

# Plan Ahead and Prepare

## Horses:

Step back and take a look at your horse. Is he suited for the type of riding you will be doing? Has he had enough training to handle the situations he may encounter on the trail? Is his age against him? Is your horse too young or too old? Is his conditioning poor? Take time to write down a conditioning program for your horse. Find time to get him the training he needs. Make every ride on the ride schedule and plan lots of rides with others to get him the experience he needs.

March and April are good months to start preparing your horse for the upcoming riding season. It is very important to start conditioning your horse for the hard mountain riding you may do in the summer. **Never take a horse out of the pasture and have him do a hard mountain ride without conditioning them first.** Start out slow. Do short, one to two hour rides to start. Keep to level terrain with some short hills. Keep track of your horse's respiration and sweating. Stop for breaks if he is laboring. **Do not be afraid to stop the group if your horse is laboring.** As time goes by, continue adding in more difficulty and ride for longer periods of time.

## Horses Vital Signs:

Average resting temperature	101.5 degrees
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## Pulse

Average resting heart rate	Less than 42 beats per minute
High fitness resting heart rate	As low as 26 beats per minute
Working heart rate	From 75 to 105 beats per minute
Heavy work heart rate	As high as 200 beats per minute

Average respiration	Between 12 and 16 breaths per minute
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Capillary refill time	Less than two seconds
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Gum color	Light pink
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To check a horse's hydration, pinch a bit of loose skin along your horses neck. It should snap back in two seconds or less. If the skin goes back slowly, your horse might be mildly dehydrated. If the skin "tents" and does not return to place, your horse may be severely dehydrated.

You can also take a capillary test. Your horse's gums should be healthy pink. Check the capillary refill time by pressing the gums till they turn white, then release. A well hydrated horse's gum should return to pink in two seconds or less.

Check your horse for gut sounds. A healthy horse will have gurgles, grumbles, and lots of other noises. A lack of noise may show signs of impending colic.

In your saddle bags, you should carry electrolytes for dehydration and Banomine for colic.

When your rides are over, take time to cool out your horse. Walk him to prevent cramping or tie up. Blanket your horse with a light weight blanket that breaths. Allow him small amounts of water.

To shoe or not shoe your horse? Your choice. If you don't shoe your horse, be prepared with boots if necessary to protect your horses hooves.

#### Gear:

Use good sense when buying gear for the trail. It is easy to buy unnecessary gear for your horse when you walk into a tack store with all those fancy doo dads looking you in the face. Be practical.

Buy a saddle that fits your horse well and is comfortable for you. Get a saddle fitters opinion. The saddle should have a back cinch.

Buy a saddle pad made of a good fabric which breathes. Wool and natural fibers are best. Buy a cinch that fits your horse well. Ask your saddle fitter which length is best for your horse.

Get a strong, sturdy bridle. Reins should be strong and fit your hands comfortably.

Look for a breast collar that is soft for your horse and will not cause rub.

A crupper or breeching is a good idea if you intend on riding steep downhills.

Invest in some good horn bags and saddle bags. The horn bag should have a place to store a water bottle.

#### You:

Wear what is most comfortable for you to wear. Watch out for jeans with thick inner seams that might rub your leg. Make sure there is plenty of room at the knees and give you plenty of bending motion.

Get boots that have a heel. That will prevent your foot from slipping through a stirrup.

Wear layers of clothes to prepare for temperature changes.

Have a water proof coat along in case of rain.

Get a warm pair of riding gloves.

Wear a certified helmet for safety.

If you are riding during hunting season, wear orange for safety.

Invest in good wool socks or foot warmers to help keep your feet warm.

Planning ahead is a win win situation for you and your horse. Your horse will be happier, you will be happier, and you'll be able to spend many hours together on the trail. Now go out and make a lot of wet saddle blankets.

