



## BEGINNER TRAIL RIDES (SHORT RIDES)

### Beginner Trail Rides (short rides)

#### 1 Staff qualifications and ratios

- i. Trail rides should be run by **qualified** staff (either through Horse Safety Australia or another recognised body which provides **specific** trail riding qualifications. This shouldn't just be a general instructor or coaching qualification, as these do not address the specific needs of trail riding –especially when tourists are the clients).
- ii. The overall ratio should be a minimum of 1 qualified staff member for every 6 participants...and **with a minimum of 2 staff** on **any** ride.  
(The Australian Horse Industry Council Code - HorseSafe)

#### 2 Venue

There should be **separation of public and horses** at all times when staff are not involved.

#### 3. Planning

This should include permits for access to trails as required, and knowledge of current weather forecasts and trail conditions. Trails should be regularly monitored and maintained, especially after extreme weather conditions and periods when they have not been used.

#### 4. Horses and equipment

Trail riding operations must have **suitable and safe horses** (including safe horses for staff with at least one staff horse suitable to be exchanged for a client's horse if required) and **appropriate and properly fitted equipment** (stock saddles are most commonly used - with two points of attachment, or double wrapped latigos)

#### 5. Waivers/disclaimers and medical information

Paperwork should include notification about the risks of riding. Ensure that minors have parental or a legal guardian's permission. Obtain relevant medical (including allergic) history of clients. Adults should sign waivers which meet the relevant legislation in each state.

Check for hydration of clients, toilet needs and sunscreen as appropriate to the length of the ride and the weather conditions.

#### 6. Helmets

Clients and staff should be fitted with **ASNZ 3838** standard helmets or equivalent (see Appendix p 6) and correctly fitted by staff

#### 7. Footwear:

Either riding boots should be provided, or if clients are using their own footwear safety stirrups should be used which prevents dragging in a fall (e.g. SmartRider Classic or Escape Breakaway stirrups)



**8. Clothes**

Clothing should include sleeved shirts and long pants

**9. Saddle bags**

These should be available for carrying client's loose items (medicines, puffers, cameras-if appropriate, drink bottles etc.)

**10. Safe mounting area**

There should be a **secure area with non slip footing for mounting up** (enclosed with appropriate fencing). Riders should be assisted to mount, their equipment checked and fitted, and their abilities assessed before they depart. Riders should demonstrate control of their horses, and as a minimum, the ability to independently start, stop and turn their horses.

**11. Young or nervous riders**

Children under 10 years old, without extensive experience, and nervous riders not in control of their horses, should be placed on a lead rein and led by a qualified staff member. This staff member cannot then be included in the normal ratios for the supervision of the ride.

**12. Emergencies**

There should be **good access and egress** to horse area and trails **for emergencies** and these should be known by the trail guides. A responsible person at home base should be familiar with the trails used and know time frames required to respond to emergencies.

**13. Trail terrain**

The trail should be safe and suitable to suit the standard, experience and fitness of the riders and horses (e.g. for beginner riders avoid overhanging branches, and ride away from significant hazards including main roads, very steep ascents or descents).

**14. Risk Management**

Risk Management must be in place for the program, and emergency procedures determined for foreseeable problems. Staff must be trained in these.

**15. First aid qualifications**

At least two staff members on every ride should be trained in first aid. First aid equipment for both horse and rider should be taken on all trail rides

**16. Communication**

Mobile phones, UHF, satellite phones or some alternate effective communication device (e.g. SPOT device) must be available for emergencies and carried by staff on all trail rides

**17. Language, and communication with riders**

Staff must have an effective means of communication with their riders whether through normal verbal commands, signs or interpreters. They should be sure that their riders understand their commands prior to departure.



## **18. Contingency plans**

There should be contingency arrangements for foreseeable weather changes (e.g. taking rain wear, considering different routes)

## **19. Roads**

If public roads are used, road rules must be obeyed: keep left, no more than 2 riders side by side at any time.

## **20. Environmental Impact**

Trails should be designed to consider and minimize environmental impact

## **Good practices for beginner trail rides.....**

*(N.B. These are general principles, and require risk management related decisions in their application, taking into account the differing needs for each group of riders, the terrain, the weather, the horses used, and the experience of the staff, etc. They should be read in conjunction with the previous general information.)*

### **Introduction, rules & demonstration**

It is good to begin with an introduction to horses and horse riding for the whole group. This should include basic rules of behaviour around horses, (no running, yelling, throwing things) and a demonstration of how to approach safely, and how to mount a horse, sit in the saddle, hold the reins and where the feet fit in the stirrups. The demonstration should include how to start, stop and turn a horse, and then how to dismount and hold a horse (and lead it, if this is likely to be required on the ride).

### **Tack check**

Staff must tack check the horses before mounting riders...particularly check the firmness of the girth, if the horse has been standing and waiting.

### **Procedure for mounting**

It is imperative that riders are not put in danger when mounting, or when waiting for others. They are at risk if they are in amongst loose horses, whether on foot or mounted waiting to start the trail ride. Horses can be tied around the outside of the area in the order they will set off on the ride. In this way they are not in position to interact with other horses, and all riders can be observed by staff at all times. Starting from the back end of the line, staff can untie the horses and mount the riders, leaving them next to the outside of the area still in line. Staff can then keep watch over mounted riders while helping the next clients. The front horses (still tied and un-mounted) are blocking the riders from moving off during this mounting process. (Take care that the mounted horses do not move forward along the line and between the unmounted, waiting tethered horses and the fence)

### **Assist with mounting**

Beginner riders must be assisted to mount (with the staff member holding the horse for them). Mounting blocks are a good aid for the sake of the horse, rider, staff's back and equipment. Purpose built mounting blocks should be used, NOT milk crates! Stirrup size and length should be adjusted prior to leaving the rider on their own. Riders should NEVER be mounted on a horse that is tethered!

### **Riders demonstrate control**

Riders must demonstrate their ability to start, stop and turn a horse prior to departure on a trail ride. This is most efficiently achieved by working with the whole group, moving the line around the area prior to departure...with all working on stopping, starting and turning at the same time. Alternately, if



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time is not a constraint, staff may choose to work with each rider during the mounting process, but they need to be aware that this involves people sitting on horseback, waiting, for a much longer time.

### **Girth check**

A girth check in the first 15 minutes after mounting is advisable, as they could have loosened, putting the rider at risk.

### **Travel single file at a walk, with the possibility of a short trot only if all riders are secure and the horses are assessed as familiar with the environment, situation and are calm natured.**

Beginner riders (tourists, children etc.) normally travel in single file at a walk. If moving in this way, the horses learn to follow behind each other and the riders require less involvement in controlling them. The front rider can then block the group in an emergency and control the pace. (If travelling side by side the horses can start to race each other and vie for the lead. In this situation, a staff member cannot effectively block (control) the riders or horses.) A short trot can be managed if all riders are keen to go faster and are assessed as balanced in the saddle. This must only be attempted with beginner groups if ALL horses involved (including staff horses!) are assessed as calm and suitable for this activity. Remember that the rule of thumb of a trail ride is that it always travels at the speed suitable for the least experienced and confident rider.

### **Position of staff members**

There must be a staff member at the front of the group to lead, set the pace and block in an emergency, and another at the back to check on the progress of the group, and assist with any problems which arise. The back rider may travel at the side of the group if there is room to do so safely (i.e. not a narrow track) as from this position they can see what is going on much better. Additional staff members (required by the ratios set at a minimum of 1 horse staff to 6 clients) may ride at the side towards the middle of the group (or in line, if the track is narrow).

The front rider should never leave the group to deal with a situation, or the problem may escalate with no one blocking the rest of the riders from moving off.

### **Staff must fix problems along the way**

Trail riding staff should watch for and fix problems along the way. These may include:

- unsettled horses which might cause difficulties (too close to another, looking like kicking, unhappy with the rider's behaviour or their tack)
- loose girths (risking saddles slipping)
- rider problems: feet jammed in stirrups, misbehaving (catching branches as they pass, dropping or waving reins around, abusing horses), nervousness and fear.

### **Leading a nervous rider**

Staff members should be trained and able to lead a nervous rider on a lead rope should this be appropriate. The staff member leading the nervous rider should be the one at the front of the ride. Leading another horse is a big responsibility and requires full attention on the rider being led, so the person at the back of the ride if leading another horse cannot move around and keep check on the needs of the group ahead of them.

### **Staff instruct skills as required**

Staff may need to instruct basic riding skills along the way, to ensure the riders are safe and in control of their mounts.



### **Tourist information**

Trail rides are an opportunity to talk about the environment, the local features and the fauna and flora in the area.

### **Returning to the venue**

Horses must always walk the last portion of the ride home. Riders should be in a safe position to dismount (away from the possibility of a kick from other horses). A simple way to ensure this is to have riders ride stay in line when home, ride on the left rein around the outside of the yard, and stop in line along the fence for their dismount. They should dismount to the inside of the area, away from the fence. Staff may feel they need to assist riders to dismount by holding each horse and ensuring the dismount is controlled.

#### **Mixed levels of riders in a trail ride:**

**If some riders are more experienced or confident can you take them faster than a walk?**

***The normal rule of thumb for all trail rides is that the ride travels at the speed suitable and safe for the least experienced rider within the group.***

On no account should a section of a trail ride trot or canter off from, or back to join a group of beginner riders.

The trail ride group may be able to divide safely if the horses carrying the beginner riders are trained to keep walking, and have been extensively tested to be calm in this situation, and the horses which will travel separately and faster are well behaved and suitable for their level of rider and the activities undertaken.

The trail ride group must not be divided without at least 2 qualified staff members per section (the ratio remains at 1 staff member to 6 clients but with a minimum of 2 staff for any group). The only exception to this rule may be if the business has prior knowledge of the skills held by some experienced riders, and there are suitable horses, and that there are two people with first aid qualifications as well as communication devices in the group which is separating for a faster section of the ride. (The two people with first aid qualifications could be one qualified staff member and an experienced rider who understands the SOPs of the business and can deliver first aid in an emergency). The more confident/experienced group then walks away in a different direction from the main group and must also walk back to join the group after the faster section of their ride has been completed.