

Safety Tips for Sharing Trails with Horses



1. **Please remember horses have the right-of-way.**
2. **Talk.** Friendly greetings or comments about the weather will help the horse feel comfortable. This is especially important if you are wearing a backpack that sticks up over your head or if you are riding a bicycle. Horses have great eyesight but not much depth perception. This will help them know how far away you are and that you are friend not foe. This is especially important when you are approaching a horse from behind.
3. **Passing:** If you need to pass the horse, **slow down and alert the rider by letting them know you'd like to pass on the right.** Give the rider time to convey the message to the horse. If a horse needs to pass you, dismount and stand with your bike on the downhill side. If possible, it is best to be about 20 feet away.
4. **If you see a horse spooking, turn** and move away from the horse. This will help the horse relax. To a horse, a backpacker or a bicyclist doesn't look human due to helmets, sunglasses, and unusual posture. Remember, the nearly silent approach of a hiker or bicyclist is very similar to the approach of a predator. The sound of your voice talking calmly about the weather will help the horse understand that you are a human, not a predator.
5. **Always feel free to check in with the rider and ask questions.** Different horses have different levels of experience and different comfort levels. Just because one horse was comfortable with a situation, doesn't mean another horse will be. It is safe to assume your presence will make every horse wary and some frightened.
6. **If a horse is stopped and you need to pass, talk to the rider** and make sure everything is okay. A horse's kick can reach 15 feet.
7. **Surprised horses can injure you or their riders.** If you are on a trail and you hear a horse coming but the horse can't hear you, start talking or singing so you don't surprise the horse.
8. **Horses are prey animals and they are always thinking about survival.** Try to look normal (this is harder for some of us than others) and move slowly around them (this is especially tough for kids).
9. **If you or your kids would like to pet the horse, ask the rider if their horse would be comfortable first.** Horses are very social animals and follow specific social rules with each other. We get along best with them, when we act as they do. They ask permission before touching each other. We call this shaking hands. Here's the how to:
 - Set down your backpack or get off your bike.
 - Offer the back of your hand toward the horse's nose with your fingers curled gently under your palm
 - Allow them to smell your hand
 - Wait until they have finished smelling your hand and bump you with their nose or turn their head away
 - Then, and not until then, reach out to pet them. The shoulder is a great place to pet a horse. Many people like to pet them on their face but most of them aren't any more fond of that than we are.
 - When you pet, rub gently and slowly in a circular motion. Don't pat. A horse perceives a pat as a prelude to a hit.
10. **Parents, please talk to your kids ahead of time** about how to be safe around horses. Remember that kids often get excited when they see horses and may need reminders from you to help them stay safe.
11. **Other points to remember:**
 - Don't flap jackets or other clothing when near horses.
 - Don't rush toward a horse – the life you save could be your own.
 - Do remember to talk and say hello or comment on the weather.

Following these simple guidelines can prevent serious injuries to you, the rider, your gear, and the horse.