

# **Biking with horses**

## **Ride safely and be aware**

Monitor your speed so that you can safely stop before approaching or passing any park users.

If you're listening to music, please reduce the volume and use just one earbud so you can hear oncoming traffic.

Obey all park rules and stay on designated trails.

## **Horses are prey animals**

As prey animals, horses are always on the alert for predators like cougars. Their survival instincts are to run first and ask questions later.

Horses are individuals. Some aren't bothered by bikes, but others can be concerned.

## **Stop and speak**

Stop before approaching a horse and ask the rider how you should proceed. Some folks may be fine with you riding by slowly. Others may prefer to have you stop while they ride by.

If a horse stops and freezes as you approach, he may be trying to figure out what you are.

The human voice is the key to letting them know that you're just a person, not a predator.

You may need to keep talking to reassure the horse.

Avoid standing behind a tree or bush as that may concern the horse even more. It's important that the horse can get a good look at you and your bike.

On single-track trails, stay on the low side. But use your best judgment. If there's not enough room to stay out of the kick zone on the low side, go somewhere else out of the way.

### **Approaching from behind**

When approaching from behind, the horse will probably see you as soon as you see him.

Stop and speak up before you get too close to make sure that the rider, as well as the horse, are aware to avoid a big startle. Then ask how to proceed.

### **Kick zone**

Stay out of the kick zone which can extend to 6 or 7 feet or more, depending on the length of the horse's legs.

Avoid touching a horse unless the rider says it's OK. Slapping or patting horses on their sides and rumps could startle a horse and cause him to kick.

### **From the horse's viewpoint**

Horses are able to see most of the way around them. When their heads are down while they're grazing, they can see predators approaching from all sides.

However, there's a blind spot in the front of their vision and directly behind their tail, and this is why horses may startle if something approaches and passes.

Because horses are hyper aware of their surroundings, things that are unfamiliar to them — such as colorful bikes, clothes, patterns, helmets and goggles — may cause a horse to freeze and stare.

Many horses are not used to seeing large groups of bikes, so that may cause them more concern.

### **The ears indicate focus**

Horses point their eyes in the direction of their attention. Ears forward mean they are interested or concerned with what's ahead of them. If one or both ears turn to the side, attention is directed to something else and they may be less concerned about what's in front. Ears pinned back against their head can indicate anger. Pinned ears can also indicate the horse is about to kick or bite.

### **Happy Trails!**

Some bikers have asked why anyone would ride a horse on multi-use trails if the horse isn't comfortable with bikes. Horses have to be trained on trails with bikes. Training should start at home with being desensitized to bikes, but there's no substitute to actually being on a trail system with bikes.