

A DAY IN THE LIFE
of an MTRA
“NEWBIE”
TRAIL RIDER

- FAQs -
Asked and Answered
BY

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A Brief Over-View

You are preparing to go on your first MTRA trail. That earns you the cherished (and unavoidable) title “Newbie”. Every Newbie wants the answer to this question: How does an MTRA trail ride work? This is a brief “big picture” answer. There is a “start camp” and an “end camp” for each daily ride. Except for rides with scheduled “lay over days”, and except for the first and final day when riding to one of the 3 lake-shore destinations, the daily routine is the same. Riders who are their own “rig jumpers” get up, care for their horses and secure them in a manner which will keep them safe until the rider returns. They then drive forward to the next (end camp) camp, choose a camp/picketing area, park their rig, catch the MTRA bus back to the (start camp) camp, saddle up and ride forward, following the trail to the camp where their rig waits for them.

Whether you ride alone or ride in a group is up to you. No one is assigned to guide you or watch over you while you ride the trail. The only “rules” you must follow are those of the DNR, USFS and MTRA which you have pledged to know and to obey. The MTRA has a long tradition of “trail honor”. You are expected to use common sense, practice good trail etiquette, observe courtesy to all you meet on the trail, offer help to any who are in need and to respect all the lands through which you ride and upon which you camp. The following pages provide a more detailed picture of “a day in the life of a Newbie”. The information provided is intended to help you have the most pleasurable and safe ride possible. If you still have questions after you read it all, just ask. It is MTRA tradition that everyone wants to help and to welcome every Newbie to the MTRA and to your first MTRA Trail Ride!

Remember – Safety is always a priority!!!!



This book is for **you** – the rider who is going to make their first “horse camping” ride with the MTRA. Here you will find answers to the “why” “how” “what” “when” “where” and “who” questions we all had the first time we ventured off on an MTRA ride across the beautiful state of Michigan.

Your first MTRA trail ride begins the day you receive your MTRA membership packet. **Read the Guide Book** carefully. You will learn about the history of the organization, the trail system, and the rules of the MTRA and how the Board of Directors conducts business.

Take note that you **must be a paid member for at least 30 days before the ride**. **Why?** The MTRA requires **all** who attend a ride to sign a hold harmless agreement (HHA) when they first arrive in camp and register with the Trail Boss. To be truthful when signing the HHA, **you must have read your Guide Book**. Be aware that the Guide Book, rules and by-laws are changed periodically. The Trail Boss will post and have copies of all changes.

Now, turn your mind to preparing **yourself and your horse** for the ride.

What do I need to take along?

Many variables enter into the answer. It depends on what kind of rig you have, how you like to camp, whether the ride has lay-over days, and your own particular wants and needs. **The ideal is to bring only what you need and nothing else.**

YOUR “RIG”

- Whatever you use to transport you and your horse, and to camp in, be sure it is safe and well-maintained. Think about staying as dry, warm and comfortable as possible. You will need your sleep! Especially be sure any gas and heating systems are in good repair to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, fire or explosion.
- Put your MTRA numbers, 3 - 4 inches in height, on the front and back of your trailer, on a front license plate or on a piece of cardboard to place in your front window so you can be more easily located in case of emergency.

- You will need the Michigan Recreation Passport sticker for your license plate. This can be purchased when you renew your plates and/or at any Michigan State Park. If you are coming from out of state, you can purchase online at: <http://apps.michigan.gov/michiganestore>
- If you have a CB radio, the MTRA uses channel 13. The Trail Boss cell phone number will be posted at his/her rig. Cell coverage is sometimes not available. Leave the Emergency Phone Number sheet with family so that they can contact you in an emergency. They should also have a copy of the ride calendar to know which number to call in reference to location.
- Good road maps, such as a Gazetteer or detailed maps covering areas such as the east, west and northern sections of the state can be very helpful.
- Plan your system for carrying large quantities of hay and water for your horse. Water containers can be purchased from catalogues and farm supply stores. Many riders find that used plastic 55 gallon drums, such as those used for fruit juice or cola mix, when thoroughly cleaned, plumbed and vented, are ideal.
- Items you will **need**: A **good** first aid kit, manure fork, rake, shovel, buckets, picket line and tree-saver devices, alarm clock. Items you will **probably want**: flashlight, lawn chair, grill, bug spray, and ice chest.

NOTE: State and Federal rules regarding pets are posted in the camps. If you bring your dog, you must know and follow those rules. Uncontrolled, unruly, barking dogs constitute both a danger and an annoyance to campers. If your dog, or your management of your dog, causes other campers to complain, you may be asked to take your dog home. If you have a dog and do not believe you can observe those regulations, you should make arrangements so your dog can be left at home.

FOOD, ICE, WATER:

- Take your own and replenish at stores along the driving route. The Trail Boss will announce any “lunch stops” along the trail at the pre-ride meeting.
- Water is available in all the camps to fill rigs and barrels. Check out your neighbors’ barrels for ideas. The Trail Boss will have a generator to run the wells in the trail camps.
- Horses will need **salt and electrolytes**, particularly in hot weather.
- Bring **ALL** the hay your horse will require – they need more to eat on a ride.
- Grain and supplements. There are a few feed stores along the drive route.

HUMAN GEAR:

- All horsemen should carry a **sharp knife at all times**.
- Anticipate **ALL** conditions for both you and your horse – rain, heat, cold and bugs. Northern Michigan can be cold, particularly at night, even in the summer.
- Bring only riding pants you know to be comfortable and non-chafing – blisters can take a long, uncomfortable time to heal.
- Don't forget the sunscreen.
- Depending on the season, plan for mosquitoes and flies.
- If the ride has layover days, plan clothing for potential activities such as swimming, canoeing, shopping or a nice dinner in town.
- Good riding boots are essential. Bring an extra pair in case of wet weather. Rain boots to wear around camp are helpful.

HYGIENE AND LAUNDRY:

- If you don't have a self-contained rig, showering can be done with a sun shower or at a local campground or facility. Use only bio-degradable soap if water will run onto the ground. Lakes and streams **cannot** be used for bathing yourself or your horse. The Trail Boss, bus driver or other riders can tell you where shower and laundry opportunities can be found.

HORSE GEAR:

- A **good fitting saddle** is **VERY** important in keeping your horse free of sores. Condition your horse in the saddle you intend to take on the ride.
- **Extra cinches and saddle pads** are **VERY** important. Wet, dirty gear promotes sores and galling. Bring extra types and different lengths of cinches so you can be sure of using clean, dry, safe gear every day. Bring enough saddle pads to provide a dry, comfortable back for your horse.
- A halter bridle or a light-weight halter to carry or use beneath a bridle, and a lead-rope should be considered for ride days.
- Breast strap or martingale; crupper – again, pay attention to proper fit to prevent sores.
- Be sure all your gear is in good repair. Bring materials to repair broken items.
- Neck collar and/or halter, extra halters, lead ropes, buckets, hay bags

- Horses generally need to be shod. Plan to have this done at home. Farriers may be available in camp but do not plan on it. Bring a replacement set of shoes. The Trail Boss will have a list of farriers who will come to the camps.
- Some riders use hoof boots and/or bell boots. Be sure that they are well fitted and bring extras in case you lose one or two...
- Saddle bags, horn bag, hoof pick, collapsible bucket and/or a 2 gallon plastic zip-lock bag. A bucket on a rope can be used to gather water when you cannot get close to the bank. Use the plastic bag to bring water to your horse when the bank is safe and solid enough for you to walk but not good enough to take your horse to the water.
- Fly repellent. Head protectors and/or fly sheets can be very useful. Dryer sheets work well for horse and rider.
- First aid kit. Consult your vet on building a **good** horse first aid kit for your rig and for the trail. The kit should include a horseman's Vet book. Put a copy of the Vet List available from the Trail Boss in your kit.
- Electrolytes to carry on the trail. These can be obtained in paste form and can be life-saving for your horse. Be sure you know the proper way to administer electrolytes – read up, ask your Vet and other riders.

RIDER GEAR FOR THE TRAIL:

- The fast walking horse will make around 4 miles per hour. This may help you estimate how long you will be on the trail and what you may wish to carry with you for the ride.
- Plan for contingencies. You may find yourself away from camp for a longer time, and possibly under different conditions, than you expect. Dress in layers.
- Rain and weather gear – if you don't take it with you, you **WILL** almost certainly need it!
- Many riders use a saddle pack, or horn bag.
 - Items you may want to carry in a saddle bag: lunch, snacks, water bottle or canteen, human and horse first aid items, electrolytes, bug spray, hoof pick, sunscreen and an emergency card with medical information.
 - Items you may want to carry on your person: cell phone, compass, trail map, emergency phone numbers (Trail Boss or someone you are camped with), matches or lighter, knife, vet list and an emergency card with medical information.
- Don't over-load yourself or your horse.

- You should ride with these things on your saddle prior to the ride so you can make adjustments for weight shifting and ease of access for items needed while on the trail. Inspect for areas of pressure or wear from packs and bags, such as behind the saddle and across shoulders.
- Consider wearing an approved helmet.

What do I need to do to get myself and my horse ready?

- Have your vet do a **Coggins** test. If you are bringing a horse from out-of-state, that horse will also need an **Interstate Health Certificate**. Allow time for these to be processed and returned to you before the ride.
- Have your horse vaccinations up to date.
- Schedule a visit of your farrier. It is wise to have new shoes put on a week prior to the start of the ride. It may be wise to put shoes on all four feet.
- Practice putting up a picket line.
- Learn to tie a quick-release knot to secure your horse to the line.
- Accustom your horse to life on the line. If using hay bags, tie them **HIGH**.
- Get your horse used to packs and dangling items. Be sure to accustom your horse to noises and movements while mounted, such as those generated when opening a map and removing or putting on your coat, particularly rain coats and ponchos.
- Start your horse conditioning program at least 6 weeks before a ride. If your horse is over-weight, start regularly exercising earlier. Consult your vet about how best to use exercise along with modified feeding to take off the extra pounds. A fat horse experiences undue stress on long rides, particularly when the weather is hot and/or humid.
- Accustom your horse to eating or drinking electrolytes.
- Bring along some apple juice or flavored Gatorade to add to your horse's water bucket to mask the taste of strange tasting water. Bring water from home if needed.
- Teach your horse to mount and dismount from both sides in case of emergencies.
- If your horse kicks, you should tie a **RED** ribbon on their tail, if they bite, tie a **RED** ribbon to their forelock, and if you are riding a stallion, tie a **YELLOW** ribbon on the forelock and/or tail. A **GREEN** ribbon indicates a

green horse. When riding up to any horse with one of these ribbons on, ride with caution.

You have choices

You must check in with the Trail Boss prior to starting the ride!!!

Nightly meetings are scheduled before each ride day. One person from each group **MUST** attend the meetings!

Trophy rides start and end at the lakes. In order to qualify for a trophy, you **MUST ride on the scheduled days.**

At the Nightly Meeting you will learn where the APPROVED parking areas in Oscoda, Empire and Mackinaw City are located and if there have been any changes in drive routes, places where you are allowed to enter the water and places where you **MUST** not go with your horse.

On the first day of the ride you can **choose** to do one of the following:

- **RIDE FROM THE LAKE TO CAMP**
 - Find someone to drive with you to the designated parking area (in Oscoda or Empire), and drop you and your horse(s) off. You then ride to the lake and then back to camp, while your driver takes your rig back to camp for you.
- **RIDE FROM THE CAMP TO THE LAKE**
 - Leave your horses in camp. Have someone follow your rig to the designated parking area in town. Leave your rig at the parking area. Have your “follower” take you back to camp. Get on your horse(s), ride to the lake then back to the parking area and trailer back to camp.
- **DO A “SHARED” RIDE TO OR FROM THE LAKE**
 - Find someone to “share a rig”. One person (or group) drives the rig – with horse(s) -- to the designated parking place in town. This person/group then rides to the lake and back to camp. The second person/group rides from camp to the lake and then to the parking area where they load up and drive back to camp.
- **RIDE BOTH WAYS**
 - Ride from the camp to the lake, and then back to camp.

Day one

A walk thru the first 24 hours, dawn to dusk

- Try to arrive at camp early enough to complete several tasks during the daylight hours.
- **#1 -- Locate the Trail Boss's rig!!!!**
- As soon as possible you **must register and sign the hold harmless agreement** with the trail boss. Take your Coggins papers (and health certificate if from out-of-state).
- Note the lay-out of the camp and where the well and toilets are located.
- Find a camp site.
- Put up your picket/high line, as shown in the guidebook, and on the right/curb-side of your rig if possible. Keep horses away from trees and their root systems and always use tree-savers when picketing to trees.
- Put your horse on the line; provide hay and water.
- Plan your time so you can be at the Trail Boss's rig for the **Nightly meeting**.
- **Attend every nightly meeting!!**
 - It is **very important** that you – whether a rider or rig jumper – attend so you will know particulars for the next day's ride
 - Any changes in schedule or routine – example: option days, bus schedule
 - The drive route – special directions, detours, dangerous intersections, drive time, services along the route, times when you should NOT be on narrow camp roads in conflict with the MTRA bus.
 - The destination camp – special directions on entering, parking, exiting.
 - The ride – location of the trail head, any detours, alternate route or special way-points or trail markings; if there is a breakfast or lunch stop or restaurant; where to water and where **NOT** to water; any areas where you **MUST NOT** ride or go.
 - **Empire, Oscoda and Mackinaw City** – special information about where you are and are **NOT** to park and load/unload horses, approved route to the water and areas where you are allowed and **NOT** allowed with your horse. This is information you **MUST** know because failing to follow these rules may result in **loss of membership** in the MTRA.

- Collect and ready your equipment for the morning. Decide how you will keep it all dry overnight -- leave it in your rig, put it in large plastic bags or cover it with a rain poncho.
- Remember – you will have to carry everything -- including whatever you use to secure your horse in the morning -- with you on the trail unless someone will take it in their rig for you, or there is room on the bus and the driver is agreeable. All personal items should be marked with your name and MTRA number as the MTRA is not responsible for lost items.
- Set your alarm to get up in time to get it all done: feed, water and brush your horse, break down your camp and secure your horse in a manner which will keep it safe for up to 2 to 3 hours until you return to camp.
- Consider asking someone, who will be remaining in camp during that time, to keep an eye on your horse.
- If you need to follow the bus to the next camp, plan to be ready to pull into line after the bus passes your camp site – by 6 a.m. or 8 a.m.
- Early bus riders are usually up by at least 4:30, late bus riders by 6:30.
- Remember, **ONLY the rig driver rides the bus** in the morning!

Ride day morning – up and at ‘em

The MTRA bus leaves camp at 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. It makes one tour around the camp, blowing its horn. **The bus is ALWAYS on time!**

- If you do not know the way from camp to camp with your rig, you may follow the bus in a **CONVOY**.
 - Be lined up and waiting, out of the roadway, and fall in line in an orderly manner. A **CB is strongly recommended**.
 - Travel with your headlights on and watch for the rig following behind. If that rig stops or you lose sight of it, stop until you are able to determine what happened and get started again.
- When you pull into the destination camp, **follow the instructions given by the Trail Boss the night before** regarding directional travel on the camp roads and proper alignment of your rig.
 - Try to find a site as quickly as possible.
 - **Do not** block the camp roads or camp sites as others are as anxious to get parked as you are.
 - **Pull as far forward as possible** and park your rig.
- Put your **picket** line up **on the right (curb) side** of your rig.
 - If time is short, it can be put up later.

- Watch your time!!!!
 - The bus leaves at **7:00 and 9:00** to return rig jumpers to their horses.
- Once you are on the return bus, you must have everything you will need for that day's ride.
- If you are the "camp sitter", about 30 minutes before the expected arrival of the bus, begin to police your camp site – especially be certain that any **fires are totally extinguished**. This rule regarding fires also applies to riders who do not have "camp sitters" and all campers, as well.
- Be sure to scatter any manure piles and/or hay piles left by your horse.
- When you arrive back in camp, tack up your horse, police your camp site and mount up.
- Find the trail head, follow the "blue dots" and have a great ride.
- Practice good trail etiquette at all times.
 - When you become aware of riders, announce your presence with a Hello. Do not run by or up behind other riders. If you are slow, pull off the trail and let faster riders pass you. If you are fast, ask permission to pass at the first safe opportunity.
 - Do not litter.
 - If you discover a hazard on the trail, try to mark it so others will see it.
- On the trail, if you are going to take a break at a watering spot, **do not** water your horse until just before you are ready to move on.
- When watering your horse, remove any tie-downs for safety.
- When you ride into the next camp, take time to properly cool your horse out.
 - Some riders loosen the cinch but leave the saddle in place for a while. If your horse likes to roll, keep a close eye on him while he is still saddled. Also watch to be sure your saddle does not roll off and that the tie rope does not become entangled in the saddle.
 - Provide hay – if your horse does not start to eat, watch him carefully as this may indicate undue stress and a looming problem.
 - Be cautious about how quickly you give water to your horse as he cools down, particularly if the water is cold. If you are uncertain about how to do this safely, ask at the nightly meeting. Also, if you are supplying electrolytes to your horse in his water, this is a very good time to do that.
 - Inspect your horse for injuries, heat bumps, areas of worn hair and sore muscles – pick up his feet and clean them, run your hands down his legs and look at his belly and the insides of his legs.

- If you detect any problems, address them immediately. If you are uncertain of how to address a particular problem, ask a seasoned rider or the Trail Boss. Riders, campers and the Trail Boss are always happy to provide information to help you and your horse have a healthy and successful ride.
- Please be considerate of Veterinarians, Farriers and other rescuers who come to your aid. They are on vacation also and would appreciate your thoughtfulness in paying for services and/or donations to their “fuel fund”.
- Once your horse is cool, fed, watered, groomed, inspected and tended, it's time for YOU to start your post-ride ritual and to celebrate a successful day on the trail for yourself and the good horse which carried you from camp to camp.

Now get ready to do it all over again tomorrow – and the next day **THEN ACCEPT YOUR TROPHY AND START MAKING PLANS TO COME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AND AGAIN AND**

SEE YOU NEXT RIDE!!!!

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