge of horses and comfort level working around them. A prior knowledge of horses or their care is not necessary but a willingness to make a regular time commitment is appreciated.

FACILITY/FARM – Volunteers can help with general maintenance around the farm. This may include daily stall cleaning, repairs and improvements (minor and major), construction projects, or field care. Some of these items are daily occurrences and others are special projects.

OFFICE – Volunteers with computer skills are always welcome to assist with word processing, photocopying, bulk mailings and other office related tasks. Our Executive Director will always welcome help on this front. No knowledge of horses is necessary to help in the office.

SPECIAL EVENTS – Most of the fund-raising at MFER comes from our special events. Volunteers are needed for committee work, event coordination, care of the horses during the event, support services and many other tasks. This is an excellent way for someone to volunteer who may not be able to make a recurring commitment to the farm or for groups to participate in the fun.

SPECIAL SKILLS – Volunteers with special skills and talents are always welcome. Whether you are into photography, have great computer skills or have construction knowledge, any talent can be utilized. Feel free to contact our volunteer coordinator to offer your skills and time (**Dee Doolittle, call 860-303-8705 or email:dee@mitchellfarm.org**).

Volunteer Responsibilities, Policies and Guidelines

Schedules and Commitment: All volunteers will be required to sign in upon arrival as well as check the daily schedule for assignments. After finishing your assignment, you are asked to sign out so that we can keep a record of hours completed. The “sign in/sign out” binder is located in the main aisle. As volunteers are a big part of the success of MFER, we ask that you notify the farm as soon as possible if you are not able to make your scheduled time.

Communication: If at any time you have questions regarding your responsibilities, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator or speak to a staff member while at the farm.

Volunteer Considerations: It is essential that all volunteers are aware of both their physical and emotional limitations. If at any time you feel you are being asked to do something beyond your abilities or out of your comfort zone, please realize you can contribute in other areas. If you feel that there are times you are not focused or up to the day's events, please let a staff member know and alternative duties can be found for you.

Confidentiality: MFER places great importance on protecting the confidential information of its clients, staff and volunteers. Please do not divulge any personal or contact information to any one other than MFER staff and do not pass on other's information.

Conduct on the Farm: It is also expected that volunteers will conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times. If at any time you feel you have witnessed behavior or conduct which is harmful to the equine residents or other volunteer staff, please report it confidentially to the Executive Director. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled correctly or wish a more confidential setting, please call the [Confidential Complaint Line](tel:203-499-6868) at 203-499-6868. This is to a member of the Board of Directors.

Accidents/Occurrences: All accidents must be reported immediately to MFER staff. An Occurrence Form must be completed by all those involved. Those forms can be found in the back of the volunteer sign in book.

Visitors: MFER welcomes all visitors to the farm. Please contact staff prior to bringing a visitor and respect all rules and safety precautions. Remember to respect all off limits areas while touring the facility.

Clothing and Footgear

Volunteers should dress appropriately for the weather. Anything which restricts movement or vision, as well as anything which hangs loosely enough to catch on objects, should be avoided. Riding boots or sturdy hard soled shoes should be worn during any equine activities.

Barn Rules

- A. **NO SMOKING** in or around the barn at any time.
- B. Please use a **quiet voice** while in the barn and working around the horses.
- C. **Barn opens at 7:30 AM.** No earlier please. Volunteer hours begin at 7:30 AM.
- D. **Hand feeding the horses is prohibited.** To avoid nipping and possibly inappropriate treats being offered, all treats should be placed in the “treat bin” in the grain and feed area. Bringing treats into pastures is strictly forbidden. **It is considered risky and irresponsible and is grounds for immediate dismissal.**
- E. **No dogs or other pets** are allowed on the property. Please leave your pets at home where they will be safe and comfortable while you perform your volunteer duties.
- F. **Please do not perform a volunteer role you have not yet been trained for.** When in doubt about any issues regarding safety or

- duties, please ask. Always defer to staff as their actions and suggestions are meant to keep volunteers and horses safe.
- G. Please **do not enter the barn, horse stalls, paddocks or pastures without staff permission/instruction** or when no staff is present.
 - H. The **consumption of alcohol or illegal substances** prior to and/or while working at Mitchell Farm is prohibited.
 - I. Since loud noises can startle the horses, it is preferred if cell phones are in the vibrate /quiet mode and car alarms are off while on the property. **No iPods or talking on cell phones while handling or working around the horses.**
 - J. **Check the white board every time you volunteer.** It will have changes in turn-out, stall assignments and any other news necessary for you to know in order to be comfortable with your job.
 - K. It is the job of each volunteer to **know your own limitations** in the following areas - physically, emotionally and level of knowledge and comfort in handling horses. Please make the Executive Director, or other senior staff aware if you are asked to do something you are not comfortable with.
 - L. Return all tools & equipment back where they belong.

Policies and Guidelines

Risk Management: Volunteers are responsible for knowing and following all safety rules, emergency policies and procedures as posted; supporting all efforts to promote a safe environment; learning about and making full use of all and any safety equipment; reporting immediately any unsafe working conditions or behaviors; and knowing the location of first aid kits, fire extinguishers, emergency exits and emergency plans.

Emergency Procedures: Please review all policies and procedures. Being prepared in the event of an emergency is essential to the successful management of an event. Remember to remain calm and take direction from the farm staff and senior volunteers.

Horse Related Emergencies: LOOSE HORSE – First, get help. Do Not Chase the Horse! If needed, a small amount of grain in a bucket can be used to encourage the horse to come back to an enclosed area (stall, barn or pasture). If possible, the route to the driveway should be blocked. If a horse is loose in the barn, close the door and attempt to herd the horse into any empty stall.

INJURIES TO A HORSE - If you have identified an injured horse, do not attempt to approach the horse. Remain calm and send someone to find a farm staff to assess and care for the horse. Remain available if supplies are needed or to aid in phone calls etc.

Volunteer Medical Emergencies & First Aid: Should you or another volunteer sustain an injury or succumb to an existing medical condition, all activity should stop. Contact the available staff or senior volunteer. MFER

staff members are primarily responsible for any first aid given. It is essential that all volunteers know the location of the human first aid kit and telephone in the grain room in the white cabinet marked “EMERGENCY”. You may be asked to call for emergency help or aid in the application of First Aid. Emergency call information and a facility diagram are posted near the phone. If needed, the closest phone outside of the barn is in the Executive Director’s house. It is required that all volunteers complete an Authorization for Medical Treatment Form prior to beginning any service on the farm. This form also includes basic medical information including allergies, chronic medical conditions and routine medications.

Fire: The facility is equipped with a fire alarm and fire extinguishers (see facility diagram for location). If you see a fire and it has not been reported, call 911 and find all available staff/volunteers to manage the situation. All barn areas are to be evacuated with volunteers and staff meeting in the front yard of the house. If it is safe (and necessary) to enter the barn, a staff member will designate crew to assist outside the structure with the evacuation of the horses to the front pasture/ring area. No volunteer will enter a burning structure. It may be necessary to wait for fire personnel to arrive to proceed with evacuation.

Severe Weather: In the event of severe weather (e.g. severe thunder storms, high winds or blizzards), activities and turn out at the farm will be cancelled. Please take direction from the farm staff as to the handling of your usual duties in these instances. Please do not put your own safety at risk to reach the farm. On-site staff will see to the safety and comfort of the horses in accordance with emergency plans in place.

Reassignment & Termination Policy: MFER has developed policies and procedures with safety and a comfortable environment for our volunteers and equine residents in mind. Individuals who are not able to perform their volunteer duties or fail to observe the rules and procedures of the farm will be given the opportunity to discuss any problems and will be provided with

alternative assignments. MFER reserves the right to terminate a volunteer's involvement at its discretion. This would be done after discussion and in the best interest of the farm and volunteer.

Unethical or Abusive Behavior: If at any time you feel that you have witnessed conduct or behavior that is detrimental to either other volunteers, staff or the equine residents or you have been mistreated, please report it confidentially to the Executive Director. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled correctly, or you wish a more confidential forum, please call the [Confidential Complaint Line](tel:203-499-6868) at 203-499-6868. (MFER Board Member)

**Mitchell Farm
Equine Care Program**

Welcome to the Equine Care Program

Thank you for volunteering to work with our wonderful horses. Our Equine Care volunteers may be horse knowledgeable or not, but we ask that you be willing to learn about the safe conduct of your duties and to adhere to our policies. You will also be required to be familiar with the information in the general **Volunteer Packet**. This helps us to maintain a safe and consistent environment for our residents and staff as well as you, the volunteer. Your primary responsibilities will include the care and maintenance of the horses and their environment. Working with the horses and in the barn is a great way to see our mission statement at work.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Grooming the horses both in the field and barn
- Cleaning the barn, stalls, buckets and any other barn chores
- Field, barn and paddock maintenance
- Cleaning pastures and surrounding grounds

Reminder: Please remember to sign in and out each time you come to the barn as well as checking the “white board” for assignments and changes in routines. Also remember to wear weather appropriate clothing and sturdy, hard toed shoes.

Scheduling: You will be scheduled for your duties around feeding times (7:30 AM and 3:30 PM) as this is when most horse related activities occur. You may also volunteer for “equine duties” during special events (chaperoning the barn/fence lines for visitors, etc.).

Training: You will be required to attend at least one equine training session in addition to your general orientation to the farm. This is designed so that our staff can gauge your knowledge of and comfort around the horses. It will enable you to have a more enjoyable, safe and comfortable experience while on the farm.

Emergencies, Risk Management

Please see the section on Policies and Procedures in the main volunteer packet.

Care of the Mitchell Farm Horses

- A. One of the jobs of a volunteer is to be the eyes and ears of the barn manager. Things to notice and report are:
- Coughing
 - Runny nose
 - Watery or swollen eye
 - Cuts and scrapes
 - Broken fence rails
 - Broken boards in stalls
 - Any sharp edges or nails in stalls or fences
 - Listlessness and/or disinterest in eating
 - Unusual mood or behavior (tail swishing, pinning of ears, looking back at belly)
 - Changes in manure. (Amount or consistency)
- B. Double end snaps on water or feed buckets should always have the smooth side up and the snap side toward the wall or bucket. Horses frequently catch and tear an eye lid or nostril on snaps.
- C. Please let staff know when coming to MFER from other barns, and at the very least, wash your hands to prevent carrying illnesses to retirees. If you are aware of illness in your other barn, change your clothes and shoes as well. Please make staff aware so they can watch for possible symptoms.
- D. The following horses are to be handled ONLY by Mitchell Farm Staff or with express permission by the Barn Manager. Do not enter their stalls when they are in them. !!! Please check the white board for any additions either temporary or permanent.

Buddy, Tobe

Safety Information and Precautions

Safety around horses involves knowledge of their possible reactions to any given stimulus, an effort to anticipate these reactions, and an attempt to stay out of harm's way while still being in control of the situation. **Most accidents are caused by the handler failing to think about safety!** With practice, safety procedures will become second nature, but **constant attention** to the situation will best prevent accidents.

I. Working around Horses

A. **Stay in the safety zone** – close to the shoulder, barrel or hip whenever possible. Keep your feet clear of the horse's feet and your head away from its face and legs.

B. **Move around the hind quarters** by either keeping a horse's length away or by keeping your hand firmly on the croup. Talking to him at all times allows him to be aware of you.

II. Approaching the Horse

A. Approach from the front and left. It is important that he sees and hears you approach. If his hind quarters are toward you, approach him at an angle so he can see you. Speak to him and watch for his ears to flick in response. Place a hand firmly on his neck, shoulder or hip, and push him to the side if necessary. Step toward the horse's shoulder. As you approach his head, remember that most horses do not appreciate being patted on the face.

B. The safest place to stand when working with a horse is close to his side, between the shoulder and the hip. Do not spend any more time than necessary directly in front or behind the horse, and when passing behind either stay a horse's length away or when in a stall, stay close to the hindquarters with your hand on the croup. Horses do not normally kick at people. However, it is always safer to keep in mind that they might. By staying close to the hindquarters as you walk behind them, you will not be in a position to receive the full impact of a kick.

III. Leading Horses Safely

A. Always go into the stall or pasture to place a halter on a horse. Never reach over a gate, stall door or fence to do so. Ask Easy how she fractured several bones in her face...

B. Walk beside the horse not ahead of it. It is best to lead from the left and keep at an arms length distance (See figures).

C. Use both hands. The right hand holds the lead rope under the chin and the left hand holds the end and keeps it from dragging on the ground. You can FOLD the excess lead rope in your left hand (See figures).

D. NEVER wrap the lead rope around your hand wrist, shoulder or body. Always keep a secure hold on the lead rope.

E. The horse is stronger than you, so don't try to out-pull him. They will usually respond to you with a quick snap on the lead rope.

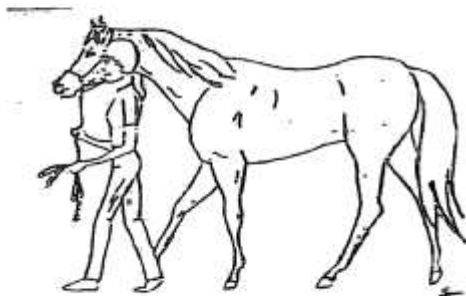
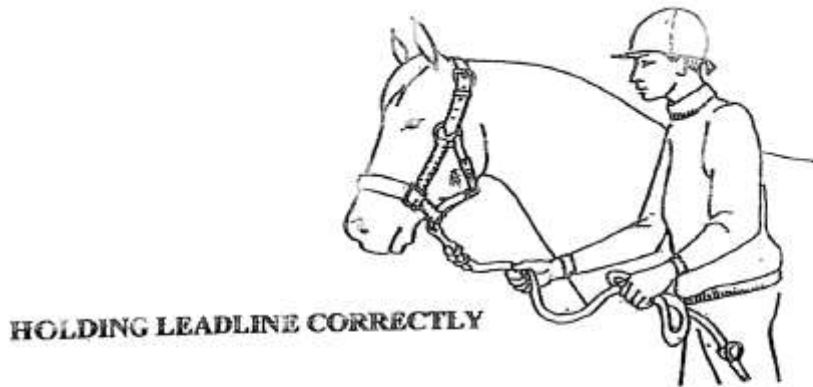
F. If the horse hangs back and refuses to move forward, do not try to pull them forward. Turn them left or right until they take a step and then proceed forward.

G. Always leave two horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you. Even the most placid horse could be having a "bad" day and not appreciate someone too close behind.

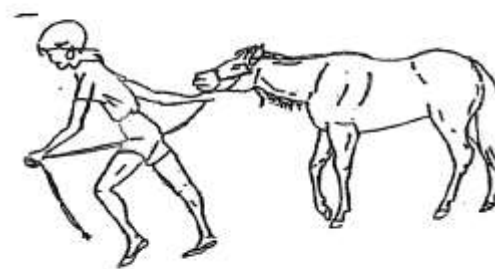
H. Do not stop if you are in a line of horses coming to or from the pasture. The volunteer behind you may not be able to stop behind you. If there is a problem which necessitates a stop, pull out of the line and then stop.

I. It is always better to PUSH a gate open (away from you) than pulling open (toward you) wherever possible.

J. No ipods or talking on cell phones while handling or working around the horses.



CORRECT LEADING



INCORRECT LEADING

EQUINE SENSES AND BEHAVIORS

A. SIGHT: A horse's eyes are placed on the sides of his head, enabling him to see almost 360 degrees. He can't see directly behind himself unless he turns his head. This range of vision was important for survival when roaming free and a target for predators. If something unexpectedly comes into the field of vision, he is likely to react instinctively (bolt/kick). Approach and work around horses where they can see you. If

you have to cross the blind spot, speak to him or keep a hand on him to remind him you are there. They also do not have very accurate vision close up. Their eyes are geared to detect fine movement at a distance (to protect against predators). The best way to approach a horse is to come to his shoulder.

B. HEARING: Horses have acute hearing. They combine their sense of hearing with their sense of sight to become more familiar with their surroundings. Hearing and not seeing is often the cause of the fright or flight response in horses.

Although they cannot differentiate between similar words, they can determine meaning from the tone of voice used. A soothing tone of voice will reassure him while a sharp reprimand can be effective discipline. When used with a touch on his side or rump, the clicking sound made by some horsemen, will move him sideways or forward. His ears move to catch sounds of interest, so you can often tell what he is listening to by watching his ears. If he hears you approach, his ears will turn toward you. (See below and figures).

As horses age there are multiple illnesses and diseases that over time can decrease these senses. **Therefore, you should take into account that the horse you are working with may have diminished sight or hearing and should be approached in a manner which makes your presence known to the horse.** They horse can adapt very well with their other senses. Therefore, touch and smell may become the most important way for them to identify you.

C. TOUCH: Horses have a very sensitive sense of touch. They use touch to communicate with each other and people. They will often use their muzzle to sniff, feel or move an object. There are “touch sensitive” areas on all horses (i.e. flank and belly) and each horse may have his/her own area

which is “sensitive” for them. It is always safest to be aware of these areas while working with a horse. Volunteers should treat horses gently but firmly.

D. SMELL: The sense of smell is thought to be very acute in horses. It allows them to identify other horses as well as familiar people. **Do not carry treats around in your pockets.** The horses may try to go after them!

E. TASTE: Taste is closely related to the sense of smell and allows the horse to identify edible and palatable objects. Horses often become familiar with objects by licking or tasting them. Therefore, the cute “nibbling” of your hand or coat could be a prelude to something more dangerous such as nipping or biting. Please be careful!

F. SIXTH SENSE: When evaluating their surroundings, horses do have a “sixth sense” which allows them to detect the disposition of those around them. They can detect when you are calm or nervous, excited or angry. At times “personality” conflicts may arise between horses or horses and people. It is important for a volunteer to be aware of this and report any “conflicts” they may be having with a particular horse.

G. Horses can sleep standing up. Certain ligaments in their legs keep their knees straight while they doze. It sometimes takes the horse an instant to become oriented upon awakening, and especially if startled awake they might react instinctively to whatever startled them. To an animal whose ancestors were preyed upon for their meat, the obvious reaction would be to put distance between him and the perceived threat (flight as a natural instinct). When confinement prevents escape, the instinctive defense is kicking. Check to see that the horse is awake before you approach so you can avoid startling him. Speak to him softly and he will turn and look at you.

H. Horses are herd animals. They like to stay together with one or two horses dominant. Some horses do not like to be alone and will do anything to stay with their pasture or barn “buddy”. Please follow staff recommendations when leading horses to or from the barn regarding when to take a horse or who they like to “walk with” and what the “pecking order” might be. Remember, if one horse spooks they may all spook.

I. Ears also show attitude. Interest is shown by one or both ears turning to catch sounds. One or both ears may point backward to hear you as you work beside or behind him. If he is annoyed, he may threaten with both ears flat back. This threat is usually accompanied by an aggressive turn of the head. This may also be accompanied by a kick or bite. Look out! (See figures)

READING HIS EARS

The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.



Ears forward but relaxed
interested in what's
in front of him.



Ears turned back but relaxed
listening to his rider
or what's behind him.



Ears pointed stiffly forward
alarmed or nervous about what's
ahead. Looking for danger.



Ears pointed left and right
relaxed, paying attention
to the scenery on both sides.



Ears stiffly back
annoyed or worried about what's
behind him: might kick if annoyed.



Droopy ears
calm and resting,
horse may be dozing.



Ears flattened against neck
easily angry, in a fighting mood.
May fight, bite or kick.

OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE ARE:

- **Tucking the tail down tightly.**
Danger to the rear.
Horse may bolt, buck or kick.
Watch out if ears are flattened, too!
- **Switching the tail.**
Annoyance and irritation:
at biting flies, stinging insects or
tickling bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- **Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.**
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- **Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.**
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.
Watch out for biting or kicking.

Bay: color term for deep brown to blackish colored horse, with a black mane and tail

Canter: three beat gait of the horse, faster than a trot, slower than a gallop

Chestnut: color term, brownish gold to red color, mane and tail of same color

Conformation: structure and general makeup of the horse

Farrier: professional who trims and shoes the horses

Gaits: various movements of the horse at different speeds – walk, trot, canter and gallop

Gallop: fastest of the horse's gaits

Gelding: a male horse who has been neutered and is incapable of breeding

Gray: color term, white to dark gray in color

Grooming: caring for a horse's coat and hooves, includes currying, brushing and picking feet

Halter: leather or nylon bit less headstall used to lead and control the horse when moving to and from the pasture/stall

Hand: A standard unit of measuring a horse, one hand equals 4 inches; a horse is measured from the ground to the highest point of its withers.

Hoof or Hooves: a horse's feet

Lead line: a cotton or nylon rope used to lead a horse, with a snap on one end to attach to the halter

Mare: female horse

Near Side: the left side of the horse

Off Side: the right side of the horse

Trot: a two beat gait, faster than a walk

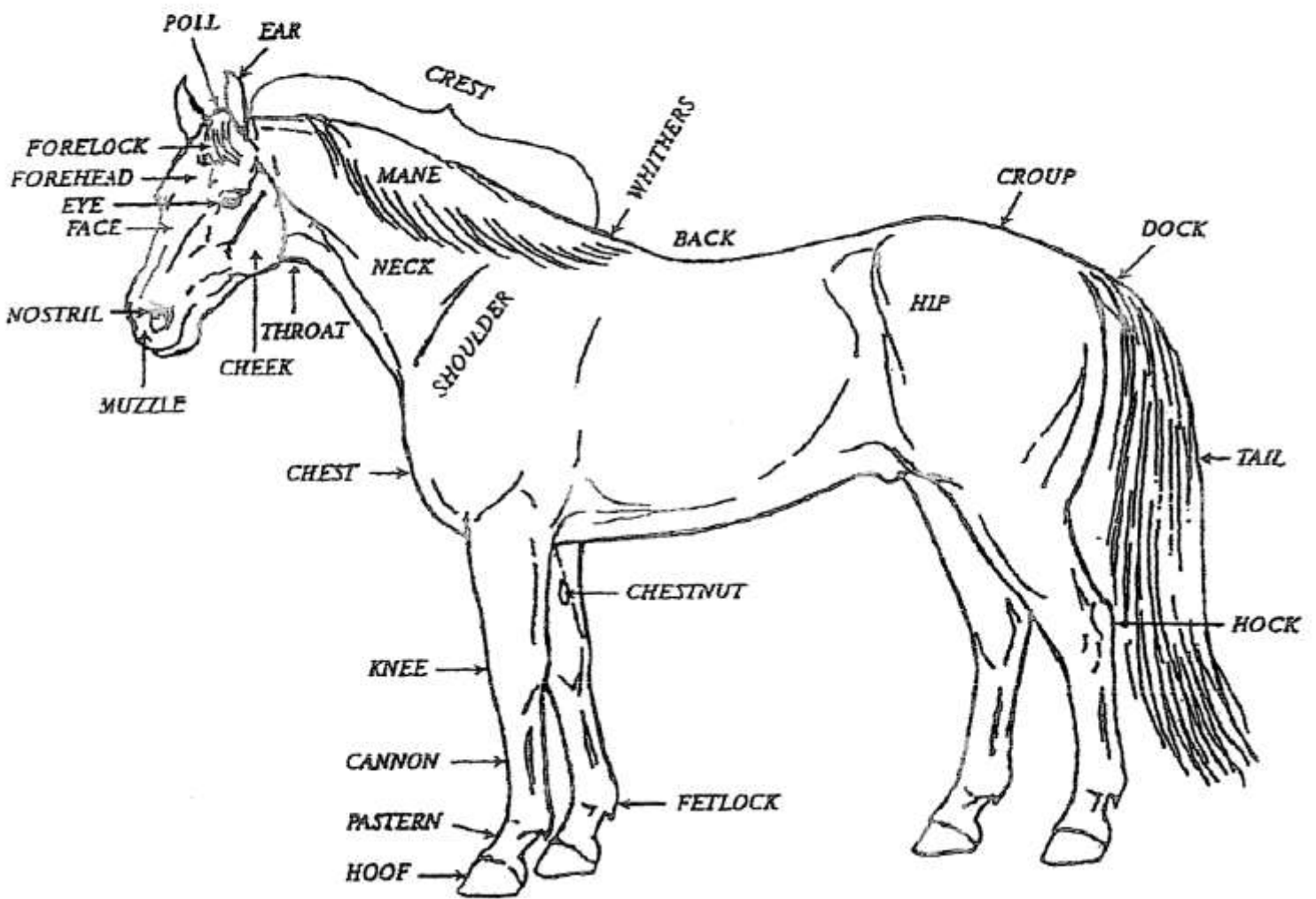
Walk On: a command to have the horse move forward at a walk

Withers: bony projection on the horse's back between the shoulders

Whoa: command to stop the horse from any gait

Parts of The Horse

When working around horses there are some special words and terms that you will need to know. Some parts of the horse are shown below.



Grooming Tools and Technique



SOFT BRUSH



MANE AND TAIL COMB



HOOPICK

GROOMING TOOLS



CURRY COMB



HARD OR DANDY BRUSH



GROOMING • KEEP ONE HAND ON THE HORSE WHILE YOU WORK