

# TRAILS

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Riding a good trail horse is one of the best ways to enjoy the wide-open country of California – more than 156,000 square miles, much of it unfenced, rolling hills and rugged mountains. For the past twenty years, plans for a riding and hiking trails system, aggregating 3,000 miles, are gradually becoming a reality.

No one breed or color is the best trail horse, but most experienced backcountry riders look for a well-proportioned horse. Each horse should be large enough to carry its rider, well conditioned, trained and adequately fed and cared for on the trail. A good trail horse may be grazed at night time and will stand quietly when hobbled. Having a good trail horse is only one of the major requirements for enjoying the trail. Horsemen should be familiar with the fundamental trail riding rules and etiquette, which must be understood, if personal safety and mutual enjoyment of the trails are to be realized.

Riders should be guided by trail rules at all times, regardless of the number of riders in the party. Good public relations are extremely important – especially in the interest of maintaining privileges on existing trails as well as those incident to the extension of the present system. Be aware of the landowner's right to privacy as well as his contribution to trails enjoyment – and by your conduct, show regard for any special rules or requirements covering his particular situation. Refer to local, County and State ordinances with which Equestrian Trails Patrolmen especially, should familiarize themselves, taking advantage of every natural opportunity to assist other trail riders in becoming aware of any violations thereof.

The most common fault with the average riding group is that it tries to cover too much ground in a limited time. In planning a ride, don't try to figure it in miles. Your group will be happier if you set a goal based on the number of hours to be spent in the saddle. A rugged terrain can drastically cut down the number of miles you may think you can travel in a single day. Unless you are a hardened trail rider, six or seven hours in the saddle are plenty. This will give you time required to care for your mount properly and to enjoy the companionship of others who will be more likely to be amenable, providing adequate stops for resting are made. Some leaders of group rides may overlook the less experienced riders in their groups and set a pace too fast for the novice. This does not mean that the group should pace themselves to the slowest horse, but that they should strike a medium pace. The inexperienced rider must realize of course, that a horse capable of a brisk walk is a primary requirement for pleasant and cooperative trail riding.

## **SEC. 1.0 - Preparing for the Ride**

Try to have your horse shod about three days to a week before any long, hard trip. Watch for stones in your horse's hooves, especially if you are on a rocky trail. Always carry a hoof pick and tool for removing a loose shoe. Be sure you have a good rope before you start on a trip. Twelve (12) feet of cotton rope will do. Take a horse blanket if your horse is to be tied up all night, especially in cooler climates.

Other items you should carry are:

Saddle bag

Halter

$\frac{3}{4}$ " cotton rope, 12' long

Pliers

Pocket knife (sharp)

Drinking cup  
Small Flashlight  
Light curry comb  
Hoof pick  
Horse shoe repair items  
Small still horse brush  
Small First Aid kit  
In dry country – a canteen  
In high country – a slicker  
Matches in waterproof container  
Regular length lariat.

On one-day rides, personal items can be wrapped in a towel. On longer trips, depending upon circumstances, your own personal ideas and requirements may change the list.

### **SEC. 2.0 - Starting the Ride**

In cold weather, plan to saddle up in advance of beginning of the ride to give your horse time to get the friskiness out of his system. Keep your saddle secure with placement well up on the withers. The flank cinch should be snug enough to avoid running brush between it and your horse.

If you tie up for lunch, loosen the cinch – but don't forget to tighten it when you mount up again.

### **SEC. 3.0 - High County or Long Ride Rules**

Low country horses are not accustomed to the thin air at higher altitudes. They should be conditioned through special care and exercised several days prior to long trail rides and high altitudes, making it easier for them to adjust to sudden environmental changes. Arriving a day or more prior to the ride and getting your horse used to the terrain and/or thin air, by riding at a medium, even pace, stopping frequently for a few minutes of rest and dismounting during rest periods, will help. If you can, rest your horse on a level spot. When climbing a steep grade make your horse dig in. Don't leap or run uphill. Grab a handful of the mane and bring your weight forward to his carrying spot – close to the withers. By climbing easily, the horse will not be so likely to tire easily or lose his breath. He doesn't get "bucking" ideas, you stay in the saddle and both you and the horse keep out of the way of the rider behind you.

### **SEC. 4.0 - Follow the Leader**

Trail discipline is mandatory to insure the safety and welfare of all of the riders and their mounts. The Trail Boss or Leader has absolute authority and all riders should be positioned to his rear. The "drag", bringing up the rear has authority commensurate with that of the Trail Boss. Riders should retain their respective positions on the trail and are not to pass the other horses, unless of necessity or by authorization of the Trail Boss. A minimum distance of one horse length is essential. Don't approach or pass another horse rapidly and/or without prior notification of the rider ahead. If you have to pass, ask the rider in front of you, then come up slowly, allowing plenty of room. Some horses kick and bite when passed. Some trails don't allow for safe passing and may be especially hazardous to the inexperienced rider. Riding ahead of the leader is not only discourteous or against the rules, but a rider may turn into a wrong trail and become lost. Also, by riding ahead you may cause the other horses to fret. **It is most**

**important that you keep your place in line.** A horse is inclined to protect himself if approached too quickly from the rear. Keep your horse still until every rider in the group is mounted. This is a safe and courteous rule, particularly when leaving camp.

### **SEC. 5.0 - At the End of a Long Ride**

Bring your horse into camp dry when coming off a long ride if possible, otherwise cool him slowly by walking him, leaving the saddle on with a loose cinch, while he is cooling. A short drink on arrival is permissible. Then cool, blanket, and feed lightly. When completely cooled out, allow access to full feed for about one hour before permitting full watering privilege. A hot and thirsty horse may become seriously ill if allowed to eat too much grain and water. Groom your horse completely before blanketing for the night. Temperature permitting, it is advisable to wash or sponge down the horse's back at this time. **Remember – your mount comes first.**

### **SEC. 6.0 - Tying up for the Night**

Tie your horse carefully so that he will not get loose when others are trying to sleep at night. A good slipknot, tied tightly to the tree or post, with the loose end through the loop is the best way. Tie about even with the horse's nose with 2 ½ feet to the halter ring, so a horse can get his head down. If your horse likes to pull back, put a loop around the neck and then through the halter ring. Never tie around the nick alone, since this may choke him.

If your horse can be hobbled for the night grazing, be sure he will not get out of his hobbles or that he isn't the kind that might travel miles toward home while wearing hobbles. Tie your horse far enough away from the campsite and horses so he won't annoy others.

### **SEC. 7.0 - Other hints for Trail Leaders**

Pre-ride the trail, if possible, so you will know where there is water, what conditions are, and how to time the ride. Remember, the larger the group, the slower the progress. If you can't pre-ride the trail, check with persons who know the area. If you can, leave your itinerary with the Forest Ranger so your group can be located if necessary. Brief all riders on the highlights of the Trails Rules, with emphasis on adequate First Aid items.

### **SEC. 8.0 - California Trail Rules and Regulations**

- 8.1** Where the California Riding and Hiking Trail passes through a State Park, State Forest, National Park, National Forest or National Monument, the rules of the respective agency having control of such area will prevail.
- 8.2** Smoking will be permitted only in areas designated for that purpose.
- 8.3** No campfire will be built, except in areas specifically provided and marked for that purpose.
- 8.4** No loaded firearms will be carried on the trail and no firearms will be discharged from or across the trail at any time; no firearms whatsoever will be carried on the trail in counties where prohibited by County ordinances.

- 8.5** No vehicles, other than those for emergency or maintenance purposes or those especially designated by the State Park Commission, will be permitted to use the trail, unless the trail traverses a common right of way.
- 8.6** No person will molest livestock encountered along or adjacent to the trail.
- 8.7** No person will ride any saddle animal in a manner that might endanger life or limb of any person or animal. No person will allow his saddle or pack animal to stand improperly attended or improperly tied.
- 8.8** All persons using the trail will respect the rights of property owners along the trail and will not trespass on their property or privacy in any way.
- 8.9** Any person noticing a fire along or adjacent to the trail will immediately make this fire his whole concern and promptly communicate the position of the fire to the proper authorities and then take immediate action to extinguish the fire.
- 8.10** All persons opening a closed gate will close the same after passing through it.
- 8.11** Riders and hikers will limit their use of the trail to the prepared surface and the overnight rest areas. In addition to these rules, those applying to the California State Park System are in effect on the trails.
- 8.12** If you must follow a road for any distance, ride the dirt shoulder with the traffic.
- 8.13** When crossing a road, line your group horizontally instead of single file, so you can all cross at once. Designate two riders as flagmen on busy roads. Always walk, don't rush across the pavement.
- 8.14** Loping should be prohibited at all times while group riding.
- 8.15** Don't let your horse graze or snatch bites. This could result in closing the rear file too rapidly.
- 8.16** When going through brush or trees, don't hold the branches. When others are following closely, call back any trail hazards you see, such as, "hole-wire-low branch-car ahead".
- 8.17** Climb down into gullies or inclines, never lunge or gallop into them. Climb right out and keep going.
- 8.18** When watering, let your horse have only a few sips at a time. The first in line should cross at the lowest point downstream so not to muddy up the stream for the rest of the horses.
- 8.19** After watering, wait on the other side as some horses will not drink if the group is moving ahead.
- 8.20** Take care of the trail. Don't cut corners. If going uphill, zig-zag to save the hill and your horse. Close gates as required.

**8.21** Don't litter the trails with papers or trash. Dispose of all papers and trash by placing them under a stone or log.

**8.22** Always leave a clean camp and a dead fire. Remember **Smokey the Bear!**

CALIFORNIA STATE HORSEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.

# TRAILS STANDARDS

*AS APPROVED AND ADOPTED BY:*

THE CALIFORNIA STATE HORSEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.,  
Executive Committee July 17, 2005  
Board of Directors November 2006

THE CALIFORNIA EQUESTRIAN TRAILS & LANDUSE COALITION  
June 10, 2005

*PRESENTED FOR APPROVAL:*

THE CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS RECREATIONAL TRAILS  
COMMITTEE

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF CALIFORNIA

# California Equestrian Trails & Lands Coalition

June 2005

## Safety Considerations for Multi-use Trails

CET&LC is continuing to develop specific design and enforcement standards for proposed and designated multi-use trails. The primary concern of our member organizations regarding multi-use trails is the safety of these trails for equestrians. The recent need (since about 1985) for multi-use trails is primarily to accommodate the addition of mountain bicycle use. **In order to safely accommodate bicycles that travel much faster than equestrian or hikers, specific trail design standards and safety guidelines are required to provide safe use for all.**

The CET&LC represents most organized recreational equestrian groups in California with 46,000 members. It is estimated that there are over 400,000 recreational riders in California. Many of these people ride trails as part of their recreational enjoyment.

The CET&LC offers general comments on conditions necessary to make the trail use experience positive, safe and enjoyable for all users. Also included is a set of **Trail User Guidelines** for issuance to every user at the trailhead.

1. From the equestrian user's perspective, mountain biking use has become a safety issue and needs to be addressed on all trail conversion decisions, as well as new trail construction, to help alleviate the conflict among users. The CET&LC supports multi-use trails where appropriate. In recent discussions with California State Parks staff in Sacramento on how best to define safe practices that will allow users to continue enjoying multi-use trails, we have recommended a number of safety provisions. The term "appropriate" means trail portions where terrain and slope do not limit the safe passage between equestrian and bike users. Inappropriate trails should not be designated multi-use until corrected. CET&LC is committed to working with State parks, other agencies and other users to develop a set of safety guidelines that is acceptable to all users.
2. Some users have commented that it is a "perception of safety" when considering conversion of trails to multi-use. To the equestrian community, it is more than a perception; it is a true evaluation of the safety circumstances, including the likelihood of increased risk to other trail users. Speed by other users is a major problem for horses, especially around blind or limited visibility curves. Trails can be designed to mitigate this problem, coupled with additional training for equestrian animals. It still remains that the primary user for which speed is part of the use is the mountain biker. If all users were to travel no more than 4 to 5 mph, as most trails are designed to be used, the most of the interface problems would be solved. Horses react to fast moving objects with their natural instincts and can only be trained to a point. Equestrian users have asked why should a well established user group be asked to significantly retrain their animals to meet a user that has brought a completely new use to the trail system. CET&LC is committed to developing a set of safety guidelines that all users can accept as long as the users consider the innate survival reaction of the horse. We accept the need to accustom our animals to meet bikers on multi-use trails so long as the biking community will do the same in adjusting their use patterns accordingly. The enclosed draft safety

guidelines should be accepted by all agencies as part of the trail plan; otherwise, it is predictable that conflict will continue. Often, in defining the conflict problem, it seems that the emphasis is focused on equestrian "behavior" rather than a focus to resolve problems by urging all the users, (bikers, equestrians and hikers) to work together for a solution.

3. In the new update of the State Park Trail Policy there is reference made that "design, education, signage, and enforcement can be effective in controlling conflict." The CET&LC totally supports this approach, and our member organizations in California join in this support. Noted below is what was recently presented to the California State parks Director and Staff:

### **Design Considerations:**

- a. **Develop a set of trail construction standards** that take into consideration each user's needs. Obviously, these will have compromises but will use safety as the primary objective. Some specific suggestions are:
  - **Visibility:** Switchbacks and curves need 50 ft. visual clearance on either side so users can see others.
  - **Trail width:** Wide trails can create maintenance and drainage problems. This topic includes old roads and whether they should continue to be used and be an exception. Some agencies consider wide trails as an erosion problem. Forest Service believes bikers and equestrians will often ride side by side if the trail is too wide, while many equestrians consider a 6 ft. wide trail as a minimum in order to safely pass cyclists.
  - **Trail slope:** Keep slope as low as possible (<12% if possible) for safe places for passing and visibility.
  - **Separate Trails:** Where terrain is steep, visibility is limited and safe passage is hazardous, consider having separate parallel trails, one for equestrians/hikers and one for mountain bikers.
- b. **Line of Sight:** Visibility is a major factor in the safety issue. Switchbacks and blind curves severely limit all users. Limited visibility reduces reaction time of trail users to gauge other users' speed and control so as to move out of the way where possible. Limited visibility also reduces the user seeing others approaching from behind or in front, thereby not slowing nor giving a warning call before reaching them.
- c. **Trail Width – Slope & Drop-off:** Safety on narrow trails requires that one be able to move off the trail to avoid an accident. If there is no way to go up a steep slope or if the drop-off is too extreme, one literally has nowhere to go. Blind curves and switchbacks in conjunction with narrow trails along sides of mountains with steep drop-offs and slopes increase the chances of accidents when trail users of different speeds are using the same trail.

- d. **Startle Factor:** Cyclists are relatively silent and can appear suddenly thus startling and alarming others. On narrow trails with reduced line of sight, the risk of collision between fast approaching, silent cyclists and other users rises dramatically.
- e. **Trail Grade:** This factor is directly proportional to the downhill speed of some users. There does not appear to be incidents among the users when bicyclists are going uphill. Cyclists going downhill are sometimes not able to stop in time to avoid startling horses.
- f. **Trail Surface:** Surfaces that are slippery with sand or excess scree diminish traction for most users and raise the chances of injury. When such a trail is also narrow, or has no escape route or reasonable visibility, it becomes a hazard for multiple users.
- g. **Quality of Outdoor Experience:** Safety and peace of mind should be a primary consideration in establishing policies for multi-use trails. Policies should enhance the positive experiences that outdoor recreation provides. For most, the trail experience is a relaxing endeavor. Mountain biking, requiring a vehicle, is fundamentally a different experience from hiking and horseback riding. These experiences may be compatible where there is sufficient physical trail space to allow each user a sense of freedom and safety without interference. However, when physical space diminishes on a trail, then compatibility disappears and conflict intensifies. Perceived risk becomes real for hikers and equestrians, and injury is a predictable experience. Thus, when the quality of a trail experience is markedly reduced, many will choose to not repeat it to avoid the possibility of conflict. They are then displaced or disenfranchised from enjoying a quality trail experience.

### **Education:**

- a. The education of trail users is a key factor in the creation of a safe trail system for all to use. Not everyone understands the nature of a horse or appreciates the incredible survival skills with which they are born. We are offering to develop some suggestions for all trail users to adopt as a way of increasing the comfort level of both the trail horse and non-equestrian trail user.
- b. The education of the equestrian user is also a vital area for multi-use trails. The CET&LC is recommending to its member organizations to improve the “startle factor” training of riders and animals as part of the adjustment to becoming multi-use trail users. Several Equestrian Clubs have adopted training clinics to teach the horses and riders to meet cyclists in varying situations. This greatly improved the animal’s awareness that a cyclist is not a threat. However, even with training, “sudden appearance situations” requires an exceptional horse to handle and is not in the usual scope or ability of many equestrian trail riders (reference police and Sheriff’s Posse training and horse dropout ratio.)

### **Signage:**

The CET&LC is recommending that California State Parks and other agencies with trail systems adopt the classic triangle yield sign as a standard for all multi-use trails. Enclosed with this letter is an example of the sign used by several other States, as well as some California park systems. It works quite well to alert users to a certain protocol and trail etiquette when meeting others on multi-use trails. Likewise, there should be good signage to make users aware of who is permitted or not on various trails.

## **Enforcement:**

Having an enforcement process is vital for today's multitude of users. There is reference to volunteer patrols in the pending State Parks trail Policy, but no mention is made of law enforcement; and that is a critical element in maintaining a safe recreational environment. If State Parks or any other agency adopts multi-use trails over special use trails, some type of rules enforcement on the trails must be in place and will need a significantly high priority.

## **Conclusion:**

CET&LC is recommending for all trail system user the guidelines listed above as a way to make riding, hiking and biking an enjoyable trail experience. As stated before, our intent is to support multi-use trails as long as the safety concerns and terrain conditions are addressed. **If an existing trail cannot meet these standards, then it should not be designated multi-use.** CET&LC looks forward to working with all user groups and agencies in developing safety guidelines.

# GENERIC SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR MULTI-USE TRAILS

## 1. The Future

The way we use the trails today shapes trail access for tomorrow. Please do your part to enhance our multi-user access and image by observing the following Safety Guidelines for the Trail.

## 2. Always yield to other trail users.

Let your fellow trail users know you are coming. A friendly greeting or gesture is consideration of others and that will go a long way towards cooperative trail use. Don't startle others. Show respect when passing by slowing to a walking pace. Anticipate other trail users around blind corners or in areas of poor visibility. Yielding means slow down, establish communication, follow the yield protocol and be prepared to stop if necessary to pass safely.

If you need to pass a horse and rider, either from behind or from the front, slow down and alert the rider you want to pass on the downhill side. Give the rider time to take control and move the horse. If a horse needs to pass you, dismount or stand on the downhill side.

When groups of users desire to pass from the rear, be courteous, convey your desires and wait for the slower users to determine a safe passing point.

## 3. Right of Way Protocol – Reference to Yield Triangle Sign

When trail conditions require a right of way for safe passage, equestrian users have the primary right of way, hikers next and then cyclists. When trail conditions allow and when there is width to safely pass, common courtesy should prevail for all users.

## 4. Control your Actions.

Awareness of trail conditions at all times is vital for safe use. It is recognized that the level of training and experience of any user varies and it is your responsibility to be in control. If you and a mount, cyclist, or hiker is inexperienced on the trail, it is suggested you travel with other trail users with more experience. Travel only at a speed that is safe for conditions on the trail.

If you see a horse shying or spooking, move away from the horse and keep talking. Speaking will help the horse relax and realize you are a person.

## 5. Safe Speed.

Excessive speed is an unsafe use of multi-use trails. All users must use good judgment and be aware that there are other users on the trail who may be going slower than they are. Limited visibility around corners and curves should be a signal to slow down to the speed of hikers, the slowest trail users.

**6. Plan ahead**

For safe use of trails know your ability and the area in which you are riding, hiking or cycling, and prepare yourself accordingly. Be self-sufficient at all times. Keep your animal & equipment in good shape and carry necessary supplies for changes in weather or other conditions. A well-executed trip is a satisfaction for you and not a burden to others.

**7. Awareness of Equestrian Safety.**

If you or your siblings would like to pet the horse on the trail, first ask the rider if it is OK. Horses are very social animals and follow specific social rules with each other. We humans get along best with them when we act as they do.

**Other Trail Considerations:**

**1. Use open trails only.**

Respect trail & road closures. Use a map, and contact agencies if uncertain about the trail. Avoid trespassing on private land. Obtain permission, permits or other authorization as required. The way we utilize the trails today will influence trail management and practices in the future.

**2. Leave no Trace. Practice Gentle Use Principles.**

Be sensitive to the earth beneath you. Recognize different types of soils & trail conditions. Wet & muddy trails are more vulnerable to damage, so consider other options. Please stay on existing trails; do not create new ones and do not shortcut. Be sure to pack out all that you pack in.

**3. Be Aware of other animals.**

Give other animals, both domestic and wild, extra space and time to adjust to you. Running cattle or disturbing wildlife is a very serious offense. Leave gates as you found them or as they are marked.