

Trail Riding Etiquette for Horse Enthusiasts

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When you're trail riding, you need to be aware of safety, not only for yourself and the horse, but also as a courtesy for other trail users. You should follow all general precautions about safe riding, but also follow practices that apply specifically to trails, whether you're riding alone or in a group, for a short or long distance, or for fun or competition.

Out on the Trail

Here are some safety tips for when you're out on the trail:

- It is best not to ride alone, but if you do, tell someone where you are going and what time you expect to be back.
- Consider carrying a whistle to use in case of emergency—it takes less effort to blow a whistle than to yell for help. Or carry a cell phone (on your person, not your horse).
- Consider attaching an ID tag to your horse. The tag should include the horse's name, your name, and your cell phone number. If you and your horse become separated when you are some distance from home, a cell phone number could help reunite you.
- Carry a current map of your riding area and have an idea where you are going. Study the land around you, noting landmarks.
- Occasionally look behind you to help make a mental picture of the trail for your return.
- Mark the trail with fluorescent clothespins clipped to branches. (Remember to remove the markers on the return trip.) Some riders find a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit to be helpful in keeping track of their route.
- Stay on designated/marked trails.
- When on the trail and you encounter a muddy trail, do not ride horses at a pace greater than a walk.

- You should cross rivers, creeks, or wetlands only in designated areas, both to minimize negative impact on the environment and for the safety of you and your horse.
- Ride only on lands offered for public or private riding use and where you have permission to ride.
- If you ride on federal or state lands, ask park officials for advice on the best trails to take and if any map changes have been made.
- After a trail ride, let the agency in charge know your comments, to help pinpoint any need for trail maintenance or simply to say thank you.

Horse and Tack Considerations

Follow these horse and tack tips, keeping in mind that your horse and its safety should be your number one priority:

- Make sure your horse is conditioned for the speed, distance, and the terrain of the trail.
- Start your rides with clean, properly fitted tack (clean and examine your tack for signs of wear after each ride).
- Make sure the horse's hooves are in good condition and properly shod for the terrain.
- Carry duct tape or an easy boot (that fits the horse) for emergencies such as a pulled shoe or sole bruise.
- Consider carrying a halter, lead rope, and hoof pick.
- On long, hot, humid rides, carry a sponge on a length of rope, which makes it easy to drop the sponge in water for cooling your horse. The toughest weather condition on a horse is hot, humid weather.
- Walk the horse the last 2 miles of the trail ride and never run back to the barn or trailhead! Serious injury can result if the horse is exercised beyond the point of fatigue.



- Pay attention to indicators of physical condition to prevent the horse from breaking down. They include:
 - general attitude and behavior
 - muscle and bone soreness
 - heart and respiration rate (normal resting values: pulse, 36-42 beats/minute; respiration, 8-15 breaths/minute)
 - condition of the feet
 - body temperature (normal resting value: 99-101°F)

Courtesy on the Trail

Trail riding etiquette also includes the following:

- If you stop for lunch, make sure your horse is resting in a place that is safe for both the horse and other trail users. Stay with your horse and be considerate of other trail users.
- If it is permissible to have the horses rest off the trail, do not tie your horse directly to a tree. Instead, use two lightweight 8-foot lines with panic snaps, securing your horse between two trees. This practice will prevent the horse from chewing tree bark and damaging a tree's root system.
- Leave what you find and carry out what you packed.

- If you do stop for a rest on a long ride, remember to loosen the horse's girth or cinch and tighten it before remounting.
- If the trail permits horse access to waterways, water should be offered to a horse at any available point on the trail. If there is no access, do not attempt to enter the water. Entering rivers or streams in undesignated areas can cause damage to the environment, harm to the horse, and possibly result in the trail being closed to horses.
- At the trailhead or when using a public park, clean up any manure. Do not toss it from your trailer into the bushes unless you have asked the proper officials if this practice is acceptable.

Trail Riding Safety

- Helmets should always be worn. They should be approved by the American Society for Testing and Material/Safety Equipment Institute (ASTM/SEI) and be properly fitted and fastened whenever you are mounted on a horse.
- Consider updating your helmet after a fall in which the helmet takes a hit, after long helmet exposure to sunlight, or at least every seven years.
- Young horses or those that are new to trails can learn from seasoned trail horses. Surround the novice horse with two or three seasoned horses when dealing with a challenging situation.
- Be aware that how a horse perceives other trail users is a safety concern. Horses may not understand that a hiker with a large backpack, floppy hat, or a fishing rod is still a person, and they can see bicycles and strollers as dangerous objects.
- Initiate a conversation with other, non-horse trail users. A little time spent talking to them can help keep multi-use trails open to horses.

Traffic Laws and Equine Travel Requirements

In Kentucky no traffic laws exist related to horses and trail riding.

However, there are regulations related to horses being transported within the state of Kentucky and where horses may congregate in the state. The regulations require a negative test for equine infectious anemia (within the past 12 months) and a certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI), also known as a health certificate. In-state health certificates are valid for up to 12 months or until the equine infectious anemia test expires.

The day before trail riding, check the website of the Office of the State Veterinarian (at <http://www.kyagr.com/statevet/equine/index.htm>) for any new requirements based on current statewide equine health concerns.

If you travel to another state to ride trails, know the state's laws related to the rider's rights and responsibilities and the equine travel requirements for that particular state.

Once Home

After a ride, the horse's welfare should be your main concern. Take good care of your horse, and it will treat you to many more enjoyable rides.

Follow these tips once your ride is over:

- Cool down your horse before removing the saddle.
- Once your horse is untacked, groom it at least where sweat has left marks.
- Allow saddle pads to dry, clean the girth area, and examine the horse's legs and feet for injuries.
- In extreme weather conditions, take extra precautions to protect your horse. If it is humid or hot, you should consider a longer cool-down time. If it is cold or windy, think about placing a heavy beach towel or blanket over the horse's back.

With all of these considerations in mind, you are ready to experience the pleasure and challenge of a trail ride. When the rider knows and practices common sense, safety, and consideration for others on the trail, both the horse and rider enjoy the ride.

Suggested Reading

New Jersey Horse Trails Booklet-Phase I. Published by the New Jersey Horse Council. For more information contact the New Jersey Horse Council at 25 Beth Drive, Moorestown, NJ 08057-3021; Phone: 609-231-0771; E-mail: NJHorse@aol.com; Website: www.njhorsecouncil.com.

Zatz, Arlene. 2004. *Horsing Around in New Jersey: The Horse Lover's Guide to Everything Equine*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ.

Wood, G. W. 2002. *Thoughts on Horses, Horsemen, Trails, and Conservation*. Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

Resources

Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Office of State Veterinarian at <http://www.kyagr.com/statevet/equine/index.htm>.

University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Agriculture and Natural Resources, equine resources website at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/anr/EquineResources.htm>

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