

Long Term Systemic Abuse of Horses and Pack Animals on the Havasupai Reservation



September 2016



STOP ANIMAL VIOLENCE
FOUNDATION

www.havasupaihorses.org

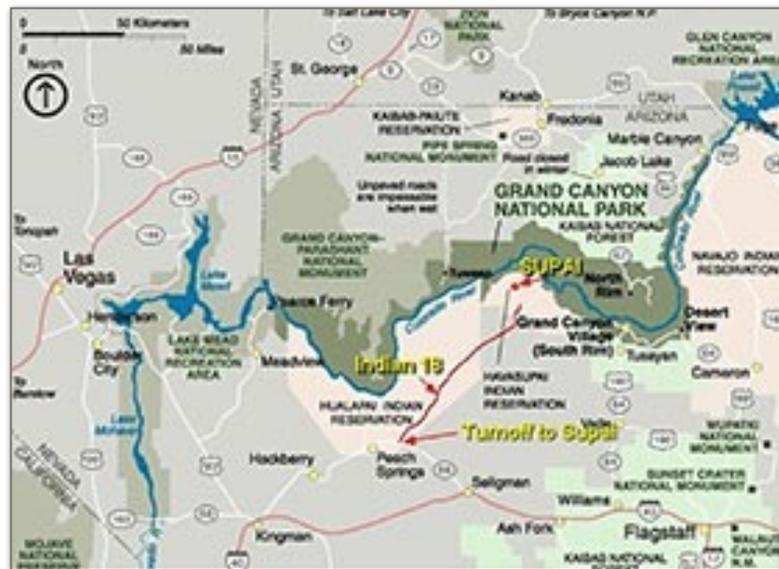
Supai, Arizona

Supai (Havasupai: Havasuuw) is the Havasupai city located at $36^{\circ}14'13''\text{N}$ $112^{\circ}41'21''\text{W}$ at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. The town is the capital of the Havasupai Indian Reservation in Coconino County. It is home to approximately 500 tribe members.

Tourism is the main source of revenue for the Havasupai Tribe, which receives more than 20,000 visitors annually. The Tribe requires visitors to reserve a fee-based permit to access the land beyond the trailhead at Hualapai Hilltop.

The trail to Supai is approximately 8 miles long, and descends approximately 2,000 feet. The campground is an additional 2 miles. It can only be traveled on foot or with horse or mule assistance. A helicopter service is available as an alternative mode of transportation.

Source: Wikipedia



Reservation Economy

The Havasupai Reservation is largely dependent on tourism as the primary revenue generator of the Havasupai Tribe and individual tribal members. Each year, over 20,000 visitors hike, ride horses, or fly by helicopter the last 8 miles into the canyon where the Havasupai Indians live. Tourists from around the world come to Havasupai to see this remote Indian village tucked away in the Grand Canyon, to see the last U.S. mail mule train in the country, to see the turquoise blue water (cont'd) and travertine pools of Cateeract Creek, and to see the beauty of Navajo, Havasu and Mooney Waterfalls, and to camp, swim and play in this unbelievable setting.

Tourism provides revenues for the Havasupai Reservation and the Havasupai Tribe is actively engaged in the tourism business. There are also small businesses owned and operated by tribal members. Some tribal members engage in part-time micro-business activities such as the production and selling of arts and crafts to visitors.

The Havasupai Tourist Office and the Havasupai Lodge can make arrangement for packing mules service.

Source: Official Website of the Havsupai Tribe

<http://www.havasupai-nsn.gov/tourism.html>



History of Neglect and Abuse

Horses and other Pack Animals

For over 40 years, visitors to Havasu Falls have been reporting on the neglect, abuse and cruelty against the horses and other pack animals at the hands of tribe members. SAVE has collected eyewitness statements going back 25 years.

“Nope. No. Not worth the trauma of wanton animal abuse.”

●○○○○○ Reviewed June 6, 2016

Went to Havasupai to enjoy what I thought would be the trip of a lifetime. The emaciated horses and mules, the wounds on their tired bodies, and the fact they were standing the hot sun for hours, no water or food, was enough to render any "beauty" there utterly null. I would never go back.

Visited October 2015

Helpful?



6

Thank Sui_Generis94



Report

[Ask Sui_Generis94 about Havasupai Indian Reservation](#)

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

These reports have accelerated greatly since the advent of Social Media.

A quick Google search yields hundreds of reports and photos posted by visitors from all over the world.



christin f
Tempe, Arizona

Level 4 Contributor



35 reviews



14 attraction reviews



29 helpful votes

“Animal abuse ruined it.”

Reviewed October 27, 2015 via mobile

Yes, the campground and waterfalls are amazing, and I wish I left with a better feeling about the experience.

The abuse of the pack animals is unreal, and I'm completely shocked at reviews that claim they didn't see a thing. Several mules had open bleeding wounds on their underbellies which left blood trails on the rocks throughout the canyon. I never once saw any of the horses or mules fed or given water.

At the hilltop as we were about to head home, we found a mule laying on it's side bleeding from it's neck and head and left to suffer for hours before it died. They left the poor thing right in plain sight and next to campers cars.

I would never return after seeing what these people are capable of. Besides, the amount of money they charge to camp is way beyond normal fees, \$160 for two people for two nights. That doesn't include the helicopter or mules.

Visited October 2015

Less ▲

Helpful?



13

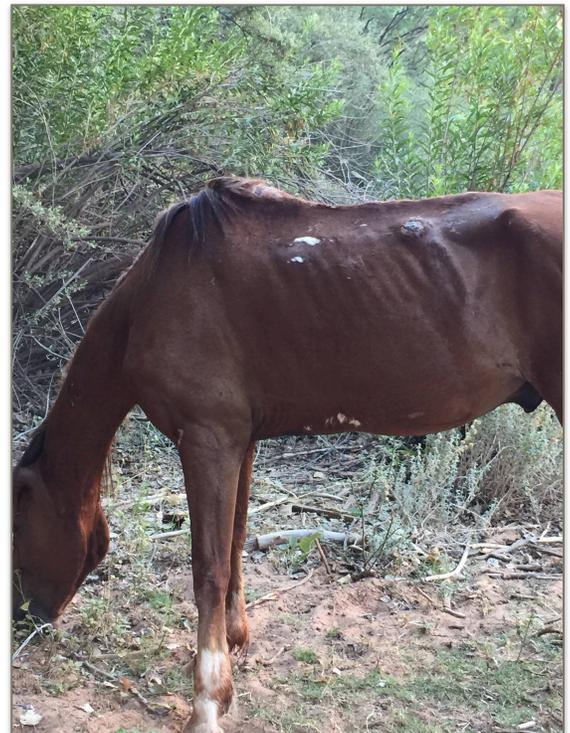
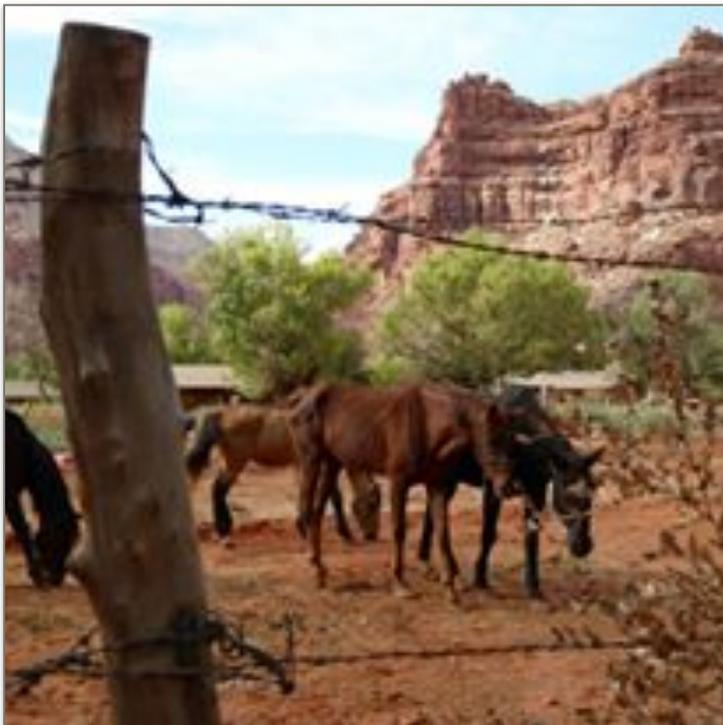
Thank christin f



Report

[See all 3 reviews by christin f for Supai](#)
[Ask christin f about Havasupai Indian Reservation](#)

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On the following pages you will find a sample of the many witness statements posted on various locations around the web such as TripAdvisor and Yelp. Many of these statements have identifying and contact information.

Visitors report seeing dead and dying pack animals on the trail.

I have been to Havasupai five or six times and have always carried my own gear in and out (luckily for me and for those poor animals). However, one of the trips we did witness that one of the horses had fallen and was literally left on the trail near the trailhead at the top with a possible broken neck (was laying on its side with blood coming out the mouth and nose). We were extremely surprised of the neglect and took it upon ourselves to bring the poor animal water, but was really expecting them to either put it down or help it up to heal, and no one paid any mind to the poor horse. - Mark Barringer

I hiked there about two years ago and there were actually two horse that had collapsed along the trail and were set on fire to burn there carcasses. I will never go back because of the way they treat their animals. - Dee Dee Lepper



Visitors have seen overloaded and exhausted pack animals being whipped, kicked, hit, beaten with rocks and forced to continue to the point of collapse.

I went to Havasupai and witness a poor animal overloaded to the point it was collapsing, the owner took a large rock and started smashing its head to try and force it to move, sickening. I reported to authorities and nothing has been done thats 15 years ago. the abuse is acceptable down there. I never use those poor abused horses. needs to be consequences put in place - La Lokioka via TripAdvisor

I have been there and seen these severely undernourished horses and mules. On my way up, an individual was leading a pack down, tied together. The horses were struggling on one steep switchback. Rather than stop until they were sure footed, this man kept whipping them to continue. Three started to and nearly rolled. The guide ignored and pulled them on. It was frightful as it looked as though there would be a terrible tragedy with horses rolling down the switchbacks, all tied to one another! I was horrified by the lack of concern this man had for his "pack".

- Elizabeth Hill Stevens

Visitors report pack animals being forced to RUN up and down miles of sandy wash and rocky trail, even in the extreme heat of summer, and then forced to stand in the sun at the hilltop area, sometimes for hours, with NO WATER or shade.

I asked the guides if the horses needed water and he said, "You don't worry about them." I felt so sad and sickened the way they were treated. We carried all our gear, both ways. But u will never ever go there again and support the cruelty of the animals.

- Kay Lewis Lee

Visitors report tribe members laughing and making jokes at the plight of injured and suffering animals, and also punching, hitting, kicking, whipping and beating them with rocks.



weho69er
los angeles

Level 2 Contributor

8 reviews

30 helpful votes

“Heartbreaking abuse”

Reviewed August 18, 2014 via mobile

A group of friends and I just returned from a week long trip to Havasupai. I was compelled to write an review regarding our experience. The place is truly magical. The falls, the river and the land was spectacular. Although the hike in and out was a bit of a challenge, we had a great time. Our last day hiking out of Havasupai left us with some heartbreaking images of the packing mules being horribly abused and beaten. The mule drivers pelted them with rocks, beat them with rods and punched them to get them moving along the route. When the last set of mules arrived with our gear, one mule collapsed from exhaustion. The driver began kicking him in the torso and the head to try and get the animal up which made the animals condition worse. He laughed and made jokes about animal cruelty. People unloaded it's crates and tried to give the mule some water. We left wondering if the poor thing survived. I'll reconsider ever returning to Havasupai. Their primary source of income is tourism but how can anyone morally give money to people that have no respect or compassion for these creatures. Please do read other reviews on Tripadvisor about others' witnessing this. Truly devastating!

Less ▲

Helpful?  27 [Thank weho69er](#)  Report

[Ask weho69er about Havasupai Indian Reservation](#)

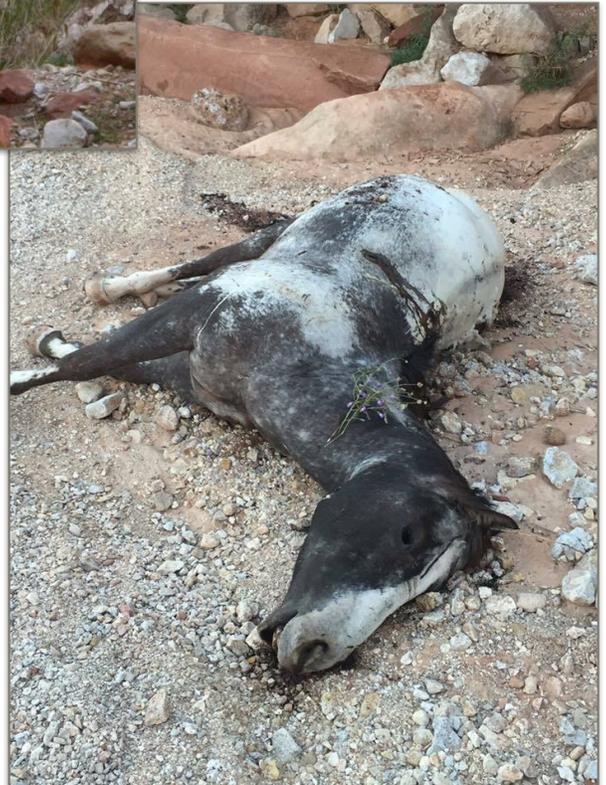
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*I've been a few times and seen some cruel stuff, one horse had a hernia so bad it's insides were hanging out his behind and they were loading the horse up to run it down. I asked the native dude about it and pointed it out to him **and he started laughing and said " hahaha do you have a bandaid. "***

- Richard Bishop

Visitors encounter suffering and dying animals.

I was there a horse was ran so hard that it was ran into side of hill, hit its head and died. We were walking down and it lay dying on the trail. I inquired about some things but was worried about saying anything while I was down there. I did write a review about the animal abuse on their website. I would certainly be willing to testify about the abuse of the horses and dogs. I hope that something can be done. - Donna Canada-Durenberger



We went to Havasupai in July 2014. On the hike in (7/11/2014, an extremely hot day), we came across a hoof and ankle bone (see photo). A bit later, we saw a horse that seemed to be in bad shape. She was lying on her side in the blazing sun (even though there was shade not that far away). She would go to stand up but then flop back onto her side. She did this several times. This was right near the trail and in clear view of anyone going by. At that time, we knew very little about the animal abuse in Havasupai, and we have no personal experience with how horses behave, but we were suspicious so we documented what we saw (see photo). When we hiked out two days later (7/13/2014, also an incredibly hot day), we encountered what we are pretty sure was the same horse: Female, with the same markings, very close to where we had seen her the first time. She was dead and grotesquely bloated, with dried blood running from her mouth and nose to form a congealed little stream and puddle (see photo). The poor animal had died right on the main trail (we had to walk, gagging, around her), which means that various people involved with the tribe (passing through leading trains of horses) must have seen her dying or dead over the course of three days, and done nothing to help. While the corpse was definitely the worse thing saw, we were deeply upset by the condition of the animals in the village as well. All of them were emaciated, many of them were tied to posts in the sun on short tethers with no access to water, and almost none of the enclosures had any shady spots.

It's two years later now and still I literally cannot talk about what I saw there without crying.

This account and photos sent to SAVE in Aug 2016



TripAdvisor “Horrorific Animal Abuse, but a beautiful place”

User name: Liburtee, Denver CO Reviewed April 8, 2015

I recently hiked down to Havasupai Falls with a friend and spent 3 days down there at the campgrounds. I will start with the overview of the experience and then go into why I would never go back or recommend it. The hike down was fairly easy, the first 1.5 miles starts with some switchbacks and then levels out. There is no shade or water on this portion. The next 6.5 miles to Supai Village are through a dry river bed in the canyon on level ground. The terrain is all river rocks though, so plan accordingly. Much more shade option through this part. When you arrive at the village, you will check in at the Tourist office to pay for your visit and get your wristbands, then proceed another 2 miles through sand, past Little Navajo Falls and Havasu Falls to the campground. The campground has running water, 3 bathrooms and picnic tables, and is first-come, first-serve. The falls are absolutely gorgeous.

Now to move on to what I was absolutely appalled by, the Havasupai people and the animal abuse. You have to walk through the entire village before you reach the campground and it is a disgrace to the beautiful land. The people there live in absolute squalor. There is trash everywhere and it has a striking resemblance to the projects in more urban areas of the U.S. They are absolutely miserable, including those that you check-in with. You get a very unwelcoming feeling there. There are dogs everywhere, just running around, not sure if they are strays or belong to someone. In addition, there are horses that are so malnourished you can see their ribs and their corrals are covered in their own feces. That is just the tip of the iceberg with the animal abuse.

*Mules are used to bring people's packs and equipment down into the canyon. They are tied up at the rim in the AZ heat without any water and then are expected and forced to make the 10 mile trek to the campground. **They are tethered together, which means if one goes down or trips, the rest of them are affected.** This happened during our stay and I cannot get the image out of my head. Horses are also used for these treks and all of those dogs sometimes follow these trains of animals 10 miles down and 10 miles up with no water in extreme heat. **A horse tripped and fell on the trail and supposedly broke its leg and was being dragged by the rest of the mule train. We did not believe this story when we heard it, but we when we made our way back to the hilltop, we witnessed it first hand. We practically tripped over a saddle and blankets and stopped to look around. What we saw was a horse, barely alive, lying on its side, looking at us. His eyes were open and he was taking shallow breaths and his ears were twitching. There was nothing we could do at this point. He was left there to die a painful and lonely death in the pathway that every single tourist travels past and will witness.***

It was an incredible place to see, a hidden gem if you will, but I'm not sure it is worth the travel through the poverty stricken village and the animal abuse.

Visitors report overloaded pack animals that are forced to carry much more than the 130 lb weight limit that is supposed to be in place.



“Pack Mule Abuse” Reviewed October 26, 2015 TripAdvisor

*The pack mules/horses carry 4 X 30 lb bags up and down the canyon which is about 10 miles in the hot sun. They don't get water or rest time and are visibly malnourished. You could see the abrasions and scars under their belly, legs and behind, where the straps hold. **I ran into two backpackers who showed me a video of a horse with a broken ankle and another who was screaming as it struggled to get up with a broken back. These animals are overworked and left to die.** I will admit the place is absolutely beautiful and understand the economy of the Havasupai people is driven by tourists and the pack mule service, but the treatment of the animals is heartbreaking. There is a way where you can regulate the weight limit and amount of trips ran per day so that you don't drive your animals to premature death.*

Alyssenoel -Los Angeles, California

Many pack animals have open wounds from cinch straps and ill-fitting saddles and packs.



TripAdvisor October 2014 sassam55 San Francisco, California

“Animal Abuse” Reviewed October 26, 2014

*This trip would of been of 5 stars if it wasn't for the way the Mules are treated. Most people don't realize how hard they work to transport people backpack and camping supply. **I saw one with a broken leg, left there to die on my way down the canyon and an other one having a heat stroke on my way back... the native didn't even bother to give it any water when they got to the top.** I've grown up with horses and know what I am talking about, this was very serious. This is very sad considering how much money we paid for the service. If I would of known I would of carried my own gear into the canyon, which I highly recommend for you to do so you don't feel guilty like I did.*

*I took a trip down about a year ago and at that time a horse collapsed on the switch backs on our way up..likely due to being over worked and the heat. **It was horrifying but the guide basically just rolled him down the switchbacks.** I cried the remainder of my climb because it was such a tragic and heartbreaking sight -- Irma May*

TripAdvisor M G San Diego, California Level Contributor 92 reviews 52 attraction reviews 146 helpful votes Visited May 2014

“Falls are pretty----BUT----NOT Worth the Trip” Reviewed July 15, 2014

*There are much better water falls to see, better places to camp, better places to hike in the Grand Canyon...here is why. This was my 10th time visiting the Grand Canyon and my 5th time camping in various locations.....although the water falls are pretty, there are much better water falls to see in other places and THIS LOCATION is NOT worth the trip.....this was my Worst Grand Canyon visit and very disappointing.....there are better falls to see and better hiking & camping within the Grand Canyon at other locations.....I would not recommend coming to Supai village....the whole place is very dirty....I have been to rural Mexico in the past and it was much cleaner than here.....the local village people are very rude, unhelpful, tried to scam us, and the worst thing is **they mistreat the animals beyond belief.....mules are given way too much weight, don't get water, have open sores & old sores, and I saw their "un-usable" horses which were like walking skeletons because they let them starve to death (according to a volunteer veterinarian that I spoke with).....***

***I am sad that I went here.....in a normal city, these people would be arrested for animal cruelty.....**The Grand Canyon is very large and I would seek a different part of the Grand Canyon to explore.*



Some hikers choose to TURN AROUND when they encounter emaciated, injured, dead or dying animals on the trail and in the village.

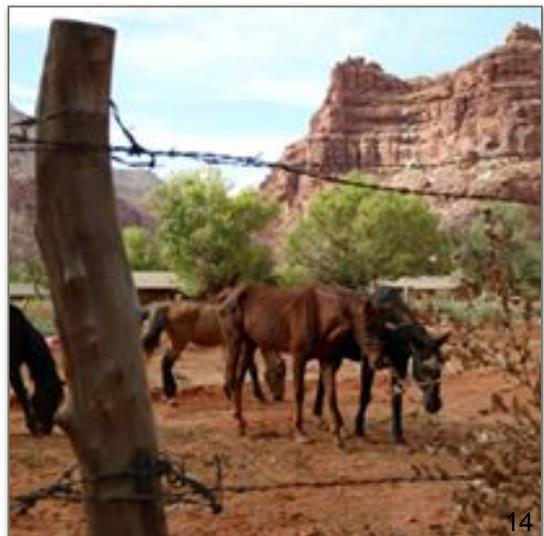
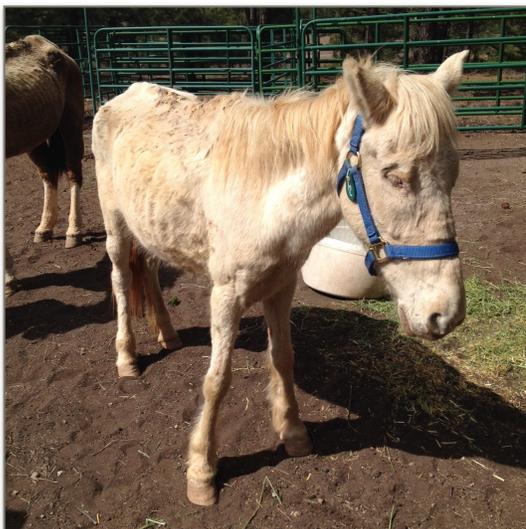
Tripadvisor “Terrible, depressing.” Reviewed November 5, 2015 via mobile

My husband and I heard about this place looking through an REI trip calendar. We then talked to a friend who had been here years ago and loved it. So we made a reservation without doing much research ourselves. But two nights before we were supposed to set out down to the falls I read some reviews about how bad the animals looked and started to get a bad feeling. I was hoping the reviews were exaggerated, so we went away. Big mistake.

*We arrived at 5:30am to the parking lot. **There were about 6 emaciated horses with terrible hoof cracks standing around in very poor fitting saddles. It had snowed most of the night and they had no shelter, water, or food.***

*On our way down we passed a lot of trash (toilet paper, soda cans, beer cans, beer bottles, more beer cans, diapers, the worst excuse for a saddle blanket I've seen), **a severely emaciated, saddled horse (or mule) standing off to the side with a glazed over look of impending death, and a dead, rotting horse.***

***We turned around about 4 miles in to the hike because I couldn't enjoy myself knowing how badly the horses were being treated.** Perhaps their owners don't know any better, but we shouldn't support them in their ignorance. When we got back to the top we fed a couple horses our apples and one of the stay dogs some eggs, but that's only a drop in the bucket. I'm sure the falls are gorgeous. But nothing is beautiful enough to cover up the ugly surrounding this place. Visited November 2015 Britany L*



The photos below are a string of pack animals that were found frozen, injured, dying and dead after being abandoned by Leland Joe one night in Jan of 2010. He was drunk and left them to freeze and die. The two scientists who came upon this grisly scene sent the tribe a letter and receipt they had found which proved who owned them. Nothing was done, and in April of 2016 the same man, Leland Joe, was arrested and charged with multiple counts of animal abuse. This is just another example of the way the tribe has ignored the abuse.

Photos by Mathias Kawski



* edited for length

*** I witnessed a young man sitting on a horse just hitting the horses head with a rope, seemingly for fun.** When we got back to the village, I decided to fly out with the helicopter.. common as people just like me, get over exerted.. between that and the animal cruelty, we just wanted to get out of there.. when we got in a German couple with their daughter, about my sons age were in there, the daughter was crying.. and the mother told me she had witnessed an Indian knocking the eye out of one of the horses. The mother was outraged and approached the man, **he told her it was common practice that they knock an eye out to keep the new ones from trying to flee from the trail, apparently the horse is more cautious with one eye.. the parents were horrified.** They like us, had planned to stay several days, but left as soon as they saw what was going on. I told them that we had witnessed not only animal cruelty but seemingly an indoctrinated tribal way of behaving truly cruel, beyond neglect.. by the way, the mules and horses in all national parks are in good shape and it is ignorantly cruel and a non- accepted practice to knock a horses eye out in any way for any reason. when we got out I called the local authorities they told me that the tribe did not fall under local jurisdiction (US laws) and there was nothing they could do. **When I got back to California I wrote the tribe's chief, from an address I found online. There was of course no reply.** -- Lisa Morgan

From: Lisa Rounds <lisarounds4@gmail.com>
Sent: Fri, Jul 15, 2016 11:10 am
Subject: Supai horses

I saw firsthand the sad conditions of these horses and mules in 2013 when I was part of a hiking group to see Havasupai Falls. The falls are beautiful and everyone seems to just accept what was told to me -- that the Indians run the horses/mules and there is nothing we can do about the abuse and neglect we see. This is part of getting to see the falls -- as you need your sleeping bags, tent, and food supplies to be carried to the bottom and then the top.

At the bottom in the Supai village, there were wandering skinny, skinny horses that were rummaging through trash bins trying to find food. They would frantically insert their snouts into the small trash openings and retrieve PLASTIC bags and eat them -- they of course could not open the bags for any leftover bits inside. It was horrible to watch. They were willing to tear up their noses and heads to try for anything over and over. They ate many plastic bags and who knows what else with their only way of trying to get a possibility of any amount of food. It was so horrible to watch. HORRIBLE! They would place their mouths inside the bins trying to get to the bottoms banging their heads in all directions to try to reach areas they could not. I wanted to take my granola bar to them but was afraid they may attack me since they were wild and hungry. It was so horrible to watch.

Some visitors report that they have felt threatened or intimidated when they ask about the welfare of an animal. They are often told by tribal members and even

guides who work for outside companies that there is "nothing you can do" and "that's just the way it is down here."

Visitors have also reported drunken and obnoxious behavior by some wranglers and tribal members. Their inquiries have been met with responses ranging from indifference to downright hostility.

Tourists and their family members, including children, have been highly traumatized by what they have witnessed. These witnesses include people from all professional backgrounds, including veterinarians.

Many of these witnesses have contacted the Havasupai tribe via letter, phone and email, yet very few have received any kind of response.

In his testimony before the court at Leland Joe's trail, the US Dept of Agriculture investigator described his animals as the worst case of horse abuse he had ever seen and as "torture."

Summary



The purpose of this document is to illustrate the depth and severity of the abuse and to draw public attention and outrage and to clarify the issues as well as solutions. Many people are under the impression that because this violence occurs on tribal land, nothing can be done. This is definitely not true. In early April, 2016, Susan Ash (co-founder of Stop Animal Violence aka S.A.V.E.) met with the U.S. District Attorney's office, two BIA officers and an FBI officer. Shortly after that meeting, federal authorities went into Supai and arrested Leland Joe. He was charged with two felony counts of animal abuse and two misdemeanor charges. His four horses were seized and taken to a local humane organization where one is still recovering.

This action by federal authorities dispels the myth that nothing can be done. Jurisdiction is complicated and is a patchwork of federal, state and tribal laws, but legal action can be taken. Additionally much be done in the court of public opinion. For decades now tourists have been coming out of Havasu Canyon appalled by the abuse they have seen. Many have called tribal authorities, the police and the BIA, to no avail, so they usually gave up in frustration. S.A.V.E has changed this. Now people can contact us and we can, in turn, make this information public and get it to media outlets. This is very important in terms of creating the necessary changes. The Tribe has basically ignored complaints up to this point because they thought they were immune. There was no organized effort to make all the outrage heard and to expose the complicity of guide companies like REI Adventures, Wildland Trekking and others who are profiting handsomely off the backs of these abused and starving animals while looking the other way.

The last issue concerns the efforts of organizations and individuals who have been volunteering their time and resources to try to alleviate some of the suffering. Many of these people and others think the only way to make progress is to offer help and to cooperate with the Tribe. On paper this looks reasonable and in fact, is what SAVE tried to do as well. These attempts were met with silence. There is no question that a cooperative effort would be the best option. However it is important to remember that this approach has been tried for over 40 years, with no significant change in the level of abject misery and suffering these animals have experienced.

Sustained public pressure and legal action against the Tribe and public exposure of outfitter practices must be used to force change. Education and supportive services can and should be offered as part of the development of a new cultural attitude. This will take time and education, but it will not be accomplished if the Tribe has no incentive to change. White people coming in and offering help does not change the culture of abuse.

Contact: Susan Ash (208) 659-2331