

Trail Ride Safety

*Learn more about trail ride etiquette, items to bring
along with you and ways to prepare for a relaxing ride.*

From the America's Horse library

Riding Safety Tips

Developed by the Certified Horsemanship Association and AQHA

Preparing for the Ride:

- Clean horse's feet with hoof pick
- Check that shoes are tight
- Thoroughly groom your horse, especially areas where tack will touch him
- Be sure saddle pad is clean and pulled forward and up into gullet of saddle to create air space over withers and back
- Be sure saddle fits the horse without pressing on the spine or shoulders, and that cinch is smooth, clean and tight
- Check bridle for proper adjustment with no pinching or loose straps, and that leather is in good condition
- Have a properly fitting halter on under the bridle
- Have a lead rope around the horse's neck or coiled and fastened to the saddle
- Apply fly spray or wipe on your horse
- Give horses opportunity to drink before starting on trail and allow them to drink on the trail if water is available
- Dress in layers
- Bring or wear a hat and sunscreen to prevent heat exhaustion or sunstroke
- Wearing a safety helmet is an individual and/or parental decision

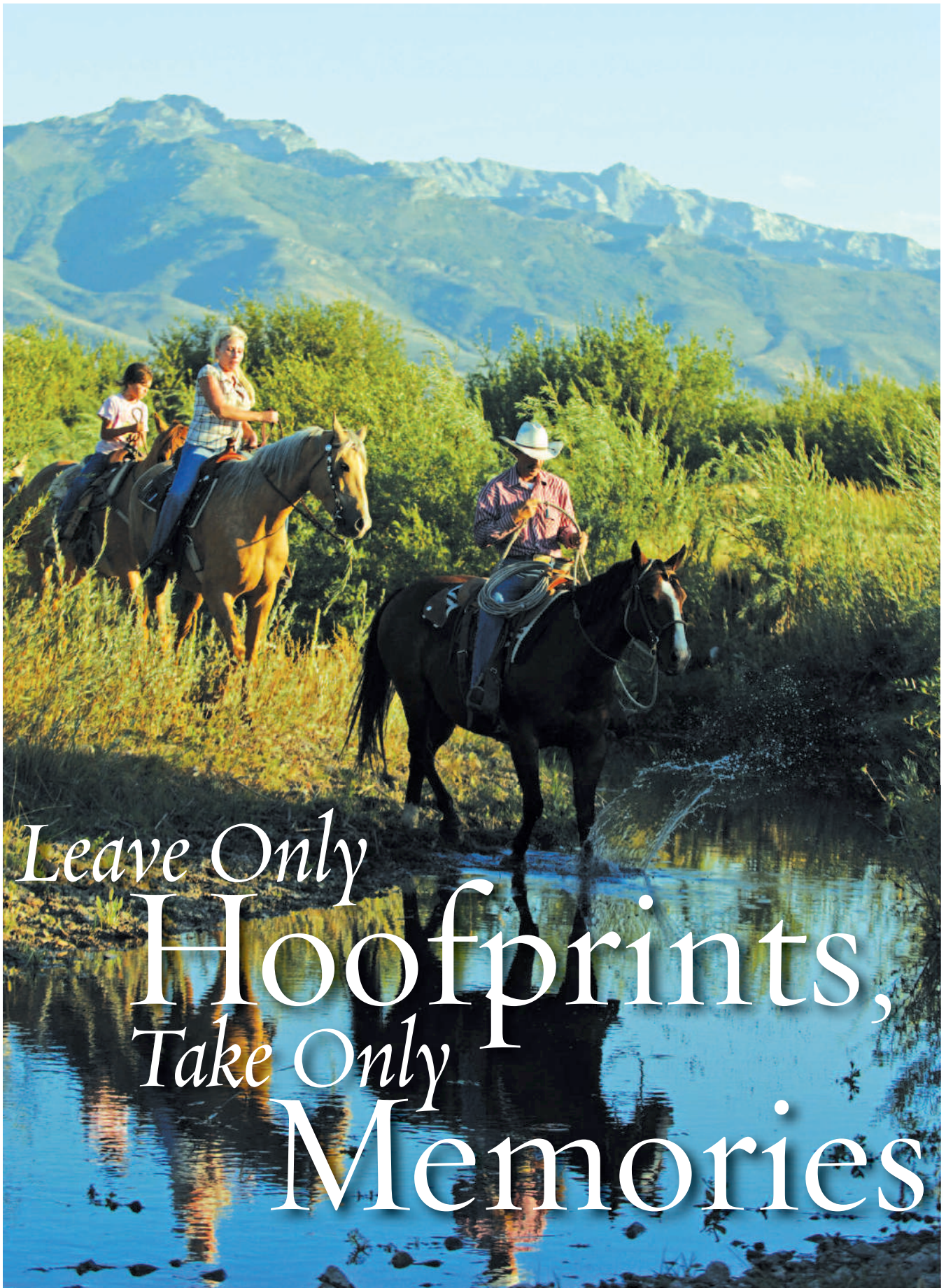
What to Take:

- Current Coggins/health/brand inspection
- Form of identification
- Pocket knife
- Hoof pick
- Insect repellent
- Fly spray
- Jacket
- Rain gear
- Water
- Snacks
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Lip balm
- Sunscreen
- First-aid kit for horses and riders
- String or leather for tack repair
- Gloves
- Compass
- Cell phone in case of emergency

Rules on the Trail:

- Ride a horse that is suitable for your riding skill level
- Remember, even the most gentle horse can or will spook if startled, so be aware of your surroundings at all times
- Tie a red ribbon in the tail of a horse that kicks
- Do not bring dogs
- Maintain space between you and the next horse
- Stay with the group or tell someone if you intend to leave
- Stay on designated trail
- Never trespass or ride on someone's land without permission
- Never leave trash behind
- Never smoke while riding
- On farm land, leave livestock alone
- Leave all gates as you found them (open or shut)
- Don't let horses injure the environment (Stay on the trail; if you stop and tie horses, spread them out and scatter manure before leaving)
- Observe fire regulations
- Don't let horses foul the water near a camping spot
- Keep horses away from areas and places where manure will bring flies and be a nuisance
- Be polite and friendly to hikers, bikers, farmers and other people you meet on the trail
- Do not run past others
- If passing another horse on the trail, first ask the rider ahead if you can pass and allow plenty of room when passing
- When making a rest stop, loosen the horse's cinch and lift up the back of saddle and pad so air can get to his back and cool it
- If tying your horse, be sure to tie with the halter and lead rope, not the reins; tie the horse at a level even with his back or higher and use a quick-release knot





Leave Only
Hoofprints,
Take Only
Memories

WHETHER ON AN HOUR-LONG RIDE OR ONE THAT TAKES A WEEK, more and more Quarter Horse owners are trail riding.

Trail riding is enjoyable anywhere. It can be fun in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the Appalachians of Virginia, or just in the woods of on dirt roads around your home.

In this article, experts on three different stages of trail riding offer tips and advice on how to better enjoy the hobby. Rick Dill, a veterinarian in Estes Park, Colorado, will discuss emergency first aid on the trail. Doug Butler, professor of equine sciences at Colorado State University and renowned farrier, will discuss hoof care and the proper way to shoe a horse for the trail. Having a low impact on the trail will be addressed by Mark DeGregorio of the Rocky Mountain National Park.

Emergency First Aid

Preventing an injury is an important part of trail riding, according to Dr. Dill. For instance, not riding close behind another horse eliminates the chance of your horse getting kicked. Also, paying attention to things on the ground – such as barbed wire, holes and culverts – prevents unnecessary injuries. “When you’re riding in a group and you see barbed wire on the ground, pass the word so everybody can be watching and not riding right through the wire,” Dr. Dill says.

Steps can be taken to diminish the chances of your horse colicking while on the trail ride. “My theory on colic is that it is caused by stress, and anything that changes the horse’s routine,” Dr. Dill says. “One thing you can do is try to keep the diet close to normal.” If you anticipate a three- or four-day trail ride, and you will be feeding a horse differently than normal, Dr. Dill says to gradually change to the new feed before the trip.

Another thing Dr. Dill stresses is allowing the horse to drink while on a trail ride. “A lot of people think that while they’re riding, the horse shouldn’t drink,” he says. “It’s been my experience that as long as you’re moving and riding, the horse isn’t going to have any problem.” If the horse is hot, and has not had a drink for some time, if he stands idle after a cold drink he could colic. “But, while you’re riding during the day, if you come to a stream, let him drink,” Dr. Dill says.

The Estes Park veterinarian suggests a few things to have along on the ride. “You are not going to take the same things for a one-hour trip like you would if you were going to be gone three or four days,” he says. “It’s going to depend on how long a ride is, and how far you are going to be away from help. The farther you are going to be away, the more you are going to want to be able to handle anything you might be facing.”

Some basic things to take along are antibiotic ointment; a roll of cotton; bandage material, such as roll gauze and gauze sponges; and an Easy Boot, or something similar. A piece of quilt will also work in place of the cotton. If necessary, its purpose is to put pressure on a cut before a bandage is applied. Elastic wrap may be the bandage material included, but should not be left on a horse for even a day, as it may get too tight. The Easy Boot, a rubber encasement that fits over the hoof, is included in case the horse throws a shoe and a farrier is not along. Find out from a farrier what size shoe the horse wears, so you take the correct boot along on the trip.

“If you’re going to be away from medical attention, you might want to take a few drugs along,” Dr. Dill says. He advises taking Banamine in case of colic. Ask your veterinarian for the Banamine, and make sure you know how to administer it before the trip. “What I like about Banamine is that you can give it either way, in the vein or in the muscle,” Dr.

Dill says. It does sting in the muscle, however some horses tolerate it better than others.

Penicillin is another drug that might be needed. Even on a three- or four-day trip, penicillin can go without refrigeration and not lose its effect, but it cannot be re-cooled and should be disposed of when you return home. The best thing is to keep it cold in an ice chest. Other antibiotics, like penicillin, come in oral form (pills or paste) and in packets, but Dr. Dill advises that in the case of an emergency, the form that gets it directly in the system is best.

Of course, needles and syringes are needed to administer these drugs on the trail. Syringes of 10 or 12 cc’s, and 18- or 20-gauge needles should be sufficient, Dr. Dill says.

To decide how to treat a wound, first assess where the wound is, and how bad it is. If the wound is in the chest area, it may not be much of an emergency, he says, because horses have muscle there for protection, and not many vessels close to the skin. For minor wounds in this area, put some antibiotic ointment on if there is bleeding, and if the horse does not appear to be lame, go on your way.

“As you start going down the leg, and get over joints and around tendons, the chances of there being a problem would increase,” Dr. Dill says. Veins and blood vessels are much closer to the skin, so many of the wounds on the leg will bleed considerably. For a small cut, Dr. Dill’s advice is to put a gauze sponge and some elastic wrap around the leg. When the wound clots, the horse should be ready to continue.

For a larger cut on the leg, put ointment on the gauze sponges and use roll gauze to hold the sponges in place over the wound. If more pressure is needed, use the cotton or piece of quilt for padding. Now wrap the leg tight as you think is necessary without having to worry about too much constriction. “But, when you apply the pressure,” Dr. Dill says, “apply it at the front of the leg. Then you’re not putting it directly on the tendons.”

Dr. Dill feels that a horse tying up stems from lack of conditioning. “Your classic tying up usually happens the first 10 or 15 minutes,” he says. Horses will get stiff and sore, and not want to walk. If that happens, let the horse stand, and when he is ready to walk on his own, slowly walk him back to the start. On the other hand, some horses will not tie up until there are 10 or 15 minutes left of the ride. In this case, you can only wait until the horse is able to walk, and walk him on in. Then you may want to seek veterinary care. Conditioning your horse is more or less common sense. A horse that has not been used for some time is not going to be ready for a long trail ride. “Take it easy and give him time and get conditioned and used to some long rides,” Dr. Dill says.

Problems are bound to occur at some time or another on a trail ride. The bottom line, according to Dr. Dill, is whatever works to get you and your horse off the trail in good shape. “The basic thing is for you to be able to decide whether to go on, or the best way to get down so you can get help,” he says.

Hoof Care

ONE THING ALL TRAIL RIDERS ARE CONCERNED WITH IS WHAT TO DO if their horse throws a shoe while on the trail. Doug Butler, professor of equine sciences at Colorado State University, says the rider has two choices: include 1) a pair of pre-shaped shoes, or 2) an Easy Boot on the ride. Many big trail rides require a pair of shoes be checked in before the ride begins. Generally, an organized ride with a large amount of people will include a farrier who can quickly reset a shoe. On

the other hand, an Easy Boot is an acceptable alternative.

If a horse is used specifically for trail riding, keep that in mind when having him shod. “You don’t trim these horses like the one’s that will be ridden in a stable area or an indoor arena,” Doug says. He will trim the horse’s soles very little, if at all, “because you want to have as much protection as you can from the rocks.” However, you don’t want any pressure on the sole from the inside of the horseshoe, either. “So, to prevent that,” he says, “we either concave the shoe out slightly, or we knife the sole out.”

If your horse’s hoof has a piece broken out of it, Doug says it is not a problem, as long as the broken part is in the quarter, and not the heels or toe. “All we have to do is have a good, solid landing point on both heels and on the toe,” he says, “and the shoe will stay on just fine.”

Cracks in the foot are a concern for many trail riders, but superficial cracks are really of no consequence, Doug says. For a superficial crack, a simple trim and the addition of a shoe is all it takes. “But, deep cracks in the toe, the quarter, or the heel can be very serious,” he says. The first thing to do is to stabilize the foot. If the crack is the entire length of the foot, stabilizing it could be a problem. “We can do it by using clips on the shoe to stabilize it,” he says, “and transfer the pressure that should be on this broken part of the foot to the

strong part of the foot, which is the frog.” Doug says this procedure takes the pressure off the weakened area, and puts it on the frog until the foot grows down and becomes sound.

“If you want your horses to have good, sound feet,” he says, “you need to have routine farrier care with somebody who knows what they’re doing.”

Minimal Impact

“WHAT WE MEAN BY MINIMUM IMPACT IS YOU ARE GOING TO DO your best to have the least impact you can on that land,” says Mark DeGregorio of Rocky Mountain National Park. “The concept is really more of an attitude,” he says, “and is also called ‘Leave no trace.’ ”

Two considerations are: 1) how many animals do you need, and 2) how much equipment will be required for the trip? The two really tie hand in hand, as the amount of equipment taken dictates how many animals are needed to haul it. Lightweight equipment is available now that is much easier to pack. “The less weight you have, the fewer number of animals you’ll need,” Mark says, “and the fewer animals, the less impact.”

This is not the only concept behind minimal impact. What riders do on the trail is just as important. A former schoolteacher, Mark tells his students to think of it as some-





one following them through the country, so they should make their impact minimal in order to get away.

One important thing to think about when out on the trail is where you tie your horse, both during breaks and overnight. Horses should not be tied near a creek or stream for two reasons: first, they will probably contaminate the water with urine or feces, and second, they will cause soil to erode into the water.

Tying your horse to a tree can also be a problem. When they get nervous or bored, horses sometimes paw the ground. Pawing around a tree causes soil compaction, and will eventually kill the roots, Mark says. He advises hobbling to eliminate this problem. Also, tying to the tree harms the tree trunk. To solve this problem, Mark makes a hitch line between two trees. To protect the trees, he wraps the cinch from his pack horse around the tree, and wraps the hitch line around it.

Picketing your horse – or staking him out – is a better idea, but “it’s really important to keep moving that picket,” Mark says. He advises getting or making a picket pin which will allow the rope to go around the pin without becoming

wrapped around it. This keeps the horse from getting tangled. If there are several horses to be picketed, Mark says to picket the leader of the group, and hobble the rest. “That will keep him home, but will give the others mobility so they don’t wear out a big area,” he says.

Mark also emphasizes the protection of trees when he says not to cut green trees either for tent poles or for a pole to hang your saddle on. Usually, tent poles can be packed on the trail with you. “If you can’t pack poles in, you can always find some dead trees and cut them to size,” Mark says. “It’s just not appropriate to cut green trees to use for camping.”

To keep saddles dry, place the saddle on a tarp laid on the ground, and put another tarp on the top for protection.

“Also, don’t hammer nails into trees to hang bridles,” Mark says. “Don’t use wire or nails. Use nylon cord, so at least you can take things down easily,” he says. Nails can kill a tree, and wire might be dropped on the ground where another horse could step on it.

Mark sums up his thoughts on minimal impact with a quote he calls the horseman’s creed, “When I go into the back country, I will leave only hoofprints, take only memories.” 🐾

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