

Endurance Ride Camp Etiquette

When endurance riders converge on a camp site it is often said that we form a sort of community. We refer to those who are parked next to us as our “neighbors.” This is usually a good thing with a gathering of friends who will loan you a can opener or agree to wake you up when you’ve forgotten your alarm clock. Unfortunately, there will always be a small minority of arrivals who will cause good neighbors to exchange knowing looks of dread indicating the opinion, “There goes the neighborhood.”

I could have written a standard article on ride camp etiquette which would have described how to be a good neighbor, such as always keeping your well-behaved dog on leash and turning off your generator after a reasonable hour (or even better, only running it for extremely short periods, even in the daytime), or securing your trustworthy mounts in secure corrals.

Unfortunately, the only people who would read it are those who already do these things. The sort of people who pull up with a nervous horse and turn him out in the first electric corral he’s ever seen, then tie their biting dog where his rope reaches the most popular route to the bathroom facility, are not the sort of person who will bother to read this article. So I have decided instead to write a more useful article on how the conscientious camper can deal with the person I will hereafter refer to as the “ride camp menace.”

Runaway horses

The most dangerous menace is the one who makes little attempt to see that his horses stay contained. Remember, “good fences make for good neighbors.” There will always be times when horses escape even the best enclosures, but if you’re a repeat offender chances are there’s a reason that people meet you some distance from their camp, pointing to a far corner of the field and giving you the tip that there’s a great spot left there.

For some reason these repeat offenders often seem to think it’s almost amusing that their horses just streaked through camp again, narrowly avoiding entangling small children with the dragging posts and fencing. Here’s a news flash: it’s not funny. The problem is it’s hard to be more obvious than the obvious...by saying, “you know, somebody could get hurt; you need to do something about your horses getting out.”

They usually just reply with a clueless smile and say, “I don’t know what to do, he’s done that three times now!” Ha, ha, ha. Rather than be too confrontational, one might try the old “a lotta guys would” method. Just amble by after the dust has died down, the frantic moms have found their children, the flagging from the vet check is repaired and the tents have been re-pegged, then say something to the effect of, “You know, a lotta guys would introduce their horse to his first electric fence at home.”

Other “a lotta guys” statements include: “A lotta guys hook up a charger to their electric tape,” or, “A lotta guys keep their

overhead line tight and make sure the bull snap is six inches off the ground.”

And then there’s the variation of circumstances such as the horse who got loose while being saddled which calls for the, “A lotta guys keep a rope around their horse’s neck when they reach to pick up the bridle.” A last resort statement is, “A lotta guys would worry that they’d get sued for everything they owned if they let their horse get loose and kill somebody’s kid.”

If a rider continues to be a problem after having ample hints thrown their way I vote that we remove them from all mailing lists and refuse to tell them when and where future rides will be held. Sorry, I like you as a person, but I’d rather never see you again than see your horses tearing through camp for the fifth time.

Space issues

Corrals. Now let’s talk corral size. A ride camp is not the Oklahoma Land Rush. Just because you got there first does not entitle you to all the land you have the stakes to enclose. If the camp is tight, riders should keep their corrals the size management requests—measured in feet, not acres. If the camp is roomy and someone begins to stake out a homestead, management should simply smile and say, “The extra-large parcels are down there,” pointing to an area far from the office and tents. It’s the same as at home. If you want a lot of land, it increases your daily commute.

Saving spaces. Since some riders plan to ride together, crew together, or sponsor each other’s children or green horses, it is often almost essential that two rigs be parked side by side so I see nothing wrong with setting out a few buckets to save a spot for your friends. One or two spaces should be the limit, though. Claiming an entire community is just cliquish and calls for selective blindness on the driver who backs over the offending buckets.

Dogs. Another irritating quality in a neighbor is the person who brings the dog that they shouldn’t bring. You know the one. It’s not the dog that sleeps quietly in his enclosure throughout the day or is walking on leash with his master afterward; that’s the dog that belongs to the person who’s bothering to read this article. We’re talking about the dog who’s biting, barking, peeing on tents and hay, and harassing the dogs that are on leads.

For some reason, some people don’t understand that a protective dog is a wonderful thing at home, but has no business tied to a trailer in a busy ride camp; and a loose, friendly dog who just hiked his leg on the corner of your tent is no friend. Since we are all animal lovers here, we would never stoop to some of the more violent ways people are known to deal with undesirable neighborhood dogs.

My suggestion for this problem is this: all riders should bring at least one can of chili and keep it in their rig. Assuming

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that the owner of said dog has to ride home with the animal in their vehicle, a full tin pan of chili might be just the appropriate treat for the dog—to ensure the owner the pleasant drive home he deserves. After a few trips with said dog the owner will hopefully decide that the animal is not a fit traveling companion and leave him home where he belongs.

Generators

Next let us discuss generators. There are two types of people. There are those who enjoy staying inside their camper with generators running, enjoying the air conditioning, televisions and microwaves that they're used to. And then there's the second group, the ones who are outside shouting above the drone of the generator—wondering when it will shut off, if it will shut off, and amusing themselves discussing violent ways they could shut it off for you.

Opinions are strong. Those inside think there would be no problem if those outside would buy generators of their own so they could stay inside away from the noise. Those outside who have been looking forward to a weekend of camping have no option but to pretend they are camping in the parking lot of a large truck stop and sullenly heat their soup on their Coleman hot plate.

A truce is in order with specific rules. The number one rule is all generators should be silent by 10:00 p.m. If you cannot live without your generator you should park as far from the center of camp as possible (preferably your own driveway). I have heard some round-the-clock generator users claim it was necessary for the comfort of their spouse or child (the one with the Game Boy permanently attached to his hand). Unless your spouse is on a ventilator, this is untrue. Cut it off.

One bit of misunderstanding comes from the “all generators off after 10:00” rule. Some generator owners take that to insinuate that “generators that run all day don't bother us.” Not true. Other campers hate your generator just as much in the middle of the day, it's just the managers who feel they only have justification to tell you to turn it off after 10:00.

A good rule of thumb is, “I can stand your generator long enough for me to mentally imagine you cooking your supper. I cannot stand it air conditioning your rig for the dog/husband/kid who cannot handle a weekend in nature.

Finally, any generator owner who runs 100 feet of cord to their generator so that they can get it far enough away from their own camper not to be bothered by the noise, but puts it right next to another camp, is just asking for trouble. I am suspicious in such circumstances when the disheveled camper closest to it asks to borrow a cup of sugar at 3:00 a.m., but so long as I'm awake too, I'm happy to oblige.

And furthermore . . .

Loud music. Never assume that others have your taste in music, be it bluegrass or opera. That's why God made headphones.

Porto-lets. Men, if you go to the porto-let during the night . . . take a flashlight. Please. Do not trust your memory for the general location of objects. During the ride it is nice when crews insist that riders break line. Towards the end of the ride weekend, I say feel free to smoke in the porto-let. Anything is an improvement.

Shade. At some rides shade is at a premium. If you are one of the lucky ones who has a tent, don't put it under the only tree around. Also, if your rider is out on the trail and you see other poor souls roasting under the sun, invite them in!

Trash. Never assume that the ride manager could haul off your trash easier than you could. If you brought it, take it home—and if you see a gum wrapper on the ground that you didn't throw down, pick it up anyway! Notice whether the camp appears to be someone's pasture and if so, don't dump out large pans of grain that someone else's horses may find. If the manager asks you to bag your manure or scatter your hay, do a good job of it. If you think it's hard to clean up after your horse, think about the manager trying to clean up after a hundred or more whose owners didn't do the job properly.

Filling up water tanks. If you happen to be the proud owner of a 200-gallon water tank, either fill it at home or at 2:00 a.m. Don't dominate the only hose in camp. Should you insist on filling it at the camp and some poor soul wanders up with two five-gallon buckets, pause, fill their buckets and send them on their way.

Drivers. You know the ones. The ones who drive up and down the dusty road without ceasing for an entire ride weekend. Granted, it may be handy to have one truck that's not attached to a rig to take things to the vet check, haul water, go for ice or whatever, but the fifth time I have to get my horse off on the shoulder to allow the same empty truck to go by I begin to get irritated.

If you have a 15-year-old teen or a 40-year-old husband who simply cannot stay out from behind the driver's wheel, at least teach them to make themselves useful. A compulsive camp driver should offer to haul things from someone's vet check back to their trailer. Always leave the tailgate down and ask walkers if they want to hop on and carry a chain to help pull stuck rigs out.

Be a good neighbor

What it comes down to is “be a good neighbor.” If you're the type that reads this article—even after seeing the title—chances are you're the type of person who tries to be a good neighbor. Just use it as a checklist to see that you didn't leave anything out. If you know someone who should have read this, photocopy the article, highlight the important parts and include it in their ride packet. Should you find this in your rider's packet, look around—did anyone else get it? Then take a hint!