

## Going on an Organized Trail Ride – by Terri Folks

### Green Horse + Green Rider = Black & Blue

This is one of my favorite mathematical equations. Seriously though, if you are new to riding and have a new horse, maybe an organized ride isn't the best place to start. Some of the rides literally have hundreds of participants and all of the activity surrounding the ride can be pretty intimidating to a horse. I have witnessed people getting hurt on rides because of the "equation." Stick to your local trail haunts until you feel confident together as a team.

### Organizational skills

Organized rides generally offer different lengths of rides for different skill levels. Each ride will have a trail boss (the lead rider) and a drag rider (the end). You must stay behind the lead rider at all times. That person will guide the way and is always looking out for your safety. The drag rider must stay in the back of the group. If you have a problem, you won't be left behind. With those handy dandy radios available now, they allow the trail boss and drag rider to communicate with others and the base camp if there is a problem.

While participating on a guided ride, please be courteous, no whopping or hollering (can frighten horses and riders), don't pass on the trail (especially at a fast-pace), no littering and no smoking unless your trail boss authorizes it at a rest stop.

Please leave your stallions at home. Most rides don't allow stallions anyway, but this is no place for one.

### Conditioning

Don't expect to jump on your horse that has been a pasture pet for the last few months and go on a six-hour trail ride. Especially when temperatures are high, this can result in your horse colicing or some other type of dangerous health risk. Don't risk it. BEFORE you go on the ride, start riding your horse regularly to get in shape or do some type of exercise. Or, go on one of the short rides!

### Tack

The nice thing about being a pleasure trail rider, any type of riding equipment is acceptable! You don't have to worry about being immaculately groomed, using matching horse/person attire or showing lots of silver. However, you should use a clean blanket (dirty horse blankets grind the dirt into your horse's back). Use a breast collar of some sorts (most trails have ups and downs and you don't want your saddle to slip sideways). You might want to consider purchasing saddle bags, a canteen bag or a horn bag to carry your "stuff." That stuff might include: a hoof pick; a rain poncho for those unexpected downpours; halter and lead rope to tie up your horse with; snacks; water bottle and some pieces of leather in case you need to do a quick repair job. This is probably not the best place to try out a brand new saddle either. An ill-fitting saddle can make a horse very unhappy and give the horse a sore back. Try out your tack before you go on a long trail ride.

### Halter/Bridles

If you want to do a lot of trail riding, you might want to consider purchasing a halter/bridle combination. These are available in many types of materials for a wide range of prices. The bit simply snaps off the halter when not needed so you don't have to carry a halter with you when you ride.

### Vaccinations

Oklahoma state law requires that all horses must have a negative Coggins test within the previous 12 months. Organizers of trail rides WILL check your Coggins papers before you are allowed onto the premises. Be prepared because those in charge will NOT let you unload your horse until those papers are checked and confirmed. You might also want to consider carrying a copy of proof of ownership of your horse as well. Horses that travel from state to state must have a current health certificate from their veterinarian.

## Ruby Slippers

Well, maybe not ruby slippers but horseshoes may be required. Many of Oklahoma's trails are rocky and your horse will need to be shod. You might want to have your horse shod the week before your trip in case there are any problems. Invest in some type of Hoof Boot for emergencies. Check with the ride organizer to see if shoes are needed.

## First Aid Kit

You can purchase pre-packaged first aid kits for your horse through catalogs. However, you might want to organize your own supplies. You never know what might happen, so always be prepared.

### **A Hoof Pick**

***Bandaging, padding, rolls of cotton, 5X9 inch gauze pads, gauze rolls, an elastic bandage, two inch adhesive tape, duct tape (the master tool)***

### **Scissors**

***An Easy Boot (replaces a lost shoe)***

***Disinfectant and cleanser such as Betadine or hydrogen peroxide***

***Saline to rinse out a wound***

***Antibiotic ointment such as nitrofurazone cream***

***Ophthalmic ointment to treat eye injuries***

***DMSO to reduce swelling from bruises and decrease the risk of bacterial infection in bruised areas***

***Tick repellent for both of you and some tweezers for tick removal***

***Fly repellent wound dressing; fly repellent that can be used close to horse's eyes***

***A First aid kit for humans is equally as important***

Of course, check with your veterinarian for more suggestions.

## Feed

Don't change your feed right before you go on a trail ride. Bring extra feed and hay in the event you might have to stay longer or someone else needs your help. I pack my feed in gallon ziplock-type bags, pre-measured in the amount of each feeding. Consider purchasing a hay bale bag to keep your hay clean and not make a mess in your trailer. Or if your hay has to travel out in the elements, cover it with a tarp or inside a large heavy-duty garbage bag. Plan on 1 bale per horse for a three-day weekend. With the expense of hay these days, don't over hay your horse. Don't give him/her any more hay until he/she has eaten all you have put out. Try to use a hay bag to protect the hay versus just putting it on the ground.

## Camping with your horse

Camping with your horse is a little different than your ordinary camping trip. It's a little like packing a diaper bag except that the baby weighs 1,000 pounds. Some trails offer corrals but most don't. You will need to train your horse to stand tied for long periods of time.

A picket line is a long length of rope to go between objects (such as a tree or picket pole) and secured to the tree with tree-saver nylon straps (or some people use mohair girths) on both ends for tree-tying. This protects the tree from being damaged. Don't tie your horse too close to the tree because the horse might damage the bark. The line should be 25-100 foot nylon, cotton, hemp or polypropylene rope and is tied high. Then your horse is secured using lead rope tied to the picket line. You can also purchase a knot eliminator to make sure your horse doesn't wind itself into a knot on the line.

You will also need a hay bag, water and grain buckets and a water hose (or a small bucket to carry the water back and forth). You can also use the hose to rinse off your horse. For removing hay and manure, you will need a shovel, rake, a muck bucket and large trash bags. Most parks require that you pick up after your horse. Please do!

**TIP:** Purchase one of those large multipurpose tubs with handles from your local discount department store. You can use that for a muck bucket or a water bucket—one that your horse can't turn over.

The night winds can be pretty cold for your four-legged friend. You might want to bring a blanket or rain proof sheet to keep your horse warm. Also during peak fly season, bring a fly sheet and a fly mask to protect your horse.

Don't forget your regular camping essentials such as a flashlight with extra batteries, extra pair of riding shoes in case of rain (I also learned this lesson the hard way after my riding sneakers were soaked at Robbers Cave) and layers of clothes. Trails snacks for you and your horse that are easily transported in your saddle will come in handy. Bring your camera!

### **Sleeping Accommodations**

Many campers now have gooseneck trailers with living quarters. For the rest of us, you can take a tent, travel trailer or even sleep in your truck or horse trailer. If you sleep in your horse trailer, bring some tarps to cover up the flooring and the sides and a broom to sweep out the manure.

Camping with your horse can be a blast! There is nothing better than spending the day on the trail with your horse and then sitting around the campfire with your horse buddies. Don't forget the marshmallows and most importantly **HAVE FUN!!!**