

Your First Ride?

Here are answers to some common questions, and some tips to help you get started.

What is an endurance ride?

It is one form of a long distance riding competition. There are three forms - endurance, competitive trail and ride-and-tie. They are all over set trails, with predetermined holds and vet checks.

Endurance is a ride up to 100 miles in a day, with known vet check locations, and a maximum time limit. The horses for the same distance start together, horses have to pulse down to begin the hold, and the first horse to arrive at the finish in acceptable condition is the winner. There are awards for every horse that completes, plus awards for top placing horses.

Competitive trail is a ride with vet check locations unknown to riders, and a minimum and maximum time. The optimum speed is faster for the longer, advanced distances. The horses start individually, holds begin when the horse arrives at the checks, and the pulse is taken a set interval later, and the horse with the best score (time closest to optimum, plus the vet marks) is the winner. There are awards for the top places in each weight category.

Ride and tie is a ride and run, with two riders/runners and one horse. Riders take turns with the horse, leapfrogging past the runner, tying the horse by the trail, and continuing on foot. The fastest team with a horse in acceptable condition, and both riders, is the winner.

What is a hold?

When the horse arrives at the end of a set piece of trail (a loop), it has to remain at that location, either back in camp, or at an area out on along the trail, and not begin the next section of trail for a specified number of minutes. The horse is "held" from continuing. During this "hold", the veterinarian will check the horse's condition, and determine if the horse is "fit to continue" or not. If the horse shows lameness, or unsatisfactory metabolic condition, it will be excused from the competition. Because the vet checks the horse, a hold is often called a **check**. (Also the horse has been stopped, or "checked".)

During the hold, the horse will also have a chance to eat, drink and rest. Holds can range from 10 minutes to an hour, depending on several factors including distance travelled to this point.

When the horse reaches the vet check area, a timer records the "arrival time". The hold time does not begin until the horse's pulse has slowed to the set criterium - often 60 beats per minute (bpm), which is set ahead of time by the ride vet. The horse's pulse rate is determined by a P&R person.

P&R?

Pulse and respiration, although only the pulse is considered at this point. The P&R person will use a stethoscope, or possibly a heart monitor, to determine the pulse rate. When the pulse drops to the pre-set bpm, the P&R person will tell the timer, who will record the time the horse came "down" (the start of the hold time), and when the end of the hold, or "out time" will be.

NOTE: The respiration should be less than the pulse. If "inverted", the horse may be too hot and trying to cool itself by panting.

In time? Out time?

The "In time" is also called the arrival time, and is the time when the horse first arrives at the check area. It may take a few minutes for the horse's pulse to slow down. NOTE: If it does not reach the set bpm within 30 minutes, the horse will be excused from the competition.

When the rider feels that the horse may be ready, the horse is presented to a P&R person for a pulse, and if it is at or below the limit, the horse is given a "down time" which is the start of the hold. The timer will add the number of minutes of the hold to the down time, to determine the end of the hold, or the "Out time". For example: Down at 10:18, hold of 45 minutes, Out at 11:03

Who are the people at a check?

Right at the arrival line

The Timer, who records your Arrival, Down and Out times on your rider card – usually sitting at a table, plus assistants who will take and return your card

The P&R people who check the horses' pulses - holding stethoscopes or heart monitors

And in the vetting area

The veterinarian - often in coveralls

The vet secretary - holding a clipboard

Where? What? Who?

<u>You & horse</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Person</u>	<u>Rider card action</u>
arrive	give rider card to Timer	Timer or assistant	the Arrival time
proceed to crewing area	sponge, remove saddle	you or your helper	---
proceed to the P&R area	get pulse check	P&R person	Down time/Out time (if your horse is not down yet, return to crewing area; come back when horse may be ready)
proceed to vet	give card to secretary	vet & secretary	horse condition
proceed to trailer	feed horse & yourself, recover saddle, retack	you or your helper	look at Out time, then PUT IT BACK
proceed to timer	present for departure	timer or assistant	safe in pocket

How much time will the ride take?

That depends on how fast you wish to go. There is no set speed.

Remember that Endurance rides do have time limits.

24 hours for a 100 mile ride

12 hours for a 50 mile ride

6 hours for a 25 mile ride

which works out to approximately 14 minutes per mile for an minimum average speed of 4.2 mph.

BUT since the total time allowed includes holds, riders must deduct the total hold times from the allowed time to figure out the riding time available, then use this riding time to calculate the actual average speed required to finish within the time limit.

Example #1 the ride is 25 miles, with a time allowed of 6 hours

After the first loop, there is a 60 minute hold

Total hold time = 1 hour, so riding time available is (6-1=) 5 hours

The average speed needed is (25 miles÷5 hours=)5 mph.

Example #2 the ride is 50 miles, the time allowed is 12 hours.

After the first loop, there is a 20 minute hold.

After the second loop, there is a 50 minute hold.

After the third loop, there is a 20 minute hold.

Total hold times = 1½ hours, so riding time available is (12-1½ =) 10½ hours

The average speed needed is (50 miles÷10.5 hours=)4.76 mph

How fast should we travel?

Aim for a reasonable pace. Beginners have won endurance rides, but unless you know your horse is already a marathon master, consider a more moderate approach. Plan to keep to a fairly steady pace that will allow for a few brief stops along the trail (sponging, grazing, tack adjustments), a slow trot and walk into the vet checks, some time for horse recovery to pulse criterion, and perhaps a half-hour "contingency" cushion. Your horse may out-vote you on ride morning, but better to have a plan you have to modify, than no plan at all. "Plan the ride, and ride the plan." Some first time competitors fail to finish inside the time limit because they weren't keeping track of their time and speed, and how far they still had to go.

If you don't have any idea how fast your horse walks or trots, try to find out. You can ride beside a road of a known length (measured with your car odometer), keeping to a steady pace, and timing how long it takes. Then figure out how fast you were going. Repeat for walk, easy trot, brisk trot, and canter.

As a very rough guide, many horses walk at about 4 mph, trot at 6-7 mph, hard trot at 8-9, and canter at 10-12. They may manage only 1-3 mph on a difficult climb.

If your horse trots at 6 mph, and walks at 4, you know that a lot of walking will put you overtime, and that you may need some brisk trotting to compensate. Remember that horses get better "mileage" at the slower paces, and use more energy per mile when at a fast trot or canter. Use your horse resource judiciously.

What will the trail be like?

Of course, this depends largely on where the ride is held. If it is held in the mountains, expect lots of climbing, some forest paths, some streams. If it is in the desert, expect open terrain with the horse ahead visible for miles, rolling hills, and not much shade or water. Ask the Ride Manager or a previous participant for a rough idea of what's along the trail. In any case, expect some challenges - not the least is staying on trail.

Can I get lost?

Yup. But not really lost, and not for long. Most rides use generous strips of bright surveyor tape hung on trees and tied to bushes to mark the trail. Usually, each loop has its own colour. Often, plastic lids are added at intersections with specific directions, such as Red Loop Out ▣. Keep watching for the ribbons, and get a feel for how often they are hung. Along a road, the ribbons may be widely spaced, while along a faint trail, you may see two or three ahead.

If you go for a minute at a trot with no ribbons, stop and reconsider. Backtrack to where you saw the last one, and ride forward again, watching for a direction change. There should be three ribbons tied along one branch to warn of a turn, and another ribbon just around the corner to get you on your way again.

If you are particularly concerned about getting off course, try to find someone to ride with who is experienced. The best is to ride with someone who knows the local area. And just because you are riding behind someone, don't stop looking for ribbon - your leader may be fallible.

What if something goes wrong?

Stay on the trail. You can be found if you stick to the trail. Your riding buddy or the next rider coming by can carry word back to camp that you require assistance. Stay with your horse, and wait for help. If your horse is lame, or has lost a shoe, you may be able to keep walking along the trail to a point where the horse can be trailered out. If you plan to do this, send word with the messenger.

What should I wear?

Wear what you find comfortable, keeping in mind how long the ride might take. Maybe you ride on weekends, taking long trail trips that may last several hours, mostly at a walk. Maybe you ride several times a week, in a ring, or for short trail rides of maybe an hour or so.

Now consider that an endurance ride may last several hours, with the average pace at a moderate trot. There will be places where a walk is appropriate (tricky turns, rocks, climbing, taking a break) and a few spots where a sharp trot or canter works. There may even be some places where walking in hand is best. You can work up a sweat, get caught in a shower, bake in the sun and shiver in the shade. Layers such as T-shirt, long-sleeved shirt, and light jacket may be more versatile than one sweatshirt. Cotton golf shirt, fleece jacket, nylon windbreaker - all good. Avoid polyester. Leave the tank top for the pool party - you want sun coverage and branch protection.

A scarf or neckerchief will keep sun off your neck, and may be kept wet for a cooling effect if the day is hot. The cowboys were right about that!

Chafing is the enemy! Jeans or jodhpurs that ride up or bunch will make ridges that rub. Stretch fabric is good if the item fits well; again, extra material migrating up the leg causes major unhappiness at a trot or canter.

The stirrups that you use will partially dictate footwear. Boots or riding runners with heels for safety should be well broken in, and socks should have some cushion. Stirrups can get hard after 4 hours, and some thicker socks help, but don't sacrifice toe wiggle room. Cowboy boots may be pretty uncomfortable if you hand walk up a rocky slope. Comfort and safety, not fashion!

Consider gloves with non-slip contact. Your sweet pony may become a snorting maniac when headed down a road with other horses ahead and behind, and having the reins pulled through your hands hurts. Also, gloves give protection while fending off branches and bushes.

Wear a helmet. Stuff happens, and with horses, it happens fast. Wear a helmet. Even if you know you would never fall off, a tree branch can whack you darn hard. Wear a helmet.

What should the horse wear?

In endurance riding, there is no particular right or wrong saddle. Actually, you could ride bareback! Bridles, bits and reins are rider's choice.

Use any saddle that fits you and your horse. A saddle that pinches, rubs or shifts will bother your horse, possibly to the point that you have to quit. Check that there is no sliding back or forward, since there will be some climbing and descending trail. Some horses need breast collars or cruppers.

Saddle pads need to provide some cushioning, help absorb sweat, and stay in place. Your usual pad should be OK unless it is particularly thin, and it should be clean. So should the girth or cinch, plus any fuzzy cover. Dried sweat can rub badly, especially just behind the elbows. Consider bringing a spare pad and girth, and changing to them at the half-way mark.

Bridles can be of any type, and bits are individual choices, but keep in mind that some otherwise well behaved horses become a little "fresh" when they find themselves in a group of

keyed-up starters. You may want to consider using more bit than normal for the first loop. In addition, even if wearing gloves, use reins that allow a good purchase. If the reins get damp with rain or sweat, they could get slippery, and the horse might take advantage. Bolting out of control is not part of the sensible ride plan.

If you want to experiment with different tack, do it ahead of time. Ride day is not the time to try something new. Trust me!

What else should we have?

You might want to carry a small first aid kit, leg wrap/bandage, pocket knife, and tack repair stuff. Consider wearing a fanny pack, or adding a gear pack to the saddle. Or both. There are pommel and cantle packs made especially for long distance riding, but a fanny pack could be adapted. Especially useful are holders for water bottles - the sippy kind used by cyclists and joggers.

Bring water, and possibly juice or sport drinks. More is better, and extra water can be poured over the horse's neck to help with cooling. How much to carry will depend on the time of day, the weather, and the length of the loop. A 7 mile loop first thing on a cool, misty morning, and you may not need more than a few sips. A 15 mile loop in midday 30 degree sun, and you could empty 3-4 bottles.

Some riders bring along a sponge, both for cooling the horse at water spots along the trail, and for convenience when arriving back at the vet check. If you do, corral your sponge in a plastic mesh bag (like the ones oranges come in), and tie the bag to a snap that can attach to your saddle. Perhaps add a sturdy cord long enough to lower the sponge into a puddle or creek. Don't use binder twine! Really!

Can you carry food? Hard candies for sucking, fruit leathers, grain bars, raisins, trail mix are good choices. Items that melt or squish (chocolate bars, sandwiches) are problematic. Apples can bounce into sauce; use plastic sandwich bags. Some pieces of horse crunch for a quick reward after a climb, or at some other break, might be appreciated by your equine partner.

Again, try adding new gear on a trial ride ahead of time. That handy pack may swing or chafe, or need another hole in the strap. Ride morning isn't the best time to find out.

What should we bring to camp?

For the horse:

If you are trailering in to vet, then taking your horse back home until the next morning, you only need food and supplies for the ride. If you are camping overnight with your horse, you will need extra meals and a way of securing your horse for the night.

Will you tie your horse to the trailer? He will need a hay net or hay bag, and a bucket for water, plus another bucket for grain. If you have a pen (a camp corral or portable panels), you may feed hay on the ground, but will still need buckets. If you are going to high line, remember the rope and any hardware that you use. Bring a spare lead rope and halter, just in case.

Remember the food. Your horse may eat "just like home" or may need some coaxing with special treats. Be prepared for your horse to eat more than usual, or less.

Estimate how much hay your horse would eat in the time at camp, and bring 50% more to allow for wastage or extra appetite. It is convenient to pre-package the hay into 2-3 flake bundles that slip into bags or nets. (Remove the binder twine before giving to horse.)

You can pre-mix the grain, or bring some of everything, but putting it into smaller lidded tubs or pails or plastic bags means the huge grain bags stay home, and don't take up trailer space. You may have beet pulp for getting extra water into your horse, before, during and after

the ride. You may have electrolytes (see next section) and syringes, and applesauce for mixing. You may bring horse cookies and other nibblies. And carrots and apples can be cut up and added to a half-time mash, or handed out as a "thank you" at the end.

Bring a warm blanket, a waterproof one, a light sheet, and a fly mask. Your horse can't move around to keep warm, or fend off the flies. Bring insect repellent!

Also bring a jar of Vaseline; handy for any areas (on the horse or you) that are chafing.

Consider a set of leg wraps for comfort after the ride, or if the weather is chilly. The travel wraps will keep legs warm, but not give much support, and may get soiled overnight if your horse is loose in a pen. A set of ice wraps (regular wraps soaked in ice water will work) will help prevent stocking up if used between loops and right after the ride.

Bring sponges and buckets for washing down sweaty necks and muddy legs. A sweat scraper is handy, and a few old towels for post-bath may help.

Don't forget the grooming tools - brushes, curry comb, elastics for braids, etc. If the weather is warm, braiding (pigtails or running braid) gets the mane away from the neck.

Uh, electrolytes?

When horses sweat to cool themselves, they lose more than just water. They lose salt and minerals. Electrolytes. These chemicals are essential for the proper functioning of muscles, including the heart and smooth intestinal muscles.

You can give these back to your horse. There are commercial preparations that combine these chemicals - usually sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium - in a ready-to-use powder. The electrolytes may be added to feed, mixed into water, (offer plain water alongside!), or mixed with a little water, or applesauce, or molasses in a big syringe, and squirted directly into the horse's mouth. Read the label. Talk to someone experienced. Too much as well as too little can be not "a good thing". If your horse is not drinking, you can't electrolyte, so keep track of how well he is drinking in camp and on the trail.

Again, ask an experienced rider about giving electrolytes, as it is important, and can be done incorrectly. The vets are always willing to advise new riders, too.

For the rider:

Again, it depends on if you are just in and out, or staying overnight.

You'll want your ride clothes and something warmer/cooler/drier/more comfy for afterward, even if you are going home after the awards.

Depending on your overnight accommodation, camping supplies may be necessary, or the camper may have everything - shelter, food prep and a washbasin. You should spend overnight dressed in something practical for popping outside to check on that loud bang at 3 am. You will have toiletries and spare socks and the like. Consider sun block, insect repellent, flashlights, first-aid kit, alarm clock, sleeping bag, favourite pillow, antihistamines and aspirin, and a hat. And a camp chair.

Food. Pack more than you think you will need, so you have a bit of choice. Bring something for the night before, the morning of the ride, the break, and afters. If the ride has a pot luck dinner, try to bring something pre-made, or that needs little preparation. If staying the second night, you'll need another breakfast, and travel munchies to get you home.

Skip the spicy and exotic the night before the ride, as your tummy may be a bit nervous anyway. Many riders go for pasta.

In the morning, plan to have something that will last a few hours, and include something to drink. (My usual is hot chocolate and granola bars.) Bring something for the half-way break, such as orange wedges, canned fruit, more granola bars, plus sport drinks, juice and water. You want fiber, fluid and energy.

Post ride, anything goes. You may appreciate salty chips or nuts, or something sweet, like raisins or chocolate bars. And more drinks. It may be quite a while until dinner, so have something substantial for a late lunch.

Depending on the weather, bring ice or bring LOTS of ice. Some is for the food cooler, some is for drinks, some is for the ice wraps on your horse's legs.

What happens at the ride?

The day before

Riders and horse arrive. Camps are arranged, gear is readied, food is prepared, and folks fill sponging buckets with water. Horses are walked around the ride site to get them acquainted with water troughs, scary bushes and next door horses, or maybe gently ridden to stretch out kinks from the trailering.

After you set-up, come to the ride secretary, and enter the ride. If you have already sent in the entry, you have only to collect your "ride package". This usually includes the rider card, a map of the trails, and the ride rules. There may be a page of camp rules as well, such as using the provided carts for manure and keeping dogs leashed. The rider card is really important - all the vet check information is recorded on it throughout the ride.

Take the rider card and your horse to the vetting area for your pre-ride vet check. The vet wants to make sure that your horse is in good shape before starting the ride. Occasionally, horses do not vet through. This is usually due to a muscle cramp or minor lameness following trailering. Remember that some of the horses at a ride have trailered in from several hours away.

The vet checks for hydration and good gut sounds, resting heart rate, and soundness. This last requires you to trot your horse away from the vet, and back again, and circle both ways.

After the vet declares you fit to go, you take your horse over to the kind person with the fat crayons (cattle markers) who marks your horse's number on its hips. Not all rides do this, but many do, and it lets everyone know which distance you are riding. The 50 mile horses have numbers over 50, and the shorter distance horses have numbers starting from 1.

Now take your horse back to your trailer, and immediately put the rider card in a safe place for the morning. If you are going to use a fanny pack, put it in there. Or the safest pocket you have. If the weather is damp, put it in a plastic sandwich bag first.

Depending on time, you may visit with other riders, and have dinner, but consider also taking a walk around the ride area, see where the trails go in and out, and confirm where you will be arriving after the first loop.

Locate the crewing area. This is a spot where you can cool off your horse to get the pulse rate down. You may wish to bring over a sponge and bucket with water, plus a bit of hay. (If your horse gets his pulse up while eating, skip the hay.) If you are going to remove the saddle before vetting, an old towel to put it on will help keep it clean. If rain threatens, bring over a blanket/cooler/fleece tucked in a plastic bag for throwing over your horse's back, and something for the saddle too.

Next to the crewing area is the P&R area. During the ride, this is where the P&R people will take your horse's pulse. Further along is the vetting area. Locate the route out and back to your trailer, and you are ready for the next day.

If you plan to feed beet pulp, set it up to soak. Prepare the mid-ride meals, but don't moisten ahead of time. Cut up the apples or carrots. Fill up your water bottles, set up your break food, and pack anything that needs to go to any "out check"*.

Ride Meeting

In the evening, after most horses have vetted in, the Ride Manager will hold the Ride Meeting. The time of the meeting may be in the ride package. Usually, the Ride Manager honks a car horn to call the riders. Bring a lawn chair, your ride map and pencil, and perhaps a jacket.

The meeting will have two main parts - the trail description, and the vetting information. The Manager or the Trail marker will go over the trail, loop by loop, touching on the main features and hazards. It can be handy to mark these right on your map. Not all loops are traveled by all horses because of the different distances, and who does which loops will be explained. Also, the manager will confirm the start times, and the location of the start and finish lines. Then the head veterinarian will announce the pulse criteria - for coming into each hold, and at the finish. Any cautions about heat and humidity are important; heed them for your horse's sake. Someone will review the post-ride schedule for vetting in, and Best Condition vetting (50 milers, top ten only).

Riders that are not overnighting will head home, and the others will tuck their horses in for the night with plenty of water and hay, and try to sleep.

Ride Day

Ride morning starts early- about 1 to 2 hours before the ride begins. Riders trailering in will have to get up even earlier to arrive at the site in good time. You'll want to have yourself dressed and fed, the horse groomed with braids done if needed, all the tack and gear on the horse, and you in the saddle with about 20 minutes to go. This will allow for some warm-up, and a chance to tighten the girth, before riding out to the starting area and checking in with the Starter.

With about 5 minutes to go, you may wish to turn and ride away from the start line to avoid being swept up at the start with the more competitive horse & rider pairs. Meet up with your riding partner if you have one, or fall in with an experienced person. Then turn, and start slowly toward the line. Your horse will accelerate, but try to control the pace at least somewhat. You may choose to live with some bad behaviour if your horse is wasting too much energy (yours and his) in a fight. Don't get so caught up with controlling your horse that you don't keep an eye on the trail, and the marking ribbons. Try to relax, and your horse may relax a bit too.

If your horse hasn't had much trail time, be cautious about rocky bits, uphill scrambles, and downhill slides. Slow down, and let the horse have a chance to figure things out. Keep an eye on the trail, both branches above and roots below, watch (and listen) for riders coming up behind you that want to pass, ride centered and relaxed - excluding the death grip on the reins - and have fun. It's what you came for!

When you near the finish of the first loop, try to convince your horse to slow down. About 1/4 mile out, try to walk. You may have to dismount and lead to get your horse to settle. If you are crossing a stream near camp, let the horse stand for a minute, and have a chance to drink. If nothing else, it cools legs.

If you haven't already, dismount and walk the last bit to the arrival timer, getting your rider card out as you go. If you can loosen the girth, this may help the horse's pulse come down. Many horses appreciate a chance for a potty break; this also helps the pulse rate. Now proceed to the crewing area and your sponging spot.

If you need to remove the saddle for the vet, you can do it now, or after the P&R, but if the day is hot, and the horse's pulse is a bit high, it's better to take it off right away.

Friendly volunteer P&R people will take your horse's pulse, and when he has a heart rate at or below the required rate, you will now be off ride time and onto hold (break) time. Your rider card will be marked with the "down" time, and with the "out" time. During this break

you must take your horse to the vet check (similar to the day before, but with the CRI**). Most people do this right away unless there is a big line-up. Check the rider card - are the scores the same as last night? Better? Anything worse? If you have any concerns, ask. The vet is there to help. After, take your horse back to your camp spot (either the trailer or a quiet spot in the crewing area) for a rest and food.

During the hold

The horse needs food and water, and so do you. Throw the water on the prepared grain mix, or dish out the soggy beet pulp. Add in the cut up apples. Now have a quick bite yourself, and something to drink. If you haven't done it yet, lay away the rider card. Hit the porta-potti on the way to collect your saddle. Leave it upside down to dry a bit, or change saddle pads. Have something more to eat while doing this. Replenish water bottles (or switch to fresh full ones), add or subtract clothing, freshen sun block or repellent, and choke down a wedge of fruit.

With about 10 minutes to go, start retacking. Give yourself time to check gear, tighten the girth, add water bottles, replace bridle, and administer electrolytes if they weren't in the grain mix. Get your helmet and fanny pack, mount up, and walk over to the Out timer area. Find your riding buddy, check the girth one more time, get the OK from the timer, and head out again.

The next loop

Your horse will be much easier to control, you will know what to expect, and the second loop will be more fun. Keep in mind that your average speed may be slower, since you aren't semi-bolting any more. It may also be hotter, or wetter, or have more climbing, or more rocky places, and once comfy clothes may start their attack. This is where the endurance part of endurance ride comes in. If it were totally easy, the six-year-old from next door would be here. But if you concentrate on the trail, and the remarkable animal under you, soon you'll be back at camp. If you are doing the shorter distance, you are almost finished. If you still have more mileage, do the vet check and hold thing again.

Finishing

For distances of 50 miles and more, when the horse crosses the finish line, the ride time stops. The horse still has to pulse down, and complete the final vet check, but the finish line is the finish.

Not so with limited distance rides. In order to discourage racing to the finish, the rule is that the ride isn't over until the horse pulses down. Therefore, when you complete the last loop, you do exactly the same things as after the previous loop - sponge down the horse, untack if you wish, and present for P&R. This time, the "down time" will be the "finish time". You can take your horse back to the trailer for untacking if not already done, and a bit of a washdown, or you can go directly to the vet check. When the horse passes the final check is the time to celebrate. Briefly.

And finally-

Now back to the trailer. Dump your helmet and fanny pack (aaah!), get something for the horse to eat, like hay and a mash, get a bite for yourself, and then start cleaning up. Begin with your horse, of course.

The water you dragged to your spot yesterday has had a chance to warm up, so it will be fine to use - just avoid putting water on the large muscles of the croup and hips. If the weather is cool, drop a light blanket or fleece over your horse's back, moving it for sponging as

necessary. If you are going to use ice wraps, now is the time. Blanket or not depending on temperature, wind, and weather. After you get the horse cleaned up, freshen the hay, and deal out some more munchies.

Now clean yourself up - it will make you feel much better and is worth the effort. Even just changing shoes and socks will work a minor miracle. Comb your hair. Heaven!

And do something with the tack. At least pull the soggy pad from the saddle, and hang somewhere to dry. Wipe down bridle and bit, and any other pieces, and get them laid away. Dump the horse wash water, and leave the buckets to dry. This will make breaking camp later less of a chore.

By now, your horse's legs are somewhat dry, so you can wrap with support bandages, if desired.

Finally you get to relax, chomp on chips, and swap stories with the other riders. And there are always stories. Check on the time for the pot-luck dinner, if there is one, then bring over your camp chair, eat and talk, and stand up with pride when you hear your name called for your completion award!

More terms

***Out Check**

Not every loop will end up conveniently back at base camp. Some large loops are too long not to have a vet check along the way. Since they are out of camp, they are Out checks. Usually there are not any included in the shorter distance rides. If there is an out check, each rider can pack a picnic cooler or bucket (or both) with snacks for rider and horse, and maybe a blanket or light sheet. Ride management will arrange for their delivery to and return from the out check if the riders drop them off at a specified location, e.g. next to the white pick-up, or by the big pine tree.

****CRI** - cardiac recovery index; also known as the Ridgeway trot, after the vet who devised it.

This test determines the horse's ability to recover from a slight stress, as an indicator of the fitness of the horse and its readiness to continue.

The horse's pulse is taken by the vet. Then the horse is trotted in hand for a measured distance, out and back. As the horse moves out, time starts. The horse returns to the vet, who begins some of the examination. After 60 seconds, time stops, and the pulse is taken again. A fit horse will have a second value no more than 4 bpm higher: often it is the same, or lower. A second value of 8 bpm higher may not disqualify the horse if everything else looks good, but would certainly be a warning to the rider that the horse is getting tired, and must be ridden more conservatively from now on. A much higher second value signals something wrong. It could be fatigue, a slight lameness, or a stallion distracted by a fetching mare! If the test shows a problem, it is repeated some minutes later. A second poor result would indicate the horse should not continue.

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This brochure was written and prepared by Elaine Bessuille who is totally responsible for the content.