

# RIDING THE COLORADO TRAIL HORSEBACK

## PREFACE

Riding The Colorado Trail on horseback is really great. Your trail ride is likely to become a cherished memory. The Colorado Trail is a 483 mile recreational trail that crosses the Rocky Mountains from Denver to Durango, passing through six National Forests, six Wilderness areas, traversing five major river systems and penetrating eight of the state's mountain ranges. The Colorado Trail is unique in that it was established and is cared for almost entirely by volunteers, "Friends of The Colorado Trail." The work is organized by The Colorado Trail Foundation, a nonprofit organization funded mainly through private contributions. Trail care is in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service.

This information assists equestrians in planning their trips. You'll find recommendations here as well as mention of other resources. Enjoy The Colorado Trail.

## PREPARATION

- Maps, CT Map Book [shop.ColoradoTrail.org](http://shop.ColoradoTrail.org)
- Colorado Trail Official Guidebook [shop.ColoradoTrail.org](http://shop.ColoradoTrail.org)
- Altitude Training for horse and rider
- Training horses for encounters with other users (backpackers & bicyclists, etc.)
- Know the area you are riding - fire restrictions, water, etc. For abnormal conditions posted on [ColoradoTrail.org](http://ColoradoTrail.org), refer to website page entitled Colorado Trail Resources by Segment (<http://www.coloradotrail.org/segments.html>) under the Trip Planning menu.
- Equipment – what you need and have it accounted for, including cell phone
- Get your stock used to all new feed before you go
- How much feed will you need, before, during and after the ride. Mock up daily ration and multiply
- Shoeing – one week before your trip
- Food Drops
- Support Crew
- Contingency Plans

## PLANNING

- Plan to ride only 2.5 to 3 miles an hour -packed
- Depending on the grades, plan no more than 10 to 20 miles a day. (at most)
- Plan to start early everyday in hopes to get over the passes before afternoon storms
- Ride agenda – carefully read CTF Guidebook for overall planning i.e.: overnights where to camp, water, alternate exits incase of emergency
- Daily duties – Setting tree lines, pitching tents, cooking, cleanup
- Place important items within reach of packs while on the trail as in saws, first aid kit (people and horse), easy boots, raingear water filters, any items you may need on the ride.
- Wild animal concerns
- Check all equipment against list at least a week prior to departure, ensure all equipment is in good repair (personal and group)

## **DAY RIDES**

- Anywhere from the Front Range, Segment 1 at Waterton Canyon to the end of Segment 5 at Kenosha Pass. These segments can easily be driven to and done in a day, if planned properly.
- Can ride more miles per day if not packed
- Don't forget the important items such as - first aid kit, warm clothing. Bring enough minimal equipment for overnight survival, extra food, emergency blanket.

## **MORE THAN A DAY RIDE**

- Know where to start trail with trailer access and pull out with trailer access. (If it is still listed as trailer access then plan in advance to drive and check it out)
- Ideally group size should not exceed 10 stock animals.
- If you have no support crew, plan extra time to move vehicles from beginning to end this may take hours so an extra day may be needed.
- Plan campsites carefully and allow enough time to get there. i.e.: don't camp at top of mountains, take grades into consideration.
- Be careful not to vary from original plan if you get to your destination early (just enjoy the time) the next segment could be more difficult than anticipated and may stress the horses.
- Camp sites should be large and open enough to allow plenty of room for the horses and tents, without disturbing the land more than necessary.
- Chose your dates carefully for the segments you plan to ride. i.e.: altitude, temperatures, snow, and water.
- Have support crew lined up with agenda of night camps, and expected time of arrivals at end point. Contingency plan discussed if late or alternate take out place is necessary.
- Know all available alternative exits in each segment in case of emergency.

## **THROUGH RIDE**

### **FROM BEGINNING TO END**

- Riding the entire length of The Colorado Trail is extremely demanding.
- From north to south you gain 89,354 feet in elevation
- Once the trail has climbed from Waterton Canyon to Georgia Pass, a distance of about 80 miles, it almost never descends to 8,000 feet until its terminus near Junction Creek.
- Most of the CT crosses the state at nine, ten, eleven, twelve and even thirteen thousand feet.
- This makes for countless magnificent vistas, but possible hazards.

## **THINGS TO CONSIDER**

### **Trail Use and Etiquette**

- Stay on the trails and avoid shortcuts
- Be courteous and yield to others when you can
- Travel in small groups

### **Courtesy**

- Plan to encounter other users along the trail incl. cyclists & motorcycles
- Choose horses that aren't too spooky when encountering other users
- Be ready & willing to educate other users on pointers when encountering horses
- Recommend to other users that they begin talking with horse riders at their earliest chance and explain that their voice is calming to the horses

- Explain that horses eyesight is poor and the human voice helps them identify oncoming users, lowering the risk of them getting spooked

### **Stock Containment**

- Use highlines and tree saver straps
- Learn about various temporary corrals & fences

### **Pack it in – Pack it out**

- What comes in must come out – no exceptions.
- When you leave, scatter rocks, logs, unused wood, and horse manure so your spot looks undisturbed

## **TRAIL CONCERNS**

### **Weather**

- Snow storms, gale force winds, stifling heat, lightning, hail, hypothermia-inducing rains and crisp days of utter perfection can materialize on any given summer day

### **Losing your horses in the back country**

- Put dog tags on their halters
- Only graze a few horses at a time even with hobbles

### **Health and wellness**

- Ensure good health and wellness of human and horse due to demands of the trail

### **Other**

- Responsibility to remove a deceased horse is of the horse owner.

### **Segments 1-3 and 6**

Bicycles

### **Segment 21**

Steep ridge, rockslide

### **Segment 22**

Highest Point 13,271 ft. below Coney, 4-foot rock step-up

### **Segment 24**

Elk Creek - 30 switchbacks down (500 ft elev. loss), rock wall, steep narrow trail, Narrow Gauge Train, 35 switchbacks up

### **Segment 27**

Indian Trail Ridge

Steep, narrow, drop offs on both sides, bridge, drop into Taylor Lake

### **Segment 28**

Kennebec Pass – drop offs are precipitous in places

Sliderock Canyon – steep narrow trail, steep decent

Bicycles

## **FAVORITE PLACES TO CAMP**

**Segment 6** - Georgia Pass

**Segment 12** - Rainbow Lake

**Segment 16** - Marshall Pass (cabin)

**Segment 16** - Camron Park

**Segment 17** - Baldy Lake (0.5 miles off the trail)

**Segment 22** - Town of Carson (cabins)

**Segment 23** - Pole Creek

**Segment 25** – Molas Lake and Hidden Lake (10.3 miles in to the alpine lake, just a 1/8 mile off trail)

**Segment 28** – Taylor Lake

## **ACCESS POINTS FOR HORSE TRAILERS**

### **Good Access**

**Segment 1** (Waterton Canyon) to **Segment 19** (Eddisville Trailhead) has trailer access at each segment, with the exception of Sargents Mesa. You can access Sargents Mesa it is just a little tight, recommend access is Cameron Park.

**Segment 22** (Spring Creek)

**Segment 24** (Rio Grande)

**Segment 25** (Molas Pass)

**Segment 26** (Bolam Pass)

### **Difficult Access**

**Segment 23** (Carson Saddle)

### **No Access**

**Segment 20** (San Luis Pass)

**Segment 26** (Hotel Draw) road states no trailers

**Segment 28** (Cumberland Basin) 4x4 at the top.

**Refer to CT Guidebook and Data book for FS road conditions**

**Do research prior to departure**

## **POSSIBLE PLACES TO STAY WITH YOUR HORSES**

**Segment 13/14** - Mt Princeton Stables/Hot springs (Cogins required)

**Segment 18** – Quarter Circle-Circle Ranch

**Segment 22** – Ryan’s Roost, Lake City

**Segment 25** – Molas Lake

**Segment 28** – Horseman’s Lodge, Bayfield

**Other locations may be available just call Chamber of Commerce or scout out other locations**

## **RESOURCES (Are available at The Colorado Trail Office or ordered on line)**

### **7th Edition CT Official Guidebook (LINK to CT Store)**

Detailed trail information, section by section. Don’t do the trail without it

Completely updated with all the latest re-routes

Expert advice on planning your CT experience

Fascinating information on CT natural and human history

Detailed descriptions for every mile

Information for re-supply and near by towns

Trail profiles showing all the ups and downs

Full color maps for every segment

Complete GPS mapping information

Over 90 gorgeous full color photos

Trip logs to record your adventure

### **CT Trailside Data-book (LINK to CT Store)**

Details miles, significant areas, elevation, latitude-longitude, profile of elevation gain and

loss in miles

**Maps on CD: The Colorado Trail Official Reference Map Series (CDROM) (LINK to CT Store)**

[www.coloradotrail.org](http://www.coloradotrail.org)

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### **Colorado Trail Foundation**

710 10th Street, #210, Golden CO 80401-5843  
303-384-3729

[ctf@coloradotrail.org](mailto:ctf@coloradotrail.org)

(For contacts of people who will give details about the trail segments you are planning to travel)

### **PACKING IN THE BACK COUNTRY**

Please refer to numerous books on the subject and web sites as in:

[http://www.packsaddleshop.com/packing\\_tips.html](http://www.packsaddleshop.com/packing_tips.html)

<http://www.horsemuletrails.com/packh.html>

Equipment list can be found at:

<http://www.isuedu/outdoor/horse/htm>

Do not under estimate the importance of education in proper packing techniques,

- Accurate weighing and balancing
- Trained and conditioned pack animals
- Proper equipment

### **QUESTIONS**

Please feel free to contact

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**Or**

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