



# Top Ten Tips for the Trail

*Ethics for Equestrians*

## *Caring for trails, sharing the land*

Trail riding is a healthy, fun activity — for both horse and rider. It offers an opportunity to appreciate the land and its flora and fauna, and it provides your horse with new learning experiences.

Equestrians in Idaho are lucky to have a great deal of public land open to trail riding. There are many things we as responsible riders can do to care for and reduce our impacts on public lands that will ensure we have continued access to these spectacular areas.

We also need to be aware that most public lands are used for livestock grazing, habitat management for wildlife, watershed protection, and a very wide range of recreational activities.

*There's a lot more to  
ridin' a horse than just  
sittin' on the saddle and  
lettin' yer feet hang down."*

From *Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On!* by Texas Bix Bender,  
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**1. Leave gates as you find them.**

Fences and gates are important management tools used by ranchers. Whether a gate is open or closed, it's important to leave it as you found it. Closing a gate might be life-threatening for wild horses or cattle, especially if it keeps them from reaching a food or water source. Leaving a gate open can be equally dangerous, particularly if there are roads nearby.

**2. Share the trail with other users.**

Most public lands allow for multiple uses. This can create conflict on the trail. If you approach another user, speak up to allow for safe passage. Many people are not aware of horse behavior and will unintentionally spook or scare them. If there are livestock on the trail, take your time to let them to move out of your way. Chasing or allowing your dogs to chase livestock is not acceptable. Patience with livestock is necessary.

**3. Keep your distance.**

Observe wildlife, wild horses, cattle and other livestock from a distance. Don't stalk or approach wild horses and never attempt to feed them. Be aware of riding near wild horses during the breeding season in the spring. Treat them as you would other wild animals: maintain a safe distance and respect their comfort zone. Feeding wildlife damages their health, changes natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Observe and enjoy, but don't impact their lives.

**4. Keep off the grass...and any other plants at the trailhead.**

In the parking area, avoid driving your truck and trailer over vegetation, into sensitive areas, or expanding the designated parking areas in any way.

**5. Just say no to poop piles!**

Carry a manure fork in your trailer so you can clean up around your trailer, taking home manure, old hay and spilled bedding. If possible, throw a bucket of water on urine puddles to dilute them. On the trail, teach your horse to keep moving when it defecates to prevent manure from piling up. If your group stops for any length of time and there is a build-up of manure, dismount and kick manure around to disperse it. Manure and urine attract flies and flies aren't fun for horses or humans! Please keep our waterways clean, too, by not allowing your horse to urinate or defecate near any water body.

**6. It's OK to play in the puddles...at least to get to the other side.**

Teach and encourage your horse to travel through muddy spots and puddles on the trail. Riding around them widens the trail, which destroys vegetation and creates a muddier mess. In a group, cross these areas in single file.

**7. Stay on track and don't cut corners.**

Stay on marked trails and do not cut new trails, switchbacks or corners. When possible, ride single file to keep from widening and degrading trails. Creating new trails, especially in sensitive areas like wetlands, bogs, or marshy meadows without permission of the manager or land-owner can cause these areas to be closed to future use. Riding in these areas can also trigger erosion and the loss of valuable topsoil which can destroy fish and wildlife habitat. Serious water quality problems occur when sediments end up in streams, ponds or other water bodies.

**8. Don't tie me down!**

Tying horses to trees or other vegetation can cause serious damage. When camping in a forested area, consider highlining your horse. A highline is simply a rope stretched tightly between two trees to which you tie your horse to. Instead of wrapping the rope around trees potentially girdling and damaging them, use a Tree Saver Strap which minimizes impact to the tree. (These are required in many wilderness areas.) Learn more about highlining and Tree Savers at TrailMeiser.com or Back Country Horsemen of America. ([www.bcha.org](http://www.bcha.org))

**9. Keep your dogs close!**

Dogs should be kept under control at all times, but especially around wild horses, cattle, and wildlife. This is even more important during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young or wintertime—or if you encounter herding and guard dogs with livestock.

**10. Be a weed warrior, stop the invasion!**

Inspect your horse's hooves and brush your horse's coat, especially the mane and tail, at home to remove potentially harmful seeds, particularly if your horse lives in a weedy area. Remove packed dirt and debris from riding boots as well, and keep your truck and trailer clean. Invasive weeds are a huge problem on both public and private lands because they root quickly and out-compete native plants. Some weeds cause wildlife to lose critical habitat or food sources; others are toxic to wildlife or livestock.



**Sharing public lands with other users helps ensure a place for equestrians in the future. Please care and share. Happy trails!**