

Tails & Tires

Mountain Bikers, Hikers and Equestrians

Safety Workshop for Mountain Bikers, 90 minutes approx..

Purpose: To familiarize mountain bike riders with horses; teach them how and why horses may react to mountain bikes and demonstrate safe techniques for approaching and/or passing people on horses and hikers on trails. Reinforce concepts of protecting the environment.

Participants: Open to all mountain bikers and others interested in trail safety. Horse and the horse handlers should be selected carefully. The best experience would include several horses that are comfortable with bikes and at least one that is likely to show a spook response. At least 1-2 experienced mountain bike riders should be available for demonstration purposes.

Safety Equipment: Shoes, no sandals, are required near horses and helmet is required to mount horses.

Presentation Materials: White board with markers, Handout for review, giveaways, if available.

Where: An unpaved open area suitable for horses with footing that is OK for bikes. A dirt road or fire road sized trail nearby for horse/bike passing is necessary. A fenced riding arena nearby is a plus as that will allow mountain bikers to experience what it's like to actually ride a horse.

Program Overview:

- Introduction – Group discussion with White Board
- Safety for today around horses
- Group session conducted by Leader
 - Prey animal concept
 - Horse Physiology
 - Safe trail behavior
- Mountain bikers ride horses
- Demonstration – Arena and trail
 - Show spook reaction
 - Safe passing
- Group Session Recap
 - What did you learn?
 - What will you do differently?
 - Feedback – What worked & what didn't you like?

Instructor Guide

Introduction – Group Discussion With White Board

Leader goes over program for the day.

Asks: “Why do you mountain bike?” List answers on white board. Asks horse owners same question. Show there is more in common than different

Initial, brief explanation of why a horse is different from say a dog. Human brains function primarily in the mode of rational thinking. We see or hear and rationally decide what the sight or sound means. Extreme sight or sound shifts the brain into pure reaction mode – no thinking, just reaction. That’s called Amygdala Hijack. In humans, it occurs rarely. With simple brains, say lizards, there is no rational thinking, it’s only amygdala response. Horses are somewhere between the two. More about that later, for now let’s go see the horses up close.

Safety For Today Around Horses

Leader explains how to safely approach a horse on foot and points out the areas of safety concern: behind the horse (kick potential) and near the legs (getting one’s foot stepped on). Also points out the ears as an indicator of the horse being comfortable or concerned.

Group Session Conducted By Leader

Why do we have these public lands to enjoy? Why are the hills covered with trees and not houses? – Because your parents, grandparents and others their age decided to protect the hills and trails for our use, forever. So next time you see a senior citizen on the trail, think about how they have given each of you the ability to walk, or ride surrounded by nature.

Discuss environmental issues relevant to the local area and the positive impact mountain bikers can have by understanding the issues and doing the right thing.

Who uses the trails? – We have hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders, but also dog walkers, joggers, seniors, and little kids. Many are athletic, but many others are not. They also don’t know the meaning of commands like: “On Your Left”. Say that to hikers and some will move away, while many will move left.

Understanding Horses: Prey vs. predator. Horses are prey animals. In the wild, they get eaten. Predators (mountain lions, bears, dogs) attack prey animals to kill them for food. Prey animals have eyes on the side of their heads. Predators have them on the front.

Why do horses flee (spook)? To escape danger! Nature equips horses with the amygdala hijack to keep them from being eaten!

How and from where do attacks happen? From above and behind

First defense – Flight! The horse runs away (spooks).

Sudden, lightning fast spin and run. Avoid that attacking predator!

Second defense – Kick

Important – When a horse is “spooked”, there is no rational thinking. You and the rider should do everything possible to relax the horse to keep amygdala hijack from taking over.

Horse Physiology

- Horse range of vision: separate left eye – right eye range of vision
- Separate brain reaction, left and right. Must “learn” on both left and right sides
- Some horses are safer on one side, others are OK on both sides
- Which side should you pass on? – Ask the rider.
- Horses use sight and sound to detect predators.
- Horse may not recognize a mountain bike rider as a person. If unknown, horse assumes it’s a predator
- Unknown sounds, like a bike moving through brush, sounds like a predator
- Sudden appearance or movement
- Open area (easy escape routes) makes horses comfortable. Narrow, confined space makes them spooky
- Bell sound is not recognized by the horse, but it does alert the rider. Use both the bell and your voice
- Horses display body language to let you know if they are calm or upset. Look for the signs – ears, eyes, head position, tail.

Safe Trail Behavior

- Talk to the horse and rider!! Say hello, Say ANYTHING, just talk!!
- Ask if it’s OK to pass
- Ask which side to pass on
- Pass only when horse rider says it’s OK
- Pass slowly, passing speed no faster than horse is traveling
- If you are aware of others, but can’t see them, ring bell and say “hello, I’m riding a bike”
- Discuss trail conditions that are of special concern – blind corners, narrow trails, steep trails or banks
- When approaching a horse from behind, ask the rider to turn so the horse faces you.

Mountain Bikers Ride Horses

- Mountain bikers gather without their bikes for this part. One or more horses are led (no rider) among the group and the bikers pet, talk to the horses and perhaps feed them carrots.
- If a fenced arena is available, bikers should mount horses, with handler holding the lead line. Lead horses with bikers around arena. Discourage free riding unless both handler and rider are comfortable with the ability of the rider to control that particular horse.

Demonstration – Show Spook Reaction

- Experience MB rider rides by a horse held on a lead line. MB rider skids to a stop near horse.
- Session Leader demonstrates other activity to show horse spook reaction.

Trail Experience

- Several horses ride along the trail single file
- Several bikes approach from opposite direction. Practice talking to riders. Ask if it's OK to pass.
- Several bikes approach from behind the horses. Practice talking to riders. Ask which side to pass on.

Recap – Gather in a group, Leader, using white board, asks “What can each of you do to create safety on the trails?”

- Commit to ride open trails only
- Leave no trace
- Control your bike
- Don't scare animals- you're in their home
- Plan Ahead - Enough daylight? Have enough water?
- Adjust behavior for conditions, other people
- Tell you friends – Spread the word – You are a Trail Ambassador