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Planning, Conducting and Scoring
4-H Competitive Trail Ride Activities

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The trail ride activity is the high spot of the year for many 4-H Club members. For months, they have been faithfully working to condition their animals and perfect their horsemanship. The trail ride now provides an opportunity to find out what they have accomplished. The ride also helps stimulate the members in their project and can be used to make the public aware of yet another aspect of 4-H Club work. Friendly rivalry among the participants provides for the development of good sportsmanship.

The primary purpose of this manual is to serve as a guide for those who are involved in planning and conducting 4-H competitive trail rides. We realize, of course, that the planning committee will probably not want to include all suggestions listed, but only those suited to their particular ride.

Another important purpose of this manual is to assure uniform procedure for 4-H competitive trail rides. In this respect, the manual should serve to unify procedures and help 4-H Club members know what to expect, regardless of where in the state the ride is held.

Considerations in Planning the Trail Ride

Most rides that prove successful are such because of adequate preparation, especially concerning the following items. (For a list of specific pre-ride activities and when they should be completed, see section on "Trail Ride Management Checklist and Planning Sequence").

Ride Location. Most of us will not be blessed with the perfect site to hold the competitive trail ride, and so we must maximize the positive and minimize the negative features of our site. If at all possible, the site should satisfy these conditions: (1) a location central to the area from which we hope to draw participants; (2) a system of well-marked, well-established trails; (3) a headquarters area having parking, picnicking and restroom facilities; and (4) camping and horse picketing areas if the ride is overnight or for the weekend. Outside horses should be banned from the course for the actual duration of the ride.

Time of Year. A ride is most enjoyable if scheduled for other than intensely hot or bitterly cold months. Spring is often chosen, but runs the risk of late cold snaps or spring showers. In addition, 4-H horses are not usually in peak condition until mid-summer. Rides in the early fall have the advantages of colorful foliage, fewer mosquito problems and more stable weather than in spring. In addition, the hustle and bustle of other summer horse activities has usually subsided by Labor Day. Avoid scheduling too close to horse show dates in your area. A new, potentially successful ride may fail if scheduled too near a show of long standing.

Chairperson and Committee Organization. Make decisions about location and time of year well in advance of the ride to allow for adequate preparation. A ride chairperson should be selected early and should surround himself with willing workers to participate in the following committees: Publicity; Entry; Awards; Judges; Site Selection/Preparation; Stabling/Parking; Food Coordination; Security, Safety and First Aid; and Cleanup.

Type of Ride. A "point-to-point" ride presents some logistical problems, such as a new campsite each night, food movement, transportation of horse trailers, multiple landowners, etc. A "base camp" ride, probably the easiest logistically, can be made into a "wagon wheel" ride by leaving and entering camp from a different direction and on a different trail each day. A "loop" ride is like a point-to-point ride if, in completing the loop, a new campsite is used each night, or like the wagon wheel ride if the loop is completed each day.

Rules of the Ride. Rules should be made available to all potentially interested people prior to the ride. They should be concise but
explicit enough to prevent any misunderstanding of what is required or allowed (see section on "General Rules for 4-H Competitive Trail Ride Activities"). Copies of the rules ought to be available when and where the entry forms are obtained.

Entry Forms. Always use an entry form (see sample in Figure 1). It should ask for the name of the horse, its color, age, sex, breed and height, and the name, age and address of contestant. Be sure to include space for member and parent disclaimers.

Judges. Finding persons willing to act as a panel of judges to officiate at a 4-H competitive trail ride may be a difficult process. A basic judging crew includes: a pre-ride judge (who can also serve as the post-ride judge); a judge to cover each natural hazard (obstacle); one or more horsemanship judges (some unannounced and hidden); one or more reststop judges, a timer and an announcer. Only in NATRC-sanctioned rides do any of these judges need to be a veterinarian. Willing, interested volunteers who will follow the directions regarding judging criteria should be used whenever possible.

Awards. Awards may be paid for from ride receipts. Occasionally, you may find individuals or organizations who will provide awards. However, sponsors or prospective sponsors should not be put in a position where they feel they must provide awards.

Awards quite often are too elaborate and are given to too few participants. It is always preferable to have smaller awards and more of them, thereby recognizing the efforts of more young people. For example, consider identifying the "Top Ten" in one or more categories. Awards could be given to the top overall scores, or separate Top Tens could be identified for trail scores, horsemanship, most precise time schedule, etc. Simply awarding first through sixth placings disappoints many worthy, interested youth and places too great an emphasis on competition.

Expenses. Major items to be considered include the judges' fees, awards, facility rental, food and beverages if supplied, and insurance premiums.

Receipts. Revenue can be obtained from entry fees. If advisable, revenue may also be obtained by selling advertising space in the program, selling the program, food concessions and overnight stall fees.

Type of Food Service. Having the ride management provide food appeals most to riders; but remember, the outdoors creates large appetites. Having the riders provide food is recommended only for a one-day ride; it can be pot-luck if arrangements are made ahead of time to assure a well-rounded assortment.

Horse Feed. Feed for the horse can be provided either by the ride management or by the rider. The entry form might include a space for the rider to indicate his wishes.

Energy Supply. What form of energy will be supplied for food storage (ice or refrigerator), for lighting (lanterns or electric lights), for cooking (charcoal, firewood or propane)? Many times, portable generators work nicely, although they may break the solitude of camp life.

Legalities. Basically, the concern here is being aware of what the law states regarding liability and its limits. The concerned ride manager can lay out a safe course, stresses safety in the pre-ride briefing and requires the signed release (see sample entry form in Figure 1). To further provide for the safe, non-negligent ride, each official of the ride should know the most direct route to medical facilities, be familiar with basic first aid procedures and have with him the phone numbers for police, emergency and veterinary personnel.

Suggested General Rules for 4-H Competitive Trail Ride Activities

1. The animal used is to be the 4-H member's own project horse and must have been enrolled on the State 4-H Horse and Pony form by May 15th.

2. Separate divisions should be provided for juniors and seniors and for horses and ponies. Juniors will be 9 to 13 years old and seniors 14 to 18 years old as of January 1 of the current year.

3. A broodmare with nursing foal or a stallion may not be entered in the 4-H Trail Ride.

4. All animals shall be under control and at a safe distance apart at all times. A red marker must be on the tail of all kickers. Each rider will be held liable for his own animal.

5. The judges' decisions will be final, and the judges may disqualify any unruly animal which is not under control at all times. A contestant may be disqualified for exhibiting poor sportsmanship, mistreating an animal and going off the trail course.

6. Riders must remain in the saddle when the horse is in motion over the course, but may dismount, if necessary, provided no forward movement is made.

7. All contestants must wear numbers, clearly visible.

8. Riders will enter the trail course in the order that they check in during a preannounced check-in period. No entries will be permitted after that period.

9. All contestants must provide insect repellent for themselves and their horses, and necessary equipment including a water bucket.

10. Horse and rider must be neat and clean. Special clothing or equipment and clipping will not be given preference. Sneakers, loafers and shorts are prohibited.

11. Animal must be serviceably sound and healthy to be granted entry. No animal will be allowed to start the ride if the official judges feel that it could not complete the ride without endangering with its future use and well-being.
CASS COUNTY 4-H COMPETITIVE TRAIL RIDE  
(A 20-Mile Competitive Ride)

Sponsored by the:  
Cass County 4-H Horse Club (Hoosier Horseman)  
Walnut Valley Realm  
Twelve Mile, Indiana

Date of Ride - Monday, July 10  
Starting Time - 3:00 p.m.

Entries are due Wednesday, July 5, and should be made with Keith Boller, County Extension Office, Court House, Logansport, on or before that date. Mailed entries will be accepted.

Entry Fee is $1.00. A weiner roast and pitch-in supper will be held following the ride for 4-H'ers and families. Weiners, buns and drink will be furnished. Bring a well-filled picnic basket and table service.

Riders will begin trail ride in the order that they check in with the first entry beginning at 3:00 p.m. The check-in station will be closed at 6:00 p.m.

NAME OF 4-H MEMBER______________________________________  BIRTH DATE_______________

ADDRESS__________________________________________________

                           Street    Town    State    Zip

NAME OF HORSE_______________________  BREED_______________________

COLOR_______________________  AGE_______________________  SEX_______________________  HGT_______________________

Horse feed to be provided by (Check one): Ride Management____ or Rider____.

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I hereby enter the above at my own risk and subject to all rules and regulations of the Ride. I further agree that I will make no claim against any organization, committee or person connected with this show for any damage to animals, person or property.

Signature of 4-H Member________________________________________

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I approve this entry and will not hold responsible the Trail Ride Committee or other individuals for any accidents to the above contestant or to his horse.

Signature of Parent or Guardian__________________________________

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NOTE: Anyone receiving anti-histamines, decongestants or other medication should arrange to bring them and maintain the medication schedule while participating in the ride activities.

Figure 1. Example entry form for a 4-H competitive trail ride.
No lame horses for any cause or reason will be allowed—lameness being defined as an impairment of the animal's freedom of movement. Proof of Negative Coggins Test must be presented.

12. Suggested distances: 15 to 20 miles for a 3- to 4-hour ride or 30 to 35 miles for a 6- to 7-hour ride.

Judging the Trail Ride Event

It should be foremost in the minds of all judges that this is a 4-H activity with the emphasis on fun! Trail riding is fun in itself; while a certain level of competition between participants may heighten the enjoyment, high-level competition will negate participation by all but a gifted or wealthy few.

Suggested Scoring System

The suggested scorecard in Figure 2 seems to suit the needs and goals of most 4-H trail ride events. It rewards the good horseman. Horses and riders may be judged from the time they check in and are issued a number until they are "released" following the ride and prior to the awards session.

Judging the Horses

The following might be considered as criteria for judging the horses during the pre- and post-ride examinations. (These are not necessarily listed in order of importance.)

1. Unsoundness and short way-of-going.
2. Undue fatigue, stress, excessive blowing (nostrils and flanks).
3. Sore back, girth sores, sores from any improperly fitting equipment (bit sores, sores from curb chain or strap, etc.).
4. Stumbling and tiredness.
5. Interference marks, tiredness.
6. Condition of horse, amount of sweating.
7. Nervousness, fretting, tossing head, jigging, going sideways.

Judging the Riders

Judging the horsemanship aspect of the ride should include, but not be limited to, the following items.

1. Asks permission to pass a horse and moves off a short way before changing gait.
2. Waits for horses in potentially hazardous places to clear congested trail.
3. Rides at a safe distance from horse in front, usually a minimum of one horse length.
4. Pulls off trail with nose of horse toward path if someone wishes to pass on narrow trail. Raises horse's head when another horse is passing.

CRITERION                          VALUE               WHEN JUDGED
Soundness & way-of-going           5 pts.               Pre- and post-ride exam
Manners & temperament              15 pts.              Pre- and post-ride exam & on trail
Grooming (horse & equipment)       10 pts.               Pre-ride exam
Obstacles (natural & artificial)   40 pts.               On trail
Time reference (+15 minutes)       10 pts.               Time clock
Overall horsemanship               20 pts.               Pre- and post-ride exam & on trail

Figure 2. Suggested scoring system for a 4-H competitive trail ride.
Lacking from the scoring system is a pulse-respiration recovery score. After the initial examination for total soundness, the only typical vet-check exam may be a spot check for safety. This ride is meant to be a 4-H fun trail ride with competition added for zest. Only as riders advance should an NATRC competitive trail ride or endurance ride be attempted, with standard veterinary examination and scores naturally included.

**Trail Ride Management Checklist and Planning Sequence**

Selection of the general chairperson plus working committees and chairpersons of those committees should be made 120 days prior to the ride. (Put a checkmark by each of the following committees when the chairperson reports it has been formed.)

- General Chairperson
- Publicity Committee
- Entry & Registration Committee
- Judges Committee
- Award Committee
- Site Selection & Preparation Committee
- Stabling & Parking Committee
- Food Coordination Committee
- Security, Safety & First Aid Committee
- Cleanup Committee

The following activities and/or items are common to most trail ride events. The figure in parentheses ( ) behind each item is the suggested number of days prior to the ride for securing a final decision or commitment from the appropriate persons. (Put a checkmark by each as it is completed.)

- Ride location (120)
- Ride date (120)
- Landowner permission (120)
- Entry forms (60)
- Rules and handbills (60)
- Judge agreements (60)
- Expenses and receipts flow (60)
- Awards (60)
- Insurance arrangements (30)
- Judging format guidelines (30)
- Rest rooms (30)
- Electricity and refrigeration (30)
- Trail preparation (10)
- Trail map preparation (10)
- Communication system (10)
- Emergency arrangements (10)
- Food arrangements (10)
- Horse feed and water (10)
- Parking arrangements (10)
- Stabling arrangements (10)
- Time clocks (10)
- Judges' assistants (10)
- Score Sheets (10)
- Rider identification system (10)
- Horse identification system (10)
- P.A. system (10)
- Cleanup (10)
- Thank you notes (10)

Keep in mind that initial contacts are usually made in person or over the telephone. A written verification of your conversation should follow immediately. Reminders of all 30-, 60- and 120-day commitments should be sent at appropriate intervals. Certainly all commitments should be reverified 10 days (no sooner) prior to the ride.

**Suggested Trail Ride Topics for Demonstration or Discussion at 4-H Club Meetings**

**Concerning the Horse**

1. Manners and Suitability
   a. Calm yet alert on trail and among other horses.
   b. Stands quietly for mounting and dismounting from either side.
   c. Suitability of horse for rider.

2. Conformation and Soundness
   a. Head of quality, with eye reflecting alert character and good disposition.
   b. Compact well-balanced body, short back, well-sprung ribs, good slope to shoulder, withers high enough to hold saddle.
   c. Straight, well-placed legs; good feet; easy gaits.
   d. Sound of eyes, wind and limbs.

3. Condition
   a. Suitable to do task at hand without tiring.
   b. Finishing strong and alert, not overheated.

4. Equipment
   a. Tack clean and in good repair, fitted to the horse.
   b. Soft, clean, wool saddle pad, halter; shank; hoof pick, water pail and other grooming equipment.
   c. If weather is sharp, blanket for use during lunch stop.
   d. Hay -- only if horse is to be fed. (Lunch stop usually to short for feeding horses.)

**Concerning the Rider**

1. Posture in Saddle
   a. Upright, balanced, balls of feet in stirrups, seat deep in saddle.
   b. No slouching, twisting sideways or hanging to one side.
   c. Weight should be forward both up and down hills.
   d. Arms relaxed, elbows in, wrists and fingers flexible.

2. Treatment of Horse
   a. Good hands, reins short enough to have constant contact with mouth, but long enough so horse can see the ground it is moving over.
   b. Quiet but commanding voice when used as an aid.
   c. Concern for horse at lunch stop: loosen girth, run up English stirrups, blanket
if cold, move the horse if warm (out of wind if possible), and check feet for pebbles and loosen shoes.
d. Horse may drink a few swallows of water on trail during ride, even if warm, but must be kept moving.
e. Proper cooling at end of ride.
f. Inspires courage and confidence in mount.

3. Courtesy
a. Asks permission to pass a horse, moves off a short way before changing gait.
b. Waits for horses in hazardous places.
c. Rides a good distance from horse in front.
d. Pulls off trail with nose of horse to path if someone wishes to pass on narrow trail. Raises his mount's head when another horse is passing.
e. Answers all judges' questions politely.

Concerning Appointments

1. Western
a. Saddle: Must be of Western type and sized to the rider and horse; should be in good repair. Pads or blankets are required.
b. Bits: Curb bits may be used, but no wire, chain or other metal or rawhide device is permissible in conjunction with or as part of the leather chin strap. Hackamores, half breed and spade bits, tie downs, running martingales, draw reins, bosals, cavesson-type nosebands, Kellys and easy stops are prohibited. If split reins are used and horse is broken to ground tying, no hobbles are necessary; but if closed reins are used and a horse is hobbled broken, hobbles may be carried.
c. Spurs: Optional, but when used, they must be used with discretion and not used forward of the cinch.
d. Clothing: Riding pants, shirt, tie, western hat, cowboy boots; must be neat and clean. Special clothing not to be given preference over informal clothing. Chinos are acceptable. Sneakers and loafers are prohibited. In case of cold or inclement weather, warm clothing or rain gear is recommended.
e. New Tack: No new or untried equipment (saddles, saddle pads, bridles, girths, etc.) should be used the day of the trail ride. Sores may develop if new equipment is used.
f. New Clothing: No new or untried clothing (breeches, boots) should be used the day of the trail ride. The rider's comfort is usually impaired by not following this suggestion.

2. English
a. Tack: Should be neat and clean. Saddles, flat English type. Pads are required. Martingales or similar tie downs are prohibited.
b. Bits: Pelham, or snaffle bit or full bridle.
c. Spurs: Optional -- unrowelled type if worn.
d. Whips: Optional.
e. Clothing: Exhibitors and judges should bear in mind that, at all times, entries are being judged on ability rather than personal attire. Neatness should be the first requisite when it comes to rider's attire. Sneakers and loafers are prohibited. In case of cold and inclement weather, warm clothing or rain gear is recommended.
f. New Tack: No new or untried equipment (saddles, saddle pads, bridles, girths, etc.) should be used the day of the trail ride. Sores may develop if new equipment is used.
g. New Clothing: No new or untried clothing (breeches, boots) should be used the day of the trail ride. The rider's comfort is usually impaired by not following this suggestion.

Related Publications

Single copies of the following Purdue Extension publications are available free to Indiana residents from their County Extension Offices or from the Agricultural Publications Office, AGAD Building, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

"Fencing for Horses in Indiana" (AS-418)
"The Nutrition and Feeding of Horses" (AS-421)
"Horseman's Guide to Trail Riding" (AS-423)
"Management of the Horse Breeding Herd" (AS-426)
"Management of the Breeding Stallion" (AS-427)
"Management of Feeding Programs of Horses" (AS-429)
"Evaluation and Judging of Horses" (AS-430)