

TRAIL ETIQUETTE AND THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU REGISTER

Though Webster's dictionary defines etiquette as "rules governing socially acceptable behavior," a code of ethics while riding in a group of horses is even more important because it can determine the safety of other riders and their horses.

If you normally ride alone in an arena at home or open field nearby home, practice riding with other horses before going on a group ride. Working with your horse at home will pay off. Other riders will appreciate the control you have over your horse, even if he is acting frisky or frightened. His trail "manners" will improve every time you take him on the trail with others, and you may be able to avoid serious trail accidents if he knows his lessons well.

The day of the ride is NOT the day to pull a horse that's been sitting as a pasture ornament and is not the day for you to ride if you haven't been ridden in months.. If you will be riding someone else's horse, do yourself, the horse, and the other riders a favor and spend some time in the saddle with the horse several days in the weeks leading up to the ride. The day of the ride is not the time to hop on a borrowed horse –no matter how gentle its owner thinks it is. It may be great with them, but may not be with you.

Some NO's for the ride: no stallions, no beginning riders, no beginning horses, no ponying, no dogs.

RIDER MANNERS - Since riders are responsible for the decisions they make regarding not only their safety, but the safety of their horses and the others around them, it is critical that they be aware of the general rules of the trail. You need to be aware of AND courteous to the riding abilities of those you are with, and the level of training the least experienced horse and rider has.

DO NOT pass the lead rider unless instructed to do so. Also, do not fall behind the "drag" rider (last scout rider bringing up the rear of the group) without letting him know you are doing so.

WAIT until ALL riders have had a chance to mount and settle on their horses before riding out. Most horses get nervous and will want to move off when the group starts leaving. A horse feeling he's being left behind could cause him to buck his rider off or dance around so much it's impossible for the rider to mount.

Whether riding on an organized ride or a group pleasure ride, DON'T separate yourself from the other riders or drift off the trail without letting someone know. Notify the trail boss or another rider if you or someone near you is having a problem with their horse or tack and needs to stop.

NEVER PASS another horse at any gait WITHOUT NOTIFYING the rider you are doing so. It is best not to pass in a fast manner at all and is considered rude. It is a sure invitation to get kicked or crowded off the trail or cause other rider's horses to get upset.

Maintain one horse-length distance between each horse to avoid being kicked or bitten. If you cannot control your horse enough to maintain the distance, politely ask the other rider to move out of the way at the first safe opportunity, then move your horse an appropriate distance from the other horses. If your horse is misbehaving keep to the back of the trail line so your horse doesn't upset others horses.

WALK up and down hills to control your horses at a steady pace. Most horses by nature want to use momentum to carry them up the other side of a hill so be prepared for this!! They prefer to rush down

and back up out again. Many times they will run right into the horse in front of them if you aren't careful.

Also, DON'T STOP at the top of the hill when another rider is behind you, KEEP MOVING! If the horse behind cannot get enough momentum to get out of the gully or up the hill, their only choice may be to go back down again dangerously, risking a fall.

CALL BACK to other riders of hazards in the trail such as holes, drop-offs, glass bottles, wire on the ground, low branches, snakes or cars. Don't hold onto branches as you go under or past because this causes the branch to sling back into the face of the next rider or horse. (We've ALL been there...)

WAIT until all horses have had a chance to drink BEFORE riding away from a watering spot. Most horses won't stay and drink their fill if the group has moved away from them. On long rides, it is imperative that horses have adequate chances to drink plenty of water. Be considerate of other's horses well being, not just your own.

RESPECT the property you are riding on. Pack out everything you bring in, and NEVER litter. Do not disturb the land in any way. Littering or land destruction can be a certain way to lose trail-riding privileges. Follow the rules that property owners. Rules are usually put in place for the SAFETY of you, and your horse and the protection of the land.

Leave gates as you found them! You would not want to be responsible for letting livestock out onto roads or other people's property.

Be aware that normal movements, for instance, removing your jacket or pulling a bandana out of your pack while you're in the saddle, could frighten another person's horse. The same is true of simple things like handing a water bottle or sandwich to another rider. Also, be aware that while you may be able to talk on your cell phone and ride, your horse could well drift into a space where he's bugging another horse or rider, or crowding up to another horse's hindquarters or hogging the trail. You may have the calmest horse at home, but dynamics change when placed in a new environment with other horses and people around.

EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS: Check all your tack before leaving on a trail ride. Tack problems not only pose safety hazards, they can spoil the day's ride for you and fellow riders. It's a good idea to carry spare parts such as leather or nylon straps, hoof boots in case a shoe is lost, all purpose tool or knife, large "zip-ties" and an extra lead rope/halter.

Place a RED (or Orange) Ribbon in the tail of a known or suspected kicker. That tells riders approaching from behind that your horse may kick or otherwise display dangerous behavior to other horses.

You may also place a GREEN ribbon in the tail of a horse that is trail savvy but still may not have miles and miles of experience. Though the ribbon alerts riders about your horse's experience, it DOESN'T relieve you of responsibility to control your horse. Not kicking another horse or rider is your responsibility and liability rests with you should someone get hurt by your horse. Keep your horse busy and focused on your signals and he won't have time to react to the other horses.

RIDING WITH COMMON SENSE: Most accidents or challenges on the trail can be avoided by using these common sense approaches to good manners and etiquette.

Remember to BE POLITE to other riders and horses while enjoying the ride

Keep a positive attitude EVEN if things are not going exactly as planned, and you will find that you can enjoy a pleasant ride with a group of fellow horsemen.

Be careful out there and take care of each other and our horses!

You will be signing a release of liability prior to the ride, attesting to the above.