



BCHBC Group Trail Riding and Etiquette.

Pre Ride checklist information for the Ride Master and Assistants:

The Ride Master can use a pre-ride checklist, such as the Short Form provided in the “how to host a Ride” article, when actually ready to perform the pre-ride information meeting with all assembled riders.

The information below is provided to enlarge on the topics covered in the short form checklist and should be made available to the Ride Master and all his/her assistants for their information during the early planning stages of a ride.

Additional pre ride considerations:

- If there are a lot of new riders and you don't know their abilities, it would be a good idea to ask the riders to mount their horses and have them walk around before they assemble. This gives an experienced eye the chance to evaluate riders and horses. This is important in deciding the order of the ride. Place novice riders near experienced riders and place nervous horses near calm horses. Do not break up stable mates.
- Horses should not be allowed to visit and sniff noses. They will quickly try to establish pecking order which can result in striking or kicking. It also provides opportunities to spread disease from horses to horse.
- During the pre-ride meeting have an experienced horseman wander through the group to check tack, adjust stirrups, tighten cinches that riders may have overlooked.
- Encourage riders to voice any concerns they may have before the ride so that the group leader can answer questions and make adjustments as needed.

Discuss any trail hazards such as:

- Auto rewind cameras, flash cameras – Be considerate of others, this is less of an issue with digital cameras.
- Carbonated drinks – Snap and fizz with possible spills, not all horses like this.
- Putting on or taking off slickers or jackets while mounted – not on a group ride! Your horse may be used to this but the horses near you may not like the big scary, fluttering “flag” in front or behind them.
- Velcro –scary noise to some horses.

- Riding through dips and jumping creeks –Try to keep an even walk though these. You don't want to jump into the back end of the horse in front or cause the horse behind to want to jump also.
- Hornets and wasps – If they are present they will most likely get the 3rd or 4th rider and subsequent horses. Yell ahead about wasps so the riders in front can clear the area quickly so the horses that are being attacked can get through.
- Wildlife – Most wildlife will be seen first by lead riders. If the wildlife does not clear out it may be necessary to turn the entire group around and leave the area in reverse order.
- Vertigo or fear of heights – Don't look down, look forward. Keep even leg pressure on your horse on the downhill side to keep him pushed away from the edge.
- Slick rock, metal surfaces on bridges etc. – Stay balanced, maintain a light contact and stay at a careful walk.
- Unnecessary stopping on the trail – Tell a ride leader that you wish to stop. They will pick a spot that is as safe as possible for the entire group. You may think you are in a good place but the horses in the front or behind may not be.
- Meeting hikers or other riders on the trail – Ask hikers to gather on one side, preferably on the downhill side (so they're not considered a predator). Pass other riders quietly. If there is no room on the trail, the lead riders from the opposing groups will discuss how far back there was room for passing. The group with the closest safe passing area then turns around and rides in reverse order to that location and waits for the other group to pass. Then they can turn around again and proceed.
- Bridges – Apply as much leg pressure as needed to keep your horse moving forward.
- Rivers - Apply as much leg pressure as needed to keep your horse moving forward. Maintain close contact with your horse so he can't put his head down. Do not allow him to splash or play. Aim his head upstream so he doesn't get dizzy.

Discuss ride rules such as:

- Gait; walk only – (according to the least capable rider) – Group rides will proceed at a walk. The ride leader will try to set the pace fast enough so that the horses don't bunch up, yet slow enough that horses don't have to trot to keep up.
- Stopping for water, photos or bathroom breaks – Ask the lead rider so they can pick a safe location with suitable tie up spots.
- Communication up or down the line, turn to talk to the rider behind you – Pass it on.
- Who rides behind whom; passing – adjustment to ride order may be needed after ride proceeds. Ask the lead riders first and make sure it suits the other riders then pass at a wide safe part of the trail.
- Spacing – You must be able to see the feet of the horse in front of you from between your horses ears. You must not lag behind then trot to catch up. You might like this but following riders don't. It creates a group ride that bunches then

trots, bunches then trots rather than a group that travels in a smooth, flowing even pace.

- Liability insurance – HCBC, AEF or CIF membership is mandatory for BCHBC members participating in the ride.

The Pre-Ride Safety Check:

- Ask riders if they have any medical conditions that the group should be aware of; tell everyone the location of the first aid kit.
- Everyone should “Ride like a Flank Rider”. - Ask riders to help each other by watching the rider in front and let them know about loose cinches, gear coming untied etc. – If someone mentions something to you, deal with it, don’t say “oh that loose cinch (or whatever) is fine. Remember it affects everyone, not just you.
- Cinches front and back snugged up – a loose back cinch can catch a branch or even a foot.
- Cruppers, breast collars, bridles, etc. should be properly adjusted.
- Lead rope for each rider.
- Slicker, hat, water bottle.
- Missing shoes?
- Insect repellent applied?
- Ask if anyone has any problem, concerns or other concerns.

Check cinches and tack again at a safe place about 10 -15 minutes down the trail.

Tighten up loosened gear.

Additional ride considerations:

- If you don’t want to take on additional responsibility – don’t ride in group rides. Even if you are not one of the leaders, you need to be vigilant.
- If you need to leave the group let the leaders know first. If your horse is stressed out being in a large group it is best to break off into a smaller calm group. Don’t ask a nervous horse to leave the group alone as that may stress him out even more.
- If your actions or the behavior of your horse put the safety of the group at risk, a ride leader may ask you to leave the group.
- A group ride must proceed at the level of the least experienced rider. If you are not patient, don’t ride in a group.
- Know your horse. Some horses don’t care how many horses are in a group. Some horses do not adjust well to large groups. Most horses can learn to tolerate large groups as they gain experience through riding in larger and larger groups. Otherwise you may have to break off from the main group for your own safety and for the group’s.

- When passing other horses on trails, take control of your horse in case there is a [problem with the other horses passing. Control your horse's hind end so he can't kick by using your leg to push your horse's hip away from the oncoming horse.
- Watering horses should be done only when the group rider chooses a safe location. If there is room, spread out and water all the horses at once. If not, water in smaller groups or one at a time then move on to leave room from the horses behind. The horses in front move forward in increments until all the horses have had a chance to drink before proceeding on the trail.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES YOU SHOULD ANTICIPATE IN GROUP RIDES

Strange horses and new riders. On a smaller ride you will most likely know the horses and riders.

Unknown levels of experience of horses and riders. There will likely be riders of all riding experience, there may be young, inexperienced horses.

Increased tension. Nervous horses and riders can be contagious. A horse that jigs, snorts and tosses his head can cause tension to spread throughout the group.

Chain reactions. If a horse does something such as spooks, breaks into a trot, or refuses an obstacle, the other horses may do the same thing.

Pacing and spacing. It is important to keep the ride flowing smoothly and safely at an even pace.

Consideration to others. Your actions may affect others in ways you haven't thought of. Selfish, show off or inconsiderate riders have no place on a group ride.

Dogs and Stallions shouldn't be included in group rides. How this will be handled is a decision that must be made by the Host Chapter well in advance of the ride. Riders who like to bring their dogs or stallions can go in a separate group with horses that are known to them. Riders don't want their dogs kicked and they don't want to cause harm to anyone else if their dog spooks a horse or gets underfoot of a horse that is not used to it. Also, a stallion's presence can cause mares to react unexpectedly. Stallions need to ride in a separate group with riders and horses they are familiar with.

Increased responsibility. Safety of the group is everyone's responsibility. Be diligent. If you see anything that needs to be addressed, bring it to the attention of the rider or a trail leader. You may think: "Who am I to tell someone else what to do? They may think I am being a "know-it-all". You may think: "They are adults and can take care of themselves". If it is a safety issue, speak up. If something does go wrong and someone gets hurt, you would feel badly if you could have prevented it.