

You are here: [Home](#) > [Publications](#) > [Codes](#)

Horse riding in the Australian Alps National Parks

Australian Alps Liaison Committee

[aims](#) | [planning](#) | [safety](#) | [holding horses](#) | [feed](#) | [horses](#) | [horse riding areas](#) | [camping areas](#) | [camping guidelines](#) | [environmental protection](#) | [meeting others](#)

Minimal impact horse riding

The use of horses is part of the cultural and historic heritage in many parts of the Australian Alps and a source of pleasure and enjoyment for a growing number of people. Horse riding is accepted as an appropriate means of appreciating and enjoying most parts of the Alps where environmental and social impacts can be kept acceptable levels. Saddle and pack horses are also used by staff in some parks to carry out routine management work.

A range of problems can result from heavy or inappropriate use of the alpine area. Each recreation group must do its best to minimise impacts.

Trail riding organisations, in co-operation with land management authorities, have for some time successfully promoted the use of appropriate camping and trail riding techniques to minimise the impact of horses on natural and cultural environments.

This code is the result of co-operation between horse riding and land management groups and its acceptance and use by horse riders will help ensure that responsible trail riding remains an appropriate means of enjoying many of our alpine areas.

Although this code has been written to assist in the protection of the Australian Alps, the guidelines are applicable to the use of horses in any national park of natural area.

Aims of the code

To provide horse riders with guidelines to minimise the impacts of horses on park environments thereby helping to:

- i prevent soil erosion
- i minimise trampling and grazing impacts
- i prevent the introduction and spread of noxious and exotic plants
- i protect waterways
- i protect significant and environmentally sensitive areas such as alpine moss beds and swamps, heath, snow grass and sub-alpine forest communities
- i protect Aboriginal and European cultural sites
- i minimise potential conflict with other users of the park.

Planning a ride

Park regulations vary between states. When planning a ride into a park and to ensure that they are familiar with park regulations, riders should contact the local park offices. Routes and campsites can be worked out to minimise impacts while allowing for your enjoyment of the park. You will receive information on current conditions applying to horse riding such as:

- i permit requirements for riding and camping

- i prohibited areas (including designated wilderness areas or zones)
- i use of management tracks and trails
- i horse numbers permitted
- i roads open to vehicles
- i special conditions applying to individual parks.

In addition;

- i riders who regularly use an area should check for any changes when providing trip details to park staff
- i some parks, such as the Alpine National Park, also have self-registration locations of permit systems. Please use them as well as contacting park staff. Information collected assists in park management and planning for recreations use
- i leave full details of your trip with a responsible person.

Safety - be prepared

First aid kits for horse and rider should be taken on all trips.

As many members of a party as possible should be trained in first aid and have basic veterinary first aid skills.

The use of riding helmets is encouraged, particularly for children. Helmets must be available as part of any commercial horse riding tour.

Check all saddlery equipment prior to commencing a trip to ensure there are no faults and that appropriate safety gear is present; eg surcingles on stock saddles, breast plates and cruppers for rugged country.

Take spare ropes horse shoes and shoeing gear.

Some other items of equipment which are essential on any bush trip are:

- i matches
- i torch
- i water
- i space blanket
- i ample food
- i compass
- i topographic map
- i raincoat
- i horse bandages
- i plastic bag for rubbish.

Let someone know before you go by telling a friend your route and expected time of return.

If an emergency develops, one or preferably two riders should go for help whilst the others stay with the injured or ill person. Keep the patient warm and monitor their condition.

Holding horses

Hold horses at least 30 metres from lakes, streams, huts and camping areas unless otherwise directed by park staff.

Horses may be held by the following methods:

Holding method	During the day	Overnight
Permanent yards	Yes	Yes

Tethering trees, holding rails	Yes	No
Tether line between trees	Yes	No
Picket-line	Yes	No
Electric fencing	Yes	Yes
Hobbles	Yes	Yes
Ground tether	Yes	Yes

Permanent yards

Use yards and paddocks where provided. Do not cut green timber to repair fences.

Use hitching rails or other holding facilities where provided.

Tethering and picket-lines

Avoid damage to vegetation when tethering. Do not tie horses to small limbs, saplings and shrubs. They are easily damaged if horses pull back. Strong head stalls and leads should be used. Leads should be long enough to allow use of larger trees. Many lost horses in parks are the result of broken reins or weak leads.

Tethering to trees during the day may be prohibited in sensitive or heavily used areas.

Avoid tethering horses that do not stand easy or paw the ground. This results in bare ground around trees in a short time.

As a trial measure, picket-lines may only be used for tethering horses for up to 24 hours and must be set up in accordance with the guidelines used by the Melbourne Trail Riders Club. This method is being trialled and is the only one approved by the Australian Alps national parks.

Tethering directly to trees overnight is prohibited. This causes unacceptable ground damage.

Temporary yards (electric fencing)

Low power portable electric fencing is the only temporary yard construction permitted. Use of wire (plain or barbed) around trees is prohibited as it causes unacceptable damage to trees.

Yards should be as large as possible as small yards cause excessive ground damage and increase the risk of fighting and injured horses. Allow at least 15 square metres for each horse.

Avoid including areas with saplings and shrubs which may be trampled.

Move fences to a new location or enlarge yard area if it begins to show signs of excessive ground damage. Temporary yards should not show any bare areas when a campsite is vacated.

Portable electric fencing has many advantages for trail riders:

- i it is inexpensive and readily available
- i the electric tape or cord used is brightly coloured and easily seen by horses
- i it is lightweight and easily transported on horseback or packhorse
- i large yard areas can be created allowing free movement of horses thus reducing impacts. More than one yard can be electrified using the one energiser. Horse numbers can be split up and difficult horses separated.

Electric fence warning signs must be prominently displayed on the fence.

For safety reasons, low power energisers only are permitted in national parks - minimal power is sufficient to hold horses.

Ensure that horses have been trained to electric fencing in a large yard or paddock prior to being confined to a small yard.

Hobbles and ground tethering

Hobbles and ground tethering may be used where facilities are not provided. A lead rope from a head stall to the hobble chain can further reduce straying.

Feed

Studies have shown horses can retain weed seeds in their gut for up to 14 days and these can then germinate in manure in national parks.

Restrictions on the type of feed you can bring into the park exist to help minimise the potential introduction and spread of weeds associated with some types of horses.

Feed permitted includes commercial grain, proprietary and processed feeds, eg pellets. Make sure your horse is used to this diet before your trip. (Lucerne chaff is permitted in Victoria's Alpine National Park).

All horses must be fed using a nose bag. Make sure your horse is familiar with this practice before your trip. Do not spread feed on the ground.

Clean up any spilt feed.

Prohibited or unclean feed may be confiscated.

Horses

A maximum of 20 horses (including pack horses and spare horses) is permitted in any horse riding group in Alpine and Sub-alpine (snow gum) zones which are open to horse riding. A maximum of 28 horses per riding group is permitted in other areas open to horse riding. These limits apply to both private horse riding groups and commercial horse riding operations. The recommended number of horse riders per group is between four and eight. This is the optimum number to ensure group safety, as well as minimising impacts on the environment and other park users.

The use of horses is restricted to the period of 1 December to 30 April in Alpine and Sub-alpine zones where horse riding is permitted. During the remainder of the year, horse riding is not permitted as riding in wet areas may cause soil erosion. The riding period commences earlier in Kosciusko National Park (1 November), because riding generally occurs at lower altitudes.

Horses must be easily handled and under control at all times. Don't take young, inexperienced or recently broken horses unless you are confident you can maintain proper control at all times, particularly when near other park users.

Ensure that your horse is accustomed to the approved holding method you intend to use. Don't wait until you are setting up camp to find out that your horse can gallop with hobbles on!

If possible, do not shoe a horse before a trip. New shoes tend to cut up the ground more than worn shoes.

Avoid using mares in season or stallions in areas where brumbies are known to run. Horses have been lost from yards due to brumbies.

Avoid yarding horses together which are unfamiliar with each other or run them together prior to a trip. Fighting increases ground damage as well as the risk of injury and lost horses from temporary yards.

Escaped and injured horses

Report lost horses to park staff immediately.

Contact park staff if horses are injured in areas where tracks are closed to vehicles and access for floats is required.

If horses have to be destroyed, report the details to park staff.

Pack horses

The use of pack horses for camping is encouraged, even in areas open to vehicles. they allow greater flexibility in routes and campsites, thereby assisting in the dispersal of impacts.

The number of pack horses can be kept to a minimum if camping equipment and food requirements are considered carefully.

Horse riding areas

Horse riding areas in the Australian Alps national parks fall into the following classifications:

Designated trails

- i Riding is permitted only on trails designated for horse riding.
- i Trails are usually signposted.
- i Camping with horses is usually not permitted.

These trails may be intensively used or may be in environmentally sensitive areas and must be closely monitored to control soil erosion, weed and other problems.

Please act in accordance with signposting and remain on authorised trails. Do not take short cuts.

It is very important that riders co-operate with park staff to ensure that trail riding remains an appropriate means of enjoying these areas.

Designated areas

Riding is permitted on management tracks and other signposted trails within a designated areas.

Camping with horses may be permitted.

Cross country riding

Cross country riding may be permitted in some areas subject to conditions to minimise impacts.

Spread out in open untracked country rather than ride in single file. This spreads the impact and assists trampled plants to recover.

Camping areas

Camping areas are monitored for impacts such as erosion, bare areas, weed growth, grazing, trampling, rubbish, human and animal waste, and impacts on adjacent water sources. Those sites showing signs of unacceptable impacts may be closed to allow recovery.

Designation of horse camping areas in national parks generally fall into one or more of the following categories:

Designated horse camp - with yards

- ; Horse holding facilities are provided.
- ; Approved temporary holding methods may also be permitted.

Designated horse camp - no yards

- ; No holding facilities are provided.
- ; Approved temporary holding methods only.

Remote area horse camp

- ; No horse holding facilities are provided and only approved temporary holding methods are permitted.

Choose your campsite according to the camping guidelines and park regulations, and where possible, use previously established sites which comply with the guidelines.

A maximum of two consecutive nights camping is permitted at any one location unless otherwise specified for designated campsites.

There will be limits on the number of horses and possibly vehicles (where applicable) permitted at any horse camp. Back-up vehicles are not permitted on management trails or other roads normally closed to vehicles.

Camping guidelines

Camping with horses significantly increases trampling and grazing impacts. Responsible camping practices are essential to assist in maintaining campsites.

Be familiar with conditions applying to camping in the park you are visiting.

Avoid camping horses in areas commonly used by other recreationalists unless they are designated horse camping areas.

Keep camps as small as possible and take only those vehicles necessary to transport horses, riders and equipment.

Camp at an existing campsite rather than a new one and keep at least 30 metres away from watercourses and lakes. Spend only one or two nights at each campsite.

Look for low impact campsites. Choose well drained sites - sandy or hard surfaces are better than boggy or vegetated areas. Do not cut trenches around tents.

Try to set up camp well before dusk, particularly if using yards. This gives horses sufficient time to become familiar with strange yards before dark, reducing the risk of horses rushing unseen fences.

Break up and scatter manure before vacating campsites. Do not clean out floats and trucks at campsites.

Environmental protection

Take special care so that others can enjoy our bushland areas.

Avoid crossing areas easily damaged by horses such as sphagnum moss beds, swamps and steep or boggy creek crossing. Apart from the impact caused, these areas can be dangerous to horse and rider.

Do not blaze or mark tracks or routes in any way. If recognised tracks are hard to follow, or if there are signs of damage, inform parks staff.

Watering horses

Horses must be watered downstream from camping areas and at least 30 metres from camping areas on lake foreshores.

Rather than leading horses to stream banks and lake edges, which can cause bank erosion, bucket water to horses. Use watering troughs where provided.

Meeting other park users

Courtesy and understanding from all park users is important to ensure that everyone enjoys their visit. Riders will meet walkers and others who are unfamiliar with horses and unsure about passing them on the track or camping near them.

Ensure that all horses in your party are walking quietly when passing other users on a track and thank them for quietly passing nervous or excited horses if the situation arises. If you are camped near others, ensure that your camp is set up in accordance with the Code to avoid disturbing other park visitors.

Horse riders may also meet people who are unsympathetic to their means of enjoying the park. Try to avoid conflict in these situations by explaining the existence of the Code and its purpose in helping to protect the park environment.

If you meet riders who are acting contrary to this Code, politely explain to them that only by abiding by its guidelines can they help to ensure that horse riding remains an appropriate means of enjoying national parks. If necessary report such incidents to park staff.

See also:

- i [Care for the Alps—leave no trace](#), 2003
- i [River Users Code](#)
- i [Car-based Camping Code](#)
- i [Snow Camping Code](#)
- i [Cycling Code](#)
- i [Bushwalking Code](#)
- i [Huts code](#), 2005
- i Horseriding Code