

Mormon Horse Hobbles

Dennis C. Manning ©

Hand forged puzzle hobbles, developed by Mormon pioneer blacksmiths during the mid nineteenth century, were effective in keeping a horse from running off with bands of wild horses and a thief had a nearly impossible task trying to remove the metal hobbles. Lack of fences in this previously unsettled land necessitated the hobbling of working livestock allowing them to feed on the open range. A person familiar with the metal puzzle hobbles could quickly put them on or take them off from a horse, mule, or ox. During his February 1849 exploration of Utah Valley, Mormon pioneer and frontiersman, Oliver B. Huntington recorded using, "...*Iron Hobbles used to fasten the forefeet of horses together.*" He also wrote, "*The best of our horses were fettered or hobbled with irons that a native could not understand.*"¹

Mormon pioneers used these hobbles while crossing the plains and during the exploration and settlement of the Intermountain West. The earliest known reference was by John D. Lee. Lee, following the Mormon Battalion along the Santa Fe Trail, recorded, 'Tues Sept 8th 1846' "...*we halted for the night having good Mormon Iron Puzzle Hobbles we secured our teams let them to grass*"² For several years during the westward migration some of the finest pioneer blacksmiths were assigned to remain in and near Kaneshville (Council Bluff), Iowa to repair wagons, shoe livestock, and make hobbles and other equipment for fellow emigrants.³

Examples of these puzzle hobbles may be seen among artifacts in a number of Western pioneer museums. Protection from theft is no longer a concern but this type of hobble is still used by horsemen camping near lush mountain meadows. The durable metal hobbles are easy on a horse's legs, as they do not absorb moisture that often causes problems with other materials.

The name Mormon comes from the *Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint accept it as, "a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas containing, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel."⁴

This pair of hobbles was hand forged. Like the originals, the rings were fire welded using a coal fire, hammer and anvil.

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IN MEMORY OF AMBROSE CANNON

1. Huntington, Oliver Boardman, *Diary of Oliver Boardman Huntington*, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo. Vol. 10 p. 55.
2. Lee, John Doyle, *Mormon Battalion Mission Journal*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.
3. Coleman, Arthur D., compiler, *Carter Pioneers of Provo, Utah*, Published by J. Grant Stevenson, 260 East 2100 North, Provo, Utah, 1966, p. 126.
4. Smith, Joseph Jr., translator, *The Book of Mormon Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT, 1981.

Dennis C. Manning, blacksmith horseshoer and descendant of Mormon Pioneers, operates a forge near the small rural town of Roosevelt, Utah. There he has shod about every type of horse. All shoes and most tools are hand forged. Researching and forging Mormon Horse Hobbles has been a life long pursuit.

The Prairie Falcon found on his work is a registered livestock brand in the state of Utah.