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SHARING THE BUSH – A GUIDE FOR TRAIL BIKE RIDERS, VEHICLES, CYCLISTS AND WALKERS MEETING HORSE RIDERS IN THE BUSH

INTRODUCTION

Through the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association's (ATHRA) ongoing education program, "Sharing the Bush", ATHRA is attempting to establish dialogue with other bush user groups to discuss common issues of concern. With ever increasing numbers of bush users comes the inevitability of more frequent contact between the different user groups, and the need for better understanding and cooperation between them.

Established in 1972, ATHRA is recognised as the premier body representing non-commercial recreational trail horse riders in Australia. We are acutely aware of environmental issues and how they affect our access to horse riding trails, and therefore constantly strive to set an example to all horse riders and to foster awareness of the environmental impact that our activities have on our native flora and fauna.

One of our primary aims is to work towards the establishment, legislation and preservation of horse riding trails, and to co-operate with other user groups and government departments in order to achieve this. We also aim to educate our members, and horse riders generally, in the protection and conservation of Australia's natural and cultural environment.

In 2003 ATHRA introduced a Code of Conduct with 13 Environmental Rules to help minimise the impact of horses on the environment and to promote safe and responsible trail horse riding. The Code has evolved to keep pace with trends and scientific developments, and now boasts "Sixteen Environmental Rules". The Code of Conduct is freely available to view and download at www.athra.com.au.

ATHRA's Code of Conduct encourages members to consider other user groups, to respect their rights to access, and wherever possible, to establish a mutual cooperation when using trails.

It is hoped that this "Sharing the Bush" Guide will be mutually beneficial to horse riders and all other bush user groups. ATHRA can be contacted through the website if any organisations wish to discuss aspects of this Guide or any other issues of common interest.

ABOUT HORSES

Horses are prey animals; that means they are "hard-wired" to expect that anything in their environment that is moving erratically, is loud, or that they do not recognise, is going to harm them.

Horses are thus motivated by fear and this fear provokes a "flight or fight" response. This response might include running away from the perceived threat (perhaps with the rider still on board but having difficulty in controlling the horse), or biting and kicking out at the threat.

The horse rider's objective of course is to train their horse to understand its environment as being non-threatening, however many trained horses remain unpredictable when confronted with something new and alien.

BUSH USERS' GUIDE

1. Be aware that horse riders may be in any public forest and have the same rights of access as other user groups.
2. Some horses are unaccustomed to trail bikes, cyclists, 4WD's and sometimes even walkers and wheelchairs.
3. Motorbike, cyclists and vehicle users should always approach horses with caution and assume they may react unpredictably.
4. First – please slow down! Cyclists and walkers should give an audible warning if approaching a horse. Horses can sometimes be startled by fast moving or silent objects from behind. So to avoid risk, let the horse and rider know you're approaching. Call out early, slow down and/or stop as appropriate.
5. Look for any hand signals from the horse riders as they may need you to slow down or stop. A rider may experience difficulties because of their horse's reaction to your presence, particularly with a young or inexperienced horse or rider.
6. In some cases it may be necessary to turn off your engine and stop. If the horse is still reacting nervously it may help to remove your helmet. Try not to motion unexpectedly or abruptly when near horses.
7. If you come across horses, feel free to chat to the riders. Just like you, we are also out there to enjoy the natural beauty of the environment.
8. A rider may ask how many vehicles/bikes are in the group or how many are behind you, so they can decide on what action is appropriate.
9. In the event you have turned off your engine, do not restart it until the horses have passed you. Give them plenty of space; 20 metres is a good guide for them to be away before you restart your engine. Please be mindful that revving engines may startle some horses.
10. If you see that a horse rider is obviously in trouble, or is thrown from the horse, assist where you can. This may include using a mobile phone to obtain help or an ambulance.
11. Together we can all enjoy the trails and tracks, if we're sharing them thoughtfully with all other bush users.

HORSE RIDERS' GUIDE

1. Treat other trail users, property owners, residents and facilities with respect and consideration.
2. Remember that many people are not familiar with horses and may be nervous when approached. It is better to approach other bush users unmounted, and then only when invited. When going into an occupied camping area or car park always dismount.
3. Remember that other bush users find it hard to see us so when riding in the bush it is advisable to wear high visibility clothing.
4. Take the time to speak to other bush users to establish a relationship of co-operation when using trails. Take the opportunity to politely educate other bush users on how to feel comfortable passing a horse and sharing the tracks with horses.

5. If you hear a vehicle approaching, put yourself in a position where you are clearly visible. If this is not possible find an area as far as possible off the track.
6. Remove all manure, old feed and your rubbish and cigarette butts from parking areas and camping grounds.
7. Always help other bush users in need of assistance. This may involve using a mobile phone or going for help.
8. Remember when riding on the road you are must obey the Australian Road Rules. Keep as far as possible to the left, comply with road signage and give hand signals when required. Drivers will appreciate you indicating your intentions.
9. ATHRA recommends the use of approved helmets by all riders when trail riding.

*Produced by Australian Trail Horse Riders Association in the interest of Bush Safety
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