



# Trail Etiquette

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Etiquette and safety are close relatives that share a proportional relationship. In many cases a lack of one creates a breach of the other. Poor etiquette typically leads to unsafe activities, while excellent etiquette paves the road for safe riding experiences. To keep riders in your group safe on the trail you should at a minimum:

- Nominate a leader/trail boss
- Ride at the level/speed of the least experienced rider
- Ask the group (and get consent) before increasing speed

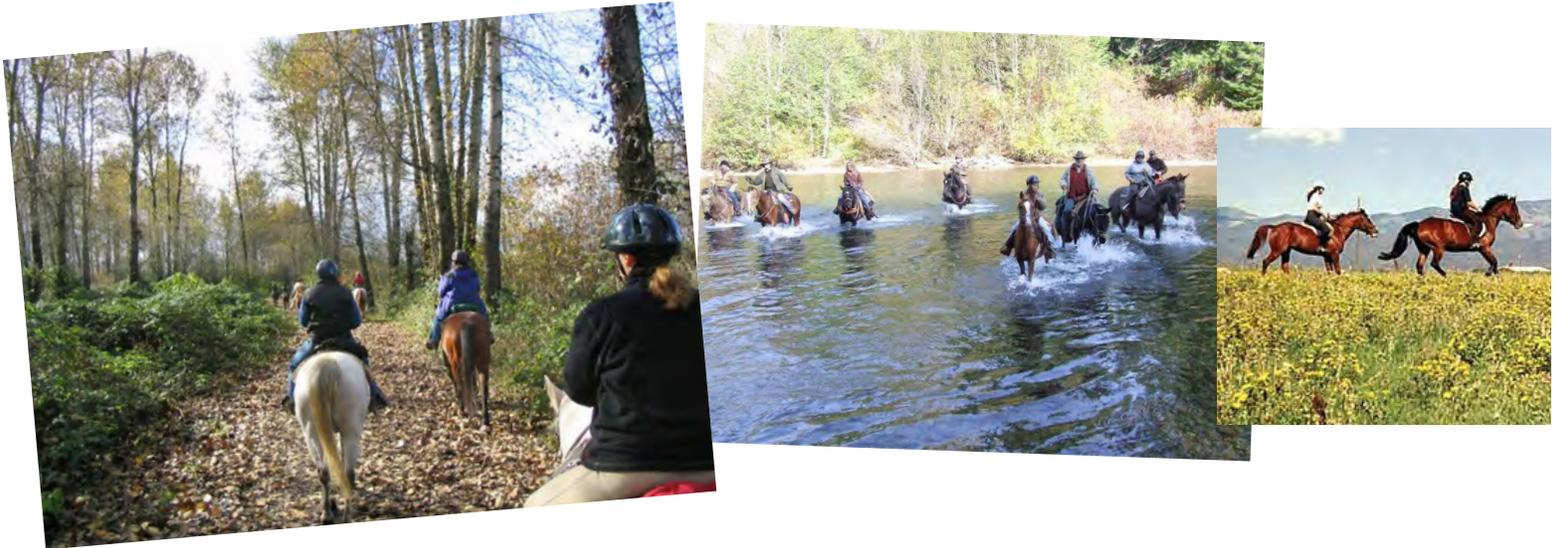
- Communicate concerns clearly
- Maintain 10 feet or more between horses
- The lead rider should notify others of danger; each following rider should pass the message along
- Carry a cell phone on your body (not on your horse)
- Carry a trail map
- Pack a first aid kit
- Require all youth to wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets
- Strongly recommend all riders wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets (helmets should be replaced after every fall)
- Always return to the trailer/barn at a walk

Make sure that your horse is ready to trail ride. Horses need to build their muscle strength and endurance gradually, just like humans. It is really important to condition and desensitize your horse well in advance of a trail ride. This takes

time and commitment. Conditioning rides should be conducted over similar terrain (i.e. riding up hills regularly in advance of a hilly ride) and in well fitted tack. Arena riding generally is not adequate conditioning for trail riding.

Proper hoof care is vitally important to the soundness of horses used for all riding. Many horses are most comfortable trail riding with shoes (or specialty boots) and you should discuss the best option for your horse's hoof care with your farrier. Other considerations for your horse's well being while trail riding:

- Allow your horse the opportunity to drink at every water crossing
- Check your tack regularly for proper fit
- Examine feet and legs carefully after riding
- Pick feet before and after every ride
- Groom or wash your horse before and after every ride



In the horseback riding world there are universal etiquette practices (discussed more in depth in “Is Etiquette Important?” at <http://www.kentuckyhorse.org/en/art/1184/> and specific etiquette for a variety of situations. Often we don’t think of trail etiquette immediately since trail riding is often a recreational activity without the formalities of “arena riding” or competition. However understanding and practicing good trail behavior is advisable.

Part of good trail etiquette is ensuring that you are respectful of trails and land areas which begins with your arrival at the trail head. Ways to become a better land steward include:

- Park only in designated areas
- Keep your muck in the trailer and dispose at home or in a designated area
- Tie only to your trailer, designated tie areas, or using a safe high tie (do NOT tie directly to trees)
- Keep your horse moving while he/she passes manure on the trail
- Take out everything that you bring in (pack it in, pack it out)
- Stay on the trail – do not create pass arounds to avoid areas
- Only enter waterways at designated crossings
- Avoid muddy trails – if you have to pass through mud – WALK
- Obey all signage – do not ride in non-horse areas

- Abide by all voluntary trail closures
- Collect muck and scattered hay from your tie site and dispose of it at home or in a designated area
- Fill in any uneven areas created by you or your horse
- Follow the leave no trace ethics (more information at <http://www.lnt.org/>)

Courtesy is another important part of enjoying the great outdoors on horseback. Many trails are open to multi users (hikers, mountain bikers, dog walkers, etc.) and it is important that we communicate with others in a productive manner. When you encounter users on the trail you can make that meeting a positive experience by:

- Talking to them
- Asking them to step off the downhill side of the trail while you pass
- Sharing the number of riders in your group and asking them how many are with them
- Desensitizing your horse at home

You should be courteous to other members in your riding party by:

- Waiting for gate openers/closers
- Waiting for all horses to drink before leaving a watering area
- Moving downstream to allow other horses ample room to drink

- Waiting for riders that might be having a hard time crossing water with their horses
- Waiting for riders when they have dismounted or are off for any reason
- Not running up behind or alongside other riders
- Passing on the left

If your horse exhibits behaviors which require special consideration you should tell all the members of the riding party about those issues and place a ribbon of appropriate color both in your horse’s tail and mane. The following are common ribbon color codes:

- Red = Kicks
- Green = Novice
- Blue = Stallion

Remember to keep an eye on safety, obey land stewardship rules, be courteous, and wear all the right ribbons to have an enjoyable ride every time. More information on safe trail riding can be found in the Certified Horsemanship **Trail Guide Manual** available at [http://cha-ahse.org/store/products/BRAND\\_NEW\\_MANUAL\\_-\\_CHA\\_Trail\\_Guide\\_Manual.html](http://cha-ahse.org/store/products/BRAND_NEW_MANUAL_-_CHA_Trail_Guide_Manual.html)

Additional information on trail riding etiquette can be found online at <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS370> and [http://www.kentuckyhorse.org/attachments/wysiwyg/5/Trail\\_Etiquette\\_Reminders.pdf](http://www.kentuckyhorse.org/attachments/wysiwyg/5/Trail_Etiquette_Reminders.pdf). ☺