



Guide to Equestrian Trail Riding

Proud Risk Management
Partner of Ontario Equestrian:



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Welcome to the exciting world of equestrian sport.

We are Ontario Equestrian and we can help you:



Connect with resources – coaches, riding facilities, trainers.



Find experts in specific areas of interest - Trail Riding, Horse Shows, and Community Events.



Learn how to stay safe and make the most of your time in the saddle. Unlike a lot of other sports (i.e. gymnastics, soccer, hockey) many equestrian participants begin as adults.

This guide is intended to give new adult riders and parents of new young riders the information you will need to have fun and enjoy the sport. If you don't find answers to your questions here, please visit our website at www.ontarioequestrian.ca, or send your specific questions to info@ontarioequestrian.ca.

Why Ride?

Get active - Develop the physical and mental skills you need to ride. One hour of riding will burn calories equivalent to a 30-minute jog or bicycle ride. Improve your:

- ✓ Balance and Co-ordination
- ✓ Cardiovascular Fitness
- ✓ Muscle Strength
- ✓ Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
- ✓ Visual Perception
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Hand-eye Co-ordination
- ✓ Impulse Control

Bond with your horse - horses are highly social and sensitive animals. This is the bond that brings people back to riding throughout their lifetime.

Enjoy quality time with your friends and family - riding is a great activity for families - young and old, male and female.

Riding is a Stress Buster - with experience, riding becomes a calming and enjoyable experience. Feeling down? Saddle up!

Get close to nature.



Why Trail Ride?

Did you know that over 50% of OE members trail ride? Whether you are riding trails for fun, relaxation or to condition your horse for competition, there are many benefits to equestrian trail riding for both horse and rider. They include:

- ✓ To experience the beauty of nature on the many trails across Ontario
- ✓ For exercise
- ✓ To provide social time with friends and family
- ✓ To build a relationship with your horse
- ✓ For discovery and adventure

The average trail rider rides with a friend, on a day trip averaging four hours in length. The beauty of trail riding is that you can ride for as long as you like, if you plan appropriately. You can take a casual ride through a local trail, spend a day long outing or plan an adventure over a number of days.

There are many trail riding groups across the province, often associated with a particular trail, and some advocating and supporting trail riders across the province. We have included a list of key trail groups/clubs at the end of this guide, for you to connect with the community (see page 15.) For a complete and up-to-date list of recreational and trail clubs, please visit our website: www.ontarioequestrian.ca

We encourage you to ride with family or friends, or join a group of some of the many trail riding communities across Ontario.

Stay active, healthy & safe.



Getting Started

Before you hit the trails, you need to learn to ride safely and independently.

Find a Coach

Whatever your riding goals, accredited riding schools and certified instructors and coaches will teach you the basics of riding and horsemanship in the English or Western disciplines.

Once you have an understanding of the basics, you can find an experienced trail guide (some who are also Certified Coaches) to introduce you to the trails.

A complete list of Certified Coaches and Instructors can be found on our website, under “Find a Coach” at www.ontarioequestrian.ca

Find a Place to Ride

Ontario Equestrian has partnered with many facilities across Ontario - all of whom have met a set of minimum standards including providing:

- ✓ Farm insurance
- ✓ Emergency Action Plan
- ✓ Rider waiver
- ✓ Barn safety rules
- ✓ And a signed accreditation partnership with Ontario Equestrian agreeing to maintain standards for the care and safety of their riders, horses and facility

You can find a complete list of our OE accredited riding facilities across the province under, “Find a Place to Ride” at www.ontarioequestrian.ca

These facilities will ensure you are partnered with a horse that is appropriate to your skill level so that you can learn in a fun and safe environment.

There are also trail riding facilities that will provide an experienced and skilled trail guide, along with horses that are experienced in navigating the range of terrains found on trails.

Trail rides can be fun, casual and calming or exciting and invigorating! As you get more experienced, you will find lots of challenging opportunities to enjoy trail riding.

Ontario has many beautiful destination Trails which are safe and welcoming to horseback riders, but remember, trails are typically located within sensitive lands that must be respected.

Riding Programs

Learn to Ride

Many of our Certified Coaches and Instructors use the “Learn to Ride” program to teach the basics of horsemanship and riding. This program is organized in both English and Western disciplines, although either discipline will teach you the entry level basics.

As you become a more proficient rider, you may choose one over the other, particularly if you decide that trail riding is your passion.



Planning Your Trail Ride

Make sure you have brought all of the equipment and supplies you need for you and your horse – food, water, appropriate dress for the weather (ensuring visibility) and a communication device in the event of an emergency.

As you make arrangements for your trail ride, remember to:

- ✓ Plan how you will travel – by trailer, on foot (leading or riding your horse)
- ✓ Plan how you will mount – are you able to mount from the ground? This is something you could practice at home as you may have to mount and unmount during your ride
- ✓ Make sure family or friends at home know your plans – where you are going and how long you will be gone, along with a number to reach you in case of an emergency
- ✓ Visit the area in advance to -
 - determine where you can park, or the route you will ride to the trail
 - map the route of the trail(s) you will ride, taking into account the length of the trail and duration of your ride
 - ideally, plan your ride to start and finish during daylight hours
- ✓ Carry a first aid kit

Riding on the Road

If you must travel on the road, you will share the road with motorized vehicles. According to the Ontario Highway Traffic Act, horse riders and drivers of horse drawn carriages have the same rights and responsibilities to use the road and must follow the same rules.

Riding on a vehicular road is never recommended since even the best trained horses can be startled and react unpredictably to passing vehicles and vehicle noises.

If you find you must travel on a road to your destination, an alternative to riding is to hand-walk your horse with a lead shank on the shoulder of the road – as far away from moving traffic as possible.

If you still choose to ride on the road, remember these important rules to maximize your safety:

- ✓ Choose the safest road possible to take you to your destination – roads with wide shoulders, low traffic and reduced speed limits
- ✓ Riding on roads with speed limits of 80km/hr or more is strongly discouraged

- ✓ Avoid using the roads at night
- ✓ If you have difficulty controlling your horse, dismount and walk until the horse is calm and under control
- ✓ Ensure that you and your horse are visible at all times
- ✓ Ride calmly at a walk, travelling in the same direction as traffic
- ✓ Multiple riders must travel in single file
- ✓ Ride on the road – not on sidewalks or bicycle paths
- ✓ Do not use earphones or headphones while riding on the road
- ✓ Be attentive and prepared to respond if your horse sees loose animals (dogs, wildlife), pedestrians or cyclists
- ✓ Take care when crossing a road – look and listen to ensure the way is clear

Trail Riding Safety, Education and Etiquette

From time to time, Trail Safety and Education Workshops are scheduled for our members, as demand arises. If you are interested in a workshop, please let us know and check the event schedule on our website.

Here are some great basic rules to follow when trail riding -

- ✓ If you're just learning to trail ride, find an experienced partner to ride with you
- ✓ Make sure your tack is in good repair - check the bridle, girth and straps, adjust your stirrups
- ✓ Educate your horse to trail ride – ensure they are comfortable and safe to ride in open spaces on varied terrain. Young and inexperienced horses are not good trail horse prospects unless you are a very experienced and knowledgeable rider
- ✓ Plan an appropriate trial ride for you and your horses experience. Don't plan a day long trail ride on your first day out! You will have a better understanding of your comfort level and skills with some experience
- ✓ Have an emergency plan in place before you head out – ensure others at home who are available during your outing know your plans and exchange phone information and ensure that they are able to come to your assistance if necessary

- ✓ Jumping logs or ditches and swimming with horses should be learned with an experienced partner (or coach) before it is attempted on the trails
- ✓ Ride in single file
- ✓ Walk when passing others on a trail, when travelling up or down a hill, or when the ground is loose or wet
- ✓ Make eye contact with others you meet on the trail - make sure they know you are there and where you are going - let them know how to pass if they are unsure - use your hand signals



- ✓ Stay calm when encountering persons or animals on or in the vicinity of the trail – pedestrians, cyclists, wildlife, livestock, stinging or biting insects
- ✓ If you see a hazard (hole in the ground, large stump or rock, animal) shout out and point to the hazard to alert others in your group - if necessary, re-route your path of travel
- ✓ Pass left to left
- ✓ Keep a safe distance of at least 2 meters between horses at all times
- ✓ Wait for slower riders - remain together as a group
- ✓ Stay on the trails - don't make new trails or damage surrounding sensitive lands
- ✓ Bring out what you take in and kick manure off the trails
- ✓ Maintain control of your horse at all times - discourteous or dangerous behavior will create resentment and can result in the banning of horses from trails

Risk Management

Intercity Insurance is Ontario Equestrian's Risk Management partner offering support to the provincial and national programs delivered by provincial equestrian organizations across Canada.

When you are learning to ride or if you are training for a particularly challenging trail ride, we strongly encourage you to find a certified equestrian coach to assist you. Certified coaches have legal and ethical responsibilities for the safety of riders in their lesson program.

Other key risk management tips to remember are:

- ✓ **The Rider** - wear an ASTM helmet and proper riding boots with a heel to avoid your foot slipping through the stirrup
- ✓ **The Equipment** – new riders may choose to use break-away safety stirrups, and the rider should do a tack check before every ride to make sure that the tack is in good condition, the girth is adequately tightened, etc
- ✓ **The Trail** – riders should be prepared for the conditions they will be riding in, and be appropriately skilled for the length and type of trail they will be riding. Be familiar with the nature of the trails (steep, narrow, through water, etc) and the experience required by you, the rider and your horse to navigate these challenges
- ✓ **Find an Experienced Trail Guide** – if you are new to trail riding or to a particular area, consider finding a guide who is skilled and familiar with the trails you are on



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Trail Community

There are many equestrian community groups in and around trails for you to meet and join. These groups often hold social events and work together to advocate for the use of the trails they enjoy and also help maintain them for everyone.

You will find there are many different communities of trail users, including cyclists and hikers - some who are very sophisticated in their skills and experience in managing and maintaining trails.

Communities who work together often have the best experience by sharing and pooling their resources, and developing a good relationship with the local Conservation Authority, Forest or Trail Managers and Municipal Governments.

Become active in your riding community!



Resources - Find a Trail, Trail Riding Event, or Trail Group/Club

The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation

<https://www.ontariotravel.net/en/play/outdoor-adventures/land-and-air-adventures/horseback-riding>

The Ontario Trail Riders Association

<http://ontariotrailriders.ca/>

The Ontario Competitive Trail Riding Association

<http://octra.on.ca/>

The Ontario Trails Council – Equestrian

<http://www.ontariotrails.on.ca/trails/activity/equestrian>





The Community for Equestrian Sport in Ontario

www.ontarioequestrian.ca

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