

Equestrian Routes and Facilities

Introduction

Exactly the same principles apply to planning paths for horse-riders as for any other users.

Factors to be taken into consideration include:

- The type, level and seasonal usage of existing and potential use(s),
- Drainage, accessibility (particularly important in terms of surfacing),
- Types of barriers used,
- Practical farm/land ownership/management issues,
- Experience and encounter availability, (scenery, views, challenges)
- Future maintenance implications and
- Available resources.

Dedicated bridle ways are unlikely to be financially reasonable to construct except in special locations. Therefore, equestrian routes are likely to be shared with other users; pedestrians, mobility vehicle riders, cyclists. Care must be taken to ensure that making provisions for one type of users does not make the path less suitable for other users.

Non-paved, natural surface paths & tracks on public lands traditionally pose difficult terrain challenges for people with physical and sensory disabilities. In some cases, horses and donkeys could be the perfect answer for those who want to experience most of our national path infrastructure that are generally located in natural environments.

People with disabilities have been discovering horseback riding as a way to help them become more mobile on our nation's path network. Many are thrilled to have an opportunity for accessible recreation in outdoor places they've never been able to experience before. Equines are very willing partners in assisting people with disabilities, and they can open a much broader world of recreation to people who have many types of mobility impairment. Horseback riding also helps physically challenged equestrians develop a greater sense of balance and build their confidence.

Route Basics

Disabled people

It is essential to implement some basic planning design guidelines when developing routes for equestrians with disabilities. There are a number of key elements that help make trails more accessible to physically and sensory impaired equestrians. Among these are:

- Paths that are wide enough to permit “side walkers” if they are required. “Side walkers” are people who assist an equestrian with disabilities by walking on either side of a horse or donkey to help them maintain their balance.
- Special ramps and mounting blocks that permit a person in a wheelchair to move easily out of the wheelchair on to the back of a horse, and at the same level as a horse’s back. Or Special stepped access with handrails to aid people with mobility or visual impairment to mount without strain These are relatively inexpensive and easy to construct.
- Detailed maps and route description signage that helps equestrians with disabilities select the most appropriate path for their ride.
- Paths with wide turning radii, which help people who are physically and visually impaired equestrians, maintain their balance while negotiating a turn astride a horse.

Common Features of rides

Safety of horse and rider – and of others enjoying countryside access – must be the over-riding consideration

- On promoted horse routes, riders expect to be able to enjoy readily passable and unobstructed clearly signed paths without any sections on busy or dangerous roads or across potentially dangerous boggy ground, offering a variety of conditions, views and experiences.
- Minimum height of a mounted rider is 2.55 m above ground level. Overhanging branches and any other obstructions should be cleared to minimum 3 m (preferably 3.7 m) on all riding routes.
- Adequate turning space and safe loading/unloading areas are essential where parking is provided for horse boxes/trailers.
- Surfaces need to be firm and capable of supporting the horse and rider’s weight without sinking.
- Without stones and gravel which can injure the horse’s hooves.

- Provide 'gallops' usually grassed or sand sections where riders can trot, canter or gallop without endangering other users. These should be fairly common or else riders will tend to look for other routes where they can stretch the horse.
- Hard surfaced sections can be used to hold the pace of horses down where mixed use of the path makes speed reduction preferable.
- Slopes should not exceed 1:12 for most purposes. Where steeper slopes are provided as challenge and exercise features a level section for acceleration should be provided at the bottom of the slope these should be no more than 1:7 (8°).
- The British Hoses Society recommends a gallop width of 5600 mm, other sections for horse only can be 2500 mm wide with narrow passing points as narrow as 500 mm. Narrow paths near drops, electric or barbed wire fencing can place other users at risk. The ground surface has a bearing on path width softer or more easily damaged surfaces should be wider to reduce constant traffic on one part of the route.
- Passing points 3000 mm (min) wide should be provided on narrow bridle paths at fairly frequent intervals.

Path Surfaces

Preferred surfaces in descending order

- Short, firm, well-drained turf, which is ideal for riding and walking, and usually firm enough for cycling, but may not suit wheelchair riders and mobility aid users.
- Vegetated paths on firm base such as grassed over forest roads or disused railway tracks well drained, stripped of ballast to expose consolidated ash solum, can be ideal for supporting year-round multi-use,
- Paths where the natural vegetation is protected or reinforced by some type of surfacing.
- Formally constructed paths with firm, non-slip surface.
- Sealed surfaces, which may be necessary to facilitate cycle, wheelchair, mobility aid user access, these are generally less popular with riders but can be used to control speed. Brick, concrete or tarmac should all be avoided as surfacing for equestrian paths, similarly any aggregate which may set and become slippery with use.

Tracks with a centre grass verge and paved vehicle tracks either side, may be acceptable for horses but are generally unsuitable for

mobility vehicles and mobility aids. They are also a hazard for people with low vision and hearing.

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