

The aim of trail riding is for you, your horse, and others with you, to have lots of fun on the trail ride, and return safely.

For the purposes of this writing we will divide trail riding into two categories; Working Trail and Pleasure Trail. While both may have many things in common there are differences that do separate them...such as length of travel, type of terrain etc. To start, we will talk about pleasure trail, although you may notice that there will be examples taken from working trail. As well we will dispense with the “stable riding trail rides” which are governed by the business , ranch, etc. that run them. In this category we will address the pleasure trail that includes such events as club rides, charity rides, training and clinic rides. The general aim of a trail ride is meant to be a ride for enjoyment as opposed to one of necessity. A comfortable pace should be maintained to allow for socialization and rubber necking (scenery, wildlife etc.), based on the abilities of the riders and the horses. In a perfect world each trail ride should have a Trail Boss, Drag Rider, and a number of Out riders, that would be dictated by the number of Free Riders. (Free riders are those that are there for the ride, but not affiliated with the management of the ride.)

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## T rail Boss:

Before the ride the trail boss should set out what will be accepted throughout the ride, what passing habits they want used and where it may not be advisable, if there are areas that require single line riding, where they may want you to let a rider clear a traverse before you proceed etc.

The reason for the trail boss is obvious but we will explain it anyway. This is the person who is in charge. They are responsible for the path/route that is ridden, for the speed of the ride, as well as the safety and welfare of the horses and riders. On designated routes he/she should be the one that knows the route well (others should as well but that isn't always the case.). On free form rides (choosing the route as you ride) they should at least know the area well. They are also the one that should make the inspection of the horses and tack, for one, to make sure both are adequate and another, to allow him/her to judge the capabilities of horse and rider...Likewise they can at this time, check for any possible special concerns such as studs, mares in season, etc.

The trail boss should also determine if any equipment is needed by each rider as well as by the group, and who should carry it. At the start of the ride the trail boss should notify riders of the plan of the ride such as length of time needed (which is approximated and judged by the abilities of the group), the expected distance the group will travel, and the skill required for the ride. Each of these factors may be altered. For instance, if time is the main factor then distance may change. If the distance is the criteria (such as an established route), then time estimates may change. If the skill level is higher or lower than they planned on then the route itself may change. This can also happen on route as the trail boss reevaluates the group. It is also his/her responsibility to see that everyone is kept safe (as within his/her means and allowing for circumstances.) As such if there is an unfortunate incident it is up to the trail boss to make the call on how to proceed.

In the event of someone wanting to or having to leave the group and "short cut" back to the staging area, it is their call on whether a designated rider(s) accompany them or whether the group cuts their ride. The trail boss should be able to adapt to changes in the trail as well as noticing changes in the terrain or surroundings that could affect the group. There should be a level of confidence and trust in the trail boss, as once you are on the trail you should depend on him/her in most cases. They should also have the willingness to listen to drag riders, outriders, and even free riders in aspects of safety or comfort issues. If any rider should feel comfortable approaching the trail boss with concerns or questions, it must be accepted that the trail boss has the final say while on the trail.

The trail boss should also realize that the trail ride will travel at the speed of the slowest rider and fit the abilities of the least able rider. He can, of course, offer alternative (escorted) detours such as a route around a hill that is too steep for some, or a crossing to deep etc. The better planned detours will lessen the time of separation as well as waiting time for one party to rejoin the other.

The trail boss may, of course, decide to make another group from the free riders that better suit their abilities, (such as have a group that is faster ride ahead.) At this time the trail boss should, from his ranks, designate a sub-trail boss and drag. If needing to draw on free riders for

this purpose, the new designated positions should be chosen on ability and trust instead of familiarity or friendship. If larger separations occur (out of sight for extended periods) then an interim rider should be chosen as a go between groups if no other communication (radios etc.) is available. They may need to separate an unruly horse from the group of position (off to the side, or near the back etc.). They should be aware of where his riders are (both assigned and free riders) and their general condition.

## Drag Rider:

The drag rider is as it sounds, one who rides the drag or rear of the group. Sometimes called a duster. They also have responsibilities. One of these is to look ahead into the group to spot any potential problems. This is a needed position as the trail boss should be looking ahead and to the sides, because you don't want a trail boss riding backwards. They have the vantage point to see if someone peels off the group into a detour or different area.

They may be the last person to see a discarded or dropped piece of equipment. In certain situations, they may be more able to reach a trouble spot in the group before the trail boss, seeing how they may spot it first and are already headed in that direction. They have the responsibility of closing gates or replacing other items that may have been altered to let the group through. As well they may hang back as guides for rescue/service vehicles, or riders at access points. This should be at the last access point to let them know which direction to follow.

A drag rider should maintain a position at the rear of the group as half way up into the group nullifies his effectiveness. Exceptions, of course, would be horses that can't have horses behind them, etc., (another point on this later) at which time they may ride closely in front of them or drop far enough back to not be a hindrance. In the event of a stoppage (tack adjustment etc.) they should remain with the last rider until such time as they catch the group. In this event, or the event of them hanging back as guides, an outrider can temporarily take the last position in the main group.

The outrider can also act as a voice of the trail boss for those more to the rear of the group. While the drag rider tries to keep everyone in front of them it may not always be possible. At such times they should strive to keep both the last rider and the group in sight at all times.

## Outriders:

The outrider is the person that usually rides to the side of the group moving his way (generally) up and down the outside. This role may be one of communication, relaying conditions, and/or needs of the free riders, forward or backwards. It is also a free flowing rider position that can evaluate the conditions of horse, tack, and rider at a closer level. They can also act as a transitory rider for other positions in the case of a group separation or incident. At times they may be called on as a forward rider to check on conditions on the trail before the group gets committed to a certain course. This may happen due to rain or other circumstance since the last time the trail was checked. In many cases, at the trail Boss's discretion, he/she may be asked to lead someone on a short cut back to the staging/finishing area or to replace the drag rider doing so. Its usually left up to the outrider to make sure the drag rider is still within sight of the group.

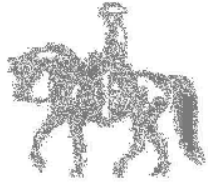
Many groups may choose to allow designated riders to change positions to allow a change for the horse or rider. Such as allowing a drag rider a chance to stretch out a faster horse held at a slower speed before he gets dopey, lazy or comatose, or allow an outrider a chance to rest or relax their horse (or themselves) from fatigue or over excitement. At times an outrider may replace the trail boss position for short periods of time for the same reasons or just to give the trail boss a chance to look the group over.

A lot of these conditions, of course, depend on the size of the group but in general many of the principles apply to any size group. In general, the larger the groups, the more outriders that may be needed or even doubling up on drag riders. On longer trips even the lead may change because of one rider knowing a particular part of the trail better. Usually, the more experience the designated riders have with each other the better the working symmetry, and the more enjoyable the trail ride.

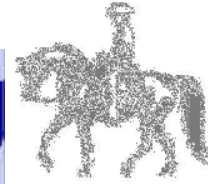
Trail Riding

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# Trail Riding



**REMEMBER:** You can walk your horse. It is better to get off your horse and walk it fifty feet, than endanger you or your horse and walk home.

1. Generally the ride goes the speed of the slowest rider(s) - unless the group is divided into two or more sections.
2. Commonly the quicker riders/horses are to the front of the group.
3. The difficulty of the ride is determined by the least able horse/rider - unless alternate detours are implemented.
4. Many riders unfamiliar with trail riding will over estimate or exaggerate their capabilities, (as well as seasoned riders at times.)
5. Many horses/riders with great abilities in other disciplines may be problematic on trail rides. Example: you may have a great trail horse but that doesn't mean that he can race barrels or handle crowds or stadium lights. In the same respect a performance horse (show/rodeo/etc.) may well encounter objects or situations that they have never had to address before.
6. A "buddy" system may be of great value to a trail green horse, such as another horse they know or seem to like/trust who is more adept at trails. Many times having another horse pass an object or obstacle will allow a horse to maneuver it with more confidence.
7. A horse that wants to charge or push forward can many times be held to speed by putting it behind another horse and not letting it pass. (This depends on your horse, and the other horse, whether either bites, kicks, etc. Ask the rider ahead to make sure their horse is safe enough and they are willing to let you following them.)
8. Get an idea of the other horses, the ones that are calm, the biters, kickers, studs, mares (and if they are in season), experienced or not..etc. At the same time check out the other riders, the novices, old hands - nervous or calm, etc. Talk to the other riders but use your impressions as well (people can exaggerate, or overestimate.)
9. Find out in advance what procedures are required for passing (on the left or right for example), stopping, etc.

10.If the pace of the group is a little too slow you may be able to offset it by riding in a circle beside the group and bringing your horse back into the group periodically. Or depending on terrain, riding him to the side and around and between bushes to expend some energy. Also on near runoffs or in advance of a runoff this latter technique may help.

11. In most cases if a horse near you starts to act up or buck or display other unruly behavior, your best bet is to stop or get your horse away from them. Many times someone trying to reach out and grab another persons horse just compounds the issue. Exceptions may be parents or owners of the other horse (someone the horse knows and responds to), or people that have experience with these situations.

12. Never leave the group for a short cut alone...or let anyone else do so...If they want to leave because they are fatigued, spooked, or just had a set to with the horse (bucking, etc.), they will be nervous and/or scared and at less than their full capabilities. This will not be a good time for them to handle any further incidences. If there are further problems or issues with the horse, they would be alone, and this is not good. There may be exceptions to this but that is up to the discretion of the trail boss and or group. It is not a good feeling to get back and find out that someone who should have been there before you hasn't shown up yet.

13.It is a good idea (and with some groups mandatory) to have a halter under the head stall, and if not possible, than a good idea is to have one with you. A good lead rope is also a necessity. Many trail rides may have a stop over with a tie up, or some incident may require you to tie up your horse, and while in familiar areas such as arenas and such your horse may be fine, but he may get spooked while tied up somewhere along a trail (by small animals, windy trees, etc.). Some horses may be trained for neck tie, hobbles or other means but use your best judgment.

14. Most riders experienced with trails will have habits that differ from those in other disciplines. They, as a rule, will not run up or down hills, or even jump their horses if they can avoid it. Many have learned from experience that while fun, these are not safe trail practices. Even though it may be a short trail ride the idea is to leave and return safe. It you treat the ride as though you were a hundred miles away from support instead of a couple of miles, you may have a different viewpoint. A sprained ankle, broken leg, etc., takes on a whole new dimension for you and your horse, if you have to add in extra waiting or traveling time.

15. On steeper hills or less secure hills, (small gravel, slippery rock, etc.), it is usually a good idea to increase the space between horses or even to wait until the previous horse has navigated the hill. This can also be true in tighter areas, ditch crossings, or other situations.

16.Take what you may need with you and don't depend on someone else to have it. Know, don't guess, if your horse can carry a saddlebag, rope, or whatever else you may not use with them often. At the same time especially on longer rides don't overburden your horse, it is hard to ride a great distance if you or the horse are hampered and are not used to it. Generally a trail ride is not the place to try a new piece of tack or equipment.

17.Remember to be aware and watch out for your horse. If they are used to short periods of

heavy/fast activities, they may find a prolonged activity more tiring. Also if they are used to a higher than walking gait consistently and you are on a walking trail ride they may fatigue sooner than you expect. If they are used to flat land or arena work and you encounter hills or climbing in and out of washes, ditches, etc., they may tire quickly. Of course more speed than they are used to may have the same effect.

18. If the group keeps an eye out for themselves and other riders you may be able to catch things before they become a problem. Notify those behind you of broken glass, holes, wire, or other potential hazards.

19. Picking the type of trail ride and the type of trail boss can also have a big influence on how enjoyable the ride will be. Some rides may be geared to a faster pace or require more exertion than you will enjoy. The opposite could also be true. While you consider the condition of the horse you must also consider the condition you are in. You and your horse can have a easier shorter ride than you are used to and still enjoy it, but, if you or your horse over extend by any great amount it will take the fun out of it. Preconditioning rides are a good practice and give you a better idea of you and your horse's abilities. If there are none available then starting out with shorter easier rides more often and gradually adding distance or difficulty has great benefits. The more you and your horse become a team instead of just horse and rider, the better able you are to deal with anything you may encounter.

20. Trail riding is usually a great way for rider and horse to bond and trust each other. Trail riding may also have the advantage of giving your horse exercise that may be lacking in other areas. It may also give them a mental "boost", as many of them find trails both challenging and relaxing. You may notice increased stamina and endurance in some horses.

21. Overall, trail riding is sometimes the closest that some horses come to a more natural environment that they have evolved from. Roaming free for periods in large pastures and such may be much closer to their ancestry, but many penned horses that are worked and ridden in enclosed areas may find it a happy medium.

22. Not all horses take trail riding well, as other horses may not take other disciplines well. There are many horses that do find problems with wider, open areas or confronting "nature" more closely. This may be an individual trait that they have, because of family lines, training, habit, psychology, or other reasons.

23. Some horses can have issues such as not liking proximity to other horses, being barn sour or even agoraphobic to name a few. While trail horses may also develop issues such as being buddy sour, herd sour, or wanting specific positions in the group (only the lead or the middle etc.).

24. All in all, it depends on what you and your horse wants and where you both will compromise. Trail riding is not the all to end all or even the best discipline for every horse, but, it may be for some and can have some benefits for some others.

**ENJOY WHATEVER TYPE OF RIDING YOU DO!!**

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