

# Five Ways to Feel Safe on Trail Rides

*Everyone loves to get out with their horse and enjoy the beautiful country side. It is great for both us and our horses to get out of the arena and ride somewhere different. But of course, with different locations, we will meet different challenges. Here at Cherry Tree Equine we are lucky enough to have 2500 acres to play on every day, so we spend a lot of time out on the trail. To help you remain safe, we hold horsemanship and trail clinics. Here are our top five tips to feel safe.*

## 1. Be Prepared for Surprises

Part of the fun of trail riding is that you never know what you will come across and what adventures you might enjoy. But you don't want any surprise that you meet to be beyond you or your horses comfort zone.

Be sure to expose your horse at home, to a range of stimuli that might create an issue on the trail. Things like plastic bags, dogs, motor bikes can all be scary to a horse that has never seen them. Do some groundwork with things like plastic bags and tarps, get your friend to bring her dogs over for a run, ask friends who have motor bikes to call in for a visit; all these things will help to expose your horse to new things whilst being at home in a safe controlled environment.



It is never a good idea to try a new piece of equipment when you're heading out on the trail. Who is to say that your horse is going to appreciate that new, long, flapping coat when she is miles from home? Has your horse ever experienced a saddle bag banging on his sides? Test any new gear you are keen to try on your horse before you leave.

Check the predicted weather conditions, make sure you wear or have appropriate clothing for the day or place you are going. The weather can change very quickly so be prepared. A little rain is not so bad if you remembered to take a rain coat but can it can be a long cold ride home if you get caught out without it.

The ultimate way to be prepared for surprises is to wear a helmet. If you are unlucky enough to fall off, there is a better chance of you getting help if you are conscious. And remember, accidents happen around horses on the ground too; so wearing your helmet may prevent injury even when you are not actually riding.

## 2. Too Friendly???

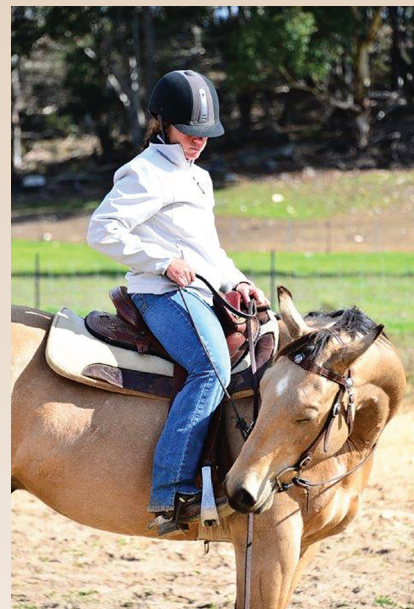
Whether you are intending to ride on your own or with friends there is nothing that can dampen the fun of a trail ride more than a horse that is unwilling or unable to leave his friends.

Make sure your horse isn't herd bound before you leave by riding on your own in small rides. Even if it just around the paddock at home. Make sure your horse is focused on you and not everything that is going on around by doing exercises that focus his or her attention on what you are doing. This may involve getting some help before you head out!

## 3. Check the Brakes Work

If something does go wrong when you are on the trail, your best bet of staying safe is being able to do a one rein stop. This will give you the control you need to ensure that you and your horse remain safe in an emergency.

Practice your one rein stop at home at all paces; start at the standstill to get the feel and then practice at walk, trot and canter. When you are confident to do a one rein stop at home, then you are ready to give it a go on the trail. But don't wait for an emergency to try it for the first time; give it a go when everything is okay, so if something does go wrong, you are ready!



## 4. Practice Challenges

Once, when visiting friends, I attempted to ride a horse into a dry creek bed on a trail ride down a safe incline. When it stopped and got a little nervous I asked the owner why it might be behaving so. Her reply was "Well she has never been ridden out of the arena".

If your horse has never crossed water, opened gates or negotiated steep terrain it may be well worth your while to practise these things either at home or in a controlled environment before taking on a big trail ride.

If you have limited access to these types of challenges at home, try to recreate them. Clean out your horse's water trough and with the emptied water on the ground, practice your water crossings. Go to your local adult riding club and see if they have training days where they do obstacles like gates and bridges. Put some rails out in a complex pattern and ride over them like you were negotiating logs on the ground. Use your imagination!

## 5. Whose Got Your Back?

Make sure someone knows where you are intending to go and what time you hope to be back. Let them know where you will be parking your vehicle (if you are driving to a spot to start your trail ride) and if possible give them a map of where you intend to ride. That way if you do not return, someone will know to look for you and they will know where to start.

If you are going trail riding, be sure you choose your riding buddies carefully. It is important to remember that your riding buddies need to be considerate of your riding level and what you may think is fun; find people who are keen to ride at a pace you are comfortable with over terrain that you can all enjoy.

When you are out riding, be sure to take your mobile phone and be sure to carry it on you and not your horse. That way if your horse runs off, you will still have the phone with you to call for help. And make sure your phone is fully charged before you leave. It is a good idea to purchase or borrow an EPIRB (Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon) in case you become lost or in the event of an accident.

Trail riding is all about getting out and enjoying time with your horse and your friends. By being a little prepared before you go, you can make sure that you have an enjoyable day and everyone returns safely.

And remember, there is always somebody out there to help you! Professional instructors (us included) often run clinics, training days or give lessons that will help you be prepared or else find some experienced trail riders who are willing to "show you the ropes". There are lots of people who are

happy to help you learn so that you can enjoy trail riding as much as we all do!



Michelle O'Neill of Cherry Tree Equine

Article and Photos: Michelle O'Neill

## Come , Stay and Learn at Cherry Tree Equine!

Cherry Tree Equine has a range of clinic and accommodation packages available for anyone wanting to get away and have fun with their horse.



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*You can come to us  
or we'll come to you*