

## TRAIL ETIQUETTE AND SAFETY

*Etiquette and safety go hand in hand. In many cases, a lack of one creates a breach of the other. Do your part to make riding with others enjoyable and safe.*

- **Ride at the Ability Level of the Least Experienced:** The cardinal rule of group trail riding is that you always ride at the ability level and speed of the least experienced rider or horse. If you have a new rider or a young, green horse in your group, do not ride too quickly or take trails that are too challenging for their comfort level and experience.
- **Keep at Least One Horse Length:** Don't crowd other riders. Keep at least one or two horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you. This keeps you at a safe distance from being kicked. Any horse is capable of kicking and biting; so, never assume it is safe to ride up on another horse. Also, when there are riders are passing, leave enough passing room that one horse isn't able to bite or kick at the horse.
- **Warn Others About Your Horse:** If your horse is a known kicker, tie a red ribbon on his tail. This will alert any rider who comes up from behind you that your horse may kick; however, never assume that all riders know what the red ribbon means. If an oncoming rider moves too close, let him or her know that your horse may kick. If your horse is young or green, tie a green ribbon on his tail to alert others. Always alert other riders of any issues with your horse.
- **Nominate a Leader or Trail Boss:** Always nominate a leader or trail boss to lead the group. This person should be an experienced rider on an experienced horse, and be able to navigate safely through the trails without getting lost or leading the group into situations beyond the experience level of the weakest member of the group. It is also a good idea to have an experience rider on an experienced horse at the back of the group.
- **Notify Others of Danger:** If you are the leader of the group, be watchful for trail hazards and relay them to those following you. Be specific with your announcement, such as, "Deep hole on the left side of the trail; keep right," or "low hanging limb; duck!" If you are not the leader, be sure to pass it along and alert others behind you who may not be able to hear the trail boss.
- **Get Consent Before Increasing Speed:** Be sure to ask and get consent before increasing speed. Never increase speed without mutual consent from all members of the group. Keep your horse under control and at the speed of the rest of the group. Never increase speed when heading back to the barn or trailers.
- **Make Sure You Are On a Horse Trail:** Be sure to follow the laws of the land and make sure you are on a trail approved for equestrian use.
- **Be Aware of Right-of-Way Rules on Multi-use Trails:** Many trails are designated as multi-use and enjoyed by those who hiker, bike or ride ATVs. The right-of-way rule is that biker yields to hiker, but, all users should yield to horses. Be prepared for any reaction your horse may have to others. Always be polite and greet those you meet with a simple "hello" with the hope they will return your greeting and your horse will recognize they are human and not be alarmed by their backpacks, bicycles or equipment. You should always stay to the right side of a multi-use trail.

- **Yield to Uphill Traffic:** Uphill traffic has the right of way, whether it is a horseman, hiker or biker. When encountering others on a hill, those going downhill should always yield. Do not begin your descent if you see anyone coming up. If you are already on the trail, safely move your horse off the trail with your horse's hindquarters away from the approaching traffic.
- **Yield to Children and Green Horses and Riders:** Always yield to oncoming groups that include children riders. Move off the trail and angle the hindquarters of your horse away from the trail. Never trot your horse up from behind to a child rider or green rider or green horse. This may cause the other rider's horse to suddenly trot off or change gait when he or she is not prepared for it.
- **Announce When Passing Other Riders:** When passing slower traffic, always try to pass to the left of a rider on the trail if possible, and announce what you plan to do by saying, "Trail please," or "passing on your left." If you must pass on the right, be sure to announce your intentions first.
- **Do Not Ride Off Until Everyone is Ready:** If someone needs to dismount during a ride, everyone should stop and wait for the rider to remount before resuming the ride. If you are toward the back of the group, announce that you need to stop by yelling, "Hold up!" When watering horses from a creek or other watering source, take turns and do not ride off until every horse has had an opportunity to drink. A thirsty horse will not drink if he is left behind.
- **Supervise Your Children:** Be sure to supervise your children at all times. Never leave a child unattended on a horse or around horses. Never assume that other adults will watch your child for you, especially when the child is riding on trails with a group. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to supervise their own children unless other arrangements have been made.
- **Be Prepared:** Always carry a cell phone with you, not on your horse. Be sure to carry a hoof pick, knife, trail map, and first aid kit. Plan your ride well. The length and intensity of your ride will determine what other items you should pack.
- **Be Environmentally Friendly:** Carry out what you carry in. Clean up any mess you make and carry out trash. Do not ride off trail or cut across switchbacks unless it is approved.
- **In Case of Emergency, HALT:** If a rider falls off and a horse gets loose, all riders should HALT, and, if necessary, dismount.