

Group Riding Etiquette and Good Trail Riding Manners



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The primary rule in group riding is to always ride at the level of the least experienced rider or horse. Once started, do not ride trails that are too challenging for the comfort level of those horses and riders.

If the group is large, it may be wise to split into two groups, according to the level of the horses' and riders' ability and comfort level. Please wear a helmet!

Keep at least one or two horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you. If your horse is a kicker, there should be a red ribbon in his tail and it would be preferable, if possible, for you to ride at the end of the line.

Never assume that all know what a red ribbon means. Explain to anyone coming too close to you.

Never begin until all riders are mounted and ready, and never leave a dismounted rider on the trail. Do not mount from downhill.

Don't take unsafe or untrained horses on a group ride until they are trained and conditioned with other, experienced trail horses.

Leave gates open or closed as found. Don't ride away from the gatekeeper until the gate is secured and the gatekeeper can join you.

Always have an appointed leader or "trail boss" of the group. This person should watch for trail hazards and relay them to those following. For example, "Deep hole on the right", or "Ware low branch, you'll need to duck." It can be unsafe to hold back a branch for a following rider.

In addition to the "trail boss", large groups should have a "drag" rider, someone sufficiently experienced to assist less experienced riders and horses if it becomes necessary.

Ride side by side only when the trail is sufficiently wide so that horses won't try to nip or bump each other.

Stay on the designated trail or road. Many areas are now closed to equestrians because poorly mannered riders have allowed their horses onto fields, into orchards and other areas "sensitive to the property owners."
*Respect private property.

Never disturb livestock! Herding someone else's livestock without permission is known as "worrying" and is illegal.

At a stream or water source, take turns, make sure all horses have a chance to drink before moving along. A thirsty horse will not drink if left behind.

Some horses have trouble crossing streams, give them space! Don't allow your horse to scratch on or nuzzle other horses or riders. Aside from being annoying and starting horse disputes, this is a frequent cause of "hang-up" and broken headgear.

Someone in the group should carry a first aid kit, a garbage bag if camping, and a horse utility kit with hoof pick, etc. Plan to carry out what you brought in.

Horses, tack and other gear should be checked prior to the ride and you should arrive on time. Late starts are stressful. If you'll be unavoidably late, let someone know.

Tell the rider in front that you wish to pass, so that he/she can correctly handle his/her horse as you come up or advise you if he/she is having any problems.

Since many trails are designated as "multi-use" and are enjoyed by those who hike, bike or ride ATVs, it is important to understand who yields to whom. Generally all users should yield to horses. Be prepared for any reaction your horse may have to others. Always speak to those you meet and encourage them to speak also. This allows your horse to recognize them as humans and be less alarmed by bicycles, backpacks, etc.

While it isn't discourteous to ask someone to yield for you, if they chose not to, it is probably in everyone's best interest if you move off the trail to allow them to pass if they choose not to.

When encountering others on a hill, the uphill group has the right of way and those going downhill should yield. Do not begin your descent if you see a group coming up. If already on the trail, safely move your horse off the trail with his hindquarters away from approaching traffic.

Always yield to oncoming groups that include children riders. Move off the trail and angle the hindquarters of the horse away from the trail.

Never gallop away from the group. Coordinate "faster" work with the other riders.

If camping, all horses should be tied high, solid, and short enough to avoid entanglement. Provide sufficient space between horses so they can't go "butt to butt" and kick each other. Most horses won't stand long while hobbled and they, and loose horses, can cause numerous problems.



Sources: "30 Steps to Good Trail Manners" - NYS Horse Council Group Riding Etiquette - Dennis Brouse