

The Lifestyle

Equestrian Trail Riders

By Lora Goerlich



Our kayaks are suspended snugly in the rafters doubling as storage for the paddles, lifejackets and a 65L backpack. Two hybrid cycles are parked in the barn collecting dust. Outside, a few inches of snow cover the dormant grass and two sets of cross-country skis are neatly placed on end by the back door, waiting... kick-glide, kick-glide. With each passing season we enjoy these typically low maintenance, affordable, leisure activities. But we also have three horses we use for recreational trail riding. And in stark contrast to our leisure things, our horses cannot be stowed away seasonally or on days we don't use them. Keeping horses for recreational use is a lifestyle.

The Physical

Every Day - No matter if there is rain, snow, sleet, ice, frigid temperatures, extreme heat, oppressive humidity, times of drought, flooding or other natural disasters, we must tend to our horses 365 days a year. Consider this... In a year's time I will have fed my horses 730 times. Over a twenty-five-year time span, I will have fed my horses 18,250 times.

Ongoing- Providing food and water are only basic obligations. Add to that other daily, periodic, seasonal and long-term responsibilities: stall cleaning; pasture mowing; fence repair; dragging dirt turnouts and pastures (to breakdown manure); shoveling access paths to the barn and paddocks after snowfall; spreading manure; barn cleaning and maintenance; deworming horses; ensuring horses are ready for vet, dentist and farrier visits; arranging hay

and grain pickup/deliveries; cleaning water buckets/water troughs; winter barn preparation and grooming horses. Horses require adequate space to freely move without being confined by stall walls; treatment free from abuse; grazing opportunities and perhaps a stable mate or two (or three or four...grin).

Boarding facilities take the brunt of chores for horse owners. Daily feeding, turnout and stall cleaning are common amenities included in the monthly fee. However, vet, farrier, dental costs and grooming are typically not included. Even those who pay to keep a horse have a large monetary and time commitment. Years ago, I boarded a horse. Paying someone to keep my horse made finding riding time easier. When I finally had the resources to move my horse home with me, an interesting phenomenon happened. My riding time slipped away. Seeing and having contact with my horse every day, combined with the added daily chores seemed to rearrange my priorities.

The Intangible

Knowledge – Equestrians must acquire and maintain vast amounts of knowledge including but not limited to: efficient barn and pasture layout; choosing the proper trail mount; toxic vegetation identification; what de-wormers to use when; pasture management; types and quality of hay; senior horse care; trailering; nutritional requirements; recognizing and treating common illnesses and conditions - colic, choke, founder, rain rot, mud fever, slobbers and stranglers; trail riding equitation; basic first aid and vital signs; horse handling and trail etiquette. Growing your mind to include horses is never-ending. It's a gift to our horses when we don't stop learning, especially when we learn how to make their life and our partnership better.



Fortitude – One cannot ride a horse without a resolute spirit. Courage is dynamic, and in a constant state of flux. It may elude a mother after having children and can vanish instantly after a riding or non-riding related injury. With age and maturity some experience a slow,

agonizing deterioration. The loss is painful and disheartening no matter the reason. Straddling a half ton animal with a brain of its own can be unnerving when our courage ghosts us. Even the most proven horse could toss a rider after unknowingly stepping on a ground nest of yellow jackets or panic when a speedy, silent, cyclist zooms by from behind. Those who have fallen off and remounted; who have ridden after healing from an injury, who ride the young ones, the sassy ones, the unproven ones, the rehabilitated or the ones who have been rescued from abuse - YOU are the embodiment of courage and bravery.

Legacy - What if we lose our desire to keep horses or we've been injured and can no longer ride or care for them? We must have a plan in place ensuring our horse is cared for at a high standard without ending up in a kill pen or abuse situation. We are obligated to do this for any animal in our care, after all, they have nearly zero choices in their lifetime. They are all at the whim of humans. I've never thought twice about what happens to my hobby items when I'm no longer interested or capable of using them or they have broken beyond usability. Sell, donate, give it away, set it by the road hoping someone takes it, store it for 50 years until it's an antique. I have no sentimental feelings about my hobby items.

Decision Making, Letting Go – We must make life and death decisions for our horses because often they do not die naturally, on their own. We are solely responsible for guaranteeing our horse(s) live a quality, pain free life. If not, we must make end of life decisions. Our last obligation and last act of kindness must be efficient and humane.

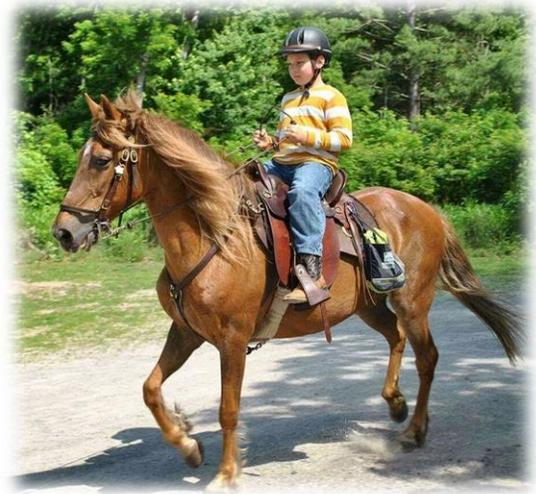
Goals

Finding Riding Time – The biggest factor affecting available riding time after family, home and work priorities have fallen into place, is weather. In the Midwest, there are about six months a year we expect pleasant weather for riding: April, May, June, September, October and November. July and August are hit or miss with oppressive heat and humidity combined with nagging horse flies, deer flies and mosquitoes. Other regions deal with those insects plus black flies. December to March can be too cold, too wet, too windy and too icy. It's always a bonus to fit in a snow ride or have mild weather during winter.

Other riding inhibitors include: seasonal trail flooding caused by melting snow and heavy rain; excess water also creates slippery trail conditions on clay tread, especially on hilly terrain. The end of daylight savings time from October-March creates another challenge as most parks close at dark. There is simply no time to ride after work. Add to that temporary trail closures or restrictions during deer-gun hunting season and for sporadic park maintenance projects. High winds create the obvious risk of falling trees, and limbs which can be deadly.

And the not so obvious, disorientation and flightiness in horses when the wind is roaring. Thirty-six trail rides throughout the year is my goal, for my geographic location.

Trail Riding – This is what it’s all about! The availability of natural trails to enjoy saddle time. For other riders it might be saddle time within the confines of an arena with a more competitive edge, such as dressage, 4-H events, show jumping, three-day eventing, breed specific events, gymkhana or any combination. Equestrians regularly cross multiple disciplines.



Trail riding is a process, it’s an event. On average, for a two-hour ride (6-8 miles), riders must commit to at least four hours from start to finish. The trail ride sequence looks like this:

1. Catch horse – halter it (some horses may challenge step 1 – being caught)
2. Load Horse (this can be challenging too since some horses aren’t auto loaders)
3. Drive to the park
4. Unload Horse
5. Groom Horse (some groom at home)
6. Tack up (saddle, bridle, breast collar, saddlebags, phone, water, snacks, other)
7. **RIDE**
8. Untack
9. Groom again
10. Optional have lunch or snack while horse cools down
11. Re-load horse into trailer (see step #2 note)
12. Drive home
13. Unload
14. Put horse in paddock
15. Take a nap?

For day trips, drive times of fifteen minutes to one and a half hours are normal. For camping and other overnight opportunities, drive times of two hours or more can be expected.

Connection with Nature – Horseback riding is the one activity that brings humans closest to nature. We ride astride an animal that is native, that is organic and part of the ecological pyramid. Other prey animals recognize hoof beats hitting the ground, and instinctively know horses pose no threat, even while carrying a rider. Because of that, horse riders have the

most intimate opportunities to view wildlife while blending in with nature. Equines unknowingly benefit insects who use manure for minerals and food. Select bird species utilize horse hair for nesting material and prey on the insects feeding on manure. Without equestrian trails, many horses would not have a purpose. Horseback riding on park trails is the most natural use for horses today.

Connection with Horse – Deep connections are forged through bonding in a natural setting, being outdoors, communicating with our horse, building trust, interdependence, practicing empathy, teaching, learning and understanding. Cognizant riders know connection means something to the horse as well, it means life. New beginnings and connections for both horse and rider can be an incredible venture.



A Purpose for Horses - Being a trail horse is a fantastic gig for any horse and it's a great way to re-purpose an out of commission race horse, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) mustang cull, a rescued horse, former breeding stock or show horse. Though there are breeds that seem more prevalent on trails such as Tennessee Walkers and Quarter horses, ANY breed can make a suitable trail mount. There are over 350 breeds of horses to choose from, take your pick.

Wide-ranging – Age, ability, experience, personal heritage, gender, and body type do not restrict an individual from riding. Fortunate are those who experience horses and trail riding at a young age. Others must wait until they are older and have financial means to fulfill their passion; the equestrian lifestyle. And many will continue riding well into their 80's. If you're a novice it's not hard to find an older, experienced horse to safely accommodate learning curves. There are special saddles and tack that can be fitted to riders with varying needs, not to mention ramps and platforms to help riders mount. Horses are made in all shapes and sizes to accommodate riders of all shapes and sizes. The older I get the more I appreciate a shorter horse since it closes the gap between me and the ground if I need to tactically dismount. It doesn't matter when an individual begins their journey. If they have the will to ride, there is most certainly a way!

Financial Commitment

Decades Long - A horse's usable/healthy life span is about twenty-five years. Though most mindful owners will continue care after a horse has aged beyond usability and through a horse's retirement years. Conceivably, all-encompassing commitment could last upwards of thirty years.

Monetary Parts - I've outlined the detailed expenses of horse keeping over a twenty-five-year period. These figures represent the average horse owner; those who trail ride and who depend on trails in natural, park areas for recreational opportunities. The figures do not represent individuals whose livelihood depends on horses: breeding, boarding, racing, training facilities, rental string operations or any other endeavors that utilize horses for profit. Since those are business ventures, expenses can be used as tax deductions to offset income. Though I would argue, they have a different level of commitment and some do utilize public horse trails.

Subjective variables include: cost of the horse, horse trailer, size and style of barn, type and amount of fence; tack; additional training or re-schooling for the horse and or rider; extraordinary vet expenses; does the owner self-vaccinate, and does the horse need corrective shoeing; what type of bedding is used; is it purchased in bulk; feeding round bales versus square bales; does the individual bale their own hay; hay quality and bale weight; pasture (or lack thereof) to offset hay expenses? All of these elements affect the final average cost. Also, some riders may not own a horse trailer because they live or board their horse within riding distance to a park trail. Many expenses are also heavily influenced by regional economics. Contributions to the local and national economy from equestrians of all disciplines are significant.

The averages should not be interpreted as being exact for every trail rider, but rather a gauge to demonstrate the monetary load equestrians accept in order to enjoy trail riding. Again, expenses are subjective. Where do you align?

Figure 1. Horse keeping startup

Figure 2. Expenses associated with keeping 1 horse - in addition to startup expenses

Figure 3. Expenses associated with boarding 1 horse

Figure 4. Twenty-five-year average for four hobbies - these expenses are also subjective

25 Year Farm Basics Start-Up Expenses

Barn equip/buckets, troughs, wheel barrow, tools, mats	\$ 8,000.00
Fence 20-30 year	\$ 10,000.00
Harrow/drag	\$ 500.00
Horse trailer	\$ 12,500.00
Horse -1	\$ 1,500.00
Manure Spreader (new or used)	\$ 5,000.00
Moderately sized barn	\$ 25,000.00
Home Mortgage \$1,000/month	\$250,000.00
Saddle	\$ 1,800.00
Tractor	\$ 22,000.00

LCG 2019

25 year total average	\$336,300.00
Yearly total average	\$ 13,452.00
Monthly total average	\$ 1,121.00

Every \$1000 spent per year adds about \$83.33 to the monthly total (\$25,000 over 25 years)

(figure 1.)

Monthly Breakdown Basic Horse Keeping Expenses

	1 Horse
Bedding (1/2 bag per day/horse @ \$5.50/bag 6days/week)	\$ 58.50
Equine Dental	\$ 8.00
Farrier for trimming 6 times/year	\$ 22.50
Forage-Hay (one horse - medium sized) 1/2 bale-day @ \$5/bale	\$ 76.00
Grain = 1.7lbs/day @ \$15/50lbs	\$ 15.00
Periodic misc. halters, leads, new saddle, new bridle, saddle pads, blankets, etc.	\$ 30.00
Supplements, treats, fly spray, de-wormer, salt, misc.	\$ 10.00
Trailer tires every 4 years (total divided by 25 years)	\$ 9.31
Vet for shots and coggins only	\$ 14.50
Yearly trailer registration (\$64/yr) some states registration is a one time fee	\$ 5.33

LCG 2019

25 year total average	\$ 74,742.00
Yearly total average	\$ 2,989.68
Monthly total average	\$ 249.14

Every \$1000 spent per year adds about \$83.33 to the monthly total (\$25,000 over 25 years)

(figure 2.)

Monthly Average Expenses for Boarding

	1 Horse
*Monthly board	\$ 325.00
Equine dental	\$ 8.00
Farrier for trimming only	\$ 22.50
Horse Trailer (\$12,500/25 yrs.)	\$ 42.00
Periodic misc. halters, leads, saddle, bridle, saddle pads, blankets, etc.	\$ 20.00
Supplements, treats, fly spray, de-wormer, misc.	\$ 10.00
Trailer tires every 4 years (total divided by 25yrs)	\$ 9.31
Vet for shots and coggins only	\$ 14.50
Yearly trailer registration (some states registration is a one time fee)	\$ 5.33

LCG 2019

25 year total average	\$ 136,992.00
Yearly total average	\$ 5,479.68
Monthly total average	\$ 456.64

* Monthly board costs are highly variable ranging from \$100-700/horse/month

Every \$1000 spent per year adds about \$83.33 to the monthly total (\$25,000 over 25 years)

(figure 3.)

25 Year Cost Average - 4 Hobby Activities

Hybrid Cycling for 2

Bikes x 2	\$ 1,100.00
Equipment: rear rack, basket, tires and replacement	\$ 5,000.00
Receiver truck hitch - bike carrier	\$ 500.00
Yearly tune up x 2	\$ 2,000.00

Kayaking for 2

Boat registration	\$ 1,250.00
2 used tribe 9', Paddles, life jackets, misc.	\$ 1,650.00

Other Hobbies

*Photography, hunting, hockey, camping, other (\$2500/year pick one)	\$ 62,500.00
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Cross Country Skiing for 2

1984 Karhu Cross county Skis (gift)	\$ -
1976 Karhu Cross country Skis (my dad's)	\$ -
2006 New bindings, boots, poles x2	\$ 650.00

LCG 2019

25 year total average 4 hobbies	\$ 74,650.00
Yearly total average 4 hobbies	\$ 2,986.00
Monthly total average 4 hobbies	\$ 248.83

Every \$1000 spent per year adds about \$83.33 to the monthly total (\$25,000 over 25 years)

(figure 4.)

Associated expenses *not* included in the calculations:

1. Additional electric costs for using fans in the summer and trough heaters in the winter
2. Camping fees, firewood
3. Clinics, additional training and reschooling fees
4. Co-pays and medical bills from farm/horse related injuries
5. Emergency and ancillary veterinary care
6. Euthanasia and carcass disposal
7. Federal tax paid – portions allotted to fund parks with or without equestrian trails
8. Fuel - when trailering
9. Fuel taxes paid – portions allotted to fund park improvements
10. Horse shoes, corrective shoeing expenses
11. Insurance: horse, trailer, tack, vehicle, property, house, barn
12. Interest paid on home, truck, trailer, tractor, farm or home equity loans
13. Lodging and food on overnight trips
14. Maintenance and repairs: truck, trailer, tractor, tack, fence
15. Manure disposal fees (if applicable)
16. Material donations to parks for equestrian trail improvements
17. Monetary donations to parks for equestrian trail improvements
18. Paid help when horse owners go on vacation or are incapacitated
19. Park entry fees and/or bridle tag fees
20. Pasture and paddock improvements: drainage, stone, fertilizer, seed
21. Property taxes – portions allotted to city and county parks, with or without horse trails
22. Riding lessons
23. Riding specific clothing, helmets, cold weather and rain gear
24. Road toll fees
25. State taxes all items
26. State taxes – portions allotted to fund state parks with or without horse trails
27. Vehicle payment (truck or SUV to tow horse trailer)

Constant Uncertainties

Horse Injury or Illness – This is a reality. It could happen in the barn yard, in a stall, while trailering, on the trail or from a herd mate. The scenarios are unlimited. Horse injury and illness are inevitable. "Plan for the worst, hope for the best" is an appropriate cliché for equestrians.

Human Injury – Remember fortitude? No matter the activity, participants usually understand and accept the inherent risks. Anytime we interact with our horses, we risk falls, being stepped on, pushed down, getting entangled and dragged, losing fingers and toes, and of course, broken bones, concussions...or worse.

Loss of Riding Trails - The ever-looming threat of equestrian trail closures combined with proposals of trail integration, most often with mountain biking, is a constant fear and reality for equestrian trail riders. Add to that the noticeable disparity in miles of accessible horse trail compared to other trails. In the grand scheme of trail creation and long-term upkeep, horse trails are the least costly to create and maintain as long as they are planned and developed properly.

Be a Positive Experience

Hikers, Cyclists, Cross Country Skiers, Joggers, In-Line Skaters, Bird Watchers, Nature Photographers, ATV Operators – Stop your feet, stop your wheels, cut your engine and talk - say "Hello!" The horse will hear your voice and recognize the human under the frightening backpack, sitting atop a silent cycle, gliding on whooshing skis or sitting in a loud, rattling ATV. The simplest act of talking can put the horse (and rider) at ease especially if it's an unproven trail horse. Allow horse riders ample time to pass, unhindered and without annoyance. Try to appreciate the incredible amount of time and effort the rider has put into the magnificent animal he/she is astride.

Dog on Leash, Leash in Hand - Frequently overlooked is the importance of keeping dogs on a visible leash, where leash laws have been established. The notion that horses are "just like big dogs" is a dangerous thought. Dogs are predators by nature and horses are prey animals; the hunter and the hunted. Both react differently to stimuli. A frightened horse could cause tragic injuries to itself or the rider if it is not accustomed to dogs running about.



Park Personnel – Keep a watchful eye for riders during trail maintenance projects especially while operating chainsaws, brush hogs, tractors, chippers, or when driving on horse trails. Shut down equipment before horse and rider reach your location and talk - say “Hello!” When horse and rider are about 100 yards away it is usually safe to resume equipment operations. Furthermore, ranger staff must be empowered to enforce rules for all trail users - horse riders included. Plan exclusive horse trails whenever possible and educate non-equestrians about proper etiquette, especially on multi-use trails.



On the Road – Revving an engine or sounding a horn can provoke a horse to react with potentially deadly consequences. When overtaking a horse and rider, simply slow down and pass wide, especially if you have a loud motor. Stop and wait if you encounter a horse and rider crossing the road; there are rules in most states that allow horse and rider the right of way when crossing the roadway. In Ohio the rule is: ORC 4549.01

To those who practice positive trail etiquette, your contributions to trail safety are undeniable and do not go unnoticed. You are a gift to equestrians!

Understanding Leads to Inclusion

The extended costs and labor involved with horse care is immense even in the simplest horse keeping scenario. The daily commitment does not go away and the expenses seem to outweigh the benefits. Equestrians endure all of this in the name of trail riding and for the horses' sake.

Equestrians have a lot "*riding*" on the commitment to their horses. It takes a significant amount of time, money, effort and grit to enjoy a trail ride but what unifies all trail users is a profound appreciation for nature and need for accessible, safe trails.

