



Tips From Veteran Trail Riders

Organized trail rides can be a relaxing way to meet other riders and enjoy the natural beauty of open space, woods and park land. Whether you are riding your own horse, or one provided by a guide, awareness of safe and courteous trail practices is essential to having an enjoyable ride.

Veteran Maryland trail riders have assembled these TIPS to help you prepare both you and your horse by following these basic guidelines.



Planning Your Ride

- Tell someone where you plan to go and how long you expect to be.
- Check the weather the day before a ride and plan accordingly. Most parks have a "no riding" policy if the trails are wet.
- If you are riding in a public park that permits horses, check park regulations on their web site, if available.
- It's critical to know how quiet your horse is likely to be on a trail ride. If either you or your horse has never been on the trail, plan a few rides with one or two experienced riders before you ride with a larger group. Your horse may encounter pedestrians, bikes, ATVs, dirt bikes and dogs on the trails.
- Know how difficult the trail will be. Young, old, or inexperienced horses need a shorter, less challenging trail. Think about how much exercise your horse is used to.
- Learn something about the trail conditions. What is the trail surface? Hard? Soft? Are there muddy patches? Is the terrain hilly? Are there stream crossings or road crossings?
- Go with someone who is familiar with the trails.
- Determine who will lead the ride and agree if you will change positions during the ride so all horses get to experience being first, last and in the middle of the group. If riders have a variety of trail experience levels, put an experienced horse and rider at the beginning and the end of the ride.
- Establish clear expectations with the other riders. How fast do they want to go? How long do they want to ride? What condition are their horses in? It may be possible to divide into different groups if some want only to walk, and others to go at a faster pace.
- Know how much shade is available on the trail. Are you riding in woods or open fields?
- Fill up your trailer manger or hay bag for the trailer.
- Choose trails with natural water crossings to provide water during the ride.

- Bring or have at least 5 gallons of water and a water bucket for your horse after the ride.
- Know how easily you can get on and off your horse without any mounting assistance such as a log or a mounting block.
- Be sure to have a halter or use a halter/bridle if you plan to tie up on the trail. Don't use the bridle to tie up a horse. Rope halters can be worn with a bridle for easy tie up.
- Check tack to be sure buckles, fasteners, girths, and leather are all in good working condition.
- When bridling up, keep the halter fastened around your horse's neck so you have something to grab if they get startled and move away quickly. Always have either the halter or reins around your horse's neck.
- Mounting and dismounting are two times when you have less control of your horse. If there is any question of safety while mounting, have someone hold your horse. Using a mounting block is easier for both horse and rider.
- If your horse has ever kicked out at another horse, tie a red ribbon on your horse's tail as a warning to other riders.
- Spray your horse with fly spray if bugs are out.
- Carry a fly whisk.
- Use a fly mask in summer that covers the horse's ears and is made with see through fabric.
- Don't forget bug repellent on the rider!



During the Ride

- Always start out walking horses so both you and your horse can warm up.
- Keep the length of one horse between you and the horse in front.
- Check the tightness of your girth after about five minutes of riding. Call out if you need to stop and tighten your girth. Check again later during the ride.
- If you are leading, give a hand signal (Put your hand in the air) to let others know that you are slowing down. Other riders should also use the hand signal to alert riders behind them.
- At road crossings, wait until all horses can cross together. In Maryland, as in most states, there is no traffic rule requiring motorists to stop for horses. Use caution crossing any road surfaces. Larger groups should have someone stop traffic from horseback to allow all riders to cross.
- If the pace is too fast for your comfort, call out to the leader to slow down. The pace of the ride should always be geared to the least experienced horse or rider.
- At stream crossings, allow your horse to drink, then move forward so others can get to water. Wait until all horses have had a chance to drink before resuming the ride.
- Stay behind the ride leader.
- If you need to pass another horse, ask permission from the rider in front of you and pass to the left.
- Keep all horses together. If you are the last horse, don't hold back so that you can catch up at a canter. Many horses will spook at the sound of a horse cantering up behind them.
- The next to last rider should periodically check on the last rider.
- If you encounter a low branch, hole on the trail, or poisonous vines, call out to others to warn them. Each rider should quickly pass the message on to the riders behind them.
- Ride leaders should check with riders periodically to be sure they are comfortable at the pace.

- On hot days, sponge off your horse in a stream crossing.
- If you need to dismount during the ride, look for a log to use as a mounting block, or move the horse close to a hill and mount from the hill. Just a few inches can make the difference between a comfortable or awkward mounting.
- Walk the last ½ mile of the ride so that horses can cool down.
- If you have any concerns about safety while you are dismounting, ask for someone to hold your horse.

After the Ride

- Thank your ride leader. Give them feedback that might be helpful.
- When you remove your bridle, keep the reins around your horse's neck until the halter has been put on so that you always have some means of control.
- One halter is on and horse is tied up, remove your saddle and pad.
- If you feel your horse needs to be cooled down, walk out slowly until heart rate returns to normal.
- Have cool water available for your horse in a water bucket.
- Sponge down your horse with cool water and wipe mud off from legs and underbelly.
- Run your hands over your entire horse to check for ticks, cuts or scratches. Look carefully at legs.
- Clean hooves if shoes are on horse, or remove horse boots.
- Have hay available for your horse after the ride, especially if you plan to stay and have lunch with your ride partners.
- Until you are ready to load up and leave, keep your horse tied to the trailer. If you want your horse to graze, keep the lead rope in your hand.

TRAIL RIDING ORGANIZATIONS IN MARYLAND

Among the major trail riding organizations are:
Trail Riders of Today (TROT) www.trot-md.org
League of Maryland Horsemen www.lomh.net
Mt. Airy Saddle Pals 301-829-5014, 301-831-5230
Old People's Riding Club www.oldpeoplesridingclub.org
Plantation Walking Horse Club of Maryland www.pwhm.net
Chesapeake Plantation Walking Horse Club
 410-923-6157, 410-215-4979

OTHER TYPES OF TRAIL RIDING

If you are seeking a more competitive approach to trail riding, you may be interested in learning about these disciplines.

Judged Pleasure Riding

A Judged Pleasure Ride (JPR) is a planned course averaging 6 to 10 miles. Riders and horses are judged on their ability to navigate several obstacles along the trail, such as water, bridges, and gates. For more information, contact The American Competitive Trail Horse Association at www.sctha.us/aboutus

Endurance Riding

An Endurance Ride is a long-distance competitive speed event over natural terrain covering 50 to 100 miles in one day. It is a test of a well-conditioned horse's stamina and fitness, as well as the horsemanship and management of the rider. For more information, contact The American Endurance Ride Conference at www.aerc.org

Competitive Trail Riding

Competitive trail riding (CTR) is a timed distance ride, usually between 15 and 40 miles per ride. Unlike an Endurance Ride in which the fastest horse wins, factors other than speed are considered, and horses must be paced by the rider to complete the ride within a certain time period. For more information, contact The Eastern Competitive Trail Ride Association at <http://ectra.org/cms/>

A GUIDE TO MARYLAND HORSE Trails



What To Wear On The Ride

Always wear an equestrian helmet.
 Riding gloves may protect hands on longer rides.
 Keep your cell phone in an ankle, belt or arm strap.
 Protect legs with full or half-chaps.
 Wear riding boots with a heel for safety.
 In colder weather, wear layers for warmth.

What To Take With You

- Use a saddlebag in front or behind your saddle to carry these items:
- Bottled water to drink on the trail
 - Light snack such as a granola bar or fruit
 - Small first aid kit
 - Insect bite cream
 - Clippers
 - Small folding saw
 - Small plastic poncho
 - Pocket knife
 - Piece of baling twine in case your reins break
 - Hoof pick
 - Sponge for hot days clipped on saddle—should have cord long enough to reach to the water.
 - Cell phone on YOU – not the horse! Tacking/GPS apps are available for smart phones.



Equipment For Your Horse

Light-weight trail saddles are designed for comfort of both horse and rider over long hours. Often treeless or flexible tree saddles are used by trail riders. The saddle must be comfortable for both horse and rider. Extra metal rings on the saddle are handy for carrying trail items such as a pack bag or sponge.

Wide cushioned stirrups can be more comfortable than metal stirrups over several hours.

A breast collar keeps your saddle in place if you are traveling over hilly or rough terrain.

Special combination halter/bridles with easily detachable reins enable you to tie up your horse on the trail. Horses can also be tied up with a bitless bridle or hackamore, but if you ride with a bit, be sure to carry a halter, or put on a light-weight rope halter over your bridle.

A saddle pack in front or behind your saddle gives you extra carrying space.

While some horses can travel barefoot, most horses require hoof protection for hard or rocky trails. For horses that are not shod, rubber protective hoof boots can be used. For cold or snowy climates, Borium studs can be added to steel shoes.
 A cotton or mesh fly mask can provide added protection against bugs.

Trail Courtesy On Multiuse Trails

Many trails are shared with hikers and bikers. Ensure that meetings on the trail are a positive experience for everyone.

Trail yield rules: Bikers and hikers should yield to horses. Bikers yield to hikers.

Thank bikers and hikers for yielding the trail.

If someone appears suddenly on the trail, politely ask them to call out so the horse realizes it is a human.

Ride on the right.

Walk past other trails users in single file.

Don't trot or canter unless you can see well ahead that the trail is clear.

Trail rules may vary concerning removal of manure from the trail. Be sure to honor the rules where you are riding. If you are riding a trail that is primarily used by hikers and bikers, kicking manure to the side of the trail (if you can safely dismount and mount again) would be perceived as good trail stewardship.

Trail Stewardship

Avoid riding directly after rain when trails are wet.

Keep your muck in your trailer or dispose of it in a designated area. Clean up any scattered hay.

Pack in, pack out – take everything with you that you brought.

Stay on marked trails. If you encounter an obstacle that must be passed around, do so carefully and report the obstacle to park officials after the ride.

Cross water at designated crossings only.

Walk thought any mud. Avoid muddy trails if you can choose another route.

If you can do so safely, clip (if permitted) back small branches and limbs from the trail.

Schedule a work day with your local parks agency, or sign up to join a "friends" group with the parks where you ride.

Camping With Horses

Maryland State Parks and Forests that permit camping with horses: *Name – Accommodations*

- Cedarville State Forest** – showers and restrooms
 - Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area** – showers, restrooms, electric
 - Garrett State Forest** – primitive
 - Green Ridge State Forest** – primitive
 - Patapsco Valley State Park** – yes, if a member League of Md. Horsemen
 - Tuckahoe State Park** – yes, if a member of Tuckahoe Equestrian Club
- County Park:**
Little Bennett – primitive
National Park:
Assateague Island National Seashore – October through March only

PRIVATE CAMPGROUNDS:

- Little Orleans Campground** (Little Orleans-Allegany Co.) www.littleorleanscampground.com
- Happy Hills Campground** (Hancock-Allegany Co.) www.happyhillscampground-md.net

STABLES PERMITTING OVERNIGHT HORSE BOARDING

- Western Maryland**
- Poor Boy Stables**, Sharpsburg—Raymond Ramsey, 16419 Woburn Rd., 301-223-9089
- Capital Region**
- Paradise Stables LLC**, New Market—Elizabeth Winters, 12302 Lime Plant Rd. 301-865-4800
- Windsong Arabians**, Mt. Airy—Sue Doll, 13134 A Old Annapolis Rd., 301-831-5083
- Woodland Horse Center**, Silver Spring—Michael Smith, 16301 New Hampshire Ave. , 301-421-9156
- Central Maryland**
- Anchor and Hope Farm**, Port Deposit—Edwin Merryman, PO Box 342, 410-378-4081
- Fairwinds Farm & Stables**, North East—JoAnn Dawson, 41 Tailwinds Lane, Rt. 272, 410-658-8187 www.fairwindsstables.com
- Flying K Farm**, Joppa—Kevin & Kim Bearsch, 3200 Clayton Rd., 410-676-1658
- Eastern Shore**
- Caper Lea, Easton**—Carey Miller, PO Box 2107, 410-822-9438 www.caperlea.com

Swimming With Your Horse!

These parks allow trail riding and swimming with your horse:
Conquest Beach at Conquest Preserve—Queen Anne's County
Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area—Cecil County
Sassafras River Natural Resources Management Area and **Turner's Creek Park**—Kent County
Wye Island Natural Resources Management Area—Talbot County

TAKE A STAYCATION—With Your Horse!

Here's how Bryan and Karen Parker of Bowie took a 4-day local staycation at 4 parks with their horses Peso and Flint:

Day 1 The first day of a great equestrian staycation at Maryland parks. Today we had a wonderful ride at Schooley Mill Park in Howard County. Just gorgeous out there!!



Day 2 Today we rode the Underground Railroad Trail at Woodlawn in Montgomery County. First time we had been there. Very nice trails!



Day 3 Today we thought Mother Nature had rained on our plans but we had a little luck and rode out toward the WSSC Rocky Gorge Reservoir in Prince George's County. What a beautiful Maryland morning!

Day 4 Rachel Carson Conservation Park in Montgomery County. What a fabulous park! Back to work now, but looking forward to another trail riding staycation!



The best views are from horseback!



To learn more:

Maryland Horse Industry Board
www.mda.maryland.gov/horseboard

Maryland Horse Council www.mdhorsecouncil.org

The Equiery www.equierey.com

Trail Riders of Today (TROT) www.trot-md.org



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