

A Day In The Life  
Of an **MTRA**

***“NEWBIE”***

**Trail Rider**

- FAQs -  
Asked and Answered

2nd Edition  
Updated 6/2008  
Michigan Trail  
Riders Association, Inc.

***“Wherever you go,  
go with all your heart.”***

**Confucius**

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, 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**.

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.
- If you have a CB radio, the MTRA uses channel 13.
- 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 the 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.
- Water is available in all the camps to fill rigs and barrels.
- 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 & HORSE GARB:**

- 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.
- Depending on the season, plan for mosquitoes and flies.
- If the ride has lay-over days, plan for potential activities such as swimming, canoeing, shopping or a nice dinner in town.
- Good riding boots are essential.
- 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.

#### **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.
- 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,.
- 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 may 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.
- 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.
  - 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.
- Don't over-load yourself or your horse.
- Do a trial run to see how it works out.
- 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 picket line. If using hay bags, tie them **HIGH** to keep your horse out of trouble.
- 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 overweight, 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.

## “YOU HAVE CHOICES”

Trophy rides start and end at the lakes. In order to qualify for a trophy, you **MUST ride on the scheduled days**, however, 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 !!!!!**  
**YOU MUST CHECK IN WITH THE TRAIL BOSS PRIOR TO STARTING THE RIDE!!!**
- 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-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/passenger-side of your rig if possible. Keep horses away from trees and their root systems and use tree-savers if needed 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: bus schedule, where to enter the lakes in Oscoda & Empire, etc.
  - 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 and Oscoda** – 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.
- 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 am and 8 am 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. Do not save spots for others.
- Put your **picket** line up **on the right (passenger) 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 MTRA markers 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 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.
- 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 and the next day and the next day  
and the next day and the next day and the next day .....

THEN ACCEPT YOUR **TROPHY**  
AND START MAKING PLANS TO COME  
BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN  
AND .....

*See you next ride!!!!*

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

*This institution is operated under special use permit with the Huron-Manistee  
Nation Forest and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.*