

Organizing A Group Trail Ride

Rule 1 of organizing a great trail ride is to begin planning months ahead of the ride. It generally takes six to 12 months to properly organize a multi-day, multi camp location trail ride. However, a one-or two-day ride from a base camp may be organized in less than three months. It is always best to start too early than too late.

What type of ride you want to host?

There are several different types of rides. Which type you choose to host depends on what type of riders you are hoping to attract, and how much time and labor you have to devote to the ride planning and preparation.

1) Single Day Ride-This is the easiest ride to host as there is no camp to plan and prepare. This ride is as its name implies-riders meet at a location, ride out and return to the same site. No camping is involved; ~~and~~ this is an excellent way for people to gain experience in ride planning and preparation.

2) Multiple day ride-this type of ride requires more planning and labor than does a single-day outing. There are two types of multiple day rides.

A) Multi Camp Ride- riders travel from one campsite to another. This type of ride requires greater coordination and personnel since you must arrange for multiple campsites, food for all meals, water and food for the horses, trailer parking at each camp, horse containment at each camp, sanitary facilities for each camp and map out roads for the movement of all camp vehicles to the next camp. A multi-camp ride potentially will most likely cross several property lines, requiring permission from each owner.

B) A “Wagon Wheel” or single base camp- ride a different trail (or loop) each day and return to the same base camp at night. A single camp ride enables riders to trailer their horses from home to the campsite each morning, or they can camp without having to travel far.

Choose the proper timing of your ride.

The season of the year is an important factor in the type of terrain your ride covers and the riders it attracts. Most rides take place in the spring or fall, when the weather is generally milder. If your ride is too early in the spring, you may encounter rain. If it is too late in the fall, you may find yourself contending with cold weather and snow. Avoiding months prone to extreme heat or cold makes a ride more enjoyable for riders and less stressful on the horses. Take advantage of the natural attractions of the area, things such as fall foliage or spring waterfalls, when considering the timing your ride.

Secure your campsite(s) and obtain permission to use the trails.

When choosing each campsite, be sure to consider the number of riders and campers you anticipate attending. Also consider the size of their trailers and camping units so that you can provide proper access for these vehicles.

Having a campsite or starting point for a single day, no camp ride with ample parking and all weather/conditions access roads for all trucks and trailers is a necessity.

Your campsite may be on private property, state land, federal land or a combination of these. You should first obtain permission to use the **site**, this will entail determining who or which agency is in charge of providing legal access to the land. It is advisable to obtain written permission to avoid any misunderstandings. Also, obtain rules from the owner or agency outlining campsite regulations and activities, land and water use, if any fees or permits that are required for use and other specifics.

You should also request information regarding general horseback riding regulations at the same time. A public campsite will likely have specific rules covering land usage and campsite regulations. Certain types of feed and hay may not be allowed within the area. Be sure to include all rules and regulations in the guidelines you provide for the participants of your ride.

If you are using private land, be sure to make a clear agreement with the owner of all the specifics they wish your group to adhere to and provide these to your participants.

Regardless of where you camp, you should check into the local and state liability insurance regulations for the public or private campsite and for your ride. You will also need to research what the current horse health requirements are for the state and location and make sure those are known to all the riders.

A list of national parks that allow horseback riding can be found on the National Park Service Web site at nps.gov/parks.html. Select “Horseback Riding” for the topic search and then indicate the state in which you want to ride.

Laying out the trails.

Whether you choose to a single or multi-day ride, select an area with diverse terrain, **which** will keep each day’s ride interesting and challenging. Vista view availability will always make your more attractive to riders.

Once you choose **a site**, ride the area with a small scouting party to find the best trails. This scouting ride will help to determine the areas level of difficulty. Choose the trails that are the most appropriate for the skill level of majority of the riders you wish to attract to your ride. Remember that the majority of your riders are on the ride for relaxation and socialization, so easier is better than harder. If your ride will cross any water, you should identify the safest area for crossing creeks by considering the skill level of the **least** experienced **rider**.

Be sure you ride the entire trail to be used as you make the ride map so that you can accurately **identify** any intersections with other **trails**, water crossings and any other trail distinctions that

will help your riders have an enjoyable and safe ride. This will also help you to estimate the time the ride will take to complete and where to appropriately place breaks along the trail. Keep in mind that a small scouting party will cover the same trail in much less time than will a group of 100 riders. Generally, three to six hours is ample time for rides. Two- to three-hour morning or afternoon rides are also popular.

While scouting, also identify the roadways that are nearest to your trail. Should you have an emergency during the ride, you can accurately and quickly direct an emergency team to your location.

Plan where to take one or more breaks each day in a location that can be reached by truck and trailer, and have a non-riding staff member meet you at this break. If a horse becomes lame, it can immediately be taken back to camp and a substitute horse can be brought in for its rider. The staff member can also return an ill rider to camp.

Working out the details.

Determining staffing needs, identifying a common area for meetings, outlining procedures and rules, as well as planning meals, entertainment and other details to ensure a safe, successful and fun ride are essential. Nothing is more frustrating than realizing after you have set up camp that you forgot the cooking equipment, so checklists are your biggest friend.

At this time you should also determine if you want to have your ride approved by the ApHC so that those participating in the ApHC recreational riding program may receive credit for their mileage. A description of this program and the requirements for approval can be found in the ApHC handbook as rules 458, 459 and 460. For more information on these programs contact the ApHC at 208-882-5578 ext. 264 or email trailrides@appaloosa.com

Ride officials and camp staff

Here is a suggested list of key potential staff and their duties

A. Ride Manager

- a. Locate and secure suitable ride site and route in a timely manner
- b. Secure crew members
- c. Secure the services of an EMT, preferably one for the camp and another for the trail
- d. Supervise, manage and direct all crew members
- e. Insure comfort and well-being of all participants
- f. Make meal arrangements

g. Make comfort arrangements (Port-a-johns one per fifteen participant)

g. Plan and prepare campsite

i. Arrange for water for horses and humans

j. Determine and verify the length (miles) of each day's ride

k. Make a detailed map of each days route

l. Give the ride welcome/orientation

m. Secure permits for trail routes and property access

n. Determines what the state or location health requirements for the horses are

o. Makes the final decision on all camp rule violations

B. Trail Leader/Trail Guide

a. Supervise and monitor activities of all scouts

b. May also function as Trail Leader

c. Assist in locating ride route as needed

d. Ensure safety of ride participants and crew

e. Assist Ride Manager in performance of his/her responsibilities

f. Be familiar with all routes

g. Be prepared to substitute routes if necessary

h. If possible, secure GPS coordinates of strategic points along the trail and all camps.

C. Ride Secretary

a. Coordinates ride information

b. Monitors paperwork and communications prior to, during and after the ride

c. Secures awards and ride favors

d. Keeps record of special requests related to ride

- e. Secures medical information on ride participants
- f. Welcomes the riders to the ride and gives them their ride packets which should include rider ID, a trail map, safety information, camp regulations, ride rules and other information determined by the ride to be necessary.
- g. Checks the state or location required health certificates of each horse
- h. Makes sure all required forms are properly signed by the participants or their guardians
- I. If holding an ApHC approved trail ride have the Trail and Distance forms available along with trail mileage for each day

D. Scouts

- a. Supervise and maintain safe conduct of ride participants on the trail and, where necessary, in camp
- b. Assist ride manager in location and preparation of trails as appropriate
- c. Greet and assist ride participants as they arrive in camp.
- d. Assist drag crew as appropriate
- e. In general, ensure that ride participants have their problems resolved on the trail and in camp

Attendance and staffing needs—When planning your trail ride, determine the number of riders you wish to participate. It's advisable to have one ride official (trail guide and scouts) for every 10 to 15 trail riders. Therefore, if you only have a trail guide and 4 scouts for your ride, limit your ride to 75 riders.

Your ride officials should be easily identifiable. Have them wear matching vest, hatbands, bandannas, shirts or other attire of the same bright or distinct color. Two-way radios will help the ride officials communicate on the trail or with the camp in case of emergency. The two-way radio allows the “Drag” (the ride official riding at the end of the ride to make sure all gates are closed, etc.) to call ahead to the trail leader at the front of the ride and alert him or her of a hold up, for example. If possible, officials should also carry cell and/or satellite phones.

Be sure to determine a specific chain of command and an emergency procedure so issues and emergencies can be dealt with quickly and without confusion. As a safety precaution, secure the services of at least one EMT and inform the local emergency services of your ride and give them exact directions and GPS coordinates to your base camp or each evening's camp. Ride officials should also remain aware of where they are riding in relation to roadways.

The ride secretary will accept payments from and handle most of the communications with the participants before the ride. The secretary should welcome each participant to the ride, give them

their ride packet, which should include an identification badge. I.D. badges are an inexpensive way to put names with faces, which helps riders get to know one another more easily.

Restrictions to trail use

Be sure to check with local officials on any restrictions that could affect those riding on your ride (dogs, horseshoes, smoking, limited number for trail use).

Always be aware of fire restrictions that may be in place during your ride.

Camp Activities

Meal time—When on the trail, riders commonly pack their own meals or are met at meal breaks by a catering truck or chuck wagon. If a caterer is used, plan the day's ride so that each meal break is taken at a location that is accessible by vehicle. Providing tasty food helps draw participants to a recreational ride.

Special/evening activities—A trail ride is more than riding the trails, they typically are social gatherings. Many times trail rides will include activities for evening entertainment or for non-riding campers. Ideas for evening entertainment include-local resident or historian to give the history of the area you are riding through, cowboy poet, dutch oven cooking contest.

Suggested General Rules and Procedures for all rides

- a) Safety of all participants and horses is of primary importance
- b) All participants must have submitted pertinent medical information
- c) All participants must have signed liability waiver
- d) No barefoot riders
- e) No bareback riders
- f) No riding double except in emergency
- g) Use of helmets is encouraged and recommended
- h) No stallions allowed
- i) It is recommended that all horses be 3 years old or older.
- j) Only one horse per rider

- k) No inhumane treatment will be allowed. The ride manager will rule on any such alleged mistreatment. Violators will be banned from the ride and expelled from camp. They may be subject to disciplinary and/or criminal action.
- l) No smoking is permitted while riding on the trail. Smoking should be limited to designated areas in camp.
- m) No alcohol is allowed on the trail.
- n) Use of illegal drugs is prohibited and the discovery of such will result in notification of local law enforcement agencies.
- o) Pets will be caged or leashed at all times. They are not allowed on the trail or at group meals.
- p) Hobbles are not allowed unless the horse is tied or held.
- q) ATV's, motorbikes, mopeds or bicycles will not be allowed, except for use by the crew.
- r) "Leave no Trace" protocol will be observed.
- s) No ponying horses on the trail except in an emergency
- t) Be sure to be very clear on your rules. Some will be considered guidelines and some are true rules of the ride which may cause expulsion from the ride.

Ways to promote your ride outside your own group.

You should begin promoting your ride at least three months in advance to help ensure a successful turnout. The basic principle to remember is that people have to know about the event before they can spread the word.

Decide who your target audience for the ride will be and then determine ways to communicate with those folks. Some general places you should consider sending a press release with information about your trail ride to include local newspapers, local riding clubs, recreational riding publications and 4-H and local riding club newsletters. A press release should answer six basic questions: who, what, when, where, why and how much? It should also include a contact number so potential riders can call you to ask additional questions.

You should contact the target publications several months in advance to ensure your information gets there before their publication deadlines. Publications will often list for free the dates, information and contact number for your ride

Another way to publicize your ride is to create flyers that answer the same basic questions as the press releases. Flyers are relatively inexpensive to produce and can be posted at feed, western wear and tack stores, local horse shows and rodeos and veterinary clinics.

Social media is another way to spread the word about your ride. Pictures of the area taken during your planning rides make great publicity photos to include on social media. Many TV, radio stations and horse websites have a free on-line calendar of events.

The morning of the ride.

You spent months planning, preparing and advertising your ride. You have a great turnout and now it's time to hit the trail—but there's still one more thing to do. Before riding out each morning, gather the riders in a central area to make announcements. Designate a central location in the camp ahead of time for this purpose. On multi-day rides these briefings can be done at meal time.

Go over key points with your riders each day so that the riders know what to expect.

- Introduce ride officials so that riders know who to ask for assistance.
- Give a brief overview of trail riding rules.
- Encourage riders to warm up their horses and check their equipment before riding out.
- Explain bathroom break procedures.
- Inform the riders of the estimated length and duration of that day's ride.
- Inform riders of the terrain they will cross, especially that which may pose an obstacle, such as creeks, mountains, steep hills and highways.
- Notify riders of special equipment needs and uses (i.e., breast collars if that day's ride involves crossing steep hills, or removing tie-downs before crossing any type of water).

The Trail Ride

After orienting the group, the trail leader will lead the ride out. Riders should not pass them and should remember they are guests of landowners. Trail safety and courtesy should be practiced. Drag riders should be used to insure no one is left on the trail and that all open gates are closed.

One horse length should be kept between riders. Raincoats should always be carried unless the climate is extremely dry. In hot weather or in areas of intense sunshine, hats usually are desirable. Always carry at least one bottle of water. Riders may wish to carry water and a snack with them.

Riders should not fall too far behind the rest of the group. Small rides do not always have drag riders, and it is possible to get lost.

The trail leader will periodically stop the ride to check for overheated horses. The trail leader rides back from the front of the trail while drag riders from the back come forward. This gives the horses time to rest and allows riders to check their saddle cinches.

An hour usually is taken for lunch. Most riders loosen the cinch on their saddles while the horse rests during lunch hour. Be sure a tie rope or halter is available for the horse. Horses are not fed at the lunch hour, but they should be watered. Hot horses, however, should not be allowed to drink large amounts of cold water until they cool out.

Most rides involve some road riding. For this reason, horses should be shod. Most horses cannot travel barefoot two or three miles on a gravel road without developing sore feet. Horses that have been foundered or have signs of laminitis may need pads if they are to travel over rocks.

Rest stops on the trail

A common mistake for many new trail riding groups is to ride too far, too fast, without adequate rest stops or time for relaxation. Scenic views are always appreciated on trails. Trail leaders should plan to stop, take a few minutes to dismount, and enjoy them. It is disappointing to be on a ride, hurrying to cover more miles, and to miss a beautiful spot.

The trip back to camp at the end of the day should be shorter than the ride in the morning. Also, the steepest obstacles should be on the morning ride. Most horses and riders will be more tired in the afternoon, and some horses may lose shoes or develop lameness as the day progresses.