Wheeler Saddle Club

Trail Riding Etiquette

Good trail riding etiquette includes ensuring safety of horses and riders and consideration of fellow horseback riders, other trail users, and the environment. Remember to expect the unexpected and be prepared to cross paths with other trail users. Poor trail etiquette can lead to unsafe riding conditions.

Before you ride, be sure that your horse is fit/conditioned enough for the trail you will be taking, and fit enough to keep up with the other horses and riders. Check and re-check tack before mounting. Tighten your cinch/girth in phases, then make sure it is tight before you head out. Ensure your horses feet are properly cared for before your ride.

Basic rules to keep everyone safe on your trail ride, while using good trail manners:

* It is a must that you cater the ride to the least experienced rider in the group, which means you may need to walk for the entire ride.
* All horses should walk while departing and returning to the barn area. Allowing horses to “run” back to the barn puts others at risk, regardless of the level of rider. This is an extremely bad habit and poor horsemanship at its worst.
* Always maintain a full horse length between horses, front, back, and both sides. Make sure you can always see the heels of the horse in front of you from between your horses ears.
* Don’t let horses get separated from the group. This poses a risk for everyone on the ride, particularly less experienced riders.
* Before increasing speed/gait on the trail, inform everyone what is about to happen.
* As with arena riding, overtake/pass riders on their left, calling out to them that you are passing. If others approach you and your horse from the other direction, pass left shoulder to left shoulder. These are worldwide standards of horsemanship.
* Horses that kick should have red ribbons in their tail.
* Riders, wear appropriate riding apparel and footwear. Helmets are encouraged, and mandatory for children.
* If something goes wrong, stay calm. Carry a cellphone and basic first aid kit.
* If you drop something on the trail, ask other riders to stop. Dismount to retrieve your item, then mount up again. Your horse will be anxious if the other horses don’t stop. Everyone wants to be safe. Don’t be afraid to tell others what you need.
* Trail riding in muddy conditions can be hazardous, and cause damage to the trail. Be mindful of your riding environment and your impact.
* Have Fun! Happy Trails!