



# Guidelines for Trail Etiquette and a Safe Ride

By Ken Carmichael

**Following a few simple guidelines can keep the trails safe and fun for riders of all skill levels**

Spring is upon us as the snow starts to clear, the frost comes out of the ground, and the days become longer. It is time to start thinking seriously about trail riding. Some of our rides provide opportunities for solitude and reflection while other rides are a time to share the experience with friends. No matter where we are riding, Trail Etiquette is important.

It all starts with riding with the other horses and riders in mind. Everyone and their horses may not be as experienced as you. When riding in a group, the group must ride at the speed of the slowest rider and in areas with obstacles which can be navigated by the least experienced horse and rider. Sometimes it is necessary to split the ride into smaller groups so that everyone has a good experience.

Know your capabilities, and the capabilities of your horse, so that you are not put in a situation that makes you uncomfortable or puts anyone in danger. Horses can act differently in a group situation. A large group ride is not the time to train your horse or try to get your horse in condition.

The ride leader can not always tell what is going on in the group. A drag rider at the back of the group can be a big help in keeping the group together. Everyone should know who the leader and drag riders are and stay between them. If you must leave the group, let the leaders know your plans.

If you have a medical problem (i.e. allergy to bees, diabetes, heart condition) make sure the ride leaders know about the problem and where your medications are located. You do not have to let everyone on the ride know, but at least let those two people know. Remember, the drag rider may be the first person to reach you.

**Horses that have a history of kicking should be identified with a red ribbon tied in their tail; young horses should be marked with a green ribbon.**

In a group, a horse can become very nervous when left behind. Wait until everyone is mounted before riding off. At watering holes, take your turn then move off a short distance and wait for the horse behind you to finish. If you can safely do so, turn and face the riders behind you. If you need

to stop for any reason let someone know. Also, if you see someone in the group stopping, take it upon yourself to notify the group and stop yourself. It is always best if everyone in

line can see and keep track of the rider in front of them and the rider behind them so that the group stays together.

Adequate spacing between horses is always important, but becomes more critical when we have unfamiliar horses. Horses that have a history of kicking should be identified with a red ribbon tied in their tail; young horses should be marked with a green ribbon. When traversing an obstacle, leave plenty of space between the horses. Don't crowd—some horses will take a flying leap to get over things. This is particularly important going up and down hills. Another place to keep good spacing is at the water holes. Give everyone a chance to water without being rushed. Tight quarters, especially with horses not familiar with each other, can lead to a serious wreck.

If you wish to pass another rider, select a safe location with plenty of room and ask the rider for permission, telling them on which side you will be passing. This gives him time to alert his horse. Do not race by, but also do not linger. Do not pass if the area is not totally safe.

Dogs are good companions but do not always have a place in a group ride. While the dog may be well behaved and accustomed to horses,

other horses may not be accustomed to dogs, or this one in particular. A horse can kick at a dog, missing the dog and injuring another horse or person. There may also be land regulations pertaining to dogs. As a general rule, it is best to leave the dogs at home.

We all lock our rigs at the trailhead now. Let someone who is riding with you know where those keys are in case of an emergency.

When meeting other trail users, bikers yield to hikers and equestrians, hikers yield to equestrians. However, whoever can get off the trail the easiest should do so. Many times it is easier for the equestrian to step aside, and for goodwill we should do so. If you encounter a hiker and they have a backpack on, talk to them and have them step off the trail on the downhill side. Have them talk to you as you approach; this lets the horses know they are human and nothing to be frightened of.

When riding, either in the back country or locally, keep safety in mind. Be prepared. **NWHS**

**THE INLAND EMPIRE CHAPTER OF BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMEN** has a mission to preserve the right of responsible horsemen to use horses and mules on public land. Then, we can all enjoy riding these trails. For more information contact Ken Carmichael at (509) 466-2225 or check our web site at [www.iebch.com](http://www.iebch.com). Please join us.

