

# Trail Etiquette

*Submitted by Elliott Harris*

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## **Common Sense Riding Guidelines for Anytime & Anyplace**

Keep at least one horse length between you and the horse in front of you. This is for the safety of both horses and riders. Your horse cannot safely see the terrain when he is following another horse too closely.

At steep or moderately steep inclines and declines, particularly when muddy or rocky, allow the horse in front of you to navigate the hill completely before you start. This also applies to any tricky obstacle. After an incline, decline, or obstacle, proceed a short way on down the trail so those behind you do not have to stop on the hill or obstacle. Do not travel so far away, though, that the horse navigating the hill or obstacle thinks you are leaving him which may cause him to become anxious and rush through a bad spot.

If you desire to pass another horse on the trail, wait for a safe location and then notify the person you are passing by saying, "Trail please-----passing on the right (or left)." This eliminates any surprises to the horse and rider in front of you. Be sure to pass at a safe pace. Another option is to ask the rider preceding you to allow you to pass as soon as he can safely pull over. This gives the rider in front of you more time to prepare for your passing.

If in a group and you want to canter, inform the other riders before you accelerate so they can get their horses under control. This is especially critical when you are with novice riders, young riders, or young horses. Horses are herd animals and may instinctively attempt to keep pace with the fastest moving animal. Another solution is to separate yourself from the group before accelerating. **NEVER CANTER UP BEHIND SOMEONE WHO IS UNAWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE!**

If you need to dismount, try to find a safe location so you can move off the trail. Those around you should also stop, if possible, to assist or just to keep your horse company. Ask for help if you need it. If you are the last rider, be sure to let others know that you need to stop. When someone is stopped for mounting or dismounting or whatever, it helps their horse to stand still if you stop also. If you have ever tried to mount your horse when he is trying to stay with the pack, you know how frustrating (and possibly dangerous) this can be. A five second stop can be extremely helpful.

If you see a hole, glass, wire, or any hazard on the trail, inform the riders behind you. If possible, safely dismount to move the object off the trail or put it in your fanny pack or saddle bag for later disposal.

If your horse kicks or gets intimidated by horses behind him, tie a red ribbon in his tail or ride last. Remind other riders of this possibility. Better yet, teach your horse not to kick.

At creek crossings or water holes, try to move to one side if your horse wants to drink. Do not rush or crowd a horse that is drinking. Be thoughtful to others if your horse is drinking or if another horse is drinking. Don't let your horse paw the water and muddy it up for those following. If your horse does paw, wait for the other horses to have had a chance to drink before allowing your horse in the water or move downstream so it won't affect the others.

Do not grab a branch or limb as you go by and then release it only to have it whiplash the person behind you.

In conclusion, make sure you and your horse are in control at all times. Train your horse at home until he is predictable under normal circumstances. **THINK AHEAD-----BE SURE YOUR ACTIONS OR THE ACTIONS OF YOUR HORSE WILL NOT ENDANGER ANOTHER HORSE OR RIDER!**

Trail etiquette isn't hard. It's common sense and the golden rule. Treat others as you want to be treated.

Happy trails to you.