

HEAVY HORSES

Working horses in forestry, agriculture, tourism and education

Doug Joiner, Hill Farm, Bosbury, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 1HE.

Mobile 07773 900751.

www.heavyhorses.net email ; doug@heavyhorses.net

RISK ASSESSMENT, BRACKEN BASHER

This is a generic risk assessment for using horses to mechanically control bracken with a 'Bracken Basher'. A site specific risk assessment pro-forma should be completed for each contract.

Bracken Bashing is undertaken during June and July predominantly. It is essential that adequate fly and sun protection is used for handler and horse. Adequate rest periods with water must be planned. It is advisable to cease work during an electrical storm. Be aware of the risk of ticks and the necessary action to prevent and to remove ticks.

Care must be taken when driving a horse into bracken. In the first 'swathe' or 'cut' the horse will be completely blind and during subsequent runs the horse's ability to see hazards is limited. The handler should position to one side in order to see into the bracken in front of the horse whenever possible. Due to the high risk of unforeseen hazards, it is essential that the working pace is suitable so as to avoid injury. Long reins should be long enough to allow the handler to walk behind the basher at a distance so that a stumble will not lead to a collision with or fall onto the basher. However, care must be taken with long reins to ensure that they do not become entangled with any part of the machine. Particular care must be taken with brambles, roses, stinging nettles and, especially, wasps' nests. Suitable medication should be near to hand. The handler is often at more risk of wasp stings as it will be the horse that breaches the nest in time for the handler to be confronted by the wasps. In any event, take any unusual behaviour in the horse seriously as you may not see what is distressing it.

Prior knowledge of the site is invaluable to identify and locate hazards, timber, stones, holes etc. and if it is not possible to view the site sufficiently far in advance the owner or commissioning agent should locate and identify such hazards. Work should be arranged so that the horse traverses a slope and has a comfortable turn at each end of the slope. Working alternately right and then left handed will balance the horse and ease fatigue.

Use of the brake in ascending and descending is preferred to ease the load on the horse. Great care should be taken on extreme cross slopes and when turning or running over unforeseen obstacles. Slow speed or actually stopping will help to avoid tipping the basher.

Most of the above comments also apply to the Heathland Rehabilitation Heavy Horse Harrow and this risk assessment broadly applies.