

Developing a Park Area with Equine Use:

Prepared by: Chuck Regimbal, Director Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, Olympic Chapter



Typical Park Use: The equine community would mostly use the area for recreational riding, usually at a walk. If this area was also connected to larger adjoining areas Equine activity might include an endurance ride, where horses traveling faster than a walk would be encountered.

Parking Considerations:

- Designated horse parking areas are preferred so not to compete with other parking needs.
- Horse rigs are commonly 50 feet long, so parking should accommodate such a rig and an area sufficiently large to turn around.
- The horse trailer might be 8' 6" at the wheels but a parking slot should also consider that the horse gets saddled up on one side of the trailer and needs about 6 feet clearance additional to do that.
- As we get older, getting up on a horse is more difficult. A large rock 2 feet high or a picnic table bench works perfectly as a mounting aid near parking area.



Trails Design/Maintenance:

- Trails should be wide enough that a 4-foot-wide body can pass through.
- Horses have no trouble doing a 20% grade.
- Any bridges should be at least 5 feet wide and preferable 6 feet wide. This is because the rider's legs are angled out from the horse's body and their feet will hit and snag on bridge structure with less clearance. Bridge tread should be non-skid as much as possible. These pictures show construction of the bridge at the Port Gamble Heritage Park

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- Trails should have construction such that passing of oncoming traffic is occasionally possible. (Occasional wide spots)
- Trail construction should include brush removal to allow the rider to pass without fighting the branches. This “ceiling’ should be about 8 feet off the ground. Logs across the trail are OK if their top surface is less than 18 inches high above the ground.
- Trail bricks in soft areas are OK but the tread should be at least 2 feet wide in these areas. Horses weigh about 1000 to 1200 pounds. 70% of their weight is on their front legs. Trail construction should consider such a concentrated load and avoid mushy locations.
- Rocky terrain is OK with consideration to keeping rocks smaller than 3 inches and rounded. Sharp rocks are hurtful. Our local Glacier till is just fine.
- Trail markings should give names to the trails so rescue operations are aided by a general location.

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- Trail Emergency Rescue tags located in other County Parks should be used and be communicated to the rescue community.
- Trail marking and on-trail maps should include directions back to the trail head. It is common to find lost hikers at Green Mountain (DNR) and the equine community regularly helps get them going in the right direction.

Other Amenities:

- Any vistas should have places to tie the horses (hitching rails or simple vertical posts spaced 20 feet apart), so the riders can dismount and enjoy the view. A vista should have a mounting aid such as a 2-foot-tall rock nearby. Here is a picture of such an arrangement at the vista at Euland Tree Farm.



Construction Standards:

- There are trail and bridge construction standards to be found at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which I think are excessive as some are intended for pack stock which need extra clearance. USDA Forest Service reference: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/trail-management-tools/trailplans>.
- Another standard from the National Park Service: https://www.nps.gov/noco/learn/management/upload/NCT_CH4.pdf.