

Horse Council BC's
Click and Learn Series

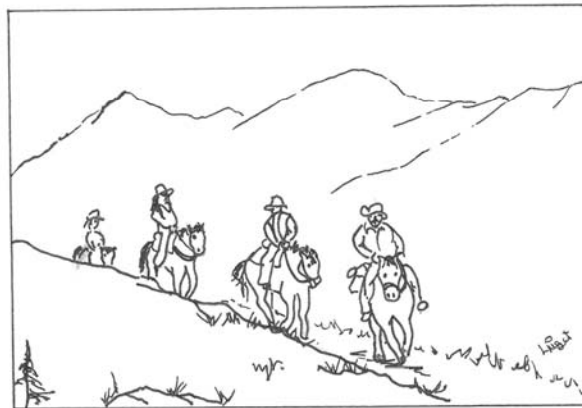


A joint project
between Back
Country
Horsemen and
HCBC

TRAIL ETIQUETTE AND SAFETY BEST PRACTICES

The Interest of Trail Safety

- You have heard of bad accidents where people or horses are injured and yes, the odd mule too. The difference between being simply bruised or totally paralyzed may be the result of choices you had prior to the accident. You should be aware of the choices you have to prevent accidents.



Best Practices

- Best Practices should be easily recognized, accepted and practiced by acknowledged expert and experienced horsemen and horsewomen. Best Practices will be reasonable and make sense, given the range of situations one could expect. They will acknowledge the nature of the stock "animal". They should be general enough to be applicable to the day ride as well as the 10 day pack trip.

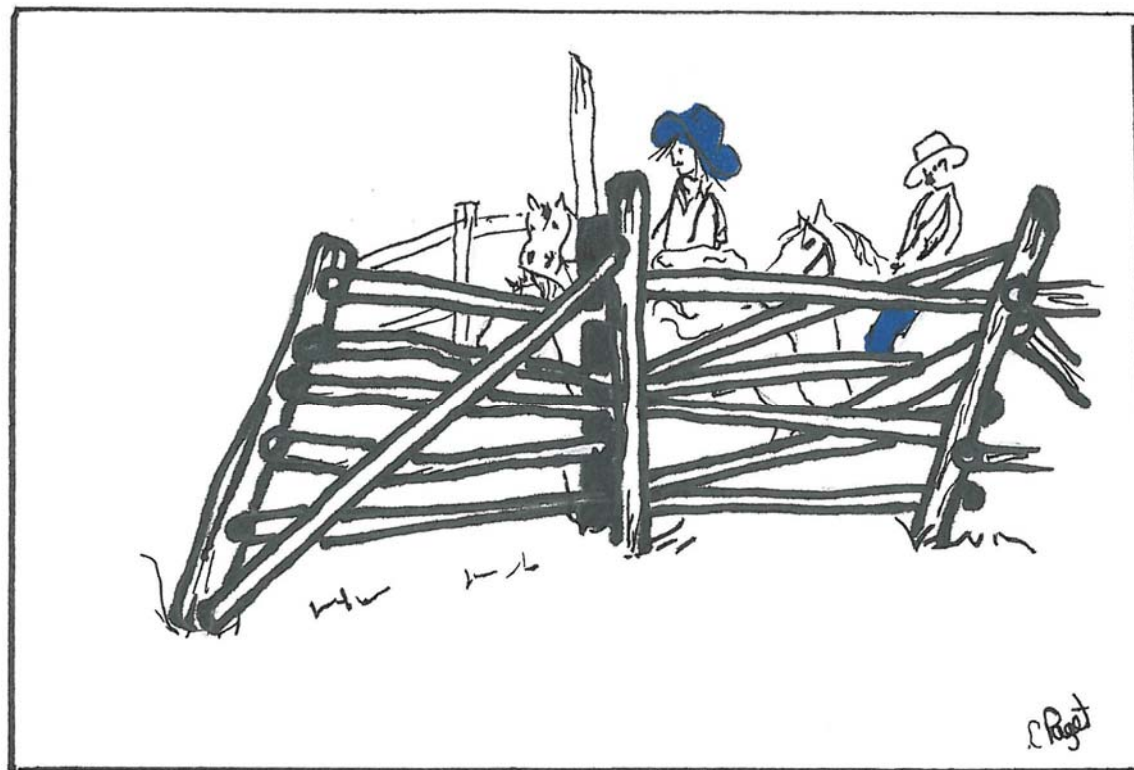


Etiquette and Safety

- There is a direct relationship between good trail manners and good safety practice in a group riding situation. A rude move by one rider can set up a chain reaction that puts other riders and their horses at risk. The predictable chain reaction challenges every horse and rider including the initiator. The more experienced horse or rider may escape with only stories ... but the inexperienced or unlucky may sustain life threatening injuries. "Rude moves" may originate in ignorance of good practice. The results of bad manners and accidents degrade the riding experience for the others in your party and those who hear about accidents.



Leave the gate the way you found it



Reduce the Exposure

- Stock handling and horse riding involves a fair exposure to personal injury. The risk to yourself, your livestock, and others' can be minimized using risk management practices,



Manage the Risk

The Strategy

- In general, a good plan will have these five steps adapted from the insurance industry. A few examples are suggested to get the process started.



HORSE COUNCIL
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Identify Items at Risk

- Personal safety and good health of the riders, safety and good health of your livestock, enjoyment of the experience, your equipment, goodwill, your continuing right to ride and access are a few things to consider.

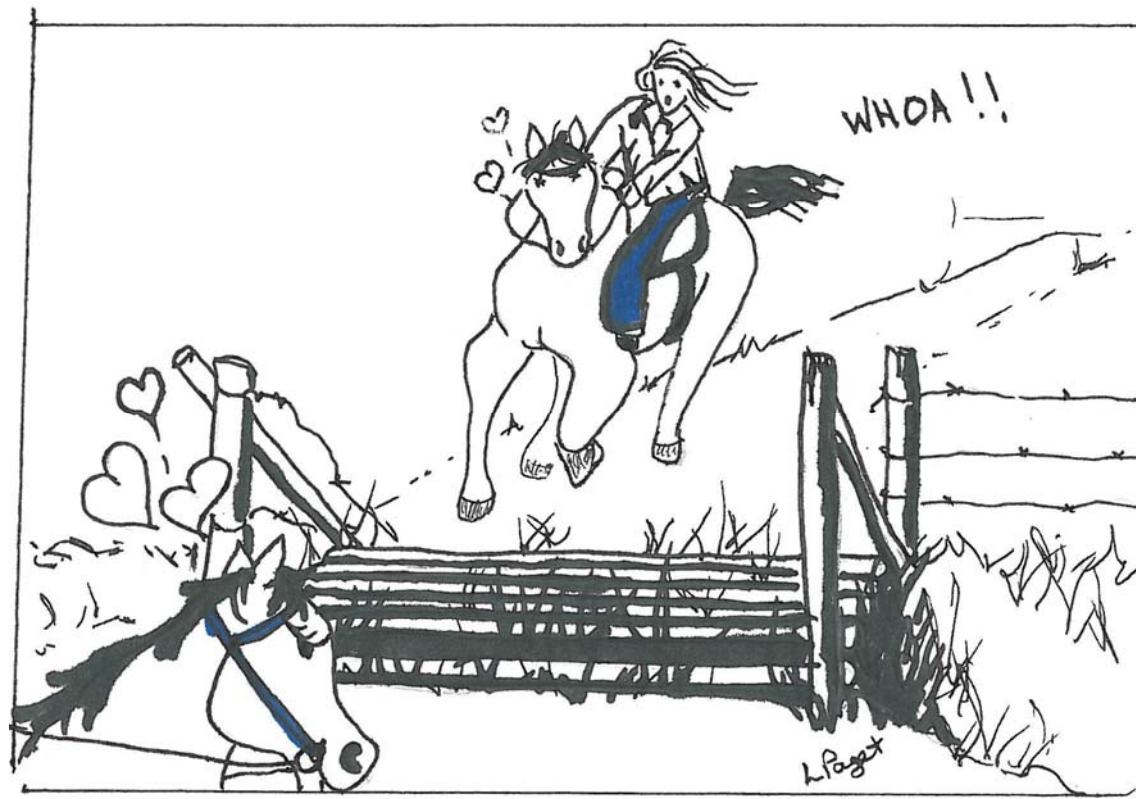


Exposures

- Think of all the **exposures which may jeopardize your risk items**. Consider the obvious things you can't control such as extreme weather and weather changes, forest fire, floods, wildlife, footing, etc. Hazards abound, but some can be influenced, controlled, removed or avoided. Lack of equipment maintenance, physical condition (of stock and participants, trail hazard, unexpected movement of livestock, inattention, hypothermia, insects, bad safety habits should be considered among others.



On the other side

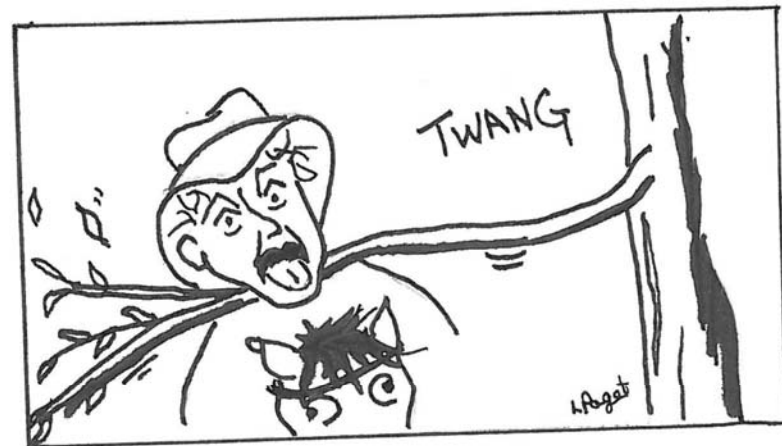
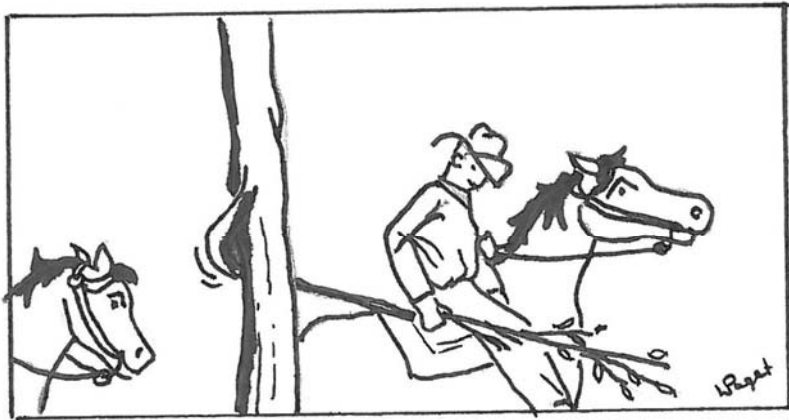


Control the Exposures

- Find several ways to handle each of the identified exposures. Consider ways to influence, control, remove or avoid the exposure. For instance, extreme weather can be handled by not going, or going prepared for the worst. Unsafe habits can be avoided by training. Worn or broken equipment can be inspected and repaired before you leave. Try to prevent the exposure or reduce its impact. The alternative is acceptance of the risk. Make sure you know the hazard.



Avoid the “sling shot”



Implement Strategies

- Implement the best combination of remedies for each risk exposure. Do the maintenance, get the right gear, do the safety training, learn, get in shape.



Find Solutions

- Be aware of your successes, failures and especially the near misses. Note what works well and find out why. Recognize problems and situations early, discuss solutions, modify the plan and implement the change promptly.





PLAN AHEAD FOR SAFETY



Horse and Rider Experience

- Trail ride safety is complicated by the wide range of experience and skill amongst its human and equine participants. The policy for a particular trail ride should be to consider the terrain and conditions, then achieve a reasonable balance between risk and skill of the horses and riders, yet still provide an enjoyable experience. For example, the number of novice riders and horses in the company of an experienced trail rider should decline as the expected conditions on the trail worsen. The combination of novice riders on green trail horses should be avoided. Combinations of green rider on experienced, easy going horse or an experienced, skilled rider on green horse may be acceptable. More difficult rides should have more experienced and skilled horses and riders in attendance. The trail boss may decide to limit the number of inexperienced riders and headcount to manageable levels. This is why it is important to have a ride contact organized ahead of time. More people and larger remuda require excellent organization to avoid frequent and serious accidents. Group dynamics specialists suggest five or seven people is the ideal group size for possibly challenging situations. In any case it should be an odd number of people. Experienced outfitters will break a large mob into groups or teams of seven, riding the trail separated by five



Suitable Gear

- Well in advance of the departure date, riders should be informed of the range of conditions they could expect to encounter. The type, weight and volume of personal gear to be packed should be specified clearly. Plenty of advanced notice will permit participants to arrange for suitable equipment. Footwear should provide good ankle support and have a sole with heel suitable for walking on rough and wet ground. Use stirrups that won't trap your walking boots should you be in a wreck. Traditional cowboy boots are for dancing. Each rider should weigh his gear for the trail before leaving home. The packer should weigh each rider's gear before packing it, and accepting no more than reasonable loads for pack animals. In general keep the loads light for longer distances and harder climbs. The riding mounts should not be overloaded with too much add-on gear. There are several good books available describing the art of packing.



Conditioning

- ❑ Tired equines and riders are prone to accidents and injury. Riders and equines should start conditioning at least six weeks in advance of the trip, to be hardened up for the task. Literature on conditioning is plentiful. Read it. Practice it.



Navigation

- Several people on the trip should be skilled in orienteering. They should have the proper topography and trail maps, compass and perhaps altimeter and GPS. Photocopies of the expected area of travel should be in the hands of all riders. Riders should periodically locate themselves on the map. This enables you to tell where to send help should assistance be required. The Search and Rescue job is much easier if they know latitude and longitude or metric co-ordinates of your location.



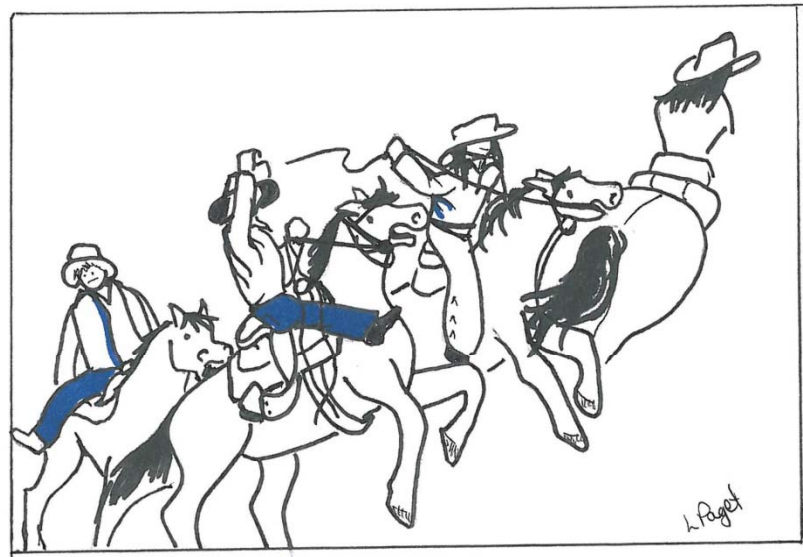
Horseplay

- Horseplay is for horses, not for responsible, safety conscious riders, especially in the bush. Why risk injuring yourself and others due to your silliness?



Pace of the Ride

- Since horses are herd animals, they want to stay together. If the fastest horse is leading, the rest will jog to catch up, resulting in a very tiring, uncomfortable, cranky ride. To make the most participants happy, put the slower walking animals in the front of the string. Those riders leading pack animals will have normal length arms at the end of the day. Keep an even, walking pace. Quicker horses should not be allowed to crowd into the horse ahead. Too many injuries arise from the ensuing kick.



Wasps and Hornets

- Summer rides may run into wasp nests on the side of the trail. Two or three horses may get by without getting stung, but the rest have to run a gauntlet. Some horses will stop to brush them off with disastrous results. This is a ready made accident. The following strategy works to minimize the number of human and equine victims, and maximize the number of wasp victims. Break the trail string into groups of four followed by a 50 yard buffer zone. One rider in the next group of four should have a "bee bomb" in a saddlebag. A "bee bomb" is a long reaching hornet and wasp insecticide designed to spray a stream from 10 to 15 feet. When a wasp or hornet nest is encountered by the lead group, they will alert those behind who stop. The bee bomber walks up to the nest quietly and sprays the nest. On contact with the nest entrance, poisonous foam builds up preventing further reinforcements coming into action. By the time the bee bomber gets remounted on his horse, the nest will be neutralized. The return ride along the same trail is much more relaxing.



Responsibility

- In no way does the trail boss or any other ride organizer take responsibility for anyone else's safety or well being. Each rider is ultimately responsible for their own safety. Following some "common sense" guidelines will help each rider to accomplish this. In the case of junior riders, the whole group who is with this person, should be made aware of who their "guardian" for the ride is. This will allow others to quickly advise the guardian of any conditions that may affect the safety of their charge.



Awareness

- The best advice is to be aware of your surroundings to help you see troublesome situations in advance. Look ahead. Use common sense. Be reasonable in your expectations. Don't assume anything. Plan ahead.





SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

These guidelines were developed for the safety and enjoyment of all riders and horses during sanctioned events. They will assist in the management of large crowds.

For the Host

- All rides require pre-registration with the host, so the host has the opportunity to plan for groups as necessary with regard to size and degree of ability
- The host will select a "Ride Master" for each group going out. The Ride Master should be a member of the club and be familiar with the route. The host should have ridden the route already.
- The host will select a "Drag Rider". The Drag Rider should be a member of the club, and must stay behind the group to prevent riders from getting separated
- The host will ensure there is a club first aid kit available, and assign a member of the group to be responsible for carrying the kit and being available to assist if someone needs help
- The host will have someone check the camp or rest spot for litter and debris after use
- The host will try and have a watering place at the trail head, however if this is not possible, let participants know when they register, so they may bring water with them
- The host will organize receptions for arrivals, delegate parking, arrange socials, etc. as required

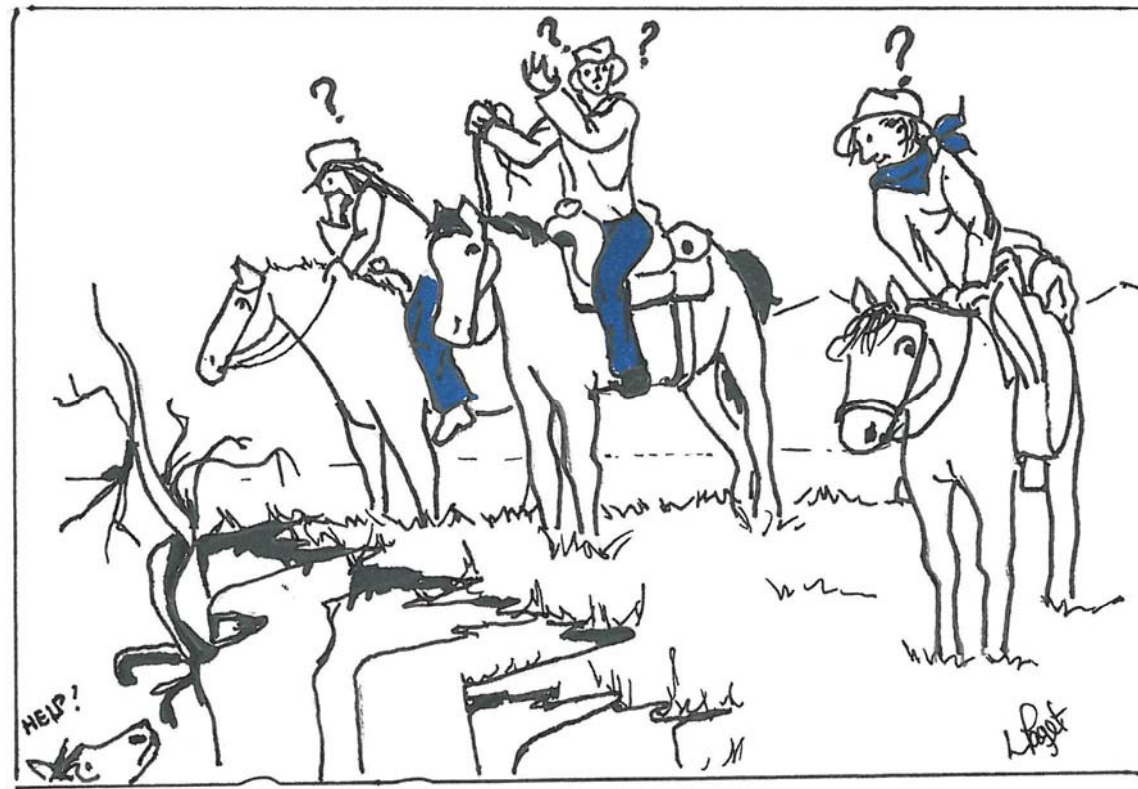


For the Ride Master

- The Ride Master is in charge of the ride at all times
- The Ride Master will ensure all rides start on time
- The Ride Master will be introduced at the start and will introduce other designated riders, i.e.: Drag Rider, First Aid rider, etc.
- The Ride Master will review the ride guidelines with participants
- The Ride Master will limit the number of riders if in his or her judgment there are too many riders for the trail conditions or safety of the group
- The Ride Master may ask members to leave the ride if they or their animals are disruptive or dangerous to others
- The Ride Master will lead the ride, being prepared to set a pace suitable to the terrain, and the majority of the participants, keeping safety first
- The Ride Master will check with the Drag Rider from time to time to assure that the group is staying together and to resolve any problems



Never Pass the Ride Master

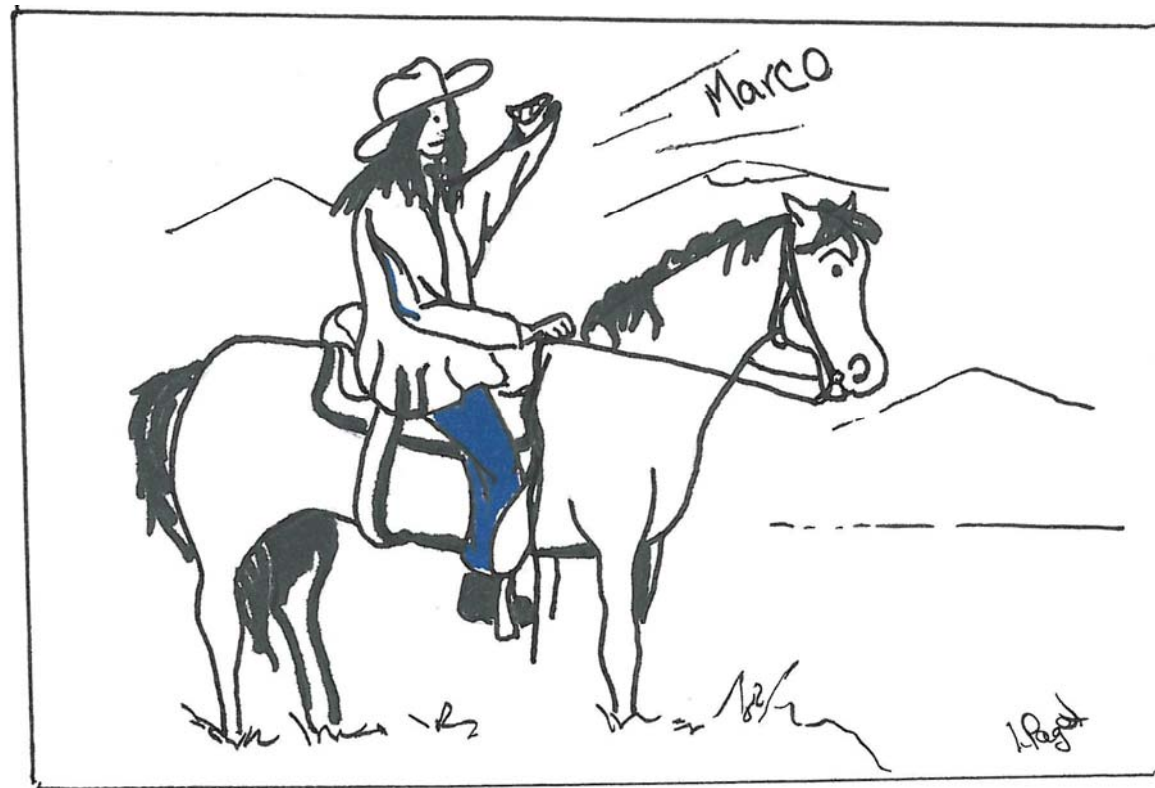


For the Participants

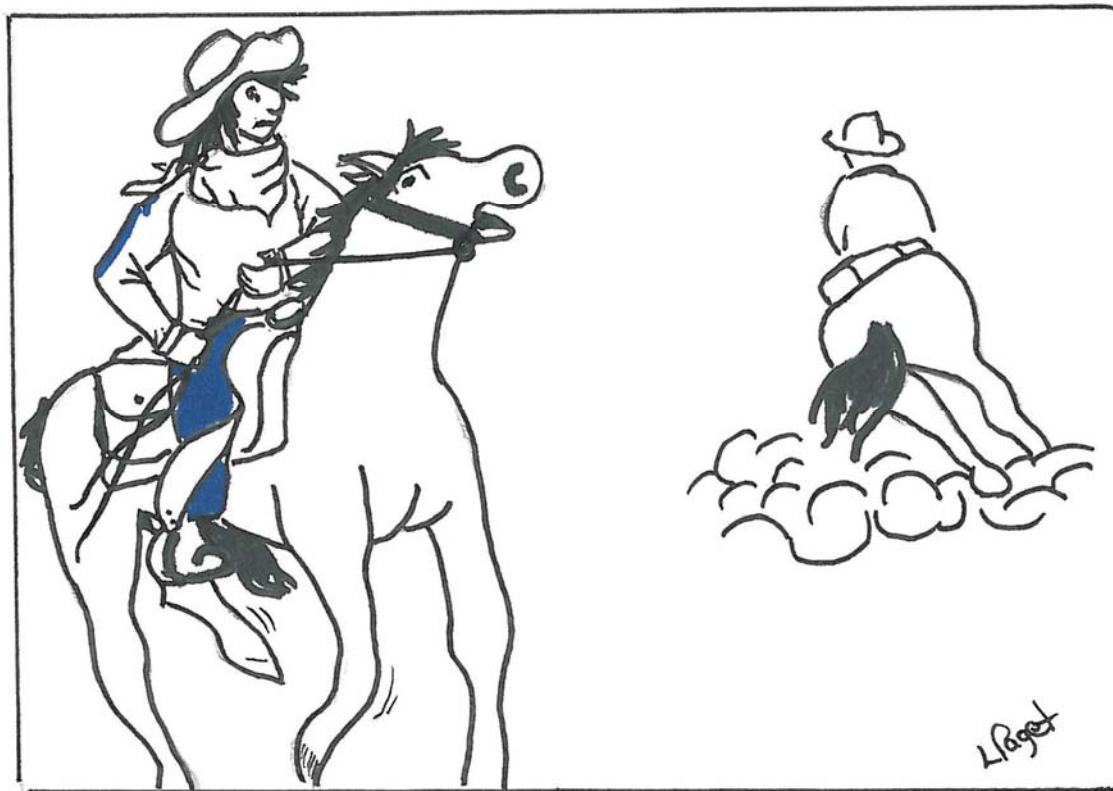
- Pre-register by calling the host. This will ensure the ride is suitable for you and provide important information as to location, facilities, etc.
- Know your horse and your capabilities. Consider the distance of the ride and fitness of your horse. You are expected to control your horse at all times.
- Rides are governed by the Ride Master, who is in charge at all times. Stay behind the Ride Master, and in front of the Drag Rider.
- Space yourself accordingly. A good rule is to keep at least one horse's length between you and the horse in front of you
- When crossing a stream and horses are thirsty, the rider in front should hold up so that following horses have a chance to drink. Some horses will not drink if they think they might be left behind
- Before stopping on a steep trail, make sure all horses are in a safe location. You don't want to stop when some horses are on slippery rock, halfway up or down a steep incline, or next to a drop off
- No stallions or dogs are allowed. Although some are well-mannered, it is safer to exclude them on rides
- If a rider must dismount, other riders should wait until he/she remounts, otherwise the horses will not stand still
- When passing, give notice to riders ahead by announcing "passing on left/right"
- Horses and alcohol don't mix -no alcohol on the trail
- Promote and support "tread lightly" in camp and on the trail
- No galloping or running horses during the ride.
- Stay on the trail and don't "bush crash" This can spook horses following the trail and can be dangerous
- If an accident does happen and you need to use supplies from the first aid kit, please remember you are responsible for replacing what you took.
- All participants are expected to act safely and reasonably at all times during sanctioned events.
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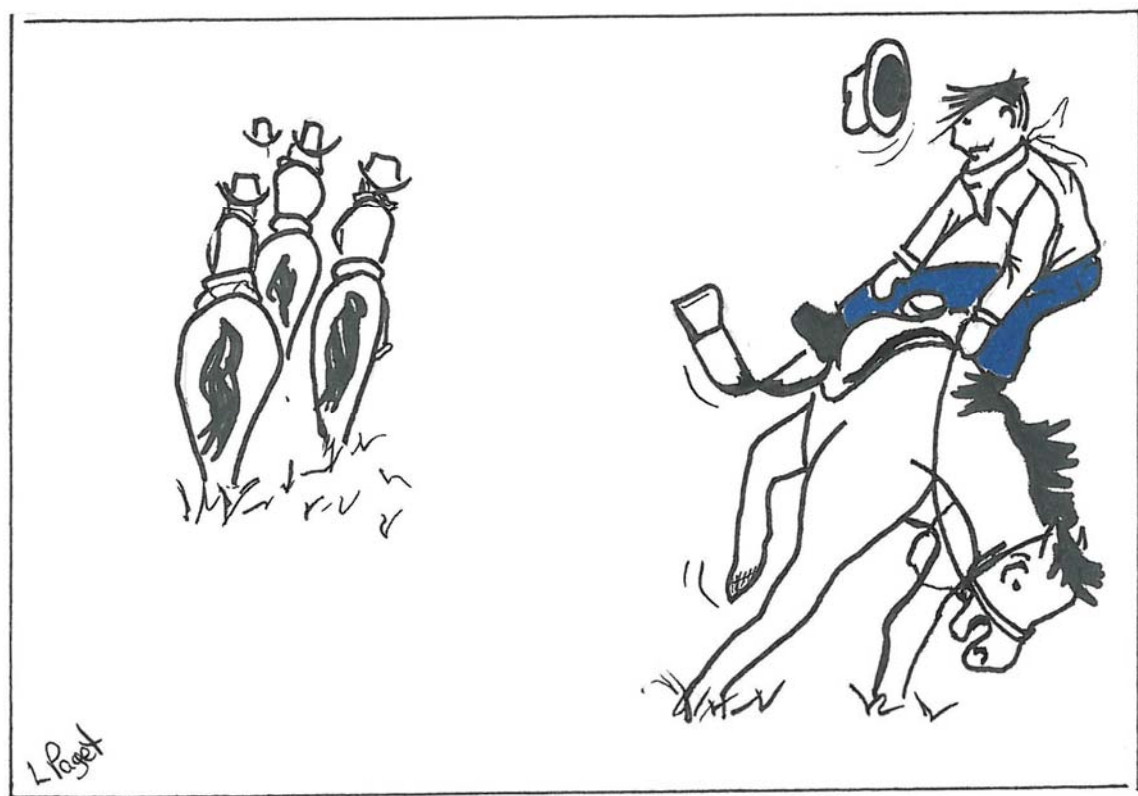
Don't lag behind



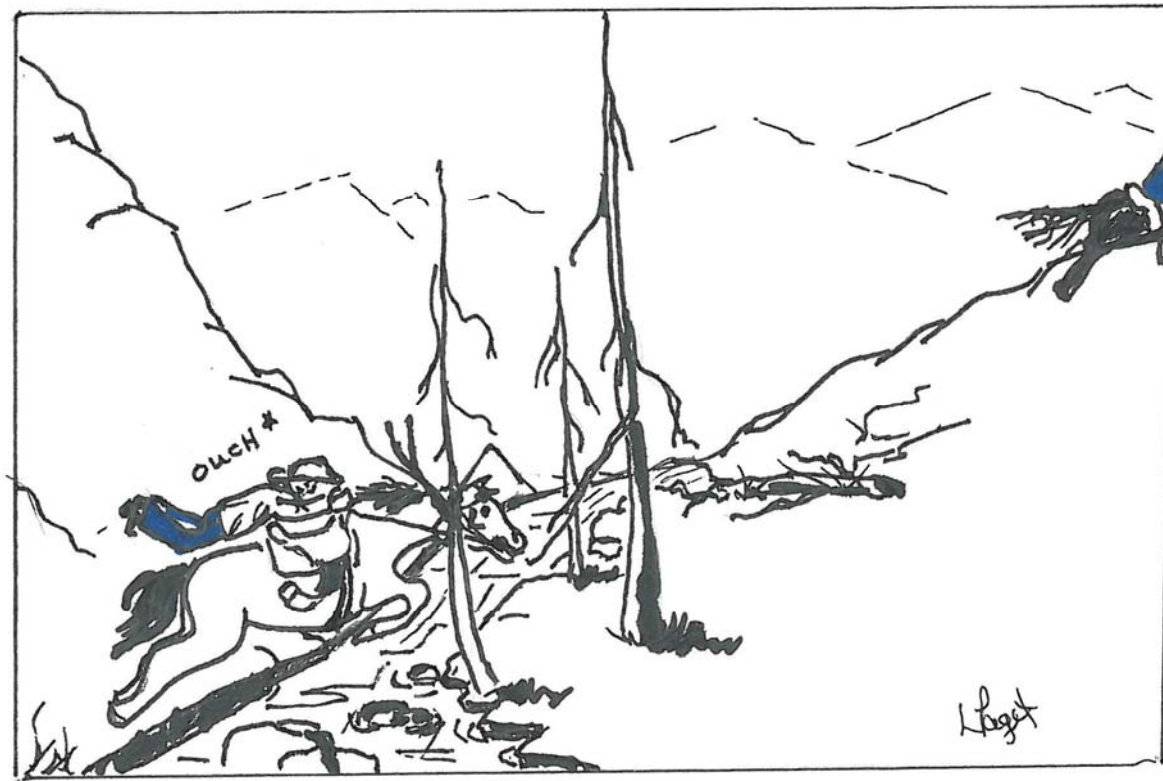
No Galloping or running horses during the ride



Do not leave a dismounted rider



Don't leave anyone behind





A RECREATIONAL TRAIL RIDE GUIDE



A RECREATIONAL TRAIL RIDE GUIDE

Parts of this guide are designed to be photocopied for use as check lists. Riders are reminded that back Country Horsemen of BC endorses, promotes and practices Leave No Trace outdoor ethics. Please understand and follow good LNT practice.

A recreational trail ride is just that, recreational. It should be enjoyable for everyone from the most experienced rider to the novice on their first trek. It is neither a competitive nor an endurance test. It is a good brisk walk with all horses maintaining a one horse length spacing for safety. There needs to be a responsible person in front and another riding drag to ensure a comfortable and safe ride. When approaching obstacles such as rivers, logs, hills, bogs, etc. safety should be the key word. It is especially important then to maintain the one horse length rule to allow horses or riders with difficulty, to safely navigate the obstacle, without them being left behind.



Short Trail Ride Checklist

One minute or one day.

Always check horse and equipment before leaving -YOUR life depends on it!

File a ride plan, see "TRIP ITINERARY". At the very least it should include:

- -when you left
- -where to find your body
- -when you'll be back. Carry emergency gear in a fanny pack or a survival vest, NOT in your saddlebags. This is to ensure it comes off your horse when you do. Keep it with your saddle so you remember to put it on for every ride.



The minimum requirements for emergency gear are:

- ❑ Leave Halter and Leadrope on horse (you never know when you'll need to tie up)
- ❑ Matches AND Lighter
- ❑ Firestarter and/or Candle
- ❑ Emergency Blanket (replace annually)
- ❑ Chemical hand warmer (they last 7-10 hours, pack at least two)
- ❑ Knife (sharp)
- ❑ High Energy Food (Something you don't like the taste of)
- ❑ Some form of Bandaging and Something for pain
- ❑ A Hat and a Whistle
- ❑ A piece of baler twine (to fix things)
- ❑ Identification & Medical Info
- ❑ One days worth of your medication: i.e. Insulin, Bee-sting kit, etc.



Recommended Gear in addition to the minimum list

- Sunglasses (safety glasses are nice if you're riding in any bush)
- Sunscreen
- Bug Repellent (for you and your horse)
- Warm Sweater (we got so cold one July we had to share an emergency blanket-your horse may not be as calm about it as ours were)
- Wear something bright colored (Orange garbage bags can double as a shelter/raincoat)
- Waterproof / Windproof Matches
- Basic first-aid kit
- Rain gear
- Hoof pick (there should always be one tied on your saddle)
- Flashlight (reverse one battery until you need it)
- Toilet paper (and a ziplock bag to put it in)
- More Food and something to Drink
- A map of a new area and a compass (only if you know how to use it)
- Axe, Saw and Flagging tape to mark detours
- A lariat or some sort of rope for pulling
- On an all day ride take lunch for your horse



Additional Considerations

- Your horse must tie or hobble or you will have to hold him (and that could make for a long night if you don't get home).
- When leading another horse never take more than 1 wrap around your saddle horn. It is better to lose the other horse than to end up upside down.
- Leave a key to your truck near the vehicle and let the others in your party know its location.
- Every ride must have a trail boss and a drag rider with additional drag riders throughout if there are a lot of riders.
- Everyone must respect the authority of the Trail boss and the appointed helpers for the safety of everyone.
- **Safety for people first, and for horses second.**



Duties of the Rider

- Firstly to obey the trail boss and helpers to insure the safety of everyone.
- Maintain one horse length between horses
- On approaching a steep hill maintain a good flat walk. Do Not trot or run.
- If your horse requires a breather, inform the trail boss who will choose a place to stop that is safe for everyone.
- Do not pass (disturbs the rhythm)
- Don't lag back for any reason (cougar bait).
- Choose your riding partners before the ride starts.
- Tell the trail boss prior to leaving if you or your horse have special position requirements due to fear, training level, kicking, etc.
- If a change of positions is required, or a stop for any reason, bring it to the attention of the nearest helper or the trail boss so the ride can be halted while the problem is being attended to.
- When tying horses, tie above their wither height with 12 to 18 inches of rope between horse and what they're tied to (If you try for 12 inches you'll be safe). Tie to something strong.
- Warn others of danger on the trail
- Avoid letting branches snap in the face of the horse or rider following (not a problem if you stay one length apart) ?:"J
- Keep on the trail, don't cut shortcut switchbacks.
- If you Pack it in, Make sure you Pack it out
- Leave only footprints take only memories (make them good ones, follow the rules)



Duties

□ **Duties of the Trail Boss**

- The trail boss may run the ride from the front or the rear and is responsible for safety.
- The trail boss determines the physical limitations of any horse and rider and regulates the speed and direction of the ride so their safety is not compromised.
- If a problem arises the trail boss will stop the ride as soon as it's safe so the problem can be corrected and no one gets left behind.
- At tie up areas the trail boss should check that horses are tied and spaced safely.
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□ **Duties of the Drag Rider and helpers:**

- To insure no one is left behind by maintaining the one horse length between horses rule.
- To bring to the attention of the trail boss any problems requiring a stop.
- To bring to the attention of the trail boss any problems caused by inconsiderate riders.



Overnight Trips

In addition to everything from the previous lists, you will need:

- ❑ One gun should be carried
- ❑ A tarp or tent (know how to set it up before you go)
- ❑ Extra batteries for flashlight (and a bulb) D -A shovel to dig a toilet pit. See Leave No Trace Info for guidance.
- ❑ Sleeping bag (If you're cold use one of your hand warmers inside it)
- ❑ Extra clothing
- ❑ Extra food
- ❑ A bowl/plate combo, fork and spoon (You should already have a knife)
- ❑ A cup (with a lid is nice and definitely not a metal one)
- ❑ Cooking pots and utensils (to match type of food being packed) D -Extra medication
- ❑ A complete first aid kit (don't bring anything you don't know how to use)



Overnight trips

You may need:

- A camp stove if there is a fire hazard (or a popular area and there's no wood left or it's just too wet to build a good fire)
- Fuel for the camp stove
- A tarp over your tent and gear if it's really wet out
- A lantern (a candle lantern is nice in the tent)
- A container for drinking water
- A filtering system or water purification tablets

Your Horse will need:

- Feed and a nose bag (you don't have time to stand there and hold a bucket for him, every one has responsibilities to attend to when you make camp).
- Brush (one stiff one can be used for wetting horse down and slicking off water)
- Hobbles or Tether rope
- Highline
- His own first aid kit
- A bell (for warning bears and for finding stray horses)
- A bucket to pack water It's handy to have:



Its Handy to have

- ❑ Glo-sticks to hang on highline and at toilet area
- ❑ Spare shoe, nails and hammer (only if someone knows how to use it)
- ❑ An easy boot if you have a horse that can't go without a shoe
- ❑ Binoculars and/or a camera
- ❑ A sewing kit
- ❑ Extra waterproofing for your boots if it's rainy
- ❑ A deck of cards or something to amuse yourself if you have to wait out a storm



Additional Considerations

- If you are grazing meadows your horse must hobble or tether (stake).
- In many areas only one horse may be tethered, the rest must be hobbled or loose to reduce damage to the area.
- Horses should, and in some areas must, be watered from a bucket or where a trail already crosses the water to reduce erosion.
- Horses should, and in some areas must be highlined at night to reduce damage to tree roots.
- Always ride in boots you can walk home in (You might have to).
- Make sure you spend 10 days training your horse to hobble/tether/tie overnight/wear a bell and give him a refresher course before trips. (We know a horse that went down the trail at a gallop, with hobbles, the first time a bell was hung on him).
- Teach your horse how to use a feed bag for grain, at home, this can also scare them.
- Before you leave choose a Camp Boss and make sure everyone knows their camp duties, some
- Jobs are: start fire, set up tent, get wood, dig toilet pit, put up highline, get water unsaddle, check over, brush, stake and hobble horses
- No food in tents hang it in trees
- Store tack above ground
- Learn to tie a few knots. Practice until they are second nature.



Wilderness and Solo Trips

- ❑ Overnight trips are a stepping stone which must be completed first. Wilderness trips should be undertaken with an experienced guide and solo trips only after extremely careful analysis of your own and your horses level of experience and capabilities.



Remember, before you growl at anybody, they just made the same ride as you did and they probably feel just like you do, so take a deep breath and try to help them.



Thank you to the Back Country Horsemen of BC

- For providing the information and photographs contained in this course. For more information about the Back Country Horsemen of BC go to <http://www.bchorsemen.org/>
- For more information about Horse Council BC go to www.hcbc.ca



About Horse Council BC

- Horse Council BC is a non-profit organization, governed by an independent Board of Directors, committed to representing the interests of our members and the equine industry. As one of the most successful multi-breed, multi-discipline provincial equine organizations in Canada we represent the equine community in BC, by collaborating with individuals, businesses and industry professionals to strengthen communication, education, and safety.

