

# TRAIL ETIQUETTE

Manners are just as important, maybe even more important, while group riding as they are at the dinner table. There is nothing more aggravating or unsafe than someone who does not follow the rules of etiquette while riding the trails.

Here are some good rules to follow.

1. **The cardinal rule of group riding:** Ride at the ability level of the least experienced rider or horse.
  1. If you have a horse that is just learning to trail ride, learn with smaller, more experienced riders and horses before joining a larger group.
  2. **DO NOT LEAVE RIDERS BEHIND.** *Be aware of all those in your group. Don't be afraid to ask other riders to slow down if the pace does not feel safe and/or comfortable for you and your horse. If you have those who want to ride faster or slower, split up the group. Horses left behind can become anxious, making the ride unpleasant and possibly unsafe.*
  3. With time and experience you will gravitate towards those who prefer to ride at similar speeds and terrain and schedule rides with them.
  4. In general, the larger the group the slower the pace will be, so be patient.
2. Especially in larger groups, have a designated trail boss who is familiar with the trails that stays in or near the lead and an experienced rider to bring up the rear who can help those having difficulty or communicate up the line as necessary. Respect the pace the trail boss sets; he or she is responsible for setting a pace to safely accommodate the group.
3. Think like a horse, especially if you are the leader of the group. If you look at objects on the trail like a prey animal (is it unfamiliar or potentially dangerous), you can help prepare yourself for anything. Once again preparation and awareness can be the difference between a controlled flight and a bad wreck.
4. Nasty horses in the back. If your horse is unruly, he should bring up the rear where his poor behavior will not be witnessed by the other horses and cause them to get upset as well. And, if you are lucky, he may learn a thing or two from watching calmer horses in front of him all day.
5. Keep at least one to two horse lengths between you and the horse in front of you. Ride side by side only where there is adequate room to do so without crowding. This will allow you to view the trail ahead and prevent your horse from being kicked. Be especially aware of spacing on hills, bridges, water crossings and any area requiring cautious foot placement.
6. When leading and/or riding with anyone behind you
  1. Walk
  2. Ask before trotting/loping
  3. Warn of holes, bad footing and other dangers
  4. Warn when you are stopping

5. Warn if a branch might snap back in someone's face
6. Keep track of other riders behind you
7. When you reach a watering area, take turns and don't crowd. Wait for everyone to finish before moving off, a thirsty horse will not drink if left behind. And remember your [Leave No Trace](#) ethics: do not destroy additional water front so you can all water at the same time. Use only the obvious area where animals come down to drink.
8. Stop if there is a wreck. This should be pretty obvious. Your help may be needed. But also, once again, horses are herd animals and do not like to be left alone, especially in an unfamiliar area. If you ride off, while someone is trying to mount back up, their horse could panic and take off to catch up with the group.
9. Take turns leading, if possible...share the dust.
10. If you are the leader, be watchful for trail hazards and relay them to those following you. Be specific, such as: "Deep hole on the left, Stay to the right" or "low limb, Duck!"
11. Review hand signs with all riders to prevent bunching up when slowing or stopping.
  1. Raised open hand means "Slow down"
  2. Raised closed fist means "Stop"
12. For multi-use trails it is important to understand who yields to whom.
  1. As a general rule, all users should yield to horses. It is not discourteous to ask those you encounter to yield; however, it may be in everyone's best interest for you to move off the trail to allow them to pass if they choose not to.
  2. Be prepared for any reaction your horse may have to others. If you know your horse reacts poorly to certain situations, move farther off the trail if possible or even dismount.
  3. Always greet those you meet and hope they return the greeting so your horse will recognize them as human.
13. 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 a narrow trail. If you are already on the trail heading down, move your horse off the trail with his hindquarters away from the trail.
14. If someone needs to dismount or wait for their horse to urinate, everyone should stop and wait before resuming the ride.