

Trail Riding – The Ultimate Adventure

by Nancy Hotovy

Introduction

Thank you for letting me speak on a subject that speaks about one of the most fun things I have ever done with my horse. Camping/trail riding with your horse allows you to leave the world and its worries behind and truly enjoy nature, meet new friends and RELAX!

This being said I am going to try to cover everything from day trail riding to the camping trip with your horse. Rich and I have been going to the mountains in Wyoming and Montana for 3 weeks every summer for the past 6 years – last year squeezing it to 25 days along with spring and fall weekend camping trips. There has definitely been a learning curve to this for sure - - sometimes will really test that marriage vow for better or for worse! I have made a slide show of pictures that show various places we have gone with our horses.

First of all, I know this is a Fjord event, however, my husband rides a Missouri Fox Trotter names Ruby. I am the one that rides the Fjord, however, I am also the one with the camera. Most of our pictures from our trips do not even show I was there!

My Fjord Angie (TUF Copenhagen Angel) has been on our mountain trips for the past 3 years. I used to take whatever horse needed the time and miles, but I am finding I really like to ride the one that knows what is going on.

That being said, I want to address the one sentence I hear people say that will send me over the edge - - “He doesn’t know a lot yet (is green broke) but will work OK as a good trail horse”. What I want in a good trail horse is a sure-footed, obedient horse that can remain calm in a stressful situation. It needs to have a smooth walk, trot, lope – needs to back up, sidepass, not walk off when mounting/dismounting, and quietly stand tied.

Trail horses should be able to handle bridges, water, mud, hikers, other animals including horses, turkeys, deer, dogs, and depending where you ride – moose, elk, bear, cattle. Remember the goal – to have a relaxing, fun, safe time.

The first thing I will address is “Where to go?” On the handout I have listed different websites to check out. On some of these people are allowed to write their comments. Keep in mind that trail riders range from people who want the trails so well groomed that their horse doesn’t have to step over a log and want to camp in a spot only where they have electricity, water hookup to their trailer, and someone to cook their meals to the other extreme of those who prefer to be alone, cook over a fire, and prefer the less groomed/maintained trails. I have found a lot of good information on the Horse & Mules website, including stay-over information.

In the Western States you can stay at any rodeo grounds for a very nominal fee. Rich and I will go to town every 5 or 6 days for an overnight at a rodeo grounds and plug in to charge up the batteries in the trailer, do laundry, pick up groceries, etc. The further east you get the more difficult it becomes.

That being said – another aspect of camping is “How much money do I want to spend?” Remember – I am from Michigan where unemployment is 14% - - we go cheap – I do everything in my power to have the most fun for the least amount of money - - you know - - after you buy the horse, tack, trailer and truck!

What do you do with your horse when you're not in the saddle?

You will find all types of different situations out there, so be prepared

My horses are broke to tie, picket on a high-line, and hobble – gives me a lot of options

People also bring portable corrals or tie their horses to the trailer

Navigating trails

Ride with a halter and leadrope on our horses for easy tying.

Bring good maps. Consider a GPS.

Care of the horse

Condition your horse BEFORE the trip

Comfortable, well-fitting tack is VERY important. I like how a “pulling collar” fits my Fjord, compared with other styles of breast collars that fasten lower down on the saddle.

We shoe our horses about 4 days before we leave on a trip

Electrolytes/Salt to prevent dehydration

Bring plenty of water. We carry our own – some camps have their own water, some do not.

Make sure the horses drink and eat enough while on the road.

In the West – the perfect spot to camp is by a creek.

Hay and grain

Weed-free hay or processed feeds is required in National Forest/Wilderness areas.

We feed our horses well – they are working hard for us

Depending on the year and the forage, we graze the horses a lot.

Some people do the weed free alfalfa cubes. Purina complete feed is another option.

Cooking

Can be as simple or as gourmet as you want to make it. Sometimes what I cook has a lot to do with how much cleanup I want.

It's kind of fun to try some of the dutch oven cooking recipes. We have a grate that we take with us and cook bacon and eggs for breakfast – you can make toast over the fire.

We usually have hamburgers, sausage sandwiches, stew – very easy – brown some meat, add onion, celery, throw in some beef stew seasoning and beef broth.

If you want dumplings, just cut some flour tortillas in and serve over mashed potatoes (cut and boil and mash with hand masher).

Campfire cinnamon rolls – Taste better than bakery! Spray some Pam in a pie maker. Put a Pillsbury biscuit in pie maker and cook over campfire. When light brown on the outside, roll it in melted butter and then in cinnamon/sugar mixture. Nothing better!

Informational Websites

www.horsetraildirectory.com

www.horseandmuletrails.com

www.horseandtravel.com

Saddlebags – Emergency items to have with you on the trail

Hobbles	Lightsticks	Snaps
Halter/leadrope	Toilet paper	Extra cinch
Gloves	Emergency blanket	Water
Leather strings	Matches	Food such as granola bars, etc.
Reflector leg wraps	Extra headstall	Warm clothing
Aspirin/Motrin/Imodium	All purpose knives	Some type of easy boo
Orange vest	Extra pieces/parts	
Rain gear	Hoof pick	
Ziplock bags	Side cutters	

Emergency Vet Kit

Syinges and needles	Lidocaine and high-potent tranquilizer from the vet	Vet wrap
Thermometer	Eye ointment, triple antibiotic type	Leg wraps
Bute	Probiotics	Elastikon
Banamine	Cotton roll	4 x 4's
Dexamethasone	Brown gauze (for wrapping)	Staples
Nitrofurizone ointment		Crazy glue – for humans and horses
Ichthammol ointment		
Acepromazine		

Helpful hints

Always put raingear on BEFORE you get wet!

Bring some type of hat to keep sun/rain out of your face, especially in high elevations.

Don't camp in a low area.

Check out what papers are needed at your destination. Some places do require health papers while most just require a negative coggins.

Downhill riding – best to stay out of their mouth, lean back a bit and let them work their way down. Switchbacks are the best way to go up and/or down steep places and also keep the erosion to a minimum.

Check to see if where you are going allows you to bring in your own wood or hay.

Always use tree savers when applicable.

Always take extra halters and leadropes.

If you are going to picket your horse, your lead ropes should have swivel snaps. Otherwise the ropes will get twisted up as the horses move around

Bring a manure bucket and fork and extra water buckets