



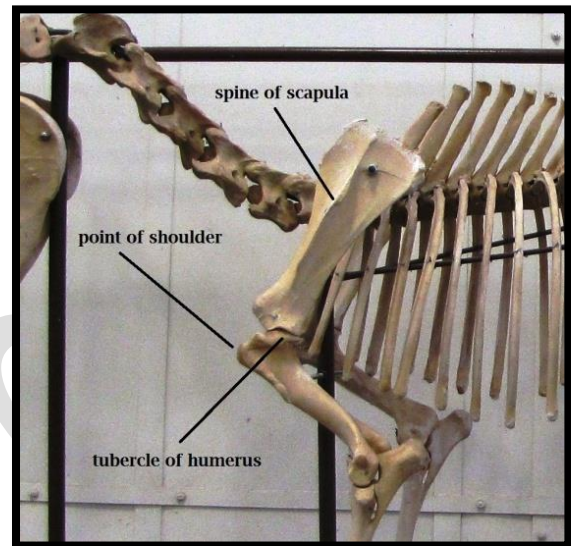
Mind Three Places on the Shoulder

Whether we ride our ponies, drive them, or work them in harness, their comfort with the tack or harness we use is critical to our safety and theirs. If they are uncomfortable, they may be unwilling to listen to commands or they may become distracted from the work we are doing, potentially putting us all at risk.

I recently collaborated with my friend and colleague Doc Hammill on another article for *Rural Heritage* magazine. Doc used his veterinary background combined with his working horse experience to highlight three places on the shoulder that are critically important to be aware of to ensure the comfort of any equine being used with tack or harness. While harness is especially likely to impact these three places, no matter whether the type is collar-and-hames or breast-strap, even saddles and especially breast bands may come into contact with these places if not adjusted properly.

The illustration here is from the article and shows the three places where bones come close to the surface and are easily felt through the skin on most equines.

When putting tack or harness on our ponies, we need to make sure that tissues aren't compressed between the tack or harness and these bony landmarks.



Here is a great lesson from Doc: "Go out and feel your horse in the [area of their shoulder where a collar sits]. You'll quickly realize how close these hard unyielding structures are to the surface; you can really feel them... What I have students do in workshops is to get them to feel for and find the spine of the scapula, then move their hand down the spine of the scapula and feel where it disappears into a softer cushion of muscles. Continuing down and forward over muscle, the hand comes to the bony structures of the point of the shoulder, including the tubercle of the humerus." (1) I know that ever since I followed Doc's advice and felt for these bony protuberances on my ponies, I've been more aware of when my tack or harness comes close to them.

If you are interested in reading the full article, let me know. Here is the way the publisher described it: "Our most extensive article on one of the most essential aspects of draft horse driving. Jenifer Morrissey's much researched article covers everything you need to know to correctly adjust your harness and collars for the best performance and comfort. Accompanied by very helpful photographs and illustrations. You will keep and reread this article forever!" (2) The article was months in the making, so it's nice that it was so well received!

- 1) Morrissey, Jenifer. "Seeking the Elusive Point of Draft," *Rural Heritage*, Issue Aug/Sep 2014, p. 16.
- 2) Summary of article on Current Edition page at ruralheritage.com, 9/3/14